

DEVELOPING WOMEN'S SKILLS FOR IMPROVING ECONOMIC PROSPECTS

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Skill development for disabled youth

A variant on this training model is another model which focuses only on skill development and placement of disabled youth, including women. This initiative has been started by the same team that developed the EGMM model and they run the Centre for People with Disabilities Livelihoods (CPDL). This is a unique model and is supported by the Department of Rural Development, GoAP. The SHG members and the JRPs identify educated, disabled youth with neuro-motor or hearing impairment. The CPDL identifies and mobilizes the private sector and encourages them to recruit disabled youth. They also provide 3 months soft skills training, computer skills and spoken English language skills.

Disabled youth are mobilized and trained and then placed with private sector companies such as Gitanjali Gems. The GoAP continues to pay for the training costs. The trainees stay in hostels for the disabled provided by the Social Welfare department. The majority of the trainees belong to the poorest of the poor sections of the population and most of them belong to Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) communities.

The skill development program for the disabled is a relatively new program and the results are impressive. Entry-level jobs give salaries of at least Rs. 3,000 per month. Interviews with the trainees revealed that this training and placement opportunity has given new confidence and raised the self-esteem of the disabled who had never imagined that they could get jobs in the city. This report includes a detailed case study of one private sector company where interviews with several young disabled women are presented.

The report also highlights a case study of the work done by an NGO in Tamil Nadu called the Ability Foundation. It helps highly educated but disabled people to link up with industry. They run annual job fairs where disabled youth and company executives get a chance to meet. These job fairs have been quite successful.

What this report emphasizes is that there are *employment opportunities for people with certain types of disability provided they are educated*. The need for good education is repeatedly stressed in this report.

6.3 Skill development for disabled girls²

There are very few skill development programs for the disabled which are also linked to employment. In this section, we describe in detail a model developed by the Centre for People with Disabilities Livelihoods (CPDL), henceforth referred to as the Centre, which focuses on providing training and jobs for disabled youth who belong to some of the poorest families in rural Andhra Pradesh.

The Centre follows a three-pronged strategy for mobilization for training, actual skill development training and placement. As in the EGMM, rural disabled youth who want skill development and placement are recruited through the women's SHGs and the DRDAs through social mobilization drives.

² This section is based on interviews with Meera Shenoy, Executive Director (ED), Centre for Pwd Livelihoods & CEO Youth 4 Jobs, A.R.K. Bhanu, senior trainer and Tapan, Head AP Project. Focussed group interviews were held with 32 disabled girls in three batches. A telephonic interview was conducted with Madhusudan Reddy, Vice President, HR, Gitanjali Gems Ltd. and Pramod Yadugani, Vice-President, Voice-line Tele-services, was also interviewed

Advertisements are placed in the local newspapers as well. JRPs, specially trained on disability issues, go from village to village identifying physically challenged youth who have completed their education up-to the 10th standard.

The Centre also gets information about disabled youth in rural Andhra Pradesh through the Government of Andhra Pradesh's disability data base called Software for Assessment of Disabled for Access, Rehabilitation and Empowerment (SADAREM). This database provides information about all disabled people in the State including their age, gender, type of disability, educational qualifications and social background. Since the focus of the Centre is to place the poorest and the most marginalized amongst the disabled, this data base is used extensively for identifying potential candidates. Telephone calls and text messages are sent to potential candidates and they are encouraged to go to their local Mahila Samakhya (federation of women's SHG groups) offices or to the local DRDA office to get more information about the training program.

The majority of the trainees/ those placed belong to the poorest of the poor. Their parents are either casual landless labourers or farmers with small holdings. A very large percentage of them belong to the SCs and STs.

Of the 32 disabled girls interviewed by this researcher, more than 80 percent belonged to the SCs. About 15 percent were from Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and about 5 percent from the "others" category.

Motivating parents and disabled youth to opt for training and placement is a major part of the work of the Centre. At the mobilization meetings at the district headquarters, parents and identified youth are counseled about the advantages of the program, and are given options for training.

