

'Special' effort to jump on plastic-free bandwagon

CHENNAI: Adults with special needs have been rising to the occasion following the plastic ban in the State to provide eco-friendly alternatives.

Before the ban, Shri Sakthi Ganapathy Trust that supports adults with special needs came up with paper cups made at their two centres. However, with the implementation of the ban, they have now shifted their focus to cloth bags. "We have suspended operations on the cups for now and began to explore cloth bags as there is a lot of scope for persons with special needs. They can earn and also they are making a difference by contributing to the eco-friendly initiative," said Shyamala Naganathan, founder of the trust.

Meanwhile, Arvind Foundation, that has about five centres with 30-35 adults with special needs, have begun to dole out options for residential apartments and individuals in the city. "We have been receiving orders for the bags that are made from printed cotton and for storage bags that can be used in refrigerators. They are also engaged in making newspaper covers and are now receiving orders for plates and cups made of areca nuts," Sudha Athmaraj, co-founder of the Foundation, said.



A student making eco-friendly plate

Arvind Foundation products have also found takers among IT companies and corporates. With the cloth bags priced at Rs 120 to Rs 150 per piece, the initiative is providing a stipend for those involved.

An organisation called Vidya Sagar has been offering support through training in vocational skills after analysing the pupils' strengths. While the plastic ban has opened a floodgate of opportunities, Vijayashree Ramesh, the coordinator of the employment education centre in Vidya Sagar, observed a different possibility. "This has been our forte for many years and we have been batting for eco-friendly initiatives through our different modules and programmes. However, a flipside is that the self-help groups are also joining the movement. The already marginalised disabled population are likely to lose some opportunities. SHGs can make upto 10,000 bags in a single day, while we can make only 500 or so."