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Editor's note

Dear Readers,

Dedicating this issue to the three ladies featured here, who are enhancing the quality of life-changing perspectives and attitudes and making this world a better place.

Start by doing what's necessary; then do what's possible; and suddenly you are doing the impossible.-

Francis of Assisi

Happy Reading,

Regards

Bhavna Botta

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From The Heart

Journey of Planet Abled Till now!!

Well I believe this is the piece I have been avoiding to write for a long time, for me, for Planet Abled and for Bhavna. Who unlike others did not send me a predictable and repetitive questionnaire, rather asked me to share the story of Planet Abled. This in fact is not an easy task to put in just few words. But I would still attempt.

Planet started its operations officially on 1st January 2016. A planned date decided after 3 years of homework and taking the decision to leave the corporate career once and for all forever. But it was not just three years that went into the making of Planet Abled. It was a gradual process and perhaps started somewhere in my childhood when I wondered why we were never going on family holidays in our summer/winter vacations like our peers. The realization that it was the inaccessibility of the places and the lack of affordable accessible transport, that stopped us, owing to the disability of my parents; happened much later.



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And I am not going to even mention the over sympathetic or insensitive attitude of the people, asking you to stay at home if there is so much hassle travelling. Cutting the long story short, there came a point in our lives that our parents put their foot down to travel. This hit me hard, that this can't happen and so started the process to find a solution.

possible for you. But everyone wanted to travel and explore the planet with a plethora of unanswered questions about the accessibility of the place and societal stigmas, basically a fear of the unknown.

each trip or activity or get together we did, we broke all stigmas. Did everything people thought was not possible for a person with disability.

And so the homework started and led to inception of Planet Abled, to make the planet accessible for everyone to travel, one trip at a time. And history was created on 30th January 2016, when the first ever tour for people with disabilities in the country saw the light of the day. It was a first of its kind ever in the world (I realized it much later) which had the participation of deaf, blind, wheelchair users, people with down syndrome, people with cerebral palsy and people without disabilities. An egalitarian group of 45 people went on together to explore the ruins of Qutub Complex and Mehrauli Archaeological Park. A six hour tour for which people even covered 400 kms to experience the magic.

Food tours of old Delhi, karaoke sessions, poetry slams, pottery workshops, visit to museums and special festivals and even owning the metro train for an hour and conducting a stand up comedy and musical jamming session there; and I am not even mentioning the innumerable heritage tours to monuments; all were subsequently added to the bouquet.



There was none and no one bothered for traveling for people with disabilities, be it the travel ecosystem or the society. With a social conditioning already inculcated in people with disabilities, that this is not

And since then, there has been no looking back for Planet Abled and the journey has been amazing to say the least. With



Then came in accessible holidays for all. Giving people with disabilities the freedom to travel the way they want. **2**

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Whether they want to travel solo, with family friends or go for a romantic get away with their partner or institutions and organizations – all became possible. And did I mention we do water rafting and ziplining also. We have the bright feather of successfully conducting the first ever rafting tour for people with disabilities in India.

And today when we are nearing almost two years of our operations, we have offered unique experiences to over 300 people and now conduct holidays in over 30 destinations across the country. And there have been so many stories of people who had their first travel experience with us. These are the stories that make us what we are today.

Traveler experience has been the top most priority for us and would always be. Now people don't even ask if we have a particular destination in our bouquet, they just say, you have to make it happen. And our veterans had been from all over the globe, from the Blind Cricket Team of Australia to para-olympians from Canada to an aircraft engineer from

Brazil. From few hours local tours we have now graduated to 15-20 days' holidays. That kind of trust is what we have earned.

Based on the concept of Universal Design, all our group tours are a mix of people with and without disabilities. This creates a unique experience of social inclusion and human interaction. People get to understand the challenges of other disabilities and people without disabilities get to interact closely with a disabled person only to realise that there is no difference and they are just like anyone else. They have went ahead to become friends and gone out of the way to hire people with disabilities and making their offices accessible. These are the ripples that have flown far and wide. Earlier, there was no conversation about travel and recreation for people with disabilities. Since our inception, I have seen that change drastically. And now, I see a totally different ecosystem, get together are happening in different cities, some new players coming in and replicating our model and people now coming out in the open with their travel

aspirations and demands. *A disruption has happened and it would go a long way.* Sometimes it gives me goose bumps to realize that in such a short span of time, I could play a small role in changing the dynamics of disability space to some extent.



This journey also with all its beautiful moments, also brought along its own set of challenges. This includes developing the destination to make holidays happen for all disabilities to struggling financially at times to just survive. Moving your life from a cushy fat salary to no salary at all is not easy my friend. But the many awards and recognitions and the love of travelers kept us going and raising the bar of Accessible Travel in the country. Yes we have been showered a lot of love from the disability community and the travel fraternity equally, and we are really proud of that.

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To make accessible travel part of the mainstream travel, on World Tourism Day this year, we also organized a conference on Accessible Tourism in alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals 2030, a first of its kind in India (we are addicted to doing things first of its kind)

Sustainable Tourism is the theme for this year as declared by United Nations and this conference brought all the stakeholders together on one platform and initiated a conversation on Accessible Tourism being an integral part of Sustainable Tourism. Be it the ministry of Tourism, ministry of social justice and empowerment, key players from the travel fraternity and policy builders were there to take the *first step towards changing the way travel happens in India forever*.

So it has really been a wonderful journey and I am really excited to break more barriers and assumptions in the times to come. Would you join the band wagon with me?



Neha Arora is the founder Planet Aabled. Neha an engineer by profession gave up the corporate world to make tourism accessible to people with disability.

For The Soul

Meet Divya, an entrepreneur with a difference. Books fascinated her and became her true soul mates and here she shares how the same books are ringing her cash register.

Divya, what do you like the most?

Books, I love them.

Tell us about your work

I started my library, **Readers Cove**, in 2007, after graduating from Vidya Sagar to be able to share my love for reading. I had a lot of story books with lots of colorful pictures for kids aged 3 and up.



But soon, we discovered that young adults and their parents were interested in reading too! So we added short stories by authors like Roald Dahl, Agatha Christie and Sudha Murthy for teenagers and magazines and novels by authors like Dan Brown and Sidney Sheldon for the grownups!

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How does one become a member?

Membership is easy! It's a fixed amount per month and you can borrow as many books as you want, and return them within a week.

How do you manage the library?

Since I'm good with visual cues, to make the library more adaptable to my needs, I ask members to bring a picture of themselves, which I stick on a paper pocket. I use these pockets to insert the card of the book that they have borrowed.

What is it that you like about your work?

My favourite part about having this library is being able to meet all the young children and being able to spend so much time around books.

Impressive, what future plans do you have

In the future, I'm hoping to expand by adding a shop where I can sell creative art work, as well stationery supplies for members and their parents!



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Straight Talk

Divorce ailments-positive impacts

Originally featured at patientsengage.com

Meet **Jamuna Rangachari**, diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis, which made day to day tasks impossible for her to accomplish. She shares with us her trials and tribulations.

Tell us about your job and the turning points in your life.

I am working with Life Positive, a magazine that asks us to focus on possibilities and positive emotions. When I was handling my challenges due to Multiple Sclerosis, one of the articles, my editor, Suma Varughese, wrote on Karma and Grace seemed to be written just for me. She talked about how we are always cushioned by divine grace even if we need to face difficult circumstances.

Looking back, I can say it was indeed grace that took me to Life Positive. Now, due to my work with Life Positive, I have come across many books and people who truly made a success of their lives, whatever the circumstances.

I once had an issue with my vision but that got resolved on its own even before I went in for a test. Later, I could not walk comfortably, could not even climb stairs and it was a nightmare for me to look around for washrooms wherever I went as I suffered from severe incontinence. This made me avoid going out and I did not know what lay ahead of me. We knew there was something wrong and this is when I was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis.

After the diagnosis, I was distraught at first and then did all I could to learn more about the ailment, what could happen and what I would need to do.

There was no cure in allopathy. So, I visited all kinds of doctors, learnt about many therapies and kept reading and re-reading on all the research that was going on. The fact was the more I read, the more confused I became. If one research said that nothing may transpire, the other would even predict an early death, and a third would warn of total paralysis and the loss of the ability to think.

In Tamil, my mother tongue, there is a saying, "Even nectar when taken in excess becomes poison". This excess reading and thinking that I initially thought was empowering me was doing just the reverse. Slowly and surely, I stopped doing the kind of things I was doing. I started understanding that knowledge does not necessarily mean wisdom. I started doing all that I could do and focused all my energy on this instead of despairing on things that were either a wee bit difficult or that had not even posed a challenge for me at that point.

