



“Too often, children with disabilities are defined and judged by what they lack, rather than what they have. Today, our children are slowly creating a space for themselves in society”

—ARCHANA CHANDRA, CEO, JAI VAKEEL FOUNDATION



Left and above: Karishma Swali, one half of the duo behind Jade and creator of the bands, in conversation with Archana Chandra, CEO, Jai Vakeel Foundation; *Right:* Wristbands to spread awareness

Hair and Makeup: Clover Wootton/
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In October, the foundation completed 75 years. The resolve to empower its kids was reinforced with the launch of the Choose To Include project. “Too often, children with disabilities are defined and judged by what they lack, rather than what they have. We started with a commitment to give our children with ID [intellectual disabilities] a true chance at maximising their potential. Today, they are positive contributors to a workspace—breadwinners for their families...gold medallists at the Special Olympics—and are creating a space for themselves in society,” says Archana Chandra, the foundation’s CEO.

It’s an incredible milestone, and one for the books. Started in 1944 by Hormusjee Vakeel and his wife (who were determined to give their daughter, Dina, who had Down syndrome, a brighter future), the NGO served as a haven for a few kids. It gradually moved from Vakeel’s living room to a two-acre campus in Sewri, Mumbai. With branches in Pune and Nasik, the foundation betters the lives of 3,000 children and adults annually. “In a country where two per cent of the population is struggling

with ID, this isn’t enough,” says Chandra, explaining the decision to boost the Foundation’s awareness campaign for this project by recruiting students, families and businesses in a network that requires each to participate actively.

Among the many initiatives planned around the platinum jubilee is a collaboration with Karishma Swali, of couture house Jade by Monica and Karishma, to create a fashion accessory promoting equality and inclusion. “Made from raw recycled denim, recycled threads and organic canvas fabrics, these bands have been handcrafted by the enterprising graduating women at the The Chanakya School of Embroidery & Fine Crafts in Byculla, in our efforts to give them an independent future. Given the need of the hour, the bands also stand for a more sustainable world that is free of violence,” says Swali, who founded the embroidery house along with her sister-in-law and design partner, Monica Shah. Incidentally, Chanakya’s client list includes Christian Dior, Fendi, Gucci, Valentino, and Saint Laurent to name a few.

The year’s celebrations kicked off with an event at Tao Art Gallery, Mumbai, on World Autism Day in April, where prominent artists and children from several schools co-created artwork with the kids from the Foundation to embody the theme of inclusion. Then, last month, the kids were given cooking masterclasses by award-winning chef Prateek Sadhu at Foodhall alongside students from prominent schools. “We want to continue to maximise the potential of our children,” says Chandra.

But why a fashion accessory? “[Because] a visual message is a wonderful way to reinforce our core values and build a community that commits to a world that is more aware, with equal rights for all. We aim to start a global movement that is fashionable and soulful,” says Swali, as Chandra adds: “It will serve as a reminder, so come be a part of our story, wear our band, inspire others and help us build a movement.” ■

Starting at ₹750, the bands will be available online at Saltscout.com/jaivakeel