One can never consent to creep, when one feels an impulse to soar.

Helen Keller
India was the 7th country in the world to have ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). And although, it is being aptly said that CRPD is as good as its implementation, I would still like to believe that India is on the right track. No other country is having the debates that India is having: on contentious issues such as legal capacity, inclusive education, employment, etc. And even though the much awaited new disability rights legislation seems to have gone into a limbo, very soon India has to take a position. And the world will be watching.

This year, NCPEDP and its allies have been able to achieve what has not happened in the last 64 years after Independence. For the very first time, we not only have disabled people and disability experts in the Steering Committee on Empowerment of People with Disabilities and Other Social Welfare Groups for the 12th Five Year Plan, we also have a presence in the Steering Committees on Health, Labour, Transport, Urban Development, Youth Affairs & Sports, Women & Children, Information Technology, Science & Technology, Higher Education, etc.

Never before have so many people with disabilities walked the corridors of the Yojana Bhawan!

The private sector, however, continues to be a worry. We seem to have hit a roadblock. Although, many have joined the disability bandwagon, ideas do not seem to go beyond ‘job fairs’ and the likes. There is no dearth of good examples, but the best practices are not being replicated.

Leading by example is a much better path to be on than being forced to comply! In the pages that follow, you will find several such role models.

Javed Abidi
Honorary Director, NCPEDP
2nd December, 2011

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This is the 13th year of the NCPEDP-Shell Helen Keller Awards. As we give out this year’s Awards, we realise the significance of sharing the amazing stories of the awardees. When we started out, our aim was to provide a medium where these stories could be heard and applauded. We would like to believe we have been able to achieve what we started out to do, although our job is far from over.

The issue at hand is challenging. In the past decade, tremendous work has happened towards promoting employment opportunities for people with disabilities in the country. The corporate sector is increasingly getting sensitised. But there is still a lot of ground that needs to be covered.

As a country we are still learning. And this is where we have understood the importance of sharing best practices. Although there may not be a ‘one size fits all’ magic wand here, we also do not need to reinvent the wheel. The best practices are out there. Over the years, we have shared several through these Awards. But there are numerous others which also need to be told. It is for all of us to look for them and share them.

My heartiest congratulations to all the awardees. Indeed, they have excelled and are worthy of emulation.

Dr. V. Krishnamurthy
Chairman
NCPEDP

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Vikram Singh Mehta
Chairman
Shell Group of Companies

As much as things change, they remain the same. Though I have written elsewhere on the subject with a sense of lament on official policy evolution, however, today the same phrase happily allows me to suggest a positive connotation. The work of NCPEDP continues to grow and inspire in a widening circle of influence.

While this year the contributions from large businesses are indeed heartwarming, it is also very commendable to see emerging businesses in the small and medium sector do so much for inclusive growth through supporting the disability movement. It is very encouraging to note that achievers are not just people with physical disabilities, but even people with cerebral palsy, who are making a difference to the workplace and to their own lives.

As usual, I am humbled when I see so much being achieved despite such limitations. It is a celebration of the human spirit to rise above adversity. And it serves as a huge encouragement to us at Shell to stay committed not just to our own programme on Diversity and Inclusion, but also to NCPEDP for the good work they are doing in recognising these unsung heroes of corporate India.
The story of the NCPEDP-Shell Helen Keller Awards dates back to 1999, making this the thirteenth 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 number 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 11 awardees of 2011, 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!

Awards

Selection Committee

The Thirteenth NCPEDP-Shell Helen Keller Awards

Sushanta Sen
Principal Adviser to the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), Sushanta Sen has been with CII for 40 years and has worked in Kolkata, New Delhi and also in London. His responsibilities have included social development on issues such as education, public health, community development, disaster management, women’s empowerment and disability, among others. He is associated with various social sector organisations and serves on several committees of the Government.

Aarti Dhar
Special Correspondent with The Hindu, Aarti Dhar reports on social sectors like health, education, and women and child development. She has a special interest in issues like disability and has written extensively on it. Aarti has been in the profession for 20 years and holds a Post Graduate Degree in Public Administration. She won the Chandulal Chandrakar Fellowship in 2001 and was awarded the Best Environment Reporter by CMS Vatavaran in 2009.

Anshu Gupta
Founder Director of GOONJ, Anshu Gupta left his corporate job in 1998 with a mission to make clothing a matter of concern. An Ashoka Fellow and Global Ambassador of Ashoka, Anshu is creating a mass movement for recycling and reusing tonnes of waste material by channelising it from cities to the villages, as a resource for rural development. He has been listed in ‘Forbes’ as one of India’s most powerful entrepreneurs.