You seem to be a voracious reader and positivity seems to be contagious

A book that also brings out a similar positivity is Dr. Robert H. Schuller's, "**Tough Times Never Last, But Tough People Do!**" Here, the author asks us to work on positivity, no matter what the problem is. Whether its unemployment, poor health, loneliness, fear or anything else that blocks our success,

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the author says we can turn negatives into positives and shares many stories of people who have done so. One of the stories in the book is that of his daughter, Carol Schuller, who had to battle a motorcycle accident at the age of seventeen.

Among Carol Schuller's various triumphs, what I completely resonated with then and even now is the point where she says, "I look at you girls who walk without a limp, and I wish I could walk that way. I can't, but this is what I've learned, and I want to leave it with you: It's not how you walk that counts, but who walks with you and who you walk with."

Another book that inspired me a lot is "The Last Lecture" by Randy Pausch. Based on the extraordinary final lecture by Carnegie Mellon University professor Randy Pausch, given after he discovered he had pancreatic cancer, this moving book goes beyond the now-famous lecture to inspire readers to live each day with purpose and joy.

What has been the pillar of support?

As far as I am concerned, I consider myself very fortunate in various areas. I have a family that has proven to be a rock of support in tough times, I work for a magazine that focuses on positivity and I do have friends and well-wishers from almost all walks of life.

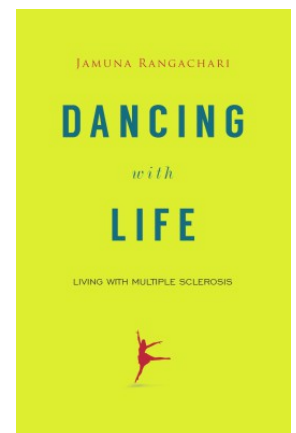
These things helped me a lot. I knew I had an ailment but I could and would be able to combat it. I started focusing on gratitude, building and making relationships robust and doing all that I loved doing. My life came back on track, physically, emotionally and spiritually.

Tell us about you as an author

I found a doctor, who was also an acupuncturist. The acupuncture therapy proved to be beneficial among other things.

All my issues are now under control and a fitness routine and a proper diet are a part of my life along with meditation and mind control.

Now, having healed myself, I have written a book and have tried to inspire others. A few more lessons that I have learnt in this process is that people heal only when they wish to heal.



I hope and pray that everyone divorces any ailment or what I would call a challenge so they do not have to remain wedded to the ailment or challenge in this data driven, wisdom-less world and move on.

My book is on Flipkart Or Amazon. The eBook versions are available at Amazon Kindle or Barnes & Noble or Kobo



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Accessible Artwork

Originally featured in *Access and Inclusion News Through Technology-*

Art is a universal medium of expression, bridging gaps across language, time and culture. With about 285 million blind or visually impaired people in the world, that's a sizable part of the global population being left out. But innovations — both simple and high-tech — are making the art world even more inclusive.

Here are just a few ways art is becoming more accessible -

1. 3D printing of fine art

One company at the forefront is 3D Photoworks, which makes tactile versions of historic paintings and modern photography through 3D printing. The pieces made by 3D Photoworks also feature sensors, which activate audio descriptions of the work as a person feels around the piece.



2. Incorporating Braille into visual art

Including Braille in traditional forms of art is one way to make pieces more accessible, while also celebrating Blind culture. And one particular artist has paved the way for this innovative technique.

New York-based artist Roy Nachum creates what he calls "visual art for the visually impaired." His work is undeniably gorgeous at first glance, even serving as the cover art for Rihanna's album, *Anti*. But for those who can't see Nachum's eye-catching visuals, the art has a different layer of artistic appeal — poetic writings embossed on the artwork's surface in Braille.

To highlight the tactile importance of his work, Nachum also lightly covers his art in ash, which leaves fingerprint marks on the work as a person reads the Braille messages. The prints left behind act as a type of documentation of human contact with his work.

3. Extra-textured paintings for inclusivity

Making art more accessible to people who can't see doesn't require changing already existing pieces. Paintings, for example, can be created with this audience in mind from the start, layering paint to make it a more tactile experience.

