

# Newsletter

## November

2017

### Editor's Note

Dear friends,

Thank you for your appreciations for the last month's edition. It was special as I designed and edited it sitting in USA where I was holidaying. Big thumbs up to the technology for connecting the world and making it a big family!

A month long freedom to roam about everywhere from groceries to knickknacks (thanks to accessible roads and pavements) turned me literally into a shopaholic! The feeling of soaring high, sky being the limit was experienced at the completely accessible Glacier point at Yosemite National Park at an elevation of 7200 ft with freezing temperature. I was stunned not just by the picturesque and tranquil sight of High Sierra but with the human foresight. Standing there up on the ramp seeing and feeling just like everybody else, reiterated the importance of equity and equality.

Many questions arise in my head as I fly back home from this lovely sojourn and hope to solve a few with all your support.

Regards

Bhavna Botta



### From The Heart

Meet my lost and found friend, **Yashasvini Rajeshwar**, Head of Media and Communication of **Adventures Beyond Barriers Foundation** explaining about a pioneering effort.

#### Tell us about this unique thought and its genesis

Adventures Beyond Barriers Foundation (ABBF) is rooted in the unwavering belief that play can change the world. By asking people to come and experience inclusive adventure together, we are hoping to create opportunities to have conversations, build relationships, and get to know each other. Once individual connections are built, we believe, the need for accessibility will automatically follow and inclusion will become a state of mind, organically and naturally. At ABBF, we believe that you climb a mountain as strangers but come down as friends, and we have seen this come true time and again.

The seed of thought behind ABBF was born from our founder, Divyanshu Ganatra. When he went blind at the age of 19, he realised that spaces of leisure, entertainment, and sport are not accessible to Persons with Disability at all. Being



an adventure-lover himself, he decided to create the spaces he couldn't find for himself, and invited others to experience the adrenaline along with him.

Over the years, Divyanshu became India's first blind solo paragliding pilot and the first blind cyclist to pedal from Manali to Khardung La (a total of 550 kms to arguably the world's highest motorable road) on a tandem cycle. As an organization, ABBF has impacted close to 4000 Persons with Disability and over 1.5 lakh able-bodied people since inception in 2014.

# Newsletter

## November

2017

### What have been the struggles and achievements so far

The last few years have been amazing for us, showing us the true impact of the power of play and convincing us of how much there is to do left. In August 2017, ABBF conducted India's first inclusive tandem cycling expedition from Manali to Khardung La with 24 cyclists. We supported an amputee in his attempt to summit Mt. Everest and took an inclusive group to Everest Base Camp. We have participated in marathons across the country with blind and visually-impaired runners. We conducted an paramotoring event in partnership with Chandigarh Spinal Rehab a few months ago and had people in wheelchairs take to the skies! The stories are many.

At ABBF, we believe that every event is a story of achievement. Time and again, we have had individuals, PwDs and able-bodied alike, push themselves and their limitations to embrace newness and change. We have had stories of changed mindsets – promises to only create accessible buildings, make spaces of work more inclusive, volunteering to scribe/read – and tales of transformation – PwDs who have thus far not ventured out of home trying their hand at adventure sport, loving it and creating an identity for themselves. Each one of our participants is a story of achievement.

The struggles are, predictably, to do with funding. Choosing to work in the non-profit space and specialising in adventure sports is an expensive proposition. ABBF does not compromise on quality and this often means that the work we do is cost-intensive, with tandem cycles, spare parts, scuba gear, ropes for mountaineering and climbing, qualified trainers, and all the other details that go into

planning events adding up to expenditure. Unfortunately in India, there is a sizeable overlap between Persons with Disability and those who cannot afford the expenditure of adventure sports. ABBF tries to accommodate these costs as well, not believing that this circumstance should stop people from having the life-changing experience that is sport. As long as public mindset counts this field of work as a 'luxury,' not seeing the power it has to create stronger, more resilient, and more empathetic societies, fundraising will continue to be a struggle for us.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY AMRIT WIKSA, EXPEDITION ORGANIZED BY ADVENTUREBEYONDBARRIERS.COM

### What is the reaction of the stakeholders and the public in general

The response has been phenomenal. Our participants, able-bodied and PwD alike, often become ambassadors for our cause, becoming regulars at events and helping us spread the word amongst their circles. We recently hit 5000 likes on our Facebook page entirely organically and have built a community of engaged, conscientious individuals on the internet.



# Newsletter

## November

2017

The media have been kind to us and covered our work extensively; giving us the reach we need to spread the power of play. Corporates who approach us to conduct internal events often become strong supporters of our cause and the relationship gets cemented in long-term partnerships. We are only grateful for the support we have received so far and hope that this continues and enables us to spread our wings wider and reach out to even more people across the country and one day, across the world.