Deepak Mukarji
Head of Corporate Affairs, Shell Group of Companies in India, Deepak Mukarji has over two and a half decades of experience in management and communications. In addition to being an accomplished actor with over 350 stage performances to his credit, he is also a published writer in both fiction and non-fiction genres. He has worked on some of the world’s leading brands across various industry profiles.
Your success and happiness lie in you. Resolve to keep happy, and your joy and you shall form an invincible host against difficulties.

Helen Keller

CATEGORY A
ROLE MODEL DISABLED PERSONS

Disabled persons from within the disability sector or outside, who have been active as ambassadors of the cause of employment for disabled people and are positive role models for others.

• Ashwin Karthik
• Nilesh Singhal
• Pradeep Raj
Securing 84% at the Secondary School Leaving Certificate Examination and receiving the National Scholarship for engineering studies is not an uncommon feat. But when it is a quadriplegic student with cerebral palsy achieving these, it does become more than uncommon! Ashwin Karthik enjoys the distinction of securing the highest percentage ever scored by a student with cerebral palsy and receiving the National Scholarship for engineering studies, which is given to only one physically disabled student across India. He is also the first quadriplegic student with cerebral palsy to become an engineering graduate.

B.E. in Computer Science, Ashwin is presently working with Mphasis, an HP company, as Delivery Software Engineer. Besides the precision and efficiency he shows in his work, he has also been a mascot of the company’s effort for inclusiveness. He has appeared on TV shows and other platforms and demonstrated that disability does not stop one from being employable. His spirit has rubbed off on other disabled fellows and encouraged them to join Mphasis.

Ashwin has been felicitated with many other awards like the National Award as ‘Best Physically Challenged Individual in India’ by the National Trust, the ‘Young Achiever Award’ by Rotary Midtown and Brigade Group, a Youth Excellence Award titled ‘Determination Icon of the Year’ by Yuva Bangalore, amongst others.

Work and academics are not the only fields he shines in! An embodiment of a truly multifaceted human being, he gives form to his feelings and beliefs through poignant poetry written in different languages. His tenacity and ability to reach out to people, as well as, sheer self-confidence are traits that make him a role model.

Nilesh Singhal
Deputy Manager
State Bank of India, Bhopal

Success, they say, is not a measure of how high you rise, but how far you bounce back after a fall. It is not easy by any means to not only get back on your own feet, but also to expend time and effort to open windows for others, after losing your vision at the age of 18. However, that is exactly what Nilesh Singhal has done since he lost his sight 18 years ago.

Undaunted by the challenges thrown at him by life, Nilesh continued his academic pursuits and obtained a first division in his post graduate degree in Political Science. He holds the second position in order of merit in M.A.

He appeared in the Madhya Pradesh Civil Services Examinations three years in a row from 1997 to 1999 and cleared both preliminary and the main examination. Yet, he was not called for the interview due to his disability. Deciding to fight against this gross injustice, Nilesh filed a petition in the Madhya Pradesh High Court. The Court ruled in his favour and directed that persons with disabilities too are equal citizens of the country and have as much share in its resources as any other citizen.

Nilesh used to run a STD-PCO booth for a living till 2003. He cleared the Probationary Officers’ Examination of the State Bank of India (SBI) in 2005, and is presently working as Deputy Manager at SBI’s Bhopal headquarters.

In recognition of his never say die attitude and commitment to fight for justice for persons with disabilities, Nilesh was awarded the Godfrey Phillips Bravery Award in 2011 and the CNN-IBN Citizen Journalist Award in 2008.
Pradeep Raj has been an active part of several advocacy campaigns related to disability rights, from the inclusion of disability in the Right to Education Act to lobbying for the new Disability Rights Law.

However, it would not be an exaggeration to say that it was his singular persistence and determination that finally led the Government of India to sit up and notice the widespread corruption in the field of disability sports.

The campaign which started in 2009, finally led to de-recognition of the corrupt Paralympics Sports body in 2011. But this did not come easy. It involved several rallies, writing letters, filing requests for information under the Right to Information Act, keeping the pressure on the Ministry of Sports and the Paralympics Sports body, and liaising with the Government for more than two years. This advocacy also ensured the participation of genuine disabled sportspersons in the recently concluded Commonwealth Games in New Delhi in 2010.

An accomplished table tennis player himself, Pradeep is currently involved in the advocacy for participation of deserving disabled sportspersons in the London Olympics, while still keeping a vigil on the Paralympics Sports body.

