

**REPORT ON ABILITIES MELA, SWEEKAR UPKAR CAMPUS,  
SECUNDERABA, 12TH AND 13TH JUNE 2010  
ORGANIZED BY BCF AND LSN FOUNDATION**

In the last decade, Government of India has come up with legislations and various schemes and facilities for persons with disabilities. However, some of the areas where the disabled still face problems include the delivery of basic services such as employment, health, education, etc. Other aspects requiring attention are reservation of equal opportunities for the disabled, protection of their rights, and full participation. Experiences, case studies and initiatives related to rehabilitation underscore the need for support services and employment opportunities for the disabled coupled with provision of information on integrated initiatives and services, ranging from large state led projects to interventions of civil society organizations, and industry associations and corporate foundations. India has a growing disability rights movement and one of the more progressive policy Frameworks in the developing world. But, a lot more needs to be done in implementation and “getting the basic rights”. With better education, training and more access to jobs, people with disabilities can become an integral part of society, as well as help generate higher economic growth that will benefit the country as a whole. Groups working on Disability needs to come together on a common platform to lobby for jobs in the private & public sector, accessible infrastructure and removal of barriers. LSN Foundation is a not-for profit Trust, established in July 2007, in Hyderabad. One of the core objectives of the Foundation is to support vulnerable groups like PwDs, elderly, homeless, street children, etc to improve their quality of life. The Foundation aims to build partnerships to improve networking quality and synergy on mutual activities of GO/NGO and promote and extend the exchange of best practice. Business and Community Foundation (BCF), New Delhi has piloted the Abilities Mela in many places in India and supported the Mela in Hyderabad. LSN Foundation has organized Abilities Mela this time in Hyderabad..

**OBJECTIVES:**

The main objective of the Mela was to match skills of PwD candidates to job opportunities in the organised sector, and to prepare a CV bank of PwD candidates that employers can access. Other objectives include : to provide a single window of information and opportunities for training and livelihoods of the PwDs, marketing products created by PwDs, sensitizing companies, CSOs and the public on disability issues and enable cooperation to promote inclusion at all levels; and provide a common platform to NGOs and networks working on disability issues to come together to lobby for an inclusive society,

## **EXPECTED OUTCOMES**

- To create awareness among the PwDs on various organized sector employment and self employment opportunities available to them
- To provide a platform to the PwDs to display and sell their products
- To identify core issues concerning the PwDs which can be recommended to the government
- Arranging jobs and building soft skills for PwDs
- Sensitizing various government departments towards creating disabled friendly policies, facilities, regulations, etc
- Creating awareness on various government programs which are available to PwDs
- Tie up with banks / other financial institutions for financial assistance for PwDs
- Providing assistance in business development plan for PwDs
- Organize a platform for NGOs who are working on disability issues for sharing, learning and advocacy
- To sensitize corporate organizations (both private and public sectors) about the employable skills available with the PwDs
- To sensitize non-disabled persons (common visitors to the Mela) about disability issues

## **PRE MELA ACTIVITIES:**

Though LSN Foundation was the key host of the Mela in Hyderabad, the methodology adopted to organize the Mela was inclusive and participatory. LSN Foundation invited many interested NGOs and other organizations and institutions to participate organizing the Mela. They all came forward voluntarily and 14 sub committees were formed. Each committee had 4-5 members and was responsible for a particular component of the Mela. Pre Mela activities went on for almost 3 months. The collective effort and ownership culminated to a successful event.

## **PUBLICITY:**

The organizers took many steps to create awareness about the event among the general public, since one of the main objectives of the Mela is to sensitize the common person on disability issues and promote an inclusive society. Tempest Advertising agency coordinated the entire press relations aspect of the Mela on behalf of the organizers. The following steps were taken:

Press meet on Abilities Mela 2010 addressed by Mr. VVS Laxman, Indian Cricketer, Dr. Hanumanth Rao, Founder and chairman – Sweekar Upkar, Mr.

Gangadhar, Mahindra Satyam Foundation and Ms. Manjula, Executive Trustee, LSN Foundation, and others. The Press meet was held on 7th June, 2010 at the Sweekar Upkar, Secunderabad.

