

# Australian Elca Grobler and her team are helping abused women at the risk of their own safety

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DECCAN CHRONICLE



"It happened some time ago at our Falaknuma centre, which was started one-and-a-half-years back," says Elca Grobler, founder of My Choices. "Four men came to the premises and threatened us; they wanted us to stop what we were doing. They weren't happy with the fact that we were encouraging women to come to us to share their personal problems. We usually have a male presence at our centres, so the matter was taken care of. Most of the times, the threats are all air," she adds.

The NGO, My Choices, aims to stop violence against women and children. A team of counsellors and psychologists train local women who are employed to work within their community to create a change; currently there are 70 such Peace Makers, working through the NGO.

Then there are times when the threats are serious. "A man walked in for counselling regarding his sister's case, hiding a packet of chilli powder and a knife. He was aggressive and didn't want any reconciliation to happen; but by the end of the ses-



**GAME CHANGER:** (From left) Founder of My Choices, Elca Grobler with a friend Daisy Mothale and co-founder Anjali Rudraraju

## Fighting violence

sion he had calmed down," says Pearl Choragudi, one of the senior counsellors at the centre.

Elca shifted to the city from Sydney with her husband, an entrepreneur, and three children in 2011. Holding honours in Finance, CFA and MBA, she wanted to work in areas leading to financial empowerment. "But whatever research I did, I came across more cases of abuse against women. Then there were the alarming statistics about women's safety in the country. India is one of the worst four countries in the world in terms of fre-

quency and severity of violence against women. The NGO aims to tell women that they have a choice to not continue to suffer abuse. When counselling is ineffective, we provide help through our lawyers."

In a short span of time, Elca and her nine-member team have worked in 122 areas in Hyderabad besides 13 towns. They have conducted awareness drives in 20 schools and have dealt with more than 700 cases of abuse and are currently providing guidance at counselling centres at Falaknuma, Banjara Hills, Red Hills and Golconda.

"We have had cases where women have walked in beaten and bruised, others who were on the verge of committing suicide and young

children who were sold into prostitution by their parents," says Pearl.

Women are given four weeks of intensive counselling training and are also taught about the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005. This is followed by a two-month internship period. "Women are also encouraged to counsel other women facing similar situations. We have also partnered with the 'Bell Bajao' campaign where people can get in touch with us if they are facing abuse," says Elca.

The NGO plans to partner with Mixit, a mobile social platform through which college students can access free and private online counselling services and will also be collaborating with Project Chaitra to come up with a state-wide helpline.



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ELCA GROBLER, MY CHOICES