He has been working in a field which hitherto was seen as out of bounds for persons with disabilities. The area of disability sports is very nascent to India and neither the Government nor the disability sector has paid much attention to it, leading to the corrupt regime that has controlled this field for a decade and more. Pradeep’s passion for sports and his determination to ensure that genuine disabled athletes get their due kept him going in his endeavour for cleaning up the system.

Pradeep has been felicitated for his work by awards like the ‘YUVA 2011’ at a National Youth Symposium, ‘Achiever’s Award’ in 2010 and the IBN 7 – Bajaj Allianz Super Idol Award in 2010, to name a few.

“Security is mostly a superstition. It does not exist in nature, nor do the children of men as a whole experience it. Avoiding danger is no safer in the long run than outright exposure. Life is either a daring adventure, or nothing.”

Helen Keller
Meera Shenoy is the Founder CEO of Youth4Jobs, which focuses on market-linked vocational training of young persons with disabilities from rural underprivileged families. In Andhra Pradesh, the Centre for PwD Livelihoods (CPDL) has been set up in a public-private partnership, with Society for Elimination of Rural Poverty (SERP), which is part of the Rural Development department of the Andhra Pradesh government.

In a pioneering fashion, 20 training centres have been set up exclusively for disabled people. In one and a half years, 1500 rural young persons with disabilities have been trained, with 80% being placed in organised sector jobs. 40% of them are girls. 700 youth are presently undergoing training. Incomes range from Rs. 48,000 to over Rs. 1,00,000 per annum. The distinctiveness of the work is that it is market-driven. Curriculum is tailored to the special needs of different disability categories and customised with companies. This involves working closely with companies to persuade them to employ disabled people, conducting sensitisation workshops for CEOs and supervisors, and helping make workplace corrections. 90% are first time employers of people with disabilities. These range from McDonalds, HDFC Rural BPO to Tata Teleservices, Shoppers Stop and Aegis.

This market-linked vocational training of disabled persons leverages Meera Shenoy’s earlier experience of setting up and scaling innovatively the country’s first Jobs mission for rural underprivileged youth in Andhra Pradesh. She has been invited to talk in national and international forums. Her work was featured in Knowledge@Wharton and the Wall Street Journal. She works with the World Bank, as their expert in the field of youth and employment. Her previous work experience is in the corporate world and media – both print and television.
Niranjan Khatri heads the Sustainable Development Initiative of ITC Hotels. The company follows a triple bottom-line philosophy which aims to holistically address environmental, social and economic issues. As part of its social responsibility initiative, ITC Hotels made a beginning by working with people with disabilities in 2005. Besides employing persons with disabilities, ITC Hotels has been instrumental in auditing its old hotels to make them barrier-free to the extent feasible. Thereafter, the ITC Gardenia has become one of the first hotels in the country to be constructed on the principle of Universal Design.

Niranjan Khatri has been instrumental in conducting a number of sensitisation programmes for different stakeholders, which include the Indian Chamber of Commerce, academics and policy makers to work towards mainstreaming persons with disabilities. He has written articles for hotel trade magazines on this issue and has conducted training sessions for human resource managers in many industries.

He has also provided inputs to NGOs on different issues, and assisted disabled persons in their initiatives, as well as in networking with other people across the industry and internationally. For instance, it was an inspiring presentation by Niranjan Khatri that led Pointec Pens Pvt. Ltd. to begin hiring disabled persons in their organisation.

A simple book on how to employ people with disabilities has been written in partnership with AccessAbility. It is through this book that the subject has been demystified in the Indian industry. By forging partnerships with different stakeholders and attempting to raise the bar, he and his organisation hope to mainstream persons with disabilities with sensitivity and empathy.

Thilakam Rajendran
Managing Director
ARUNIM, New Delhi

As part of the disability sector for more than 21 years, Thilakam Rajendran has concentrated her efforts in an area considered to be difficult even within the disability sector – empowering people with developmental and intellectual disabilities.

As Managing Director of ARUNIM (Association for Rehabilitation Under National Trust Initiative of Marketing), her goal is to open more and more windows of opportunities for the economic independence of people with disabilities, particularly persons with developmental disabilities.

A dynamic and motivated leader, the thrust of her work has been to create employment opportunities which are inclusive and make business sense. She and her team have facilitated placements for persons with disabilities in various models of integrated employment – open, self and supported. She pioneered the concept of partnerships with industry associations – FICCI, CII, Export Promotion Council, Apparel Training and Design Centre, Vocational Rehabilitation Centre, Labour Ministry and organised ‘Career Development Forum’ and ‘Jeevika Sammelan’ for disabled people along with industry specific trainings.

