

CHEERING CHAMPIONS AND THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS

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VANDORAI vaazha vaikum Chennai'. This popular Tamil song encapsulates the sentiments of the city perfectly. Chennai welcomes every individual with open arms and fills them with love and warmth which is reflected in the work people here do. Walking down any street in the city, you will come across people working for and with a community, excelling in their field, or bringing about much-needed change. Most of these people are away from the limelight. To recognise their efforts, Kalyana Sundaram Associates Trust, a city-based trust has been honouring these champions for a decade.

Started as a chartered accounting firm 32 years ago, the team of four partners formed the trust in 2012. The vision was to give back to the city they have called their home for four decades. Working on it, the partners came up with the concept of identifying the people who work "silently" for the welfare of society and acknowledging them with the 'Champions of Chennai' title. The award is a cross-section of a conch shell that represents evolution and growth with the names of the achievers imprinted on it. The ceremony commenced in 2013 and marked its 10th edition this year in August.

The purpose of the awards put forth by Gopalakrishnan is "to promote individuals to come up and do more in their field of work". The motto behind this is 'to do something sustainable' — to conduct these awards year after year and recognise people who contribute to the city's growth. "This entire programme has been sustained throughout the years because of the peo-

ple in the city. It is them who nominate and it is also the people of Chennai who win this award without any age restriction," adds Gopalakrishnan, a trustee. The trust believes that throwing light on the individuals and the work they do will help them attract attention, which will in turn help them on their mission.

A gala for hard work

The awardees are categorised under Arts and Culture, Education, Enterprise,

Their dedication, hard work, and perseverance have made it to the list of winners," says Vijaya Kalyan, advisor to the team.

By the public, for the public

The winners are first nominated by the general public in the respective category on the Champions of Chennai's online portal. "The portal is open and entries keep coming throughout the year. If a public member thinks that an individual is to be awarded for the work that he/she/they is doing, then they are filtered after a background check," says Vijaya.

The background check includes the kind of work the nominated person has been doing for over 10 years, its impact, and what the general public has to say about that individual. Of

all the nominations who tick off every criterion in the checklist are forwarded to the jury. A four-member jury — two men and two women — comes together to look at the filtered nominations and does a second background check.

The jury members' research helps select the winner. They take a couple of months to decide on the top five and then finally a champion. After which, the winner is contacted. All this process happens without the nominee knowing that he/she is elected for the award. There have been instances in the past where the awardees have not accepted the acknowledgment stating that there is more to be done by them. "If the winner declines to receive the award then we approach the second person on the list of nominations," says Manikandan.

With a hope to take this model of encouragement to different cities and recognise the silent heroes there, the trustees are gearing up to plan for next year.

To nominate, visit: championsofchennai.org



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Manikandan R

Healthcare, Science, Social Initiative, and Sports. "People belonging to the LGBTQIA+ are awarded but they don't have separate categories because we want to be inclusive. Limiting them under one category is the opposite of inclusive," says Manikandan R, trustee. The awards started with three categories and were extended to eight over the years. Till date, they have identified and awarded 60 such champions who work on the ground to bring a change.

This year's awardees were Thirupurasundari Sevel for Arts and Culture, Vidyaakar S from Udavum Karangal for Social Initiative, Dr Navin Jayakumar for Education, Adyar Ananda Bhavan for Enterprise, Dr Rajan Ravichandran for Healthcare and Rao Brothers from SDAT AKG TT Centre for Sports. "Some of these people are well-known, but they did not rise to fame overnight. It was years of work that secured them the spot.