As A.R.K.Bhanu, a senior trainer, said, "There are several challenges. Parents of these youth find it hard to believe that their children could do productive work. They have no expectations from their children who are seen as a burden. Disabled youth have such low self-esteem. Although the students are selected on the basis of their educational qualifications, they are very apprehensive about whether they will be accepted at their place of work and whether they will be able to manage without the support of their families."

6.4 Motivating employers

Equally important, if not more so, is to convince potential employers to provide training and placement to the disabled. According to Meera Shenoy, Executive Director of the Centre, mobilizing employers to accept disabled employees is a major challenge. They have to work very hard to find the right employers who are willing to take on this task, and much of the time of senior people at the Centre is spent in lobbying with the private sector.

Their approach with the employers is very clear. They convince the employers that it is not a welfare activity or charity. Youth have to be taken on the basis of merit and competency. They do not want an employer to place someone who is not up to the mark because this would have a very negative impact on the trainee and add to that person's already low self-esteem. Once the employer accepts the disabled youth for training and placement, the employer also has to agree to make work-place adjustments. Disabled youth are so keen to learn new skills and get jobs that often they do not complain about their

working conditions because they want to be accepted. Thus, for instance, there were cases where disabled youth agreed to work even in places where there were no toilet facilities for the disabled.

6.5 Training program and entry level jobs

Since the Centre is relatively new and resources are limited, it follows a twin-track approach. The members identify disabled youth with potential and invite the private sector to interview them. Many private sector companies, such as Gitanjali Gems Limited, provide a profile of the type of employee they are looking for to the Centre. So, for instance, since Gitanjali Gems deals with diamond polishing and jewellery-making, they require people with good eye and hand coordination. Once the trainees have been identified by the company, depending on the nature of the work, either the company provides the training and placement or the Centre provides them with basic orientation.

The Centre also has a three month training course which includes confidence-building, improving spoken English-language skills as also training in life skills. The entire training pedagogy is interactive and fun-filled with games, songs and uses mixed mode learning. Trainees are also given computer skills and are helped to improve their typing speed. This model centre sets the quality standards for trainings; introduces new curriculum based on the changing needs of the market; customizes modules for different disabilities and works closely with companies to develop new training content. Managing public transport is also part of the training program. Most of the trainees trained at the Centre are placed as data entry workers or for voice-based and non-voice based tele-calling. People with less disability get entry level jobs in the retail and hospitality sectors. The Centre tries to match abilities and qualifications with opportunities and those with higher levels of education are helped to get jobs at a higher level. Apart from generic training which includes the do's and don'ts of living in a city, specialized training is provided by the company based on their requirements. The Centre staff visit the trainees both at the work-place as also in their hostels to ensure their safety and well-being.

6.6 Cost of training

The program costs of Rs. 6000 per trainee per month are borne by the Government of Andhra Pradesh. The cost includes training, transport, board and lodging. Some companies that hire directly and train the youth on the job also pay a small monthly stipend of Rs.1000.

6.7 Hostels and transport

The Government of Andhra Pradesh has a tradition of running hostels for the disabled and the Centre is able to accommodate the trainees in them. According to Meera Shenoy, this facility is important since the youth are from underprivileged homes and if a stipend is not given to cover hostel costs for the training period and also for the first month of their work, some drop out. Transport is provided by the Centre upto the main bus stop and the trainees are then able to take public transport or walk to their hostels.

Gitanjali Gems has rented hostel space in the villages around their factory in the Special Economic Zones. Trainees are provided free accommodation and food. Some of the trainees interviewed by this researcher said that the factory had got specially designed buses for the disabled which made it easier for them to get in and out of buses.

Pramod Yadugani, Vice-President, Voice-line Teleservices, a franchisee of Tata Tele-services, said that the two disabled girls working in his company stayed at a disabled youth hostel and navigated the public transport system on their own. These girls had their initial three month training at the Centre.

6.8 Numbers of disabled youth trained/placed and their educational qualifications from January 2010- to mid-2011

The total number of PwD youth trained between January 2010 and June 2011 was 1001. Of these 76 percent were placed in jobs. Of these 1001 youth, 331 were girls.

Given below in Table 4 is the educational profile of the trained youth.