She is credited with the concept of ‘Shop in Shop’ under which she introduced products made by persons with disabilities to leading brands like Fab India, Good Earth, Cottage Industry, Mother Earth etc. Another initiative by her has been to network with educational institutions like the Delhi University to outsource their canteen, stationery and photocopying jobs to disabled people.

Under Thilakam Rajendran’s leadership, ARUNIM is committed to achieve its objectives for its 170 members across the country by inspiring and incubating enterprises of persons with disabilities, facilitating high volumes and better quality products. Since its launch, ARUNIM’s sales turnover has increased ten times from approximately three lakh in 2008 to 30 lakh in 2010!
Walking with a friend in the dark is better than walking alone in the light.

Helen Keller

CATEGORY C
COMPANIES/NGOs/INSTITUTIONS

Organisations from the disability sector or outside, that have shown commitment towards promoting equal employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

- Aegis Limited, Mumbai
- Deaf Enabled Foundation, Hyderabad
- ITC Maurya, New Delhi
- Muskaan (Parents Association for the Welfare of Children with Mental Handicap), New Delhi
- Pointec Pens Private Limited, Bengaluru
Recognised as the ‘Best Employer 2011’ in India and Australia by Aon Hewitt, and the winner of the prestigious Golden Peacock Global Award for HR Excellence, Aegis has an exemplary record in employing persons with disabilities, globally as well as in India. The organisation is not only committed to hire a minimum number of disabled people, but also has a detailed framework of policy and infrastructure so as to support the training and employment of disabled persons on a long-term basis.

Currently, Aegis has 627 disabled employees, which constitutes 1% of its total global workforce. This year their commitment is to enhance this to 1.5%. Of the total disabled employees globally, as many as 314 are from India! The population of disabled persons at Aegis is fairly diverse too, from a gender perspective, as well as from a disability point of view.

As part of a six-dimensional Diversity Model, Aegis has designed and implemented the following initiatives that act as enablers towards enhancing the cause of employment of disabled people:

**Equal Employment Opportunity Policy:** This policy covers all areas of employment, including recruitment, hiring, training, retention and promotion of qualified individuals with disabilities. All service conditions applicable for disabled employees are same as those applicable for others; however, certain flexibilities are provided for disabled employees based on their specific needs.

**Facilities for Persons with Disabilities:** This policy defines the facilities that are accessible, convenient and specially cater to the needs of disabled employees.

**Target based commitment:** This year their commitment is to enhance the global workforce of disabled people to 1.5% of total global workforce.
Within two short years of being set up, the Deaf Enabled Foundation (DEF) has been successful in extending its reach to various stakeholders, and work for the all round development of the deaf community in India.

With an aim to empower deaf people and equip them with different skills and abilities, DEF conducts Advocacy and Leadership Trainings, Personality Development Programmes and Seminars, Sign Language Seminars and Deaf Education Methodology Seminars on a regular basis.

The thrust of the educational training programmes under the Deaf Enabled Education Centre (DEEC) has been on Vocational Training and Computer Education. DEF also helps the deaf youth who have completed these courses to find jobs.

Not just that, DEF provides an orientation for Human Resources personnel of companies that are willing to employ deaf persons. This orientation helps them understand Sign Language and the importance of team work and equal opportunities for the deaf. In the last two years, 92 placements have been made in corporate houses and other establishments.

Advocacy Training creates awareness about the problems of hearing impaired persons in India, not only to sensitise others, but to help the deaf community become more participative in social and legal matters that concern them as citizens. Toward this end, DEF works with various NGOs and other deaf organisations such as the National Association of the Deaf to meet common goals.

To look forward to a better future for deaf people in India without investing in the leadership skills of the next generation would be short-sightedness, and this is something DEF takes cognisance of. Thus, Leadership Training is one of the most important training programmes conducted by them. Besides, they also conduct regular seminars and workshops on Universal Human Rights, gender related issues, sexual harassment, domestic violence for deaf women, and so on.

Keeping the all round development of the deaf in mind, DEF organises Adventure Camps, HIV Awareness Workshops and Cultural Programmes. They also provide Matrimonial Services and Counselling for family members of the deaf.
With the very air of the place exuding a sense of luxury and comfort, ITC Maurya is the country’s finest luxury hotel. It is also one of the best known employers in the industry, with its basic credo being ‘Responsible Luxury’. The organisation has structured the assessment of societal performance through Key Performance Indices, which now include the number of disabled persons employed.

Of its total strength, ITC Maurya has chosen to employ a sizable number of disabled people. This is the highest in any five-star hotel in Delhi. Out of the total of 1079 employees, 22 are people with disabilities. The figure of 2% disabled employees is one of the best in any industry in the country. The nature of disability ranges from hearing/speech impairment to cerebral palsy, dyslexia, dwarfism and locomotor disability.

