Never bend your head. Always hold it high.
Look the world straight in the eye.

Helen Keller
"I long to accomplish a great and noble task, but it is my chief duty to accomplish small tasks as if they were great and noble."

Helen Keller
In my two decades in the disability sector, I have never seen more exciting times! Sure, there have been those years when major developments have taken place. But 2011 will witness two significant developments that will shape the future of millions of people with disabilities in India for years and decades to come.

After eight months of advocacy led by NCPEDP and the Disabled Rights Group, we were able to convince the Government to go in for a brand new, comprehensive disability law reflecting the letter and spirit of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This dream of the sector, when realised, will usher in a whole new paradigm of rights for people with disabilities.

2011 will also witness a serious and genuine attempt towards enumeration of people with disabilities in the Census. This time around, the sector saw tremendous co-operation from the Census Commission which led to a much improved question, a whole process of sensitisation of enumerators and creation of awareness among people with disabilities. I am hopeful, we will get the numbers right this time. Authentic numbers will mean significantly better resource allocation for disability issues.

In most of our struggles, there has been that divide of ‘Us’ – the disability sector versus ‘Them’ – the Government. But this time, the Government has truly done what was expected of them. It is now really upto ‘Us’ to show wisdom, maturity and above all, unity to create history and leave a legacy.

As we celebrate this year’s World Disability Day and 2010 slowly inches towards closure, I feel strangely optimistic.

I seriously do think we are at the threshold of history.
For more than a decade, Shell has partnered NCPEDP to sponsor the Helen Keller Awards. Every year it humbles me to see the nominations that come in. They are increasing in number and quality. This is heartening to note because it shows without doubt that the world is increasingly becoming more inclusive. With some shame I accept that it is not enough in quantum or in speed but clearly there is a step change happening.

Shell continues its stress on Diversity and Inclusiveness as a policy across the group globally. And as I work across other company boards, I see this aspect growing in corporate consciousness. I would like to believe that NCPEDP has done much to spur the growth of good work. I would also like to acknowledge the efforts of the many who silently continue to do so much for the disability movement across the world without any recognition or reward.

As much as we felicitate the winners of this year’s Helen Keller Awards, it is to this silent group out there that I offer my personal gratitude to honour the work they do.
It has been twelve years since we set up these Awards. With each passing year, we are amazed at the ever increasing rate of contributions by people and companies towards the promotion of equal opportunities for persons with disabilities.

This year too, we received an overwhelming number of nominations. It reaffirms our belief that The NCPEDP-Shell Helen Keller Awards are the definitive benchmark in honouring those who contribute significantly towards the empowerment of disabled people.

The spectrum of Awardees this year is very wide and very vibrant. On one hand, we have a small NGO in Ladakh generating employment for people with disabilities turning waste to craft and on the other, we have a winner from the gem industry! There is also the story of a housekeeping enterprise and then another of the hospitality industry.

It is encouraging to see that sectors which were hitherto thought to be unviable for disabled persons are taking up disability issues in a big way. Hopefully, these stories will pave the way for many more to come.

I would like to extend my heartiest congratulations to all the Awardees and wish them all the very best.
The story of the NCPEDP-Shell Helen Keller Awards dates back to 1999, making this the twelfth year of the Awards. Over the many years, these Awards have come to be recognised as the most prestigious Indian benchmark for honouring people and organisations that have worked towards a barrier-free, non-discriminatory and inclusive India. Though, over the years, many individuals and organisations have been honoured, two factors have remained constant. One, the highly encouraging increase in the numbers of nominations that we receive each year; and two, the truly diverse nature of work being done by the awardees (and indeed, all the nominees) in their respective fields. Both these facts amply suggest that India is well on her way of recognising disability as an issue that needs to be addressed. However, like always, we would sound a word of caution. The fight for equal rights, access and opportunity for people with disabilities is an ongoing one. There is still much that needs to be done. Nevertheless, please join us in felicitating the 10 awardees of 2010, as we share their inspiring and motivating journeys. Heartiest congratulations to them for overcoming myriad difficulties in making our country – its institutions and workplaces more accommodating and inclusive!
Subodh Bhargava: Chairman of Tata Communications Limited and Tata Communications International Pte Ltd.; Chairman, Advisory Board, Wartsila India Limited; and Chairman, Viom Networks Limited, Subodh Bhargava, is one of the most influential spokespersons for the Indian industry. Past President of the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and ex-Group Chairman and Chief Executive of the Eicher Group of Companies, he is also one of the Founder Trustees of NCPEDP.

