

ENABLING

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Voice

Monthly E-News bulletin published by the UDIS Forum

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From the Editor...

We are happy to meet you through this monthly E-News bulletin "Enabling Voice." It portrays the current dimensions of development in the disability sector, which is one of the fast growing professional fields in India. The Government departments and voluntary organisations are regularly coming up with new schemes to address education, rehabilitation, employment, accessibility, technology, etc., pertaining to disability and we want to disseminate such useful information to the service providers.

The Enabling Voice also serves as a channel to highlight the challenges in the field. Though more schemes are emerging, issues like lack of human resources, information exchange, networking, etc., are still concerns in the field.

Each issue of the Enabling Voice will take up one theme and deliberate on that for the benefit of the readers. The E-News will also be posted on the website www.davo.in for you to access. We hope the readers will find this electronic news bulletin useful.

EDUCATION FOR ALL - *Theory to Practice*

The developing nations at present are facing the daunting task of providing education for all children by the year 2015. Government of India is implementing the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) with an attempt to achieve education for all. The scheme is an excellent framework and allows a lot of flexibility at the district level to adopt cost-effective and innovative strategies to include all children under the umbrella of education. The SSA scheme ensures that every child with special needs, irrespective of the kind, category and degree of disability is provided education in an appropriate environment.



Photo courtesy : Sightsavers

SSA and Disability - The Current Scenario

As per the statistics of the Government of India, (www.ssa.nic.in)

- ★ 30,38,038 children with special needs have been identified from 35 States and Union Territories of India.
- ★ 21.86 lakhs have already been enrolled, which works out to be 72% literacy level among the identified children with special needs.
- ★ The data reveals huge variation between States. Some states have identified more children with disabilities whereas some have not. The percentage of children with disabilities identified through the SSA is about 1.54%, which is below the percentage (2.1%) quoted in the census 2001.
- ★ 6,678 special teachers are currently working in the SSA.

Enrol and Educate

The twin objectives of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan in the case of disability may be best described as “Enrol” and “Educate”. The current figures indicate that the enrolment of children with disabilities in the last couple of years has certainly increased. The success of the system depends on the percentage of retention of these children in the school system and therefore, skills in them need to be developed.

The children in inclusive education may be classified as follows:

- **Category A - 45%** - Children with mild disabilities who can be handled by general classroom teachers with minimal training.
- **Category B - 30%** - Children with mild/moderate disabilities who need counselling services.
- **Category C - 15%** - Children with moderate/severe disabilities who need resource assistance including corrective aids and regular help in academic areas.

- **Category D - 10%** - Children with severe disabilities who require direct attention/preparatory assistance from the special teachers.

The current challenge is to provide educational services to all the four categories of children with disabilities.

Challenges

- ★ There are presently 6,678 special teachers whereas the number of children enrolled is more than 21 lakhs. This presents a special teacher: pupils ratio of more than 1:300. This calls for the services of more special teachers.
- ★ The key to success of inclusion depends on the nature of support extended by the general classroom teachers. They have been sensitized to a large extent on how to handle children with disabilities and as a result, the fear of having a disabled child in the classroom has been minimized. However, the competency of these teachers in attending to the day-to-day issues dealing with disabled children is a topic of debate.
- ★ At present, many pre-service programmes do not include adequate component on disability. They need to make disability related studies as an integral part of the curriculum in order to make inclusion successful.
- ★ The early intervention requires more attention in the SSA.
- ★ The current data reveals that only 47.14% of schools are barrier-free for children with disabilities and this needs to improve.

In summary, there is a significant improvement in terms of quantity of services but the quality is yet to be ascertained.

There is inclusive climate but the inclusive education in true sense may still to happen as the schools are facing acute shortage of trained teachers.

Report on Uniform Education For All Schools augurs well for Disability

The report of the Muthukumaran Committee on Education For All Schools is addressing one of the most neglected sectors in disability.



The committee strongly recommends that the Government should assume full responsibility for kindergarten education, and it is hoped that these kindergartens sensitize their teachers and caretakers in disability management too so as to address early intervention, which is the missing link in special education. A structured programme for early intervention at the kindergarten level is what the disability field is looking for and in this context the report of the Muthukumaran Committee is timely. It is hoped that more kindergartens would come up in the hard to reach areas of the State in order to create access for children with disabilities.

Activity Based Learning - Advantages and Limitations

The Activity Based Learning (ABL) being introduced in primary education in Tamil Nadu is facilitating higher order cognitive functions in children thereby contributing to their effective learning. In this approach, the “concept learning” gets more focus than the mere content learning. In order to develop concepts in an interesting way, teachers employ multi-sensory instructional procedures in the ABL approach.

Ever since the concept of inclusive education for children with disabilities emerged, it has been a debate whether the general system is adequately sensitized to the educational needs of these children. The concern was more so in the case of children with hearing impaired who are devoid of the language experience. The picture cards used in the ABL are most useful for children with hearing impairment to develop concepts and associate words with objects. The concepts are graded according to different levels and display of these cards helps the child to develop a comprehensive idea of the concept.

The picture cards and the logical sequence also help a child with mental retardation to form the right concepts in learning. Though they are developmentally delayed, their learning becomes meaningful through the ABL approach.

The one common observation is that the over emphasis on visual cues in learning is putting a visually impaired child into hardship and therefore verbal description of the picture cards with tactile adaptations should be made for their effective learning. Otherwise, there is a risk of excluding visually impaired children in the learning process.

The ABL may demand more work from the teachers as they are expected to prepare a lot of teaching-learning materials but the learning interest of children tends to be increasing, which is a welcome sign in education.



Good Response for the CONSERVE

The UDIS Forum initiated development of a professional database namely CONSERVE (*Consultation in Special Education, Rehabilitation and Vocational Education*) and we are glad that professionals from all over the country are sending their resumes expressing availability for providing short-term and long-term consultancy for institutions in building disability related services in education, rehabilitation, vocational education, technology support, etc. Have you sent in your resume? Log onto www.davo.in

UDIS Report Card for January 2008

Here is the brief report card of the UDIS Forum for the month of January 2008.

- ★ State level essay competitions on Tamil and English conducted in collaboration with the Sri Krishna Arts and Science College and Narayanaguru College, Coimbatore. 89 short-listed entries were received.



- ★ The National Youth Day was observed on 12 July 2008 wherein the winners of the essay competitions were awarded prizes.
- ★ A Memorandum of Understanding was signed with the Association for the Rights of the Visually

Challenged (ARVIC) to promote adult literacy among blind people.



- ★ 7 persons with disabilities were provided job placements
- ★ A meeting of the Non-Governmental Organisations was organised in Tirunelveli on 21st January, which was attended by 58 representatives of NGO organisations.
- ★ The UDIS Forum in collaboration with the PSG College of Arts and Science organised orientation programmes on 'Disability Management' which was attended by 788 children from 6 schools.



- ★ A state-level seminar on Disability Management was conducted at the PSG College of Arts and Science on 30-31 January to orient the departments of social work of colleges to disability related work.

For more details on the activities of the UDIS Forum, log onto www.davo.in
We value your suggestions.

Do you want to write in the Enabling Voice?
Send your brief write-ups on issues relating to disability to udis@vsnl.net

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