

Crowdfunding a Well-Deserved Break

adapted from an article by TEJAL RAO

1 I had hoped readers would enjoy following a food vendor around on the streets of Manhattan for a day, but I hadn't expected the story I wrote about Kabir Ahmed to take on a life of its own.

2 Mr. Ahmed, 46, immigrated from Bangladesh 23 years ago and now works five or six days a week selling chicken biryani and other hot dishes out of a halal food cart in the Financial



District. He is one of more than 10,000 people, most of them immigrants, who make a living selling food on the city's sidewalks. The job is difficult and unglamorous, like many jobs in the food industry. It does not pay well.

3 Mr. Ahmed's wife had mentioned to him, in passing, the idea of saving up for a family cruise in the Caribbean. It was a luxury that Mr. Ahmed knew they could not afford for their family of six, but for some reason it had stuck with him. At the end of my article I wrote about Mr. Ahmed's longing to go on vacation.

4 Not long after my piece was published, readers sent emails asking how they could be helpful. I suggested they buy lunch at food carts, and tip well, especially on rainy days when business slows down. Then one reader started a crowdfunding campaign to raise money for Mr. Ahmed and his family and their dream vacation. This past Friday, a couple of weeks after I had spent that day with Mr. Ahmed, I stopped by his cart to show him that the campaign for his family had reached over \$5,000. "I cannot believe this, I cannot," he said.

5 I wanted to know what Mr. Ahmed thought about the article. His wife and son liked the story very much, he said, and his customers seemed to like it, too. As we shared a doughnut, it occurred to me that Mr. Ahmed himself hadn't read the piece. "I started to read it on the train, but then I fell asleep. You know, Tejal, I was very tired."

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