Moving forward in a systemic manner when it comes to employing them, ITC Maurya first imparts vocational training through NGOs such as Noida Deaf Society and Deafway Foundation in various departments like room reservations, laundry, linen room, engineering, kitchen and front office.

Capitalising on blind people’s strengths of the four main senses – touch, smell, taste and sound, ITC Maurya has entered into a partnership with National Association of the Blind (NAB) for training them in spa treatment. Employing disabled persons in the front office is also a significant change in policy, as it was unheard of in the hospitality industry until a few years ago. In a path breaking effort, women from NAB have also been trained in reception handling skills.

ITC Maurya is also the first hotel in Delhi to conduct a comprehensive accessibility audit by disabled activist, Shivani Gupta of AccessAbility. They have taken great care in making the physical environment accessible and disabled friendly. These measures include parking bays for disabled guests, disabled friendly reception desk, coffee shop, pool side etc., wide corridors, accessible elevators and rest rooms, among other facilities.

ITC Maurya believes in creating and nurturing human capital.
Muskaan
(Parents Association for the Welfare of Children with Mental Handicap), New Delhi

Muskaan was established way back in November 1982, at a time when there were no other organisations to address the needs of adults with developmental and intellectual disabilities. They started their vocational training project in 1989 with three trainees and one teacher, and held classes in a garage in Kalkaji, Delhi with no model for adult training to follow. Muskaan dabbled in various vocational programmes, coming up with full curriculum, assessment procedures and teaching strategies over the years.

Through their training programmes and workshops, Muskaan has proved that persons with intellectual disabilities can learn work related and other skills, and earn for themselves. It has been their aim to rehabilitate intellectually disabled people by enabling them to be productive members of society through capacity building and securing their rights by organising the necessary development opportunities and support services.

Realising the need for employment of the graduates from vocational training programmes, the Muskaan Work Centre was started in 1995 and has been a very successful experiment. Today it has 45 production assistants, 35 of whom are intellectually disabled and 10 have multiple disabilities. They are working in eight production units, namely bakery, cooking, masala and pulses, food processing, solar drying, candles (regular and decorative), decorative diyas and office & gift stationery. The annual production is worth more than Rs 20 lakh!

Muskaan markets the products made at the Work Centre and takes orders from various organisations. Difficult though it is, they constantly try to place some of their higher functioning trainees in open market too. However, only three students have been able to get regular employment – two in a packaging unit at IGNOU and one in a garment factory.

Besides, the organisation has evolved a range of training programmes aimed at multi-dimensional development that include variety of life skills such as personal adequacy, self awareness and awareness of surroundings, socio-emotional competence and cognitive training.

Empowerment, rather than charity has been the guiding philosophy of Muskaan and it has been striving to build an equitable society which recognises diversity and respects the rights of all people irrespective of their abilities.
As part of their Corporate Social Responsibility, Pointec Pens has been actively involved in helping the under-privileged, especially women from weak socio-economic background, find employment through Self-Help Groups. But it was at a conference organised by ITC Hotels for its stationery vendors that Pointec Pens was first familiarised with the concept of employing persons with disabilities.

Instead of treating the presentation by Niranjan Khatri, who heads the Sustainable Development Initiative of ITC Hotels, as mere words, Pointec decided to act upon it. The organisation initiated the process of creating employment opportunities for disabled persons by collaborating with Enable India and Mobility India.

This programme was started in June 2011. Within a very short period of time, Pointec has come a long way. At present they have 11 disabled employees working with them, out of 400 total employees, which is nearly 3% of their work force – a figure which is very impressive. Moreover, their target is to recruit 15% of the total employee strength (nearly 60 disabled persons) by December 2013.

The disabled employees are working in various departments, ranging from accounts, production assembly, production moulding, data entry to quality lab. With the help of the Mobility India team, Pointec Pens identified the candidates and Enable India helped to train them.

Though they have not made any changes in their organisation to accommodate disabled employees, they have gone a step ahead and taken the work to the homes of persons with disabilities. What this move also achieves is that it creates work opportunities for care-givers of persons with disabilities too! Being a manufacturing company of pens, gel pens and mechanical pencils, their products lend themselves to assembling and sub-assembling work in homes.

Despite being in very early stages of their initiative to promote employment opportunities for disabled people and to help them become independent, Pointec is eager and enthusiastic. Their aim is to become a role model company.
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.

“The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched – they must be felt with the heart.”

Helen Keller