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Editor's note



Hi friends,

The last fortnight has witnessed momentous happenings in contemporary history. Personally the excitement of meeting Ms. Haben Girma, who accepted my invitation and gave talks on access and the world disability day celebrations of launching the access to sea shore were highly satisfying.

Cyclone Vardha incapacitated life in Chennai and brought forth the urgency to tweak the disaster management to meet the needs of people with disabilities. The passage of the RPWD BILL, 2014 in less than a minute in both the houses, cheered by some and criticized by some has created enough confusion among the disabled. The coming days will throw more light on this.

This issue features excerpts from Haben's interview, inclusion strategies from an expert and a unique inclusion event which is blazing its way into the hearts.

Happy reading,

Regards

Bhavna Botta

From the Heart

Haben Girma, an internationally acclaimed accessibility leader, was on a visit to Chennai and delivered talks on Access. The first Deafblind person to graduate from Harvard Law School, Haben champions equal access to information for people with disabilities. She has been honored by President Barack Obama, President Bill Clinton, and many others.

The excerpts of an interview with her

Communication and information has to be made accessible to all-how is the situation in your country

It's true that information and communication must be made accessible. We are working towards it by teaching and training people to develop programmes, technologies that are accessible. Positive stories of disability, can help in this,



Education is a right, which policy do you think has been effective in implementing this

It is hard to pinpoint to one policy which has been more effective. Inclusion happens in the community. There has to be multiple people working on it. Some people working in sciences to make it accessible while

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some people working in arts to make it accessible, some people working in physical education to make it accessible. It is multiple policies and laws working together

Discrimination is a cause for mental health issues, do you sue the service providers on this ground and do they fall in line

There are lawyers who work on access issues, there are others who work on these emotional issues. Personally I believe in fixing the barriers to access.

Whose work is it to provide Job accommodations?

It is employers work to provide the accommodations. It is as simple as that

Tell us about an impacting case which you handled as a lawyer

During my time, the biggest case was the digital library case. This was not accessible to blind readers. So we sued the library and got them to change their website and works accessible.

It is a success as they are working on it.

Consumer rights are upheld in your country, what about the consumer rights of people with disabilities

There are advocates who ensure that products and services are accessible. There are advocates who are teaching and training people to make things accessible.

There are others who test, while others who sue. There is a lot of work involved in the making things accessible.

watch the video on -<https://web.facebook.com/>

[ConnectSpecial-237985419908836/](https://web.facebook.com/ConnectSpecial-237985419908836/)

Lots of Fun with SignBee

A unique method of inclusion which not only removes stigma around disability but also develops a skill and a positive attitude. That's Sign Bee.

Genesis -

In late 2014, IEEE - Bangalore (part of a global non-profit body of EE Engineering Professionals), established a 'Special Interest Group on Communications Disability' with technologists, Clinicians, Primary care givers & end-users. This group was chartered to develop standards and technologies for 'Enabling Ability in Disability'.

The group started deliberating on various gaps in technologies required to alleviate the day-to-day living of people with Communications Disabilities like Speech & Hearing Impairments, Visual impairment, Neurodegenerative disorders like Cerebral Palsy, Autism, etc. It was decided to conduct periodic Workshops, Events & Standardization activities that can bring various stakeholders to a common platform and enable development of technologies and solutions for the differently-abled.

However, along with these activities, a need was felt to raise the levels of awareness and inclusiveness in the society about the needs of the differently-abled. SignBee Contest was a result of this need.

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What is SignBee

It is a National Level Competition for School Children who have no known Speech & Hearing disability and have learnt or are willing to learn Basic Sign Language. The key objectives of the contest are

I. Teach and train School students on Sign Language so that they can help in communicating with persons with hearing impairments and also with their immediate family members who may suffer hearing loss in later years (ex: Grandparents, Elderly in the society)

II. Lead to an inclusive society so that the persons with hearing impairments are not stigmatised

III. Scale up the availability of manpower for 'Sign Language Interpreters' to aid Government Initiatives (ex: Accessible India, Indian Sign Language Research Centre)

IV. Provide a forum to create and innovate in Assistive Technologies (ex: Gesture recognition, Apps, Mobile tech) The SignBee Contest was a big success in its Inaugural edition in 2015 and on request from Schools and Parents scaled up further to 'Spell Bee' contest.

