“ALONE WE CAN DO SO LITTLE, TOGETHER WE CAN DO SO MUCH”

Helen Keller
What a winter that was, the winter of 2016!
At this time last year, as we gave away the Helen Keller Awards and celebrated the World Disability Day, we were not sure if the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill would even get taken up in the Parliament in the controversy ridden Winter Session, leave alone if it being debated or passed. However, we continued to live in an everlasting hope.
And then, the impossible happened. The mood got created. The mood was created! The Disabilities Bill that had lingered for months/years, got passed by both the Houses of Parliament within less than a week. The Bill was now an Act. The “law of the land” as they call it. The Gazette of India boldly announced to the world, “The Following Act of Parliament received the assent of the President on 27th December, 2016, and is hereby published for general information.”
With those few words, India ushered into a new age. I refer to it as “Disability 2.0”. Meaning that if the Disability Act of 1995 led us to our first generation, cross disability, advocacy based, nationwide disability movement, then this law – The RPWD Act 2016 – would catalyse us (perhaps catapult us) into the second generation, much more mature, much more aware, and a district, grassroots based, cross disability movement.
I can already see the next five years - that of immense opportunities for persons with disabilities. And I am simply overjoyed.
Over the last 17 years, the NCPEDP Helen Keller Awards have been celebrating the power of the human spirit by recognizing exemplary work done by individuals with disabilities and organizations who are empowering them to excel. The NCPEDP-Mindtree Helen Keller Awards 2017 aim to recognize the champions in our world who are charting new ground in enabling and empowering people with disabilities to reach their true potential.

Mindtree as an organization deeply resonates with equality, respect, and potential of every individual and has always strived to create a culture of inclusion, both internally and externally. As a non-discriminatory, equal opportunities employer, we believe in creating the right organizational environment, processes, and frameworks that promote sensitivity, empathy, and inclusion.

The Helen Keller Awards have been seeing an increasing number of nominations year on year. It is very encouraging to see the changing attitudes and perceptions towards people with disabilities, and the collective efforts towards making them an integral part of the workforce - building, innovating, creating and impacting the society as whole.

I would like to congratulate NCPEDP and Mr Javed Abidi for all their efforts in spearheading this critical initiative, mobilizing and positively impacting many lives. I earnestly hope that this endeavor will pave the way for a society that provides equal opportunities and equal treatment, empowering every individual to reach their true potential.

Som Mittal
Chairman
NCPEDP

This is the 18th edition of the Helen Keller Awards. I am delighted to see the progress made evidenced by the enhanced quantity and quality of nominations received by us each year.

An analysis of the CSR policies and spends of the top companies in India reveals that only a few have a formal policy to support the cause of people with disabilities and of them majority seem to be focussed on employment alone. The mandate sometimes expands to skill development of disabled youth. This is good but not enough. The limited focus is not because of lack of will or sensitivity, but more due to lack of awareness, information and understanding of the magnitude of the issue and the role that corporates can play.

We need to ensure that accessibility is embedded across our workplaces, our websites, our communications, our products and services. Disability inclusion must be mandated across all the existing projects and initiatives under our CSR. The new Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act mandates every corporate to have a definitive policy on disability. There is need to support policy advocacy and creating awareness a key role that NCPEDP plays.

Advocacy assumes even greater importance in the case of disability as it is shrouded in stigma and stereotypes. It is important to empower, inform and engage, not only people with disabilities, but also those that influence policy - directly or indirectly.

We are grateful to Mindtree for all their support to our work and we look forward to more companies coming forward to support such initiatives.
The Eighteenth NCPEDP-Mindtree Helen Keller Awards

The story of the Helen Keller Awards dates back to 1999, making this the eighteenth 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 10 Awardees of 2017, 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!

Selection Committee

Saurabh Chandra
An IAS officer of the 1978 batch (Uttar Pradesh Cadre), Mr. Saurabh Chandra retired as the Secretary, Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas in April 2015. With a career spanning over 37 years, Mr. Chandra has vast experience in formulation and implementation of policies in multiple areas & sectors – from oil and gas to foreign direct investment. A graduate in Electrical Engineering from IIT, Kanpur, Mr. Chandra is also a Policy Commentator and a Columnist.

Abhijit Chakraborty
A Post Graduate in English Literature from Jadavpur University, Kolkata, Abhijit Chakraborty is a member of the Indian Foreign Service since 2006. After serving in various capacities in Indian Missions in Lisbon, Luanda and Paris, he is now posted in New Delhi. He has earlier worked from 2002 to 2006 as a Junior Manager in MSTC Limited, a Public Sector Enterprise.