Press notes covering various aspects of the Mela were distributed to the press persons. Many of these were carried out in the newspapers.

Posters were developed which were displayed at institutions, shops, and other major centers of congregation by the volunteers.

2 prominent hoardings were displayed on the Mela few days before the Mela one outside Sweekar's office and other on SP Road

All the participating NGOs were requested to publicize this event in their respective areas.

Leading Telugu newspaper "Sakshi" carried 2 prominent advertisements for free of cost.

Various Telugu newspapers and Hindu has given very good publicity about Abilities Mela.

<http://www.hindu.com/2010/06/08/stories/2010060858560200.htm>.

Above is the Hindu link on Abilities Mela publicity.

### **INAUGURAL FUNCTION:**

The inaugural function was held on 12th June in the Main Conference Hall of Sweekar Upkar from 10am to 12pm. The event started with the Prayer Song sung by students of Devnar School followed by lamp lighting ceremony by the Chief Guest and other Guests of Honour –Ms. Poonam Natarajan, Chairperson, National Trust and Mr. VVS Laxman, International Cricket Player. Introduction and welcome address was delivered by Mr. Jayesh Ranjan, Managing Trustee of LSN Foundation. He started with an introduction on Abilities Mela, a two day event for PwDs being conducted by LSN Foundation and Business & Community Foundation along with a core group of NGOs, GOs and CSR Organizations working for PwDs since last 3 years. This is the 4th Abilities Mela being organised to explore the job and self employment opportunities for unemployed PwDs. Many private and public sector companies are coming forward to assess and hire PwDs, not only as part of their CSR, but also because of the enormous benefits PwD employees give to the organization. The audiences were briefed on the 2 day programme schedule covering events, workshops and assessments thereafter. After the introduction to Abilities Mela by Mr. Jayesh Ranjan, the event continued with speeches by Mr. VC Kumar- CEO, Mahindra Satyam Foundation,

Mr. Sanjeev Jain, ITSAP, Mr. Debashish Basu, and Convener for HR, Skill Development and Affirmative Action, CII- AP, Dr. Hanumantha Rao, Founder and Chairman of Sweekar Upkar, and Ms. Sunitha, Director, MEPMA. Mr. Dinakar, a Visually Impaired candidate, who has benefited from Abilities Mela by getting a job with GE, shared his experiences. Mr. Chandra Ramulu and Ms. Tulasi, both PwDs, also gave their feedback about Abilities Mela. For the first time in this Mela, 2 PwD achievers, namely Mr. Srikanth, a Visually Impaired Student at MIT, Boston, USA, and Dr. Ramesh, an Orthopedically Handicapped medical professional from Kurnool, gave inspirational talk before the gathering. The Guest of Honor Mr. VVS Laxman, Indian Cricketer expressed his gratitude for being invited to this extraordinary programme. He conveyed that Abilities Mela is just not a standalone event but an opportunity for PwDs to showcase their talents. This will help them to learn about the various facilities and schemes of the Government for PwDs. He also released the publication “Success stories of Abilities Mela”, a book brought out by LSN Foundation that has profiled 15 successful PwD achievers who have attended earlier Mela. Mr. Laxman shared that he was once fortunate to watch cricket match among the visually challenged teams of India and Pakistan which motivated him to support the cause of the PwDs. He concluded by wishing best luck to organizers and participants. Ms. Poonam Natrajan, Chairperson, National Trust, New Delhi, and the Chief Guest for the inaugural function, delivered a very inspiring speech. “As we have been listening to different success experiences of PwDs, it means a lot for people with multiple disabilities to achieve success.” Abilities Mela is bringing large arena of corporate groups to assess the PwDs and direct them to the job opportunities suiting their skills and abilities. She also explained the services extended by National Trust for PwDs. She also appreciated the convergence between various NGOs and government organizations and institutions in successfully organizing the Mela. The inaugural function was followed by stalls inauguration by Ms. Poonam Natrajan. She visited all the stalls and encouraged the participants by understanding various aspects of their work.