Table 4: Educational profile of trained youth

Educational Qualifications	Number of Youth	% to total youth
Below 10 th Class	94	9
10 th Pass	521	52
Intermediate Pass	186	19
Graduates	172	17
Postgraduates	28	3
TOTAL	1001	100

Ninety percent of the trainees have at least a 10th grade education. .

Given below is the educational profile of the girls.

Table 5: Educational profile of girls

Educational Qualifications	Number of Girls	% to total girls
Below 10 th Class	41	12
10 th Pass	196	59
Intermediate Pass	54	16
Graduates	35	11
Postgraduates	5	2
TOTAL	331	100

Table 6: Salaries paid to girls

Salary Range	% to total girls placed
Btw 3000-4000	43
Btw 4000-5000	24
Btw 5000-6000	26

Btw 6000-7000	5
Above 7000	2

The salaries paid to these trained girls are quite significant. Many girls said that earlier they were seen as burdens on families and now many of them were able to send money home to support parents and siblings. This had made a huge difference to their self-esteem. Many of the girls who were interviewed by this researcher said that after working for some years and saving their salaries, they would like to go back to college. Now that they had worked for a while and gained confidence in their abilities, they had ambitions beyond their entry level jobs. They said that the only way they could hope to get better jobs in the future was if they improved their educational qualifications.

6.9 Matching disability with requirements of the private sector

Placements are done by the Centre based on the nature of the work of a particular company. For instance, a company like Skylark which does Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) work will accept those who are wheelchair-bound; but Gitanjali Gems requires people who can sit on stools and therefore cannot use youth who are unable to manage without a wheelchair. Moreover, they need people with good eye-sight for diamond polishing and good eye-hand coordination and therefore can hire people with hearing impairment. Tele-calling services require people with good hearing and clarity of speech and physical disabilities or inability to walk is not a disqualification. At present, only those with neuro-motor disabilities and those whose hearing is impaired are being recruited for training given the additional challenges that need to be overcome for training and placement of the blind and mentally challenged.

6.10 Case study of Gitanjali Gems

One of the key tasks of the team at the Centre is to ensure that there is a skill match with the requirement of the company so that this placement is not seen as a “welfare” activity. In fact, this point is stressed emphatically by the team with all potential employers. According to one senior Centre team leader, Tapan, their experience was that disabled youth were in fact far more competent than others in many tasks. Many of their partner companies such as Gitanjali Gems had told them that disabled youth worked better and faster than others and did not get easily distracted. This was confirmed in a telephonic interview with Madhusudan Reddy, Vice President, Human Resources, at Gitanjali Gems, who said that they had experimented with 7 disabled youth in 2008 and now they had 288 disabled youth (both girls and boys) working for them. This was more than 10 percent of their workforce. Their experience had been that the disabled were more diligent and hardworking. The attrition rate was very small. Absenteeism was negligible. They did not waste time talking to each other. They were quick learners and very hard-working. Gitanjali Gems now wanted to have a focused drive to train disabled youth and their aim was to increase the recruitment to 1000 disabled youth in the next three years. “Training and hiring disabled youth was a sensible business proposition and not just CSR”, said Reddy.³ The productivity

³ This has also been the experience of other private and public sector organizations that have recruited Pwds. According to the World Bank report on disability, in a survey of 6 metropolitan cities and interviews with 120 corporates, it was found that two-thirds of the firms employing disabled youth were very satisfied with their performance. Pwd employees were considered assets. The experience of the TITAN

levels of disabled youth were also considered higher than for those without disabilities. They had better concentration. They had a better grasp and their productivity was much higher. Although they got a salary of Rs. 4500 for an 8 hour working day, they also got production-linked incentives. Some of them could earn as much as Rs. 10,000 per month.