Abraham Moses
Abraham Moses is in the IT industry since 34 years. He was with Wipro heading Administration for 17 years. Later, he was heading Administration in Mindtree since inception till 2010 and is now heading the Mindtree Foundation from 2010 as General Manager and Good Samaritan. He drives all CSR activities across the organization. In 2012, he was conferred with the “Good Samaritan” philanthropy award by Forbes India magazine.

Asheesh Gupta
After receiving a management degree in 1994, Asheesh Gupta worked with McKinsey and Company. Later as President of Hero Mindmine and subsequently as Co-founder of The 9.9 Group, he has been involved with professional and higher education in different capacities over the last 16 years. Asheesh is passionate about enhancing the quality of life for senior citizens and has launched Samarth, a social venture in the eldercare space in India.

Rema Nagarajan
Rema Nagarajan is a Senior Assistant Editor at The Times of India. She writes mostly on public health policy but also covers other development issues including disability rights. She was awarded the BMI South Asia Award for Healthcare Journalist of the Year 2015. She was a Nieman Fellow at Harvard University and a Hubert Humphrey Fellow at the University of Maryland on the Fulbright Exchange Programme.

SELECTION COMMITTEE

ABOUT
CATEGORY A

Role Model Disabled Person

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.

Awardees

• Dr. Charudatta Jadhav
• Devanshi Joshi
• Dr. Nirmita Narasimhan
• Pradip Sinha

“ALL THE WORLD IS FULL OF SUFFERING. IT IS ALSO FULL OF OVERCOMING”

Helen Keller

Dr. Charudatta Jadhav
Accessibility COE
Tata Consultancy Services Limited, Mumbai
charudatta.jadhav@tcs.com

Dr. Charudatta Jadhav heads the Accessibility Center of Excellence (CoE) at the Tata Consultancy Services, in the Research & Innovation Unit. Dr. Jadhav works with leading companies globally to incorporate universal and inclusive design principles in all aspects of the companies’ digital operations.

Recently, Dr. Jadhav has been instrumental in the launch of Sugamya Pustakalaya, an online initiative to develop a nation-wide ecosystem for real time availability of accessible content for the visually impaired persons. Access Infinity, a digital platform developed by the TCS Accessibility CoE, powers the online functionality of Sugamya Pustakalaya. The project has already made a significant difference to the lives of the visually challenged, with over 2,25,000 books covering syllabi of 13 state education boards, university educational materials, and a couple of leading magazines now being made available in real-time to users registered on the system.

Dr. Jadhav has been an active chess player and promoter of chess for the blind. He founded the All India Chess Federation for the Blind (AICFB). Under his leadership, chess for the blind has grown immensely in India, with 10 medals at the International Chess Olympiad and World Chess Championships. The AICFB has developed 170 world class players with FIDE ranking, the highest number by any country. Many of Dr. Jadhav's technology initiatives, such as Talk 64, Internet Radio, Daisy chess books have created novel and much-needed infrastructure in the world of chess for the blind. He has been appointed as president of International Braille Chess Association (IBCA), first person outside Europe to receive this honour.
Visit Gram Bharat in R.K. Puram, New Delhi, and you are greeted by a cheerful young lady. Working as Store Assistant since 2013, Devanshi has created a special place in the hearts of her customers - her ‘fans’, who visit the store to meet her. A true embodiment of ‘Service with a Smile’, Devanshi is a dream employee - responsible, reliable and respectful to customers and suppliers. Reflecting dignity of labour while helping her juniors learn new skills, and an eager learner herself, she remembers not just the product codes and prices but also the stock levels and reordering schedules.

She cleared Std. X and XII from NIOS, after studying in regular school earlier. She explores computers and pursues photography and dance as hobbies. Devanshi champions the cause of Inclusion by demonstrating how self-development and independent living is possible. She has been inspiring hundreds of young adults with Intellectual disabilities at forums like SAFi, National Trust, Down Syndrome Federation of India, Amrit Foundation and Special Olympics. She delivered the keynote address as Self Advocate at World Down Syndrome Congress in Chennai in August, 2015.

She has been honoured with President’s Award (Best Employee). She was invited to Melbourne for the screening of ‘Raising the Bar’ documentary covering her story along with six young adults from India and Australia.