### What are the ongoing projects and future plans

There is always something happening at ABBF. In the immediate future, we have the first group of blind-and-sighted cyclists participating on a tandem for the Deccan Cliffhanger, the Pune to Goa relay race. We have a couple of events planned down south, ensuring that we cater to people in that region as well. We hope to take forward the momentum of our paramotoring experience and do more of those events as well. The best place to keep an eye on what is coming up is by heading to our Facebook and for those who are interested in volunteering with us (as allies, photographers, writers, technical and web support, anything at all), fill the form available there in.

In the long run, ABBF has dreams of building India's first fully accessible community space for people across disabilities as well as able-bodied people to truly experience inclusion. We hope to organise international tandem cycling expeditions, introduce Persons with Disability to open-water scuba diving, take more people to Everest Base Camp and higher. Simultaneously, we also hope to have many,

many more local, smaller events that include everyone. We hope to create platforms where more and more people can experience inclusive adventure, even if they have no prior experience in adventure or interacting with Persons with Disability. We believe that the key to transformation lies in experiencing, and we hope to enable this experience for as many people as we possibly can.

### How have you been solving access issues

At ABBF, we believe that there are multiple ways that one can influence change, some being more effective than others. Policy and legal amendments are both important and necessary, but they also require the time and effort to navigate the bureaucracy. At ABBF, we believe that the power to transform lies with the individual just as much as it lies in the "system". If your friend was wheelchair-bound, you are more likely to pay attention to the accessibility issues of public places. If your colleague was blind, you would make sure all documents could be read by a screen reader. For change to occur, the person needs to feel invested in it. ABBF enables this investment.



# Newsletter

## November

2017

Since 2014, we have had multiple stories of success. After running a marathon as a sighted ally with one of our blind runners, a prominent architect in Pune promised us that everything he designs from now on will be entirely accessible. After cycling together, we have had blind participants being invited for interview calls at major organizations. The examples are endless. The best part? That they were entirely organic, voluntary, and natural.



### A Few words about your team

ABBF believes in being a lean, efficient organization. Our team comprises of five people currently. Divyanshu, the founder, leads from the front and is our in-house guinea pig for all adventure activities. Being an adventure lover himself, he participates in all our activities personally to streamline our processes before we open it out to everyone else. Tanya and Bhargav take care of operations and logistics, making sure all the details on the ground are running smoothly. Nimisha is our Director for Accounts and I head the Media and Communications. That is Team ABBF for you!

### Straight talk

Meet Mrs. **Padmatharani**, the first cerebral palsy person to post graduate from All India Institute of Speech and Hearing, Mysore.

### Tell us about your career

I am currently working as a Speech language pathologist and Audiologist at District Differently Abled Welfare Office, Thanjavur. I work with children having speech, language and communication disorders like cerebral palsy, mental retardation, Autism, Stuttering, Aphasia.

### What about your education Padma, were you in an inclusive set up?

My medical condition, an extreme form of cerebral palsy, could never be diagnosed accurately for the first 2.5 years, putting my family into a lot of untold turmoil. I was advised to undertake physiotherapy regularly. Well trained physiotherapists were not available in Madurai at that time. My



# Newsletter

## November

2017

physical conditions started worsening with age and lack of proper treatment, both upper and lower limb muscles were getting very tight and my movement became very restricted and had to undergo surgery at the age of 7 followed by intensive physiotherapy.

The turning point was in 1994, I got a good and well trained physiotherapist, Dr. Uma Shah, I started to stand and walk a little. In-fact, it was only after 15 years of surgery and therapy including one in Mumbai in 2001, I started walking with a walker, started climbing stairs alone.

As a consequence of surgeries and physiotherapies demanding more time, I had to suffice with home tuitions initially. But then, as time moved on, I started attending the Rose matriculation school in Madurai. Admission into the school for the last 4 months of her 10th standard after a lot of negotiations but I came out with flying colors.

This fuelled my desire to study higher. My parents struggled a lot in hunting down schools for me. But then, not many were willing to take. In fact many looked upon my disability as a major disqualification point. Finally, Maharishi Vidya Mandir, Madurai went onto accept me even after knowing the difficulties.

All this made me even more focused and I etched a career ambition in my mind- a career which would help people with disability and create awareness among people regarding the same. So, I went onto write the entrance exam for admission into the All India Institute of Speech and Hearing. I got through the entrance and went onto become the first student with cerebral palsy to study in that

institution. It was a dream that came true for me, my parents and all my friends and relatives who had constantly encouraged and supported me.. All the 18 years of hard work, hope, difficulties suffered and sacrifice had paid off.

