



Edition 36

Editor's Desk

Dear friends,

It's common to hear - *Sometimes we're tested not to show our weaknesses, but to discover our strengths.* But as I finish compiling this edition, these words ring in my ears -

Dream it.

Believe it.

Build it !!

Happy Reading!!

Regards,

Bhavna Botta

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From The Heart

Meet Mrs .Eshawari, founder Mahalshwar, whose mission is to empower others.

Can you please tell us about yourself

I am Kumkuma Eshwari. I was born and brought up in Chennai. My education was abruptly stopped when I was in 7th Grade. I was married off to my cousin in a village in 1984 .It was a complete new world altogether to adjust to a village life.

I had my first child ,Mahalakshmi, in 1986. Even after 6 months from birth she was unable to hold her head. She was pampered a lot as she was the first born grandchild in the family .I was also too young to understand the issues. When Mahalakshmi was 8 months old we first visited a neurologist, Dr.Kumaresan. He referred us to Vidya Sagar .

When I first stepped into Vidya Sagar (in Rajambal street),I saw a new world . Mrs. Poonam Natarajan ,the founder, the therapists there Mrs. Suguna and Mrs Latha assessed Mahalakshmi. They counselled me about the condition and explained how it is important to look at holistic development. I understood and accepted the situation and started working with my daughter without any expectations .My life was transformed and my self- confidence improved. Interactions with other parents, continuous work with my child taught me great experiences.

In one of the Out Station Programmes of Vidya Sagar, Dr Kurin suggested genetic testing. But since I was on a family way already with my second child, I could not undergo the test. My second child, Ramachandran, nicknamed as Jinju ,was born with special needs too.

I came back to Vidya Sagar with both my children and started learning things to ensure they get best rehab practices. Personally ,I accepted my children with disability but the family and society around could not. I had to face a lot of hardships .It broke my self esteem . I was inspired by the service of Mrs.Poonam Natarajan. It gave me strength and I focussed only on my children.

When and why did you start Mahalshwar

In 1992,I joined Arumai Illam, a school for hearing impaired near Mayiladuthurai with my children in tow. I started sharing the little knowledge I had about intervention services to children with intellectual disabilities in the centre.

Mrs .Poonam Natarajan (Poonam Akka)constantly guided me and encouraged me to get a training through Community Based Rehabilitation services of Vidya Sagar.



I lost my daughter Mahalakshmi in 2002, due to chest congestion. It was Poonam Akka who suggested to me that I should start a school. I had doubts on my capacities but she had complete faith in me and extended full support. There will be many hurdles to cross but nothing is impossible was what she said. I started the centre as a home management (parent training and empowerment) with just two students.

How has this journey been

By 2003 September 5th, there were 15 students in the Day Care Facility. I named the centre as "**Mahalshwar**" in memory of my daughter Mahalakshmi and Poonam Akka's son Eshwar Natarajan. Mrs Mallika Rama Rao, coordinator from Vidya Sagar guided me at every step.

In 2007, with seven important persons from the society we constituted a governing body. I completed my tenth grade and twelfth grade through National Institute of open schooling and also underwent a training and RCI certification in rehabilitation from IGNOU.

We got 12A and 80G in 2014. In 2015 we got Government recognition for Mahalshwar. The same year we got the EICMR project from the government. We conducted disability awareness programmes in schools, colleges through street plays.

Right now we have 60 students in our centre and reach out to another 400 through parent training. We also encourage eye donation .



In 2017 ,we got a permanent place for MahaEshwar on a very low rent .We are running the government EIC AUTISM PROJECT .We have registered 50 students for insurance under Niramaya scheme of National Trust.

Very inspiring journey indeed ,your parting words to our readers ..

when I look back ,I recognise that we learn more from our experiences than formal education. Also the support of Poonam Akka and Vidya Sagar has made me achieve this.

Our vision and mission is to ensure genetic counselling is available ,best rehabilitation services for children with disabilities, livelihood initiatives for people with disabilities.



Tech Corner

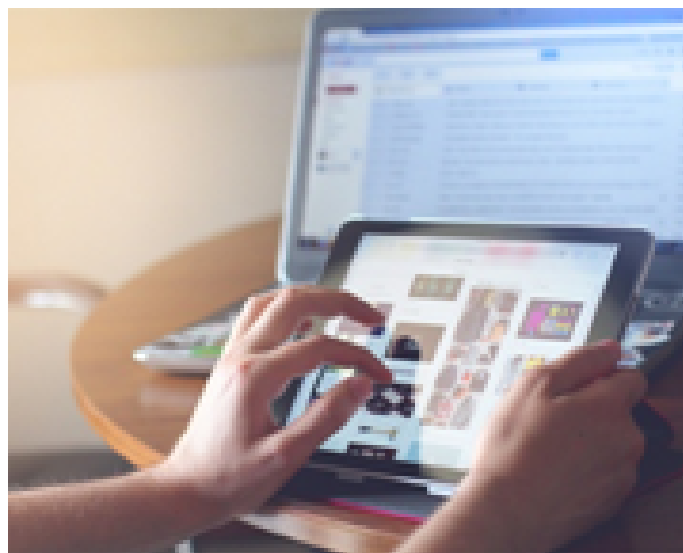
BDD Assist aims to revolutionise lives of blind and deaf people, gets mixed reviews

Originally featured in Access and inclusion through Technology-[**https://paper.li/e-1452749534?edition_id=d4e4d2a0-4363-11e9-b211-0cc47a0d164b#/**](https://paper.li/e-1452749534?edition_id=d4e4d2a0-4363-11e9-b211-0cc47a0d164b#/)

Modern technology through assistive devices and artificial intelligence has always come to the help of people with disabilities. One such device is the **Blind-Deaf-Dumb (BDD) Assist** founded by Rochana HM, a student of II PUC in Bengaluru. The BDD Assist created by this youngster is definitely aims to revolutionise the way blind and deaf people communicate. It will also benefit those with multiple disabilities as well.

BDD Assist will act as a mediator to bridge communication gap for people who are blind and deaf. Various input methods like writing, typing, speech recognition, Braille Keyboard and Sign Language are incorporated into the device. Hence, this will be a blessing to blind and deaf people who do not know Braille or Sign Language because the device will translate everything for them. In fact, the teaching mode of the device teaches Braille and Sign language to users!

Apart from all these features, BDD Assist translates English speech output and texts to various regional languages including Malayalam, Tamil, Bengali, Gujarati, Kannada, Telugu, Hindi and Urdu . Amar Jain, a visually impaired corporate lawyer thinks BDD Assist is a good initiative that will enable people with disabilities to become more productive and efficient. Since BDD Assist caters to people who are both blind and deaf, it is remarkable.



Most importantly, it has facilities to translate content to regional languages, something that is of a greater need and an important area to work on. Cost of the BDD Assist is also quite reasonable. BDD Assist will be made available at a cost of Rs 6,000 and Rochana is working on creating a patent. If all goes well, BDD Assist will be introduced to the market soon. It can be installed in gadgets like smart phones, computers and even tablets.

BrightSign is an assistive technology start-up developing enabling innovations to facilitate communication for individuals who are non-verbal. BrightSign can be personalised for custom hand gestures, and can output speech in any language, giving users complete control over sign language libraries and verbal



eSight is a wearable medical device designed to improve the functional vision of those living with low vision or legal blindness. The device was developed by Canadian-based company eSight Corp. eSight is worn like a normal pair of glasses. It houses a high-speed, high-definition camera that captures everything you are looking at, and then displays it on two near-to-eye displays.

eSight's ability to tilt up and down allows you to always have access to your native peripheral vision. This enables true mobility.