Anuradha Bhavnani: Regional Director at the Shell Foundation in India, Anuradha Bhavnani’s focus has been on building and nurturing innovative entrepreneurial enterprises with social and environmental impacts. A postgraduate in Business Administration, she has worked with global multinationals across over 12 countries. She has been an advisor to the Rockefeller Foundation on their Asian Climate Change & Resilience Program Network.

Dharti Daftary: Senior Programme Manager with the British High Commission, New Delhi, Dharti Daftary has over a decade of experience in the development sector. She has worked with international NGOs such as Care India, Oxfam GB and Save the Children UK, in leadership positions on issues of disaster relief, risk reduction, disability, human rights, child rights and gender.

Parul Chandra: Deputy Chief of Bureau with The Asian Age in Delhi, Parul Chandra has over two decades in journalism. Having worked with The Statesman and The Times of India in the past, she has covered issues concerning education, rural development, water disputes, minorities as well as J&K and politics. She has also been on a British fellowship for journalists to UK.

Selection Committee
List of Awardees

CATEGORY A
ROLE MODEL DISABLED PERSONS
- Dipti Bhatia
- Mohammed Iqbal
- Sai Prasad Vishwanathan

CATEGORY B
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- Meera Chetan Bhatia
- Rama Chari

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- Gitanjali Gems Ltd.
- Lemon Tree Hotels Pvt. Ltd.
- Sinar Jernih (Ind) Pvt. Ltd.
- Yum! Restaurant (India) Pvt. Ltd.
Life is a succession of lessons which must be lived to be understood.

Helen Keller

Role Model Disabled Persons

- Dipti Bhatia
- Mohammed Iqbal
- Sai Prasad Vishwanathan
A congenital visual impairment didn’t deter Dipti Bhatia from being a multi-faceted woman. The Deputy Director of Vidya Sagar, Chennai, Dipti is an M Phil (History), a teacher, a bilingual poet and a role model to many. Not unexpected, given that her grandmother made sure that Dipti grew up as independent as possible. She was given responsibilities and rewarded or punished like the other children, who grew up with her. Such positive experiences in childhood have been a great influence.

Dipti aspired to be a lecturer, as teaching was her passion. She joined Vidya Sagar as a volunteer in 1990. The turning point in her life came when, following her heart and not her head, she declined a lecturer’s post in the prestigious Presidency College, Chennai and continued at Vidya Sagar.

Dipti became the coordinator of the Inclusion Cell at Vidya Sagar in 1998. The cell has secured admission for nearly 100 students to schools and colleges. Her role is of a facilitator for inclusion and support for the students. She continues to fight the stereotyping of people with disabilities.

At the same time, she also co-ordinates Vidya Sagar’s government programmes. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan reaches out to 1600 children with disability in over 300 schools in Chennai. Vazhndhu Kaatuvom (a state government poverty alleviation project) is implemented in 59 villages in Kanchipuram district, reaching out to 1500 people with disabilities.

Perhaps there is no greater testimony to her belief in the cause, than her poem on inclusion, which is often quoted in lectures and seminars.
It takes a discerning eye to spot an opportunity in something that all of us generate, and consider worthless – garbage. That’s precisely what Mohammed Iqbal’s Leh based People’s Action Group for Inclusion and Rights (PAGIR) has been doing, among various other things, since 2007.

PAGIR is a rights movement working to create a society that is inclusive and free of prejudice. This goal addresses the issue of providing livelihood to disabled people as the group firmly believes that economic empowerment is the first step towards social empowerment and inclusion. PAGIR is led by disabled people and members of their families. The group promotes two economic enterprises; Jungwa Shrungskyob and Himalaya on Wheels.

Jungwa Shrungskyob (the protection of the four elements) focuses on a huge environmental concern – garbage. It engages disabled artists, who turn waste to craft and other useful products as also reduce environmental damage by producing paper and cloth bags instead of poly bags. These activities are expected to provide employment to about 200 people.

Himalaya on Wheels is a collaborative effort with Chennai based Travel Another India to make Ladakh more accessible to disabled tourists. AccessAbility was commissioned for an access audit of tourist destinations and corrective measures are being taken accordingly. Once fully implemented, wheelchair-user tourists can expect greater levels of comfort, a wider choice of accessible destinations and the flexibility to tailor packages to individual needs.