Since the productivity of disabled youth was higher, the company did not mind investing in hostels and providing free transport and subsidized food. Gitanjali Gems had rented 10 hostels; 4 are for girls and one exclusively for disabled boys. Disabled youth were provided free transport and accommodation even after the training period is over. They are considered regular employees of the company and are entitled to Provident Fund and Employees State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) benefits. Disabled girls interviewed by this researcher said that the factory had ramps, exclusive toilets and special seating arrangements for them. The buses were also disabled-friendly. According to Madhusudan Reddy, the additional costs of making their factory disabled-friendly and providing hostel and transport facilities made very good business sense because their productivity was so high. Gitanjali Gems had received the “Best Employer” award from the President of India in the category of National Awards for the Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities.

Gitanjali Gems Ltd. participates in the mobilization drive with the Centre staff to recruit disabled youth in the districts. These trainees do not go through the generic training programs offered by the Centre. The reason for that is that they do not need people with soft skills or English language proficiency. They need to make sure that the candidates chosen have good eye-sight and good hand-eye coordination. The Centre facilitates this interaction between the company staff and the potential trainees.

An important contribution of the Centre has been to change the stereotype associated with persons with disability. They can now be viewed as persons who can contribute substantially in their work rather than as objects of charity or a means of fulfilling corporate social responsibility.

6.11 Interviews with disabled girls

Thirty-two disabled girls were interviewed in Hyderabad over a two-day period. They belonged to different districts of Andhra Pradesh. Except for one girl who suffered from severe burns, all of them said that they were victims of polio. Four out of the 30 girls used long sticks to support themselves while walking as their legs were of different sizes. One girl walked with the support of her hand as her leg had shrunk after polio.

All the girls interviewed had finished their 10th standard exam and several of them had completed the Intermediate exam. Some of them were graduates. Most of them reported that they had to face considerable difficulties to complete their education as the high school was far away from their villages.

company was similar. They employ both Pwd men and women who are given special training. Barrier-free work-spaces have also been created. Supervisors have been trained in sign language and now it is difficult to know who has a hearing disability and who does not as everyone uses sign language to communicate. See, World Bank (2007) “People with Disabilities in India: From commitments to Outcomes”, op.cited, p.99 for a case study on TITAN’s work with the disabled. The report also provides a case study on the National Thermal Power Corporation’s (NTPC) policy of training and recruiting people with disabilities

Most of them had travelled by bus to college and this commute could take anything upto two hours one way. Many of the students said that they had studied at the *mandal* (administrative unit of a district) headquarters and stayed in the hostels meant for disabled students. Except for two trainees, who had considerable difficulty finishing their education because of lack of family support (especially brothers), in all other cases, the girls reported that their parents were very supportive and encouraged them to study. Of the parents, it was mothers who had really supported the girls. Many girls were brought to the Centre by their mothers. Although at the time when the girls were studying, there did not seem any hope that they would be able to get jobs, yet parents felt that educating their children was important as they hoped that they would have to pay less dowry if they got married.

All the girls faced considerable difficulties in school from their peers. Many of the girls said they were able to finish their education because of the encouragement they received from their teachers. Their peers were often mean and unkind about their disability which made it very hard for them to continue. They gave detailed accounts of how they managed to study and complete their education inspite of the enormous handicap they had. Their stories revealed grit and courage of a high order.

Brothers were worried that after the parents died, the responsibility of looking after the sisters would fall on them. There were many cases where the brothers tried to marry their sisters off to older, widowed men just to get them off their hands. But the girls resisted. They told this researcher that while they did want to get married and raise families, they had heard numerous stories of harassment and abuse after marriage. They were therefore reluctant to get married. All the girls reported that they had heard of the training and placement program from the district officials and the JRPs during the mobilization drive.

Twelve of the 32 girls interviewed were trained by the Centre. Ten of them were still under training. The girls still receiving training said that when they first came to Hyderabad for training, they were really scared and were not sure if they would be able to cope. As Kavita said, "I was too scared to open my mouth when we were asked questions, but our Sir said, 'Do not worry about making mistakes. That is the only way you will learn. You must talk'. So that is how my confidence increased. Now we are learning to speak English and we practice English in the hostel. If I know English, I can manage anywhere. The English training is the best and I want to improve my language skills."

Other girls said they had never touched a computer keyboard before and were scared to do so the first time they had to. But the trainers helped them to get over their fear, and many girls had a good typing speed now.

