

Connect Special



Editor's desk

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Dear Friends,

*This edition compiles interesting individual journey,
a parental advice, good developments with regard to
disability sector and some tech solutions .*

Every once in a while, a new technology, an old problem,
and a big idea turn into an innovation.- **Dean Kamen**

*Happy Reading!!
Regards,
Bhavna Botta
connectspecial.in*



Taking small steps towards independence: From a parent

I recently received a call from a very young parent- father of a nine year old child with Autism looking for a residential facility for him!

On enquiring further I found out that he has another child a daughter who was 15 years old and stay at home wife. And he simply wanted to send away the child as he felt that his wife was not able to get enough time for herself or anyone else due to the special need child .

I discouraged him to send his child to any residential setup for I felt the child was too young to be sent away as these are the formative years

However I gave him the following suggestions for making his child take the baby steps towards building self reliance:

Make a check list of all those things he has not been able to learn according to his age .

Shortlist any of the three activities and start working towards it, it can be toilet training (top priority towards independence), opening the bottles and pouring water for himself, wearing clothes, buttoning and un buttoning. So and so forth.

- Give yourself a time frame of achieving these before moving on to the higher levels.
- Eating independently
- Letting him make small
- Choices like bread over parantha or playing indoor vs outside
- Stop making special concessions to him due to his special need in comparison to his sibling(trust me it will send the right signal to both the siblings)
- Talk to him not talk down to him!

Please know that independence starts with self esteem and respect. Show that to your child and he will reward you back by learning as much as possible.

Trust your child's abilities , start working on the " can do" list before taking up the most difficult of the challenges ,that way both/ you and your child will stay motivated!

Happy independence!

Neena Wagh

National Consultation on Accessible Elections – Report

Ms Smitha Sadasivan, Member Disability Rights Alliance India.

‘No Voter to be left behind’ being the motto and overarching premise of Election Commission of India, various measures have been taken by the Commission to establish the same as well as make it into reality across the country. Focused interventions are being made with respect to inclusion of different categories of vulnerable sections of society, including persons with disabilities, in the electoral process. Conscious and continuous efforts had been taken by the commission in this light, with the announcement of ‘Accessible Elections’ as the yearly theme for National Voters Day 2018, following which a series of consultations with the stake holders at the district and state levels, and reporting mechanism of facilitations for voters with disabilities provided at the ground level fed in to the construct of the first ever National Consultation on Accessible Elections, held on 3rd and 4th July 2018 at New Delhi.

The national consultation on accessible elections witnessed detailed deliberations among civil society representatives including experts with disabilities from across the country, chief electoral officers of all states, political party representatives and senior officers from different ministries and departments, with regard to the barriers faced by persons with disabilities, challenges in implementation at ground level, good practices and suggestions for the effective inclusion and enhanced participation of persons with disabilities in the electoral process. The national consultation as well showcased an exhibition of best practices with regard to inclusion of persons with disabilities in the electoral process, democracy wall and a model accessible polling booth. The Commission launched the accessible SVEEP website and the vigilance mobile app cVIGIL at the opening ceremony of the consultation on 3rd July.

All participants were set to discuss in groups in technical session, wherein a wide range of action points for short term, mid-term and long-term implementation evolved on three crucial topics namely ‘Accessible registration process including use of information & technology’, ‘Accessible polling stations including EVM, VVPAT & other facilitation measures’, and ‘Voter education and outreach for persons with disabilities and leveraging partnerships’.

Then on the second day saw presentations of key recommendations that emerged from every group on all the three themes, as observed and commented by a panel of members which included disability experts. There were additional suggestions from the participants during the open session. The consultation culminated with the launch of the Strategic Framework on Accessible Elections, delivering EPIC in braille to two voters with visual impairment and the Honorable Chief Election Commissioner of India declaring a wide range of measures to be carried out with regard to inclusion of voters with disabilities in the electoral process and to meet after 3 months with the work done in this respect. The forum dissolved with a commitment to work steadfast towards achieving the goal of accessible elections across the country after a group photograph.

Applaud able effort was done on the part of ECI in the areas of access provisions for the Consultation too by organizing an accessible venue, sign language interpreters, wheel chairs, volunteers, screen reader friendly documents in soft copy, braille handouts, braille name tags, signage and direction boards.

Meet Vinayana Khurana, a serious blogger on something that is so close to her life



Vinayana zipping around in her motorised wheelchair

How did this Vinayana's World blog evolve

I have done my post graduation in English literature from Delhi University. I am a vigorous writer and a poet, I write on various issues related to disability and empowerment. My disability is just a part of me, and it doesn't define who I am. I don't think that physical disability can hinder your quest and thirst for knowledge. The people who are close to me, understand that I am just physically different from them and psychologically, we are just the same.

I am currently the author of my own blog, Vinayana's World.

I am having fun in writing about any topic that comes to my mind. The idea of having a blog of my own, didn't really attract me at first, but then many friends of mine started forcing me to start my own Blog. That's how Vinayana's World came into being. If you look at my blog, I write about disability in majority of my blogs. People often ask me, why do I do that? Why I cannot find a different topic to write about? I always say that disability is a part of me, and how I not write about something that is so close to my life!!

Great going ,what are you looking forward to

My future dreams, consists of being a popular writer and I dream of teaching my favourite subject at the university. This is my major dream in my eyes right now. If talking about more farther dreams of the future, I want to be a successful writer and earn money in my kind of writing.

Where do you think India is lagging behind as far as disability is concerned.