These initiatives are expected to generate enough revenue to make PAGIR sustainable in the long run.
Sai Prasad Vishwanathan lives by the belief that nothing is impossible! Don’t believe him? A run through his achievements should convince even the most hard-nosed cynic. From being thrown out of schools on account of physical disability, Sai Prasad went on to receive a research scholarship for an MS degree at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, USA. Doubts about his physical mobility didn’t deter him from becoming the first disabled Indian to sky dive from 14,000 feet. Facing great odds at securing a job only firmed his resolve which led to offers from three multinational companies. That, in turn, led to securing admission to the prestigious Indian School of Business, in spite of being among those with the least work experience to do so.

And if that is more than what most achieve in a lifetime, it isn’t all! A gold medal for academic excellence from the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh in 2002, a place in the list of toppers of undergraduate Engineering from CBIT, Hyderabad in 2006 and the Best Trainee award at Infosys in 2007, bring Sai to the present where he has founded and funded Sahasra, devoted to the cause of sponsoring financially backward students with scholarships to pursue education.

The master achiever believes that when society recognises a person’s abilities rather than disabilities, when peers are sensitive to an individual’s dreams rather than being sympathetic about them, when parents and educational institutions provide the much-needed confidence, and most importantly, when physically disabled people themselves believe that something extraordinary is possible regardless of the odds, the belief turns into achievement.
“My share of the work may be limited, but the fact that it is work makes it precious.”

Helen Keller

ROLE MODEL SUPPORTERS

- Anubhuti M. Bhattacharya
- Meera Chetan Bhatia
- Rama Chari
Anubhuti M. Bhattacharya

It requires great courage of conviction to let go of a senior assignment with a multinational, to pursue a calling of the heart. Anubhuti Bhattacharya possesses that courage in full measure. An HR professional with extensive industry experience, Anubhuti set up Anubhuti Consultants, an HR consultancy exclusively for disabled people in May 2005. The firm specialises in conducting access audits and sensitisation trainings, and finding employment opportunities.

In her words, the attempt is to be the bridge between the corporate world and the large population of persons with disabilities. In that sense it is a consultancy firm not only for disabled people seeking employment opportunities in the private sector but also for potential employers, who seek guidance to identify, train and recruit such people.

In the past five years, Anubhuti has helped find employment for over 500 people across levels and industry. Companies such as Pepsico, IBM, ITC Hotels, Yum! And Genpact have benefitted from this initiative. The firm also reaches out to NGOs with job opportunities, training inputs and professional guidance.

Her contribution to the cause hasn’t gone unnoticed. Anubhuti is a recipient of the Helen Keller Award 2007 for contribution towards the employment of people with disabilities and the Manav Seva Award 2009 for excellence in social entrepreneurship.
Meera Chetan Bhatia

Working for the welfare of the hearing impaired, runs in the family of Meera Bhatia. With father, Suraj Prakash associated with the All India Federation of the Deaf and mother, Mohini Kanchanbaras a national award winner for training deaf girls, Meera didn’t have to look far for guidance. For inspiration, neither as both her parents are speech and hearing impaired. Starting as an interpreter for the deaf at age 16, Meera set up Sai Swayam, a coaching institute for such people in 2000.

Defining her mission to be “the empowerment of the hearing-speech impaired by providing them quality education and training”, Meera assists them in getting suitable jobs as well. Vocational training at Sai Swayam is competitive and abreast of current market trends. A student gets to choose his area of interest or is provided with professional counselling to identify it. Over 250 of her students now work with companies such as IBM, HCL, SITE, Genpact, KFC, Costa Coffee and Cafe Coffee Day.

With a view to increase the acceptability of people with speech and hearing impairment, Meera has worked towards raising awareness of Sign Language among the general public. She has conducted Sign Language sensitisation programmes for over 100 public prosecutors and lawyers at the Supreme Court of India and several High Courts.

You have probably seen her on television too. For the past 16 years, Meera has been a news reader on Doordarshan for the news magazine for hearing impaired people.
Never underestimate the power of an email! When she moved to Bangalore in 2005, Rama Chari wrote to Infosys BPO, which had just begun to hire people with disabilities. With her support, the company became the first in the IT sector to recruit a large number of disabled people.