The next phase of life started when I reached Mysore to join the institute in 2005. After reaching there, I realized that it is not easy for to manage without wheelchair and a caregiver. The next six years, living in a new place taught me many things and empowered me in many ways.

### **Can you share with us some of the most satisfying moments?**

I pushed my father to start a school for children with intellectual disabilities. This was a very satisfying moment. Personally I also offered voluntary speech therapy programs to whoever needs them at the institute of Dr. Uma Shah during vacations.





# Newsletter

## November

2017

**Padma, hats off to your determination, you are a much sought after motivational speaker, is there a dream you are chasing**

I strongly advocate a barrier free environment for the disabled. I have done many live programs in the local television channels to create awareness about speech therapy and about special children which has created a change people's attitude about disability. I have plans to form a parents support group to provide mental support and to get mutual help from other families.

**That's great, now about your personal life**

I found Mr .Right in Ramesh. We got married on April 4 2013 after many conflicts from parents and relatives .We are now leading a beautiful and blissful life. All this I wouldn't have achieved without my parents. My support system now includes my husband and my affectionate in laws too.



*Padmatharani is the recipient of Best women Achiever of the year, Madurai, 2012; Sourashtrian Achiever Award in the year 2013 from an NGO called BVK foundation at Madurai.*

**SHE PROVED THEM WRONG AND EXCELLED BEYOND EXPECTATIONS**

Originally published at [Patientsengage.com](http://Patientsengage.com)

***Rucha Shere, 28, is the first student in Maharashtra with Down Syndrome to have achieved academic excellence. Battling ridicule and rejection intrepidly, she is now pursuing a Master's degree in Sanskrit. Read her wonderful story as told by her father.***



**Congratulations!!** You have been blessed with a beautiful baby girl, we were informed. My wife and I were thrilled. Our little bundle of joy had finally arrived and she looked lovely: small, flat nose, round face and slanting eyes. Her first cry had been particularly loud and clear. We brought her home in a few days. There was immense excitement with friends and neighbours dropping in to celebrate.

We named her Rucha, a Sanskrit word for 'Hymn'.

# Newsletter

## November

2017

It was when we visited our pediatrician, that a slight anxiety overcast our joy. The doctor recommended that we do blood test for her – the Trisomy 21 Down Syndrome Test. At that time, we did not know anything about Down Syndrome. The doctor too did not tell us much. Anyway, we got the test done and it turned out to be positive. When we went back to the doctor, all that we were told was that her physical development would be slower than other children and to keep a close watch on her progress. Since Down Syndrome did not make much sense to us those days, we thought we could somehow surmount developmental and growth issues.

By the second year, we began to realize that Rucha's response to activities was much slower than other children. Her growth also seemed delayed. She looked small for her age. Finally, we took her to a child specialist. She had one look at Rucha's face, and declared that she had Down Syndrome. She told us Rucha would not be very good at studies and not to have any expectations from her. "Try and admit her in a school for special kids," she added.

We were still grappling with Rucha's condition and had not fully understood the problem. We thought we could battle it out and bring her on track with other children. As she grew, we got her a physiotherapist and speech therapist to set her developmental records straight. Her legs and hands were weak and her speech was unclear. But we noticed that she liked books. So we started getting her plenty of story and picture books. She could sit with her books for hours, flipping through the pages, staring at pictures. She would also watch television avidly.

Till the 4th Std, Rucha went to a regular school. But the early hours of school and increasing classwork, began to burden her. Unable to cope, we put her in a school for special kids. At her new school, she was the brightest among her classmates. She was the only one who could read and write. The class coordinator recommended that Rucha be shifted to a regular school. When we admitted her to a new school, she had to join two classes junior to her, as her English and Maths were weak.

In 2011, Rucha managed to complete her 10th Std and secured 58%. She was the first child with Down Syndrome in Maharashtra to have successfully completed her school. Rucha wanted to study further. We as her parents supported her enthusiastically. She enrolled for Sanskrit major for graduation. As her college was far from home and required a train journey, her mother too enrolled herself in the same college for post-graduation course, so that she could accompany Rucha to college. For two years, both mother and daughter attended college together.



# Newsletter

## November

2017

Currently, Rucha is doing her Master's in Sanskrit. Her goal is to complete her B.Ed degree so that she can become a Sanskrit teacher. Rucha is a quiet, reserved girl. She likes cooking and dancing. She has participated in several cultural programmes in college and won prizes.