The support system and policy changes that are needed for the people with disabilities in India today, is the implementation of the accessible India Campaign. It is not enough to just launch a campaign, it is for the abled population to understand why accessibility is important. The ramps and the tactile tile are not just made for the people with disabilities, it is also made for the older persons, the person with a broken leg and many Such people out there.

What is your take on employment and livelihood of the people with disabilities.

The first problem here is that the institutions don't want to hire a person with disabilities. These institution doesn't want take a risk of hiring the person with disabilities. It is a shame that these institution, think that person with disabilities couldn't cope up with the pressure. In reality, person with disabilities are 100% focus towards the work given and try to give their best to their job.

The idea of the inclusive community, is to have a psychology that everyone is equal. Even if the person has some disability in her body, we can include her in the community in some part or the other.. inclusion is a demand of the future and the only way in which we can achieve a inclusive world is through great compassion and understanding for others . I think that there's still a need to make the society more inclusive, psychologically... for the persons with disabilities. It is just then we can call our world, inclusive...



picture description- Vinayana enjoying the nature

Tech4goodawards finalists- AbilityNet Accessibility Award

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Be My Eyes

A free mobile app helping the blind people in situations where a pair of eyes is needed.

Be My Eyes is a free app that connects blind and low vision people with sighted volunteers and company representatives for visual assistance through a live video call. Be My Eyes aims to make the world more accessible by helping the blind people in situations where a pair of eyes is needed. There are more than 253 million blind people in the world, and it is Be My Eyes' mission to bring sight to everyone who needs it. With more than 82,115 blind and low vision users and over 1,389,006 volunteers, the app harnesses the power of generosity, technology and human connection to help blind and low vision people lead more independent lives. Be My Eyes is available in more than 150 countries worldwide and in over 180 languages. The app is free for both iOS and Android.

Facebook

Using artificial intelligence and machine learning services to power accessible technology.

Facebook is using artificial intelligence and machine learning services to power accessible technology for people with low vision and vision loss.

In 2016, [Facebook launched Automatic Alt Text \(AAT\)](#) a feature that uses object recognition to describe photos to people who are blind or who have low vision and use screen readers. In December 2017, they launched a Face Recognition tool that can tell people who use screen readers which friends appear in photos in their News Feed even if they aren't tagged.

How AAT Was Developed?

By programming machines through AI, Facebook was able to improve access to content at a global scale. AAT can currently detect 100+ concepts, such as: the number of people in a photo, whether people are smiling, physical objects like "car", "tree", "mountain", and others. This was an enormous technical challenge that was overcome by leveraging Facebook's Computer Vision Engine. The engine is based on state of the art deep convolutional networks and provides web-scale scalability and reliability. The models for the concepts exposed through AAT were learned based on the utilisation of millions of human-labeled examples, and were evaluated by Facebook's engineering group to guarantee an adequate balance of precision and recall. The development team also ran multiple rounds of user research and updated AAT based on feedback

GiveVision

GiveVision' team are developing the next generation of low vision aids. Their first prototype, called SightPlus, uses augmented reality and a virtual reality headset to help visually impaired people see better. SightPlus works as an advanced digital magnifier and a pair of binoculars to achieve a multitude of daily stationary tasks easier or more independently.

Using a VR headset enables testers to have their hands-free which drastically changes the way they can engage in an activity (for instance, imagine if you had to hold a monocular to watch a play for two hours or hold a magnifier when you are looking for something in a drawer). It also changes the way testers interact with their surroundings as they can capture more visual information by simply adjusting the zoom, contrast or brightness.

Seeing AI

Seeing AI, a free Microsoft app that narrates the visual world for the blind and low vision community.

Seeing AI is a free app from Microsoft that narrates the visual world for the blind and low vision community. Microsoft's mission is to empower every person on the planet to achieve more.

That the blind and low vision community (estimated size of 253 million according to WHO) is often underserved by technology and historically has reduced educational and employment opportunities. And we want to close that gap with the help of technology.

This ongoing research project harnesses the power of Artificial Intelligence to open up the visual world and describe nearby people, text, currency, colour, and objects with spoken audio. Much like a Swiss Army knife, this app provides many tools in one by leveraging the power of on-device deep learning to open many "first time in life" scenarios.

Key features include – Real-time text reading, document structure understanding, audio-based barcode locator and product recogniser, face recognition and emotion/age/gender description, currency recognition, colour recognition, audible light detector and handwriting reader. Additionally, this app can make even other apps accessible and inclusive by describing photos while using other apps

WayToB

Smartphone applications for way finding such as Google Maps are widely used, but they are not suitable for those with LD – both from a cognitive perspective, and from a safety aspect, walking while trying to follow a smart phone screen presents risks from traffic, crime, and others.

WayToB was created to tackle this problem. It offers individuals with LD independence, good levels of mobility, well-being and quality of life, and also peace of mind to family members and carers, who can make sure their loved ones are safe.

The solution is an integrated smartphone and smartwatch platform to help people with LD navigate independently and works based on a partnership approach.

The person with LD follows icon-based instructions on their watch; and their partner (parent, friend or carer) adds safe routes for them and is able to track their location, heart rate and battery life, as well as get notified for key journey events (eg. getting lost, stopping for too long, showing high levels of anxiety, etc.).

Events to Follow

- *The 18th Biennial Conference of ISAAC will be held at the Gold Coast Convention and Exhibition Centre on the Gold Coast, Australia, from July 21 to 26, 2018.*
 - *13th World Down Syndrome Congress, Glasgow- July 25 to July 27, 2018*
 - *Marina Open AITA Ranking Wheelchair Tennis Tournament 2018 - July 31 2018, chennai*
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