Rama’s experience in the field of disability goes back two decades and ranges from working at the grassroots level to policy advocacy and research at the macro level. She started her career with Action for Ability Development and Inclusion where she prepared children with disability to join mainstream schools. She then joined the National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People where she was part of several campaigns for policy advocacy.

In 2007, she set up Diversity and Equal Opportunity Centre (DEOC) to provide policy and accessibility consultancy, training and research in the area of disability. She strongly believes that disability employment is not about recruitment alone but about creating an environment conducive for people with disabilities to participate in an equal manner. The effort should be towards making changes in the infrastructure, policies and systems to make them inclusive.

Rama also works with organisations to create unique programmes towards the larger goal of inclusion. These include Wipro’s Disability Framework, Mphasis’s Project Communicate and IIMB’s Office of Disability Service. Under her leadership, DEOC compiled a comprehensive manual, A Values Route to Business Success – the Why and How of Employing Persons with Disabilities for the Confederation of Indian Industry.

Rama Chari

Director
Diversity and Equal Opportunity Centre
Life is an exciting business, and most exciting when it is lived for others.

Helen Keller
The Gem & Jewellery industry provides ample opportunities for the employment of persons with disabilities on account of the specific nature of its processes. No company has put this realisation to better use than the Gitanjali Group. Established in 1966, Gitanjali is India’s largest integrated diamond and jewellery manufacturer-retailer and a leading name in the global gem and jewellery industry with brands like Gili, Nakshatra, Asmi and Sangini.

The group’s CSR programmes are run under the umbrella banner Sambhav, with specific projects in the fields of providing employment to disabled people, education for the underprivileged, health and training under the banners Saksham, Saakshar, Sujyot, Sneh and Srishti.

The Saksham initiative focuses on empowerment of people with disabilities through training and employment. The objective is to create conditions for their rehabilitation and integration into society. Saksham Training Centre, integrated within the factory premises at the Rajiv Gems Park, Hyderabad SEZ, imparts six months long training in the basics of jewellery designing and manufacturing to disabled people and youth from rural areas.

After completion of the training and gaining work experience in the factory, Gitanjali aids them in absorption within and outside the industry. Gitanjali employs nearly 250 disabled persons, a figure that is expected to rise four-fold in the next three years. The
group believes that people with disabilities can constitute at least 5 per cent of the industry’s workforce.

These initiatives apart, Gitanjali works with NGOs and government bodies such as District Rural Development Authority’s Employment Generation Marketing Mission and the employment scheme of the state government to organise job fairs in the state’s remote villages. In recognition of its efforts to empower disabled people, the Government of India conferred the National Award for Best Employer upon Gitanjali Gems last year.

Spurred by the success of the Hyderabad centre, Gitanjali plans to replicate the model across the country. The group understands that CSR is an ongoing endeavour but with its Sambhav initiative, little seems beyond reach.
If all goes per plan, by 2013 Lemon Tree Hotels will have about 300 disabled people as team members (or one in every ten, a significant jump from the current 50 or 3.3 per cent of staff strength). Not surprising for a chain that prides itself on providing employment to those with speech and hearing impairments. This has been company policy from an early stage of the chain’s existence.

All disabled members are trained to perform at par with their colleagues. The results have prompted the company to push the envelope further. Initially assigned to back-of-the-house areas such as Housekeeping, Kitchen and Laundry, this year, some of them have been moved to front-of-the-house areas and now are a seamless part of the front end team. A comprehensive guest contact training programme made the transition possible.

That apart, Lemon Tree Hotels supports the cause of people with disabilities by working closely with a host of institutions such as the Vocational Rehabilitation Centre of the Ministry of Labour & Employment (Delhi), Noida Deaf Society, Sanjay School for Disabled People (Goa), Nirmalya Trust (Pune), Indore Deaf Friendship Club, Blind People’s Association (Ahmedabad), Institute of Hearing Impaired People (Chennai & Chengalpattu) and Enable India (Bengaluru).

Young, fun, fresh and spirited, Lemon Tree Hotels is India’s first, largest and finest chain of moderately priced, upscale,
full service, business and leisure hotels. Founded in 2002, the company currently owns and operates 13 hotels in 10 cities, aggregating 1220 rooms with 1550 employees. By 2012, this will increase to 20 hotels in 16 cities with over 2800 rooms and 3000 employees. As will its commitment to the cause of employing more and more disabled people!
What better testimony to the thoughtfulness that goes into the employment of persons with disabilities than the fact that each such individual’s special needs are taken into consideration at the time of induction? An equal opportunity employer, Sinar Jernih (Ind) Pvt. Ltd. believes in doing things differently. A resting room in the office building has been assigned to people with special needs. Ramps, railing and a lift are being installed to make the building more disabled-friendly.