## **PRODUCT EXHIBITION AND STALLS**

There were 24 stalls put up by NGOs, Government Institutions and a few corporate organizations. For the first time, few stalls were put up by agencies who manufacture Aids and Appliances for the PwDs. Organizations like Sweekar Upkar, Vikalangula Kalyana Vedika, APVCC, Vocational Rehabilitation Centre, MEPMA, DRDA – SERP, National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), Chirala Weavers, Nenu Vunnamu Foundation, MESH, etc. displayed and sold products ranging from fabrics, saris to home products. During the Mela and at the end of the Mela, organizing committee also enquired about the sales and profits they made. Majority of the stalls got good sales and got benefited by their participation in the Mela.

## **PRESENTATIONS ABOUT SERVICES OFFERED TO THE PwDs**

15 NGOs, Government departments and Institutions gave brief presentations on the programmes, facilities and services they offer to the PwDs. The services include various courses and schemes like computer training, embroidery, tailoring, fabric painting, besides vocational courses, speech and hearing courses, health education, awareness etc. Presentations were made by NIMH, MEPMA, SERP, Helpage India, Deafway Foundation, Commitments, Andhra Mahila Sabha, Helen Keller Institute, Aakar Asha, LV Prasad Eye Care Hospital, Devnar School for the Blind, and a few others.

## **WORKSHOPS AND ROUND TABLE DISCUSSIONS:**

As a part of the Mela, workshops, seminars, and round table discussions were conducted over the two days. Eminent people from NGOs, Government organizations, Corporates and various other institutions working with persons with disabilities participated. A brief summary of the proceedings is given below.

## **WORKSHOP ON MEDICAL REHABILITATION:**

The main objective of the workshop was to familiarize and create awareness about disability rehabilitation covering all aspects like prevention, restoration, remedial measures, education, training, and employment related technologies, through presentations, exhibitions and live demonstrations. The speaker included Dr. Hari Prasad, Dr. B. Ramesh, Prof. Jyothi, Dr. Venkatanarayan and Dr. Gogkte. Dr. Hari Prasad spoke on different types of hearing loss. He also explained about the government program called Aarogyasri, which is providing support to children by providing aids for hearing disability. Dr. Ramesh spoke on causes of disability. malnutrition, hygiene and sanitation, reproductive age are the few main reasons, he explained. Prof. Jyothi spoke on causes of disability due to genetic disorders. She gave an insight on the components of genetics: genes, DNA and chromosomes. Dr. Gogkte spoke on different kinds of visual disabilities. He also spoke on the importance of eye donation. Dr. N. Venkatanarayan gave awareness on Hemophilia and disability. The session ended with the vote of thanks to the speakers by Dr. Arun Joshi, Director Vocational Rehabilitation centre.

## **ROUND TABLE DISCUSSIONS WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF HOTEL INDUSTRY FOR EMPLOYMENT OF PwDs :**

The purpose of this discussions was to explore employment and self employment opportunities for PwDs in hotel industry. More than 15 senior General Managers and HR managers of leading 5 star hotels of Hyderabad along with office bearers

of the Hotels and Restaurants association of AP (HRAAP) have attended the discussions, which were moderated by Mr. Jayesh Ranjan. The key points discussed are the following.

1. PwDs have difficulties in getting jobs in organized sector. Securing access to corporate jobs is difficult.
2. Exploring hospitality sector for PwDs with respect to employment and self employment opportunities for their livelihoods.
3. There are mind block to be overcome as PwDs are wrongly perceived as “difficult employees”. They are rather better employees in many ways :  
Attention · Loyalty · Higher efficiency and Productivity in certain tasks
4. There is no risks involved in hiring PwDs, they should be employed not just as part of CSR, but as a sound business practice.
5. The hotel industry is willing to employ PwDs, but is currently not aware on where to look for suitable candidates.
6. Important to break myths like hotels are not safe place for the ladies – in fact they are safest.
7. Hotels must have a policy to employ PwDs. Some of the Hotel representatives talked about their positive experiences of working with PwD employees. Even now, some hotels are outsourcing some of their tasks to organizations/NGOs that are working with the PwDs.
8. Hotel industry has no access to the database of PwDs. No one had approached them so far for the employment of the PwDs. Someone has to proactively approach them and share the database. Sufficient training is also required for the identified candidates. Basic training on computers and English can be given for the back office and desk work. DRF and Enable India can give long term training to get necessary soft skills required for employment. PwDs need stronger emotional support, including mentoring and counseling. Some part of the training can be on the job, for which the hotels can create some of the training programs in barrier free spaces.
9. There can be 4 to 5 areas to employ PwDs, for which one has to draw a metrics of tasks at different levels and skills required. Qualifications, strengths and capabilities can be evaluated by one on one interaction with the PwD candidates.