Devanshi has shown uncommon grit and tenacity in overcoming challenges posed by her disability, Down syndrome. Her dream is to become the manager of the store where she works.

Dr. Nirmita Narasimhan
Senior Fellow and Program Director
G3ict, Bengaluru
nnarasimhan@g3ict.org

Dr. Nirmita Narasimhan has over a decade of experience of working on issues of accessibility for persons with disabilities and is a founding member of the Centre for Internet and Society, where she built up the Accessibility and Inclusion programme.

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Pradip Sinha
Executive, Issue Retrieval Centre in IT Asset Management
Dell - EMC, Bengaluru

Pradip is deaf blind and working productively as an employee in a MNC company DELL EMC which is present in 185+ countries. Most deaf blind have an interpreter along with them for their work constantly. Pradip does his work at Dell EMC without such support and lives independently. His perseverance and his work ethics make him a role model. Several employers have been impacted by his journey and have taken positive actions to empower persons with disabilities in their circle. A candidate having received his training from Enable India, Pradip has received The Ability Master Award (March 2003) for teaching deaf blind children at Helen Keller Institute for the Deaf Blind (HKIDB).

He was the first deaf blind computer trainer in HKIDB. Pradip is actively engaged in spreading awareness about deaf blindness and teaching methodologies for children with deaf blindness through various avenues. He has delivered talks in approximately 35 seminars/conferences all over the world. Internationally, he has participated in USA, UK and Vietnam with interpreters. In USA, he participated in the American Association of the Deaf Blind (AADB) conference. In the UK, he presented in a conference, organized by Sense International UK, supported by Princess Anne, where he presented about his life and experiences. In Vietnam, he spread awareness in schools and universities about how to teach and work with deaf blind children and imparted training to the new teachers, using tactile sign language. He has also been a part of series of videos to spread awareness about how people with deaf blindness live and work independently.

“LIFE IS EITHER A GREAT ADVENTURE OR NOTHING”
Helen Keller

CATEGORY B Awardees

Role Model Supporter of Increased Employment Opportunities for Disabled People

Individuals from within the disability sector or outside, who have contributed substantially to the cause of promoting employment opportunities for disabled people over an extended period of time.

• S.V. Krishnan
• Swaminathan Subramanian
S.V. Krishnan
CEO
Dialogue in the Dark - ACE Take 1, Hyderabad
svk@acesocial.org

SV Krishnan, founder and CEO of Dialogue in the Dark & ACE Take 1 brings more than 20 years of corporate experience spanning areas of business ideation to project management and has held multiple leadership roles in various sectors.

In 2009 while waiting for a delayed flight in Atlanta USA, Krishnan stumbled upon an exhibit of Dialogue in the Dark and was immensely enthralled by its powerful message. Dialogue in the Dark’s mission is to facilitate social inclusion of blind and disabled people on a global basis. This impactful experience inspired Krishnan to set up Dialogue in the Dark (DID) in India in 2011.

In the last 7 years over 3.5 lakh visitors have been sensitized about the abilities of disabled persons through Dialogue in the Dark leading to 8000 job pledges for them from corporate visitors. DID’s deep impact on govt. policy thinkers led to the Government of Andhra Pradesh pass an order encouraging all officers to visit DID to appreciate diversity & the social inclusion of people with disabilities. DID has conducted over 300 workshops & events across India at corporates, schools and colleges with an aim to bring about fundamental mind set changes about the way disabled people are perceived by the non-disabled world.

In July 2014, Krishnan launched ACE Take1, a national social movement to create at least 1 job in every corporate in India and till date 5000 disabled individuals have been trained and 3,000 have been placed in corporate jobs by Take1.

Swaminathan Subramanian
Manager, Payments and Operations
ANZ Bengaluru Service Centre, Bengaluru
swaminathan.subramanian@anz.com

Swaminathan Subramanian, or Swami as he is fondly called, works with ANZ Bengaluru Service Centre. He manages a team of 130-odd people which provides payments and cash operations services across the bank. Swami is also proactively leading a key initiative that supports hiring and inclusion of persons with disability. His consistent efforts over the last seven years have resulted in the hiring of 220 persons with disabilities in ANZ Bengaluru. This is more than 3% of the total organisational strength.

To make the hiring and inclusion of disabled people successful, Swami and his team of champions advocated a four-pronged approach which included a) having a strong buy-in from business unit heads, team managers and leads, (b) partnering with NGOs such as Enable India and v-Shesh, (c) convincing stakeholders to make changes in infrastructure and test criteria, and (d) engaging with the Learning Team to initiate Sensitisation training for the regular staff so that the disabled candidates can truly be mainstreamed.

He along with his team introduced various on-campus initiatives to create a workplace which provides equal opportunity to all. Arranging wheelchairs for the staff, deploying ramps for easy movement, introducing a mentoring program, organizing sign language sessions for the regular workforce so that they can understand their colleagues, and introducing banking terms in the sign language.

Swami’s sustained, steady, passionate, and result-oriented efforts towards the hiring and inclusion of people with disabilities have been well recognised not only by his employers but by others as well.
CATEGORY C
Role Model Company/NGO/Institution for its commitment towards promoting equal employment opportunities for people with disabilities

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

Awardees
• BarrierBreak Solutions Pvt. Ltd.
• Hatti Food and Beverages Pvt. Ltd.
• Lemon Tree Hotels Ltd.
• Vindhya E-Infomedia Pvt. Ltd.

“LIFE IS A SUCCESSION OF LESSONS WHICH MUST BE LIVED TO BE UNDERSTOOD”
Helen Keller
Think Accessibility – Think BarrierBreak!

The pioneer to initiate accessibility in India, BarrierBreak Solutions Pvt Ltd – a Mumbai-based accessibility and assistive technology company has been set up with a single vision to ‘break the barriers of knowledge and disabilities’. BarrierBreak was founded in 2004 by Shilpi Kapoor who believes passionately that technology can be the game changer for inclusion and has successfully built a sustainable business model in disability products and services.

With the main objective to include people with disabilities in every aspect of life, BarrierBreak was founded on three basic principles – accessible technology, hiring people with disabilities and a for-profit model.

At BarrierBreak, through their accessibility consulting services, they assist organizations to recognize that accessibility needs to come at the start, and not be an afterthought. Their key services include testing websites and mobile applications to make them disabled-friendly (accessible), remediating accessible PDF, Word or PowerPoint files, creating Inclusive E-Books and ensuring Videos are accessible.

They also provide assistive technology for people with diverse needs including visual, hearing, learning and mobility impairments. Their teams which comprise of about 65% employees with disabilities are aligned with their vision and mission to help their clients to provide accessible solutions.

BarrierBreak has been actively involved towards bridging the digital gap by empowering people with disabilities, bringing innovative assistive technologies for inclusion to the Indian market, building public awareness through accessibility conferences and lobbying the government. They are the initiators of Techshare India – one of the largest conference and exhibition that brings about awareness on assistive technology and accessibility at an international and pan-India level.

BarrierBreak also believes in giving back to the society and has launched Newz Hook, India’s first inclusive news channel which aims at changing the attitudes towards disability in India with a special focus on disability related news.

Member of standards building organizations like W3C and International Association of Accessibility Professional (IAAP), BarrierBreak provides accessibility services in the US, UK, European, Australian, Canadian & Middle Eastern markets.
Hatti Food and Beverages Pvt. Ltd.

Hatti Kaapi is a fast-growing South Indian filter coffee chain based out of Bengaluru. From serving 100 cups daily from their first outlet in Gandhi Bazaar in 2009, Hatti Kaapi currently serves more than 50,000 cups per day across its 60 outlets in Bengaluru, Mysore, Mangalore, Hyderabad, Telangana, Delhi and Gurugram.

With around 300 employees on its rolls, Hatti Kaapi has spread its wings far and wide with presence in leading Corporates, MNCs and Airports. Hatti Kaapi has been striving on the path of innovation by coming up with new delivery models such as “Kaapi on Wheels” and “Hatti Flask” etc.

Engaged in the business of traditional South Indian filter coffee, Hatti Kaapi has not only witnessed exponential growth in the last eight years but has changed many a lives by giving employment to people with disabilities and senior citizens.

Hatti initiatives, has employed people from rural areas, disabled people and senior citizens. With an aim to create opportunities for people with disabilities and to bring them to the mainstream and making them sustainable, it has partnered with various NGOs to look for people with various disabilities such as autism, physical disability, visual disability, and deaf.

With more than 10 per cent of its 300 employees being disabled persons, Hatti Kaapi has given a new meaning to their lives. Standing on their own feet, supporting themselves and their families, financially, these people have emerged more confident.

The training imparted to them in communication skills and hospitality sector, through NGOs as well as at Hatti Kaapi, has helped a few of them excel in their career. Even customers at its outlets are very happy to see these disabled workers greet them with a smile and carry on with their job effectively.