We are extremely proud of our daughter. Sometimes, through her perseverance and determination, she gives us strength to carry forward and overcome our difficulties.

I would like to tell other parents who have children with Down Syndrome: **Don't lose heart, remain motivated.** I remember when Rucha was young, we were told she would not be able to study much, but **she has proved them wrong.** Rucha can be an inspiration for other similar children. Times have changed now, there is a lot more awareness about Down Syndrome and plenty of guidance. **I think with extra initiative and support, children with Down Syndrome too can excel in their field of choice.**

## 5 Tech Gadgets to Help People with Disabilities

Originally published at

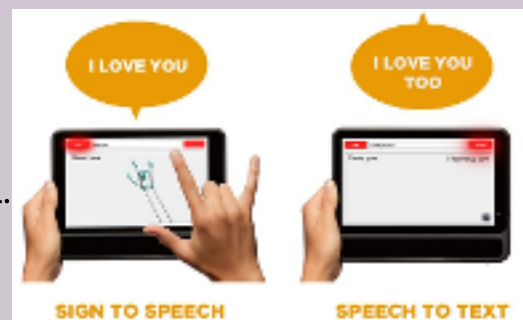
[davebanesaccess.org-maketecheasier.com/tech-gadgets-disabilities/](http://davebanesaccess.org-maketecheasier.com/tech-gadgets-disabilities/)

People with disabilities are never left behind in life, and this holds true for technology as well. There are many types of assistive tech gadgets that are made specifically for people with disabilities to make things easier for them. They may not be able to help a blind person see (at the moment) or a speech-impaired person speak, but they can surely convey their message and provide help when needed. Below you will see five gadgets that can help disabled people.

### 1. UNI

UNI is a new gadget to assist deaf and speech-impaired people communicate with other people. It's a two-way communication device that will detect sign language using its camera and immediately convert it into speech. On the other hand, it will also convert speech into text to allow two-way communication.

Furthermore, it also has a built-in software to create custom sign language and customize it according to your need.



### 2. Tobii Dynavox PCEye Explore

Tobii Dynavox has created the PC Eye Explore device to help people with limited movement control a Windows PC just with their eyes. It connects with your Windows 8/10 PC (laptop or desktop) and uses its eye tracker to let you control the mouse and perform clicks. It also has a built-in software to personalize PC Eye Explore accord You don't have to worry about the light emitting out of it to track your eyes, as it is very low and doesn't damages the eyes.



# Newsletter

## November

2017

### 3. BRAILLE EDGE 40

This is a braille device for blind people to let them control their PC, Smartphone or PDA. Braille Edge 40 connects with your device using Bluetooth or a USB cable and converts the text on the device display into braille.



### 4. Sesame Phone

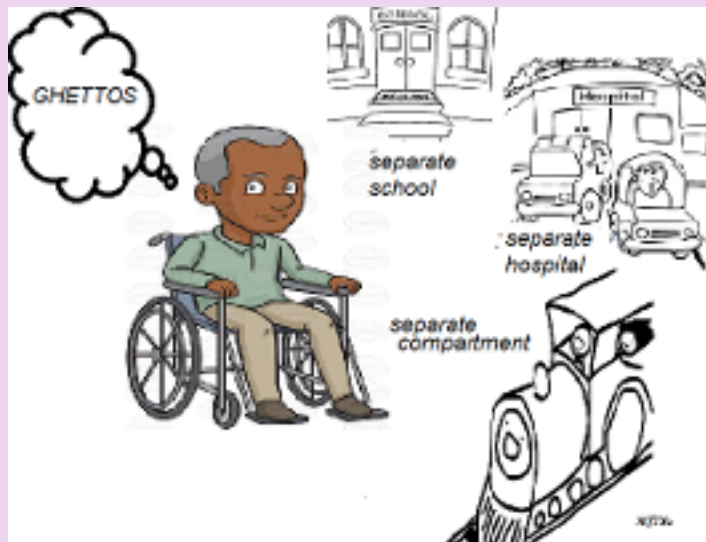
Sesame Phone is a completely hands-free smartphone made for people with limited movement (like paralysis or spinal cord injury). It is actually a modified version of Google's Nexus 5 device that tracks the user's head and allows full control of the phone just with the head.

### 5. Liftware

This is an eating utensil that allows people with motion disorders (like Parkinson's disease) to eat their food without any help. Liftware is actually a stabilizing handle you can attach a eating utensil to, including a fork, spoon and soup spoon. The handle is capable of reducing hand tremors 70%, making it good enough for moderate tremors.



### Humour Corner



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