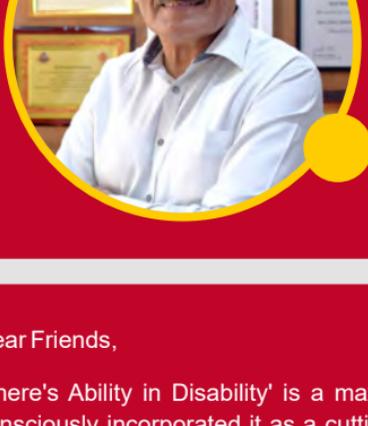




समवादे

Special Edition on the International Day of Persons with Disabilities

KEYNOTE



RAKESH SONI

Chief Executive Officer

Tech Mahindra Foundation

Dear Friends,

'There's Ability in Disability' is a maxim we strongly believe in and have consciously incorporated it as a cutting-across theme in all our programs, enabling us to Rise. On the occasion of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, this issue of Samvaad is a tribute to all those lives we have striven to transform through our projects; 46,000+ persons with disabilities (PWDs) such as speech and hearing impairment, intellectual disability, visual impairment, autism and cerebral palsy. Tech Mahindra Foundation is among the few CSRs who are committed to work for PWDs. For this, we have in place two programs designed specifically for PWDs: ARISE+ which serves children with special needs and disabilities and SMART+ which aims to train and secure dignified jobs for youth with disabilities.

Within these programs, we have taken some important initiatives that I would like to highlight here. We piloted an 'Inclusive SMART Centre' at Pune to create job opportunities by providing vocational training to youth with disabilities along with the regular batch of SMART students; in the pandemic situation to encourage online learning among children with disabilities residing in far-flung remote areas, smart devices such as tablets and data packs were distributed; creative and innovative teaching-learning materials were developed to make learning parent-centric rather than teacher-centric; organizing Disability Partners Meet to brainstorm to share and collaborate among stakeholders, all of which are testimony of the Foundation's resolve to work in the field of disability. The intent is to scale up this component of our work and take it to the next level as part of our mandate to ensure that at least 10% of all our beneficiaries are PWDs. To this end, the overall budget allocated towards the various initiatives has seen a boost in the past few years.

As an equal-opportunity employer, Tech Mahindra recently recruited five speech and hearing-impaired students, including one interpreter in its Google Process, at its Hyderabad office. Also, this edition features the story of a PWD employee of TechM; career progression from a SMART+ beneficiary currently working with Wipro; and two videos from the Disability program at the Foundation. This provides a sense of the commitment of all its stakeholders in making the Disability program sustainable at the Foundation.

In our interaction with PWDs, they come across as enthusiastic, optimist and extremely resilient in the face of adversities; qualities which we need to imbibe and inculcate. To this end, it is my firm belief that step-by-step we will succeed in providing them a skilled and fulfilling career; a dignified life that they are entitled to.

Best wishes for Christmas and New Year ahead!

DEEPA'S JOURNEY AT TECH MAHINDRA

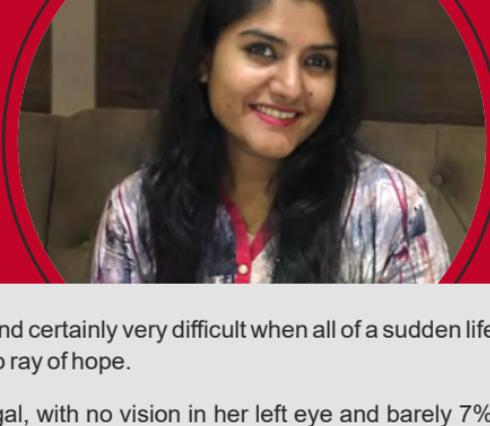


Deepa Kasana is a young enthusiast at heart and a software engineer by profession at Tech Mahindra Limited (TechM), NSEZ, Noida. Deepa joined TechM on 5 May 2017 and 'it has been an exciting 3.5 years of journey' at TechM, she says. She was affected by Polio during her early childhood. But this didn't change her approach to life at all. She learnt to do regular day-to-day things on her own and independently. She took up her first job with TechM when she was 24 years old.

As an optimist, she is quite appreciative of the work culture and values followed by the TechMighties as she feels that the environment and people around in the office keep her motivated. As an employee, she feels at par with her counterparts, which she dedicates to the Diversity and Inclusivity policy at TechM that promotes equal employment opportunities to everyone regardless of any bias and discrimination. She is also grateful to the Corporate Services team at NSEZ who helped her get a car parking as soon as she reached out to them. As a responsible employee of the company, she feels all PWDs must declare the disability certificate in their jobs as it allows them to get the due concessions towards the various facilities and income tax exemptions that they are entitled to from the government. On many occasions she has helped people in need without even looking at her own difficulties.

Deepa feels that persons with disabilities are not handicapped but they have abilities of special nature which you and I might not have.

SURABHI: A DREAMER, BELIEVER AND GO-GETTER



It is different and certainly very difficult when all of a sudden life becomes dark and there is no ray of hope.

Surabhi Mudgal, with no vision in her left eye and barely 7% visibility in her right eye says 'there is technology and there are alternatives that will allow me to move on in life'. Surabhi, who is 28 years old, hails from Hyderabad and has a successful IT career today. She lost her vision when she was in class X and cleared the exams using a voice recorder. Soon after that she came to know from a relative about LV Prasad Eye Institute-a TMF SMART+ Centre where she received her training in computer applications using the various assistive technologies such as the audio-books and the scribe facilities that gave her the confidence to live with minimum dependency on others.

Surabhi started her career in 2014 as a junior accessibility tester where she was an end-user testing all google products, in a company named Tech Finix. Soon she got a better offer with Cisco Systems in Bengaluru with a 50% hike in her package; when she had a tough time convincing her parents to let her shift base all by herself. She wanted to experience the challenges involved in staying alone which she managed quite efficiently. However, after 6 months she got an opportunity with Wipro back in Hyderabad where she got a big promotion and was offered the position of an Accessibility Tester. This time again with a 50% increase in the salary.

Surabhi thanks TMF and the placement coordinator of LV Prasad Eye Institute which she believes have played an important role in completely changing the course of her career.

TMF PARTNER SPEAKS



A FEW WORDS FROM OUR BENEFICIARIES



Samvaad is a quