

Sarthak Educational Trust report on Advocacy Initiatives taken in India for empowerment of people with disability

Background

According to World Bank report, one billion people, or **15% of the world's population**, experience some form of disability, and disability prevalence is higher for developing countries. One-fifth of the estimated global total, or between 110 million and 190 million people, experience significant disabilities.

Persons with disabilities are more likely to experience adverse socioeconomic outcomes than persons without disabilities, such as less education, poorer health outcomes, lower levels of employment, and higher poverty rates.

Barriers to full social and economic inclusion of persons with disabilities include inaccessible physical environments and transportation, the unavailability of assistive devices and technologies, non-adapted means of communication, gaps in service delivery, and discriminatory prejudice and stigma in society.

Poverty may increase the risk of disability through malnutrition, inadequate access to education and health care, unsafe working conditions, a polluted environment, and lack of access to safe water and sanitation. Disability may increase the risk of poverty, through lack of employment and education opportunities, lower wages, and increased cost of living with a disability.

In India, the population of persons with disability is around **26.8 million**, constituting 2.21% of India's total population (Census 2011). However, World Bank data proposes the number between 40 to 80 million. But despite the discrepancy between the numbers it is very clear that PwDs constitute a significant part of Indian Population.

Sarthak Advocacy Initiatives- Aims & Objectives

Disability Advocacy came from the disability rights movement. The significant battles were fought for the rights of people with disability, including the right to have access to public resources, right to education, right to be employed, and other community support services necessary to support living an independent, unsegregated life.

Over decades, disability advocates have fundamentally shifted traditional models of thinking about disability to a new understanding where society as a whole takes responsibility for enabling inclusion.

The primary focus of our awareness & advocacy initiative is to create opportunities for a life of equality and dignity for Persons with Disability and their families through holistic approach by providing Medical Rehabilitation, Inclusive Education, Skill Development Training & Sustainable Employment and Advocacy to those in need.

We at Sarothak, carry Advocacy very extensively through various approaches. Prominent amongst them are National Conference on Disability, Round Table Conference, Regional Summits, Job Fairs, Corporate Sensitization and others.

The motive behind conducting these advocacy events is to discuss, deliberate, and bring concrete changes in the lives of the persons with disability. The hardcore advocacy events are directed towards bringing the issues in the notice of the stakeholders and help in creating constructional changes in the present disability scenario.

We believe that people with a disability have the same rights and responsibilities as the rest of the people. Sarothak Projects work for Persons with Disabilities, and aims to provide solutions in the form of Health/Medical Treatment, Inclusive Education, Skill Building, Employment Generation and Advocacy to all the varied age group of disabled populace.

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Advocacy at Sarothak

Advocacy with Government

As an outcome of hardcore advocacy with center and state government of India, Sarothak advocacy events came with varied thought leadership over various areas of action for PwDs, namely, **National Action Plan, Accessibility India Campaign, Sector Skill Council for Persons with Disabilities**, and passing of the **Rights of Persons with Disability Act, 2016** was the positive outcome.

Advocacy with Corporates

Gone are the days, when charity or empathy was assumed to be guiding force of hiring persons with disability. Now, is the era where, diverse workforce offers multifarious advantages namely Diversity, Creativity, Engagement, and what not?

Now corporates are conducting such workshops where case studies maps out the various job profiles suitable for the persons with disabilities with the mutual consent of the Human Resource Manager. Not only this, a basic orientation session is conducted for the non – disabled employees of the organization to acquaint them with the basic know – how to deal with the persons with disabilities, for instance, sign language sessions, basic infra support for accessibility at workplace etc.

Advocacy with Media

Images and stories in the media can deeply influence public opinion and establish societal norms. Persons with disabilities are seldom covered in the media, and when they are featured, they are often negatively stereotyped and not appropriately represented. It is not uncommon

to see persons with disabilities treated as objects of pity, charity or medical treatment that have to overcome a tragic and disabling condition or conversely, presented as superheroes who have accomplished great feats, so as to inspire the non-disabled.

The media can be a vital instrument in raising awareness, countering stigma and misinformation. It can be a powerful force to change societal misconceptions and present persons with disabilities as individuals that are a part of human diversity. Sarthak during advocacy events ensures the disability sector is covered under positive light.

Advocacy Events

- **National Conference on Disability-** Since 2014, Sarthak Educational Trust is annually organizing a national conference with an objectives to invite the **prime stakeholders** (Government, corporates, media, researchers, bureaucrats, academicians, innovators, medical personnel, administrators, educational leaders, policy makers, industry representatives, researchers, students, and others interested in the fields of disability) over a panel discussion for brainstorming pressing needs of disability sector. In 2014, the conference was inaugurated **by Late Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam, Former President of India** and since then each year this platform witnessed presence of various other eminent persons from different walks of life. Hence, served as a greatest place of brining upon the constructive changes at the PAN India level.
- **Round Table Conferences on disability-** It is unique initiative of Sarthak – bringing corporate houses on one single platform to share their experiences of hiring persons with disability with the prospective and new corporate partners, a huge shift of non – hiring partners into hiring partners is been witnessed in the so far organized 50+ Round Table Conferences
- **Regional Summits-** Regional Summit is a platform to involve the senior representatives from government, corporate and local bodies to talk over the improvisation of the contemporary disability orientation in the society.
- **Stakeholder Engagement Seminars** - In order to sensitize the corporate hiring partners and make the staff equipped with the general behavior of persons with disabilities, Team Sarthak carries out the sensitization drive in the corporate houses and try create an understanding amongst the non – disabled workforce about the common practices to be followed with the disabled workforce.
- **Sensitization Workshop** Advocacy is the lynchpin of Sarthak's effort and we believe it is only through effective sensitization, the stigma associated with disability can be scraped out. Corporate Sensitization is one part of it. Disability Sensitization of the employer is

vital for sustainable employment of persons with disability in the corporate space. We take pride in mentioning that more than 200+ corporate houses have been sensitized and converted into the prospective hiring partners of persons with disability.

- **International Advocacy Event- Sarothak at World Skill Asia- Abu Dhabi** - The recent collaboration with **World Skills India** and joint hosting of national event has proved to be a huge boost to the Abilympic movement, as Sarothak and NAAI was invited by **World Skills Asia** to demonstrate the unique skills and talents of persons with disabilities during their event held in Abu Dhabi from **26th to 29th November, 2018**.

More than 20 Asian countries including Chinese Taipei, UAE, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines and many others participated in the event, to showcase their talent in 17 trades. During the event, Sarothak & NAAI participants also demonstrated the skills garnering huge attention and appreciation from the visitors. Delegations from Japan, Korea and many other countries were some of the main dignitaries who witnessed the Sarothak & NAAI pavilion and appreciated the talent and achievements of Sarothak & NAAI.

- **Accessibility Summit with Microsoft India**- Accessibility is an essential step to ensure that every member of the community gets benefitted by the products or services provided to them. The Microsoft Accessibility Summit, 2017 focused on creating sustainable business and social values of accessibility.

Accessibility Summit was a joint effort by **Sarothak Educational Trust** and **Microsoft** to bring together stalwarts of different field on a common platform. Here there were discussion on how technology should be made accessible and how technology was used to create an inclusive work place for persons with disability.

Under the theme of “**The Future of Accessibility, through the lens of Technology**”, the summit provided a platform for empowering innovators and helping them achieve break-through in their next generation innovation.

- **Marathons, Joy of Giving week, International Advocacy Days, and awareness campaigns** are part of Sarothak annual advocacy calendar for bringing positive changes through a trail of our hardcore advocacy events, across PAN India.

Measurable Outcomes (2008-2020)

- **2** National Abilympics
- **6** National Conferences on Disability in Delhi
- **50+** Round Table Conferences across India
- **20+** Regional Summits across India

- **300+** Sensitization Workshop in leading corporates across India.
- **500+** center level advocacy events (Awareness Campaigns, Street Plays, Street March, Competitions, Important disability days, etc)

Snapshots


