

THIS-Ability



*Miraculous!*

HOW THIS  
MOTHER  
TURNED  
DOWN'S  
SYNDROME  
INTO AN  
UPWARD  
SPIRAL



**K**imaya was born to her mother Yojana Wavikar after 13 years of marriage, several years after Yojana had given up hope of ever having a child. When her toddler was diagnosed with Down's Syndrome, Yojana thought of it as a joke that didn't amuse her. However, she shook off all doubts, questions and fears to arrive at the conclusion that she had been chosen as the custodian of what definitely was a miracle. And that is where the story of Kimaya, which means miracle, really begins.

Today, Kimaya is a confident and friendly 21-year-old teacher's aide. She has a bouquet of talents and hobbies, from dancing to crafts and cooking. It has been a bumpy ride, Kimaya and Yojana admit but at the moment, their lives are social, thrilling and extremely fruitful. Kimaya's day begins with helping her mother with the chores (no discounts, despite the fact that the Wavikars have domestic help – she even cleans and dusts her own room) and then, like most of us, buzzing around to get ready for a day at work: picking out her clothes and packing a *dabba*. School is Kimaya's way of 'giving back'. She teaches at the same school that she studied at.

"I teach poems, reading, writing and craft to a class of 30 junior kindergarteners", she tells me.

Her duties at Infant Jesus Toyland School span three hours.

Kimaya enjoys lunch with her mother nearly every day, and then spends the afternoon reading. Come 4 o'clock, it is time for Yojana's daily coaching sessions with several children who have special education needs. Kimaya assists with the classes, especially the parts that require storytelling.

The later part of the evening is devoted to Yoga at home with friends and the children from the coaching session. "Most of the children bring a snack that is shared with everyone, so snack time doubles up as fellowship time," says Yojana. She further says that the tuition class is followed by games and storytelling. "We use story-telling as a tool to impart morals and life lessons," she adds.

Kimaya sometimes also pitches in to help her father, a lawyer. On some days the mother-daughter duo cook dinner together and on most days, they enjoy a reading session before bed. "We never forget to take stock of the day and practise gratitude," Yojana says.

Yojana didn't always have this much to be grateful for. It certainly wasn't smooth sailing in the early days that were

riddled with demotivating words from paediatricians and all sorts of rejections from schools and social network alike.

"People told me she would not make it past grade 3. They said that I should not send her to a regular school. Moreover, without the internet, there was a serious lack of concrete and correct information about Down's Syndrome even among the medical community. I borrowed books from libraries and even bought some; I even had relatives abroad dig out and send me books to improve my understanding of Down's Syndrome," Yojana recounts even while insisting that on the bright side, her obstacles have led her to the expertise that she offers as a counsellor today.

Yojana was working as a manager before she had Kimaya. But with her supportive husband Uday, a successful lawyer and doting father shouldering the family's financial responsibility, she swapped manager, for full-time mother without batting an eyelid, tossing everything aside to be Kimaya's rock, from fighting her way into a regular school and then sustaining her interest in studying. Despite many people telling them that Kimaya would not make it, she passed her 10th standard NIOS (open school) with 68% much to her parents' delight. This was only the first in countless proud moments to come: from the moment she appeared on TV, dancing with Shiamak Davar and crew to a modelling assignment with Paris-based photographer Sanjyot Telang who had pictures of Kimaya and several other young adults with Down's Syndrome on display at the National Library in Paris for three months, to the launch of 'Kim Kan', a small-scale decorative crafts business run by Yojana and a bunch of other parents together with their children who also have intellectual disabilities.

Kim-Kan is invited to several exhibitions and come Diwali and the wedding season, their house is flooded with decorations from multiple orders. Kimaya has also been part of two fashion shows in Mumbai – one for NGO Trinayani, at the MIG Club in Mumbai and another at the Reach Outcamp held at The Yoga Institute, also in Mumbai.

Yojana's pride knows no bounds and she is determined to ensure that parents of other children with Down's Syndrome share her pride and joy. "I have a friend who has two sons and claims that the one with Down's Syndrome is much more attuned to the mother's needs, more supportive and more keen on maintaining a close parent-child bond than her other child, and more expressive in his love. It is important for us as parents to recognize that our child is as normal as any other child, perhaps a tad more innocent but definitely as sensitive, if not more," she says.

I spent an evening with this delightful mother-daughter duo and I was struck with the strength, perseverance and delight that Yojana brings to all things Kimaya. It is amazing how her determination has helped her daughter live a happy, fairly mainstream and very normal life that even experts insisted wasn't possible.

*The THIS-ABILITY article series is an attempt to create a positive, humane and empowered discourse around the lives of people living with disabilities. An initiative of the NGO, TRINAYANI, founded by Ritika Sahni, the aim is to alter perspectives and change attitudes of the masses with our premise being that we are all different, yet similar. [www.trinayani.org](http://www.trinayani.org)*