The NCPEDP-Mindtree Helen Keller Award 2017 has inspired them to dedicate one of their outlets exclusively to be run and managed by disabled employees with effect from 2nd December 2017.
Lemon Tree Hotels Ltd.

Fresh, spirited and youthful, the Lemon Tree Hotels (LTH) is India’s largest hotel chain in the mid-priced hotel sector, and the 3rd largest overall, in terms of controlling interest in owned and leased rooms, as of June 30, 2017, according to the Horwath Report. Lemon Tree hotels are located across India, in metro regions, including the NCR, Bengaluru, Hyderabad and Chennai, as well as tier I and tier II cities such as Pune, Ahmedabad, Chandigarh, Jaipur, Indore and Aurangabad.

Lemon Tree believes that the brand should stand for more than ‘just profit’. They have focused their efforts on creating a socially inclusive work environment which seeks to bring in people of different backgrounds, abilities and ethnicities and offer them work as a unified team with a common goal.

They believe that persons with disabilities (which can be physical, social or economic disabilities leading to an opportunity deprivation) must be provided the same opportunities as others to realize their full potential and live with dignity. By creating a supportive environment in the organization that allows them to deliver their best, they are able to play a part, however small, in social inclusiveness, opportunity/livelihood creation and therefore nation building.

Lemon Tree started this initiative in 2007 with only two disabled employees. They now employ 662 opportunity deprived Indians, or approximately 22.0% of their total employees, as of July 31, 2017. Employees with disability include people with speech & hearing impairment, people with orthopaedic disabilities, people with Down syndrome, people with Autism, people with visual disabilities and Acid Survivors. The economically/socially marginalized segment includes Below Poverty Line (BPL) individuals; widowed/abandoned/ battered/destitute/divorced women; orphans/ abandoned girls; individuals from economically weak families; communities who do not get education and employment opportunities easily i.e. people from North Eastern states, Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Orissa, tribal/interior areas of any state, etc.
Vindhya E-Infomedia Pvt. Ltd.

Vindhya E-Infomedia Private Limited is a BPO that started in 2006 with the vision of bringing Business and Philanthropy together and employ close to 1500 employees with majority of its production staff comprising physically disabled people, hearing impaired, socially disadvantaged women and people with Autism. Close to 58% of their employees in Bengaluru centre are persons with disabilities and their Hyderabad centre is staffed 100% by disabled people.

A unique “For Profit” organisation serving diverse verticals in the voice and non voice business process segments has won several accolades and recognition including NDTV business leadership award and one of the 100 women achievers of India by the Ministry of Women and Child Development. Vindhya’s founder has been recognized as one of the 12 Transforming Women of India by United Nations and NITI Aayog.

Vindhya’s vision is to reach 5000 employees by the year 2020, increase delivery centres across India and serve global customers. They cater to some of the top organizations in sectors like BFSI, Telecom, Hospitals, IT, Government, etc. The organisation has built inclusive training programmes to enable people to work on various critical projects which are constantly being appreciated for their quality deliverables.

At Vindhya, attitude has been the primary qualification. Vindhya creates awareness by setting up camps and jobs fairs, and educating disabled people. Families are also encouraged to come and witness the facility and get confidence to get their wards to be employed at Vindhya.

The impact that Vindhya has created is that lot of them who were deprived of opportunities have now taken up jobs and are able to bring in a huge difference by supporting their families to become debt free where agriculture was their primary occupation. One of the most important change has been that the families have accepted the fact that one’s disability is no more a liability.
The Disabled-Friendly Corporate Logo

The Disabled-Friendly Corporate Logo was designed in 1999, when the 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.

Brochure Concept

Helen Keller’s quotes inspire many a success stories. Some stories begin from ground zero and show a remarkable ascent all the way up through hard work and perseverance. These stories display the indomitable human spirit, which is ever willing to explore newer ways to rise above challenging adversities and thrive despite difficult times.

This year’s brochure concept uses the fundamental geometric forms and colors – the basic graphic toolkit. It shows how a visual composition is triggered by an idea, such as these quotes in this case. The creative expression then progresses with an exploration of form and space, balance and harmony while ensuring that the core message is communicated clearly. It requires pragmatic thought process on one side; and the childlike playful instinct on the other, to lend originality to the artwork. This act of a graphic expression has been used as a backdrop to provide a visual theme and colour to the stories of the awardees each of which is an inspiration in itself and showcases their capabilities, skill and vision.