The girls said that the most important part of their training was to help them build their confidence. The course curriculum was designed such that the first two months were spent in helping the girls deal with low self-esteem. They were trained in soft skills apart from English and were given basic computer knowledge.

The success of the soft skills training was very evident. The girls were taught to greet people with enthusiasm and to be well groomed. They were taught the basic etiquette needed for working in an office and dealing with others. So, for instance, they were told that it was not a good idea to wear anklets that made a sound as this would disturb others in the workplace.

The two girls working at the tele-calling centre said that they found the training very useful. Their boss, Pramod Yadugani, said that he was often called by the Centre as a Guest Speaker and that was the opportunity he used to identify possible candidates for his tele-calling centre. His work did not require English language skills but proficiency in Telugu and Hindi was important. His experience of getting trained girls from the Centre was very good and he hoped that in the coming years he would be able to employ more disabled girls. The technical training for tele-calling was provided by his staff. However, he did say that he found the soft skills training provided by the Centre to be very useful as these girls had a lot more confidence as a result. Training for how to adjust to the city, particularly to the public transport system, was also very important. Without the services of a Centre like the one for Pwd livelihoods, he would have had a hard time training and placing disabled girls, he felt.

Twenty disabled trainee girls interviewed said that the training was essentially on-the-job training. While the work was monotonous and sometimes they would get very tired sitting in one place for long hours, the salary was good. As one girl said, “The main value of this kind of work for us is that there is no danger of falling and injuring ourselves. Even tea and snacks are sent to us at our work-station while the others have to go to the canteen. Then the factory provides transport, accommodation and food. And after the training we have an assured job.”

Impact of training and placement on families and others

The girls said that the best thing that happened to them was the impact this training and placement had on their families and other villagers. The girls got more respect when they went home because they were working and earning. Most girls sent money home to their parents. As one girl said, “We are no longer dependents. We are providers! We are supporting our parents in their old age.”

More importantly, the girls were working in Hyderabad city! Villagers who earlier taunted them for their disability no longer did so. Parents were relieved that the girls could now be independent and would not be a burden on their brothers or family. Girls reported that they were treated better by their siblings now. The girls also said that apart from the salaries they were getting, the good thing about working and living together in a hostel was that they did not feel isolated. At home when everyone left for work, there was no-one to talk to and they would feel sad.

Future plans

All the 32 girls interviewed said they would work for a few years and then go back to completing their education. Some of them wanted to improve their English language skills so as to start English language classes in their village. One girl said, “Till we came to the Centre and started learning English we had no idea how important it was for our self-confidence and well-being. In our schools, teachers teach English in Telugu so of course we could not speak the language. Now when I go home to my village and speak English so well, everyone is surprised and they treat me differently.” Other girls wanted higher level jobs which required better qualifications.

6.12 Lessons learnt

There are several important lessons to be learnt from this model. For one thing, it is an unusual partnership of government and a group of committed team members with a private sector background. The vision, strategy and the face of the program have been crafted by the private sector team of the Centre

whose salaries are paid by a private foundation. The Government pays for the training costs, both at the Centre as well as at companies like Gitanjali Gems. The rent for the Centre office and training facility is raised by the private sector team. In this case, there is no intermediary NGO involvement. The private sector team works independently and innovates as it moves along. Since the government does not pay their salaries, the relationship of the team with their government counterparts is not hierarchical.

Secondly, disabled youth are identified through the established network of SHG groups and the local district offices as well as the SADAREM database. Since most States now have SHG networks, a similar strategy can be pursued in other states as well.

It is a competency-based model in that all placements are made after an assessment is done of the competency of the youth by the recruiting company. No special concessions are made for the disabled (other than work place adjustments which are costly and which can deter profit-making companies). However, as mentioned earlier, companies have realized that there is less attrition and persons with disabilities are able to work hard and be productive.

Any employment based on a welfare approach would not last long. Furthermore, it is important for the self-esteem of disabled youth to know that they had been hired for their competency and not for their disability. Certain elements of this model need to be underlined. Strong private sector linkages are needed in order to convince senior management of the need to make workplace adjustments as also of the viability of offering employment to the disabled.