In the country since 2001, Sinar Jernih (Ind) Pvt. Ltd. is the India arm of Sinar Jernih Sdn Bhd, Malaysia. Headquartered in Chennai, it is headed by Josyula S. Shekar as Executive Director. Sinar Jernih focuses on the Hospitality industry with clients including the Taj, Oberoi, Hilton and Leela along with properties in the business and public domain.

The head office employs nine persons with disabilities ranging from orthopaedic impairment to intellectual impairment. Set up in 2007, Sinar Jernih’s project for the disabled – Need Trust generated employment for 370 persons with disabilities, through a job fair. Simultaneously, a web job portal – Able Job was hosted to enable those not conversant with English to access employment opportunities. Need Trust has been a leader in urging other companies to employ disabled persons not merely as a part of corporate social responsibility but as a part of statutory policy.
Sinar Jernih works closely with Tamil Nadu Disabled People’s Federation as a technical partner in all their programmes for disability. Future plans include building a consensus with other multinational companies to employ persons with disabilities, popularizing advantages such as PF benefits, partnering NGOs and constituting a panel of experts to aid corporate bodies in need of technical inputs on disability access. All in keeping with the company’s credo: Responsible, Reliable, Accountable.
Yum! Restaurant (India) Pvt. Ltd.

A vision to open one specially-abled restaurant in every city that Yum! Restaurants International operates in, opens new opportunities for gainful employment of disabled people. The owner of brands such as KFC, Pizza Hut and Taco Bell, Yum! opened its first specially-abled outlet in 2008 and currently has seven such outlets in four cities. More than 50 per cent of the employees in these outlets are persons with disabilities and they are amongst the best performers in the country on all business and consumer parameters.

And that is not all! The group’s signature global programme – World Hunger Relief – addresses hunger and hopelessness. Partnering the United Nations’ World Food Programme, the initiative runs an annual hunger awareness campaign for which it has been honoured as the Corporate Partner of the Year globally.

The World Hunger Relief programme has set a target of $24 million and 6 million volunteer hours for the current year. It cumulates to $84 million and 21 million volunteer hours for the past four years. Funds collected in India are used within the country. This year the proceeds will be used to support a livelihood project in Rajasthan. Food grain banks will be provided to help communities achieve sustainability and enhance resilience in difficult times.

The parent company of Yum! is the world’s largest restaurant company with over 37000 restaurants in over 117 countries and
territories. Yum! employs more than 10000 company employees and franchise associates across its system in India and is the largest and fastest growing restaurant company in the country.

One of the company’s work principles – Believe in All People – underscores the importance of actively seeking diversity, believing everyone has the potential to make a difference, and coaching and supporting every individual to grow to her or his full capacity. Giving back and making a difference in the lives of people with disabilities is a privilege and a responsibility.
The Disabled-Friendly Corporate Logo

The Disabled-Friendly Corporate Logo was designed in 1999, when the NCPEDP-Shell Helen Keller Awards were first instituted. The brief for the design was simple – it was to portray the partnership between the Indian corporate sector and the disabled citizens of India. What emerged was a simple, yet striking, graphic representation in blue and yellow – the international colours of disability. The logo symbolises an ideal relationship between companies and people with disabilities. Visually, it portrays two sides of the same coin, or in other words, a yin and yang relationship. It seeks to reinforce the fact that people with disabilities bring to the table qualities such as commitment, productivity, talent and loyalty. It also tries to spread awareness amongst corporates that they should practice non-discrimination at the workplace, and ensure that it is barrier-free.

The fact that many companies and organisations have realised the economic benefits of employing people with disabilities, is evident from the increasing number of nominations that we receive each year. And while many of these corporates are implementing policies that are already in place globally, it is highly encouraging that others have developed and instituted their own disabled-friendly corporate policies.

As a supporter of the disability sector, we urge you to do your bit by influencing policy at your own workplace, opposing instances of discrimination, and persuading others to offer equal opportunity to people with disabilities.
Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement. Nothing can be done without hope and confidence.

Helen Keller