

ENABLING Voice

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Using Youth Power for Disability Services

We need to Change Human Minds

"Incredible India" is a slogan featuring everywhere in India and also in foreign nations. India is showcasing its heritage, culture, technology, knowledge power, etc., to the external world and we are proud that the world today is viewing India as a force to reckon with. Though we are proud of the "Incredible India" in many dimensions there are certain areas where we have not yet made resounding success - disability is one such area. We have incredible policies on disability but we can't say with authority that our services to persons with disability are incredible. One day we can inform the world that our services to persons with disabilities are also incredible provided the entire society becomes sensitised to the needs of persons with disabilities and treat them as human resources instead of looking at them as less privileged citizens.

Today, we have a stupendous Act - the Persons with Disabilities Act 1995, which is used as model legislation by many countries, but when it comes

to implementation of the clauses of the Act, our success is far from satisfactory. We propagate inclusion of children with disabilities in the mainstream but not all schools have opened admission for all types of children with disabilities. We aim at accessibility but more than 50% of our schools are not accessible to children with disabilities. If all public and private sector industries had implemented the 3% reservation for employment in letter and spirit, the unemployment problem among persons with disabilities would have been wiped out in India. As a result, people with disabilities and organisations working for them are agitated. The root cause of these problems is the mental barrier of the society. We still harp on the Karma Theory and say that a disabled person is less privileged. The society is developing stereotyped responses towards disability through their limited exposure to persons with disabilities. The problem today is not so much of a physical barrier, which in fact can be overcome gradually, but the real problem is the mental barrier, which is a challenge to overcome.



What we need today is the “Change in Human Minds (CHUM)” campaign, providing a literal meaning that the society should become a chum (friend, companion, associate, buddy, etc.) of persons with disabilities. The Youth of the country can certainly play a role in this campaign to influence positive attitude in the society. India is proud that more than 65% of its population belongs to the age group below 25 years and it is vital to use this tremendous youth power for the benefit of disability services too.

Youth Wing for Disability Services (YWDIS)



In India, there were times when we talked about the youth power, then we believed in their abilities and it is high time to give them responsibilities. The Youth Wing for Disability Services (YWDIS) formed in Coimbatore provides testimony to how the youth power can be used for spreading awareness about disability services when they are given responsibilities to conceptualize ideas, plan activities, and execute them. The UDIS Forum took the initiative to form the YWDIS and the model is worth emulating in other places. Here is the model.

- ✦ The Youth Wing for Disability Services (YWDIS) consists of student volunteers from colleges, who wish to involve in services for persons with disabilities. The activities of the Youth Wing are primarily coordinated by an executive committee consisting of student volunteers.
- ✦ One of the colleges in Coimbatore was encouraged to become a nodal agency to coordinate with other colleges in organising

disability related activities. We believe that this type of arrangement would influence ownership of the concept instead of treating the work in project mode. The GRD School of Social Work of Dr. G.R. Damodaran College of Science volunteered to serve as the nodal agency.

- ✦ The Heads of Departments of Social Work of the participating Colleges are invited to be part of the Advisory Committee of the YWDIS.
- ✦ The student volunteer, after enrolment, should be prepared to undergo a training of 2 days on disability management, which is organised by the UDIS Forum. (The Forum also facilitates 90 hour intensive course on disability management and other skill oriented long-term courses for those student volunteers who desire to make disability work as their career.)
- ✦ After the initial training, the student volunteers are given opportunities by the UDIS Forum, nodal agency and participating colleges to organise awareness programmes in schools, public, and also involve in awareness rallies, identification of persons with disabilities in the community, adult literacy activities, and identification of jobs for persons with disabilities.
- ✦ The executive committee plans activities for one academic year, which may include organising student seminars, essay writing contests, oratorical contests, work with the community, youth rallies, school awareness programmes, etc.





- ✳ When the students graduate, they cease to be the student members of the YWDIS. However, they can involve in disability related services in their regions. The UDIS Forum establishes such contacts for the graduating students.

Therefore, the Youth Wing on Disability Services has lofty objectives. We believe that the college students in general and social work students in particular can do extraordinary job when work as a team for the cause of disability. We hope that youth wings started all over the country could make a big difference in the field of disability in the process of empowering them in education and employment.

What has been achieved?

The YWDIS volunteers in Coimbatore have carried out the following tasks in less than one year besides their studies in colleges.

- ✳ More than 150 graduate and post-graduate student volunteers underwent one-day orientation programme on disability management.
- ✳ 120 students from the above underwent a two-day intensive programme on how to identify and assist people with disabilities.
- ✳ 20 students underwent a 90 hours course on disability management in order to organise college and school level advocacy activities to influence positive attitude towards persons with disabilities.
- ✳ The volunteers have gone to 12 schools in the district and created awareness on disability management among 1500 plus school students at the primary and secondary

levels. (The effect of this school awareness programme is that the school students guide parents of persons with disabilities on where to contact for services. Many referrals have been made to educational institutions and vocational training centres by these school students.)

- ✳ The volunteers are organising national level essay contests for post-graduate students of social work on "How will I involve myself in services for persons with disabilities"; State and district level oratorical competitions on disability management, quiz contests, etc, are organised in order to motivate them read on disability work and interact with them to know their abilities.
- ✳ Public rallies are also initiated by the youth wing to create awareness among the public about persons with disabilities.
- ✳ They are contacting local employers to consider employing persons with disabilities in their respective concerns.
- ✳ The volunteers are also helping organisations in providing skill training to persons with disabilities to enhance their job opportunities.
- ✳ They are appealing to the society through visual, audio, and print media to develop positive thinking about persons with disabilities.
- ✳ They are also working with communities to identify adult persons with disabilities who are illiterate with an objective of making them literate.

The list is not exhaustive. The YWDIS has plans to create state and national level networks consisting of youth to involve in disability work. When the youth take up disability work, it should certainly succeed.

Kudos, Youth!!!

The above are just exemplars for what is possible through the youth power. The main constraint today may not be in the area of technical

know-how or even in resources to help people with disabilities. The fundamental problem is to create a demand for education and other services for persons with disabilities by motivating persons with disabilities and their parents to value such services with a positive approach that the person with disability would become a contributing citizen. The society should also be influenced to recognise the abilities of persons with disabilities. We need human resources for effecting such a change in the disability sector and the Youth Wing is a potential answer. We need to multiply hands to serve the cause of disability and these are the hands. The cultivation of the right spirit for service during their college days would go a long way in making them better and compassionate citizens of the country.

When the Youth of Coimbatore can work for disability as their passion, we are sure any place would also have such dedicated youth. What we need today is just to create the right opportunities for them to come together to understand their power which can transform the disability sector leading to the empowerment of persons with disabilities.

As Swami Vivekananda said, "put the chemicals together and the crystallization will take care of itself." That is what the UDIS Forum has done in Coimbatore. The Youth force has directly and indirectly commenced its CHUM (Changing Human Minds) campaign.

If we can do it, you can also certainly do it...

UDIS Report Card for June 2008

- The UDIS Forum facilitated employment for 14 persons with disabilities during the month of June 2008.
- A course on 'Disability Management' was conducted for 20 students of various colleges from 01 to 09 June 2008.
- One student from the Department of Social Work, Bharathiar University is undergoing field training at the UDIS Forum.
- YWDIS Volunteers assisted the Employment Exchange for three days in the registration of persons with disabilities.



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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