One well-known artist using this technique is John Bramblitt, who began painting after he lost his eyesight due to complications with epilepsy and Lyme disease in 2001. Bramblitt says losing his sight helped change the way he thought about art and color for the better. He often creates his pieces with thick layers of paint, appealing to touch as well as the gaze of fans who can see. [isti](#)



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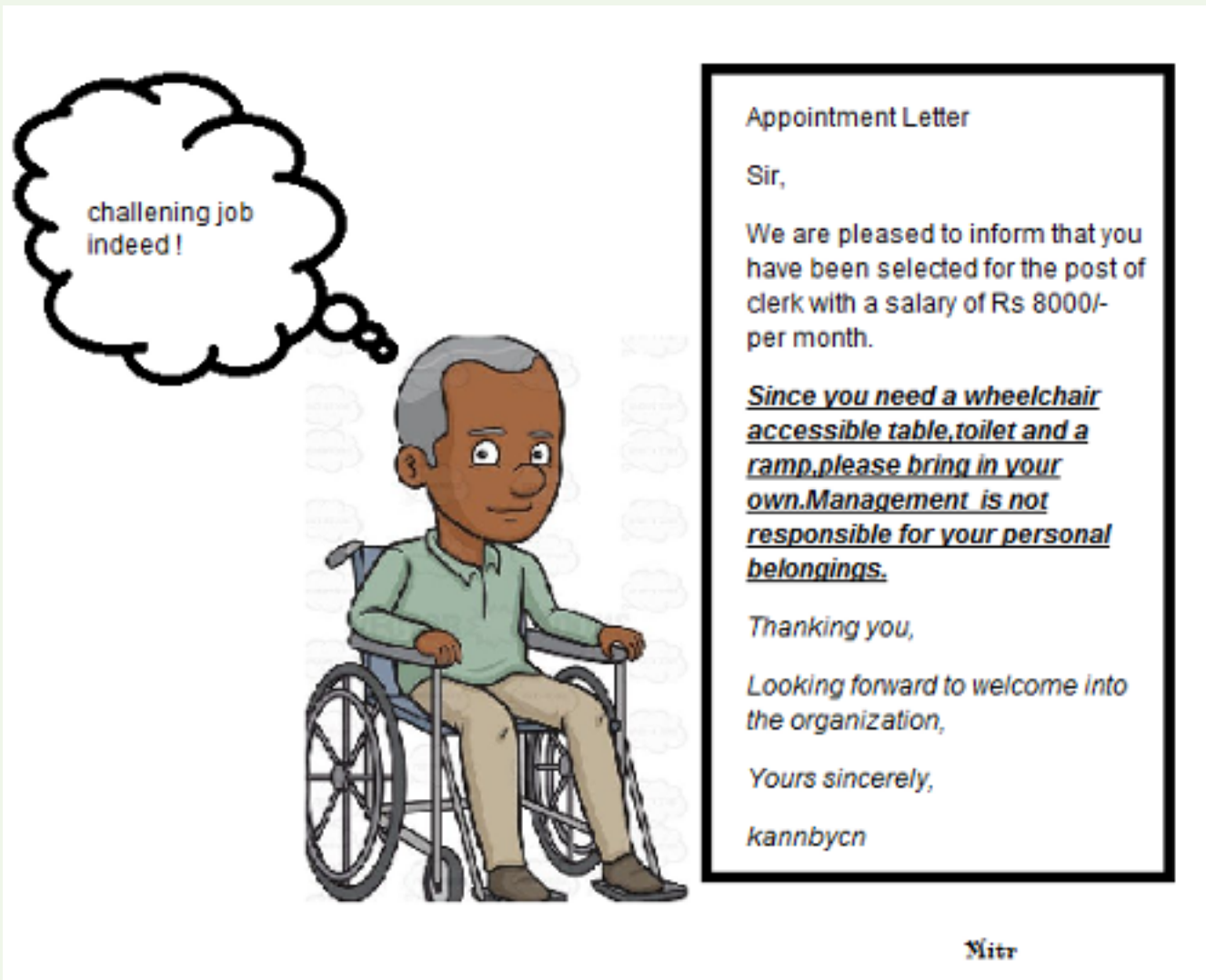
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4. Tactile art that welcomes touch

We're used to hearing the phrase, "Please, don't touch the art." But California-based contemporary artist Andrew Myers creates works specifically to challenge this common, disapproving phrase.

Using screws of different heights, the artist creates topographic-like portraits by inserting the screws into wooden boards, making images with the meticulous gaps and grooves. As a result, his work has mass appeal for blind people and those with low vision, who can touch his portraits.



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