This year, the SignBee Qualifiers were held in 3 cities viz. Trivandrum, Coimbatore & Bangalore. The training for the Qualifiers were ably supported by pioneering institutions like NISH, SRCISH, AIISH* and by forward-looking institutions like Coimbatore District Library & Noida Deaf Society.

Children selected from each of these centres

were then invited to participate in the SignBee 2016 Finals held on 03rd December (World Disability Day) at Visvesvaraya Industrial & Technological Museum, Bangalore. The success of this inclusive event was reflected in the Finals, which was a well-contested event and had Ties for the Top 2 Prizes!!

*NISH - National Institute for Speech and Hearing, Trivandrum,
SRCISH - Dr. S. R. Chandrasekhar Institute of Speech and Hearing, Bengaluru,

AIISH - All India Institute of Speech and Hearing, Mysuru

www.signbee.org

Connect Special congratulates the winners-

1st Prize Winners : Bhadra P Varma, Meenakshy Sudheer (both from TVM)

2nd Prize Winners : Deepit Patil (BLR), M. Athira (CBE)

3rd Prize Winner : Spoorthi K.S

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INCLUSION STRUGGLES AND STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

Mrs. Sujatha Sriram

What are the Challenges faced in including children with disabilities?

There are issues at every step- attitude, perception, myth about the conditions, lack of awareness about the inclusion process and acceptance from teachers get compounded by inaccessible physical structures.

Failure to desensitize the teachers and peers about the children with special needs, lack of counseling to handle adolescent behaviors, there are many challenges but none which cannot be solved.

Are there any challenges from other parents and from students without disabilities?

Yes the attitude of some parents of non disabled kids is worrying .they don't want their children not to mingle with kids with disability, imitation is the reason being given

In some cases there is peer bullying is seen particularly with students having Learning Disability

Is the school management positive towards inclusion? The first resistance is to alter the structural environment of the school to accommodate a student with physical disability; some are even charging higher fees .There is unwillingness to take

the ownership of the student even after years. Unwillingness to get one teacher trained towards inclusive teaching, in some schools the ratio is not being maintained from the Management side, which is actually burdening teachers.

How about teachers?

It is a tough game with teachers who have traditional thought process. There needs to be a shift. Also many are unaware of Differential Alternate Strategy needed .Also very little work is done on interface between the teachers, Parents and Resource Network. Some teachers are reluctant in taking the responsibility from the resource teachers to prepare the Alternate Question papers and Coordination of Assessments .Another area of worry is lack of openness in inclusive extracurricular activities.

Tell us with your experience some strategies for Success

- o The child should be assessed to know the current performance level taking into account their multiple intelligences and learning styles
- o Children should be placed in the age appropriate grade level or maximum one or 2 grade levels lower to avoid bullying
 - o Admissions initially for half day for better settling in a larger group and space to continue their therapy services. Partial Inclusion – Little step towards smooth transition towards Inclusion
 - o Have the student plan at the time of admission addressing all relevant areas of intervention

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o Jotting down IEP catering to the curriculum of the school. Ensuring the child is able to participate in the school curriculum with respect to exams, assignments. Parallel working the remedial component from the curriculum to bring success in performance. This helps in boosting the confidence of the child and also makes the school/ Parent believe that the child can perform.

o Ensure availability of Aids and Adaptations wherever required

What is your advice to a teacher ?

The teacher is the person handling the student so they

o should ask for regular once a term training to orient about the conditions, the facilities available for student with special needs. o Follow alternate teaching methodology so that the whole class benefits and not just student with special needs

. o Remember Physical literacy program / sports is a Step to learn social skills for children with special needs and normal kids

o Structuring the environment based on the needs of children. (e,g) Seating , breaks, time tabling, lighting , noise and distraction levels

o Anecdotal Records to monitor Behavioural outbursts (note to parents) will help to keep the therapists posted about the happenings in the class.

o Peer learning and peer buddy to assist the child during transitions and facilitate communication in the class

o To take help from Parent support groups and Volunteers from Community as scribes during Exams, co curricular activities like

sports day, annual day and any outings from the school

o Usage of Alternative Augmentative Communication (AAC) for academics and social interactions encompassing total communication.

o Regular support services from NGO or resource person to ensure the "continuum of services".

Mrs. Sujatha Sriram is a Consultant-special education/counselor .She has immense work experience in inclusion.



Talk on Access by Haben Girma



For suggestions, reviews & subscription

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www.connectspecial.com