Regarding self employment opportunities, the following ideas were emerged:

1. Hotels can support NGO suppliers who work with PwDs by providing them business (e.g. scrubs, vegetables, flowers, etc) as indirect employment.
2. Outsource task/ work to PwDs. Category of work should be identified to be outsourced; repetitive jobs like cutting vegetables, peeling onions etc. can be easily outsourced.
3. Sell products made by the PwDs in boutiques of Hotels.
4. The hotel industry can also extend the support by arranging show for PwD artists.
5. The hotel industry can outsource back office requirements.

#### **KEY OUTCOMES AND ACTION ITEMS:**

Representative from Abilities Mela core committee would visit the hotels (one large and a medium sized hotel) to study the jobs available as well as micro-enterprise opportunities available in their premises for PwD aspirants for employment and self-employment. List of candidates who can be hired immediately and list of candidates who need training will be prepared. Database available with Abilities Mela shall be sorted and CVs of those who can be placed in hotel industry can be identified. Meanwhile, through the intervention of the HRAAP, the number of jobs available for PwDs at different levels will be consolidated hotel-wise, and further selection and training process will follow.

#### **WORKSHOP ON TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT OF THE PwDs:**

The purpose of the workshop was to create awareness on the training and employment opportunities for PwDs. The speakers spoke about awareness on assistive technology products and tools for different categories of PwDs. They also exhibited different equipments which shall help the visually impaired or people with low vision support for reading. The presentation elucidated the importance of self motivation; the speaker quoted example of visually impaired people in USA working as system analysts/research associates at the top positions. In public sector and in companies like BHEL 2% of the revenue funds are allocated for the welfare of impaired people. Technologies are developed and are readily available so that employing PwDs is becoming easier. Eventually, the idea of one institution/university where all facilities related to training is provided for PwDs, from where companies can recruit and NGOs can find PwD candidates to work for

their betterment, was mooted. The speakers were representatives from PSUs like BDL, BHEL, ECIL, Andhra Bank, Indian Bank, South Central Railways and Ms. Shilpi from Barrier Break Technologies, representative from Karishma Enterprise, Mr. Madhusudan Reddy from Geetanjali Gems, Mr. Bhargav – VH (Independent Financial and tax consultant), Mr. Murali – VH and Ms. Supriya – VH (Lawyer).The concluding remarks were presented by Mr. Arun Joshi.

### **SEMINAR ON SELF EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE PwDs:**

The objective of the seminar was to create awareness on self employment opportunities for the PwDs and to bring different stakeholders (e.g. GOs, NGOs, PPP, etc.) focusing and supporting self employment under one roof, and create awareness on different schemes available for PwDs to start an enterprise.

The session was started with the note that, “PwDs are made to run pillar to post for the job placement and are made miserable. If they find their own employment avenue there will be no need for them to feel let down.” Core committee of Abilities Mela has discovered a way to bring together the funding institutions, successful PwD entrepreneurs and aspiring entrepreneurs. There are several hurdles when a PwD wants to take up a job, since all the work locations are not barrier free and difficult in accessing to work place can cause a major detainment to motivation. The speakers explained about various programmes under which funding support can be made available to the PwDs. The key outcomes and action items from this session are:

1. Convergence of Self employment development agencies (GOs and NGOs)
2. Single window session for PwDs is essential
3. VRC declares Wednesday as self employment day and offers infrastructure support for Hyderabad and RR district and requested other Abilities Mela core group members like Aarohan Foundation, APVCC and Commitments to take responsibility on self employment awareness, training and bank linkages for PwDs. Key Speakers of the self employment session were Mr. TRV Satya Prasad from KVIC, Mr. D. Subba Rao from APBEIRD, Mr. M.V. Leela Krishna from MSME, Mr. Madhusudan Rao from JSS, Dr. Prabhakar from MEPMA and Ms. Shailaja, GM, APVCC.

