

# Dad's death becomes defining moment for Pashan youth

Ardhra.Nair@timesgroup.com

He had passed standard X, when his father was diagnosed with cancer and his mother, who worked as a maid, was finding it hard to make both ends meet.

Shekhar Jadhav (19) had fleetingly thought of quitting studies to work. But a sympathetic mentor and a few good students gave their time to teach him and Jadhav is now a third-year student of biology at the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER) aspiring to carry out research in cancer.

Jadhav is an inspiration to students from his neighbo-

urhood in Nimhan Mala, an impoverished neighbourhood in Pashan area. After scoring 93% in standard X from a municipal school, Shekhar was thinking of dropping out of school.

"We had an Exciting Science group where people, especially from National Chemical Laboratory, teach students about basic science. One of them was Guruswamy who noticed my interest in science and would tell me about various competitive exams like the JEE. But I never wanted to go to IIT as pure science fascinated me," Shekhar said.

This led his mentor to

## Spreading knowledge

Shekhar is now a member of Disha. After experiencing how a few good and determined minds can change a person's future, Shekhar has decided to do what they did for him. "This year, my friends and I have decided to teach three girls from my own school who did well in their standard X and XI. I will be teaching them physics, chemistry, biology and mathematics. I can't ever thank enough all those who helped me get here. I know how hard it is for a child in a PMC school to achieve something. Teaching needy children is the best way to give back," he added.



talk to members of Disha, a student outreach programme by students of IISER, Pune. While Disha was into teaching students in the slums, there was no specialized train-

ing. "Some students started teaching me physics, chemistry, biology and mathematics. I am the only student who has ever been taught in such a special manner,"

Shekhar said. But the stress at home due to his father's illness, a change in the teaching pattern in schools and junior colleges, and the intermediate training by IISER students led to Shekhar performing badly in standard XII. "I could just make the cut off to apply to IISER. I knew it was a do-or-die situation for me," he said.

Shekhar plunged into studies. "Somebody told me the results would be declared the same day. I don't have an internet connection at home so I kept calling people every hour. I called a Disha coordinator at 3am to ask about the results," he added.

That year, the results were announced five days later. Shekhar said they were the worst five days. "On the sixth day, the result was announced and I was in. Nobody from our locality knows what IISER is. To them, it is a cluster of intimidating buildings on the left while going to the university from Pashan," he said.

His parents paid his fees through loans from friends, and the second and third year fees were paid by Shekhar himself. "I get Rs 5,000 as stipend every month which I saved. I want to do research in cancer, hence I chose biology," he added.