

Battling Down syndrome, 23-year-old ups the bar

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New Delhi: It's 11am. Wearing her favourite make-up, Devanshi Joshi has packed her lunch and is on way to Gram Bharat — an outlet in RK Puram that sells products made by rural artisans. She is accompanied by her father.

A diligent employee — many customers come back several times only to meet her — Joshi has been working as a store assistant since 2013. Last year, she received the President award for best employee. Joshi's story is one of relentless pursuit towards "independence" — overcoming challenges posed by Down syndrome, a genetic condition that le-

ads to delayed physical growth and intellectual disability.

Joshi is this year's Helen Keller Award winner from Delhi, a recognition she will formally receive on December 3 — the International Day of Disabled Persons — for being an active ambassador for the cause of employment for disabled people and acting as a role model for others.

"We are happy for Devanshi, and not just because she is our child. We hope that the recognition will give hope to parents of other such children. While visual and hearing impairments have got much attention, people still remain largely ignorant about Down syndrome. They are just lost," said Anil



MAKING A DIFFERENCE: Devanshi Joshi received the Helen Keller Award or being an active ambassador for the cause of disabled people

Joshi, father of the 23-year-old, and an IT employee who is submerged in the task of ensuring accessibility and inclusivity

In her effort to raise awareness about the "path that can be taken by kids with Down syndrome", Joshi has spoken at va-

rious national and international forums, such as SAFI, National Trust, Down Syndrome Federation of India and World Down Syndrome Congress.

Looking at Joshi, it's tough to imagine how she has battled nearly two decades of no support system — even "expert" paediatricians knew little about what to do in her condition, leaving the family to do their own research.

Born in Nagpur, Joshi received her formal education in a "normal" school, which helped her gain confidence. She cleared class X and XII through NIOS. "There was initial reluctance from people to accept Devanshi, but her honest, frank and friendly behaviour

brought them around. It's the lack of understanding and exposure that makes people behave the way they do," Rashmi Joshi, her mother, said.

An avid photographer and dancer, Joshi proudly displays the snaps taken by her that adorn the room. In fact, her first self-earnings came through pictures that were sold at an exhibition in Hauz Khas Village. She is also the subject of an award-winning documentary, "Raising the Bar", which explores the journey of people with Down syndrome in various countries and states.

Joshi now aims to become the store manager — raising the bar towards self-reliance, one step at a time.