

## The good Samaritans

When a brother-sister duo took pizza to shelters for the homeless in New York, it was not just food that these second generation Gujarati youngsters got the poor. They got some special moments for those who haven't had many

Raja Bose

June 20, 10.30 am. The mood at Bread and Life on 75, Lewis Avenue, Brooklyn, is ecstatic. There is music, dance and a sense of gay abandon. A day, inmates of this centre for

the homeless, will probably remember all their lives.

And, bringing a smile on their faces is the brother-sister duo in the US — Obaid Kadwani and Qurrat Ann Kadwani — who spearheaded the 'Pizza for the Homeless' project, getting pizzas, along with live music and lots of fun to five shelters for the homeless in NYC, Brooklyn and Bronx.

"We come from a culture of service. We have very lofty role models like Mahatma Gandhi and Mother Teresa. It was logical to combine the arts with community service," says Obaid, a celebrity among South Asians across America for hosting a national TV show about Bollywood called 'Namaste America.' His father migrated to the US 23 years ago.

Obaid, who's family has roots in Kutch, runs a non-profit multicultural arts company, Eyeblink, that has caused a stir in New York City through this project.

The project has seen 75 large pizzas being donated a day to different NYC shelters, every day for a week. Pizza Hut has joined the grand pizza sponsor for this humanitarian initiative, donating a free full-house pizza for every pizza that Eyeblink has purchased from them. According to statistics, as many as 5,000 slices of pizza have been distributed.

"The over-arching idea is to show that you can have one good thought, regardless of where it originates, and, because humanity is basically good, people will jump onto the bandwagon and that same good thought will become a firestorm of good. Even a dollar does make a difference," says Qurrat Ann Kadwani, artistic director of the NGO. All projects are approved by her and she makes sure that the projects fit the vision and the mission of the company.

Obaid promises that this would become an annual project and would increase in scope every year. "Our donors have shown us their commitment. The shelters and kitchen have shown us the need. As requested by the shelters, we will be back. However, we need everyone to help," he says.

Project 'Pizza for Homeless' created a pizza party and a special moment for those that don't have too many special moments. And, it has evoked warm response.

Yemi Oyaname, nutritionist and manager of St. John's Bread and Life in Brooklyn, said that

Eyeblink had done something never done before, “In 27 years of existence, nobody has ever thrown a pizza party for our guests. People were dancing, clapping, and everyone was so excited. Having the live music was just amazing,” says Oyaname.

Reverend Steve Sele of Love Gospel Kitchen in the Bronx echoed her sentiments. “This is so different for us. Eyeblink

and its donors are spreading so much love. We want Eyeblink to come back every year. Just look around at all these happy faces. This means so much to them.”

Swoan Parker, who volunteered to take pictures at Love Gospel Kitchen in Bronx, was seen fighting back tears. A woman had told her that she would skip her meal so that she could take the pizza back to her sick husband who hadn’t eaten all day, even though she herself had not eaten all day either. “Thanks to the plentiful pizza provided by Eyeblink and its donors, the woman was able to eat and take some pizza back for her ailing husband,” says Parker.

“Eyeblink was initially formed as a theatre company and has grown and evolved into an arts organisation. The theatre department has been doing a very innovative, ongoing series called ‘American Colors.’ We also give away at least 200 seats per week to underprivileged people including abused children, battered housewives



Qurrat Ann Kadwani



Obaid Kadwani