### **ASSESSMENT OF PwD CANDIDATES BY CORPORATES:**

During the Mela, there were HR representatives from different companies who come to assess the PwDs resumes and offer career advice. The companies included Tata Consultancy Services, TATA-BPO, Mahindra Satyam, GE and Dr.Reddy’s Labs. 270 new profiles were assessed. All the HR representatives have given their assessment feedback to the organizers. Some candidates were found to be suitable for more detailed selection process. In general, gaps existing among the

candidates was also identifies and suggestions for their training and capacity building discussed. It has been decided that a sub-committee among the abilities Mela core group members will follow up on the training and recruitment issues with the PwDs and corporates on a regular basis.

### **CULTURAL PROGRAMS:**

After the conclusion of the business sessions on Day 1 of the Mela, a number of cultural performances were organised. It is significant to note that all the performances were done by PwDs themselves.

- Magic show by Mr. C Ravi Chandra (Hearing and Speech impaired)
- Orchestra performance by Mr. Ramu and team from Blind Foundation.
- Dance by Ankuram – Girl's home for street children.
- Telugu film songs by PwDs

### **MEDIA COVERAGE:**

The 2 days event was given a positive coverage in various news and electronic media locally. Some of the main links are as follows:

<http://www.hindu.com/2010/06/13/stories/2010061364160400.htm>.

The you tube link follows

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8YLXTKNVM3w&feature=related>. And

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9W3owtnOFsQ&feature=related>.

### **VOLUNTEERS:**

The Mela received the services of 40 volunteers, all employees of Mahindra Satyam, for various coordination responsibilities during the Mela. In fact, some individuals, who have volunteered in earlier years during the Mela but who are no longer working in Hyderabad, came over to Hyderabad during the Mela specially to volunteer again. The volunteers performed the following main tasks:

- i. Putting up posters before the Mela
- ii. Assisting in setting up of stalls
- iii. Reception of visitors
- iv. Helping with logistics
- v. Assisting in distribution of food
- vi. Public announcements
- vii. Guiding PwD candidates in filling up of CVs and participating in assessments
- viii. Documentation
- ix. Closing formalities at the conclusion of Mela etc

## **DOCUMENTATION:**

The organizers have made efforts to document the entire Mela proceedings. All the workshops, seminars and other thematic discussions were recorded by the Aarohan Foundation, Ms.Pradnya and volunteers. Photographs were also prepared. A record of coverage in all print and electronic media has been kept.

## **FOLLOW UP:**

While the 2 day Mela ended on a very successful note, there are a number of important issues that require long term follow up, such as corporate interactions for recruitment of the PwDs, follow up with Hotel industry representatives for jobs for the PwDs, self-employment tie ups, training and capacity building programmes for the PwDs, product improvement suggestions for some of the products displayed and sold in the stalls, and further networking at the policy level. Ms Amita Joseph, BCF, moderated a session towards the end of the Mela with all the core group organizers and gave valuable suggestions on how an effective follow up needs to be done. She suggested having sub-groups to follow up on different themes with clearly defined responsibilities, and the need to have regular monthly meetings on each aspect of follow up. The organizers have agreed to these suggestions, and have decided to put them into practice at once.

## **CONCLUSION:**

In conclusion, it can be mentioned that the 4th edition of the Abilities Mela held at Hyderabad was largely successful in meeting most of its objectives. While some of the objectives could only be met partially, many of them received a very positive response. After 4 years of the Mela, the PwDs now have very high expectations from the organizers. Similarly, the government agencies also recognize the platform provided by the Mela as a very useful forum to have a dialogue with the NGOs and civil society organizations working on disability issues. There is also a growing demand to spread the Mela to other parts of Andhra Pradesh, and not to confine it only to Hyderabad. The organizers hope to factor all the feedback and experiences gained in organizing this edition of the Mela and come out with even better and purposeful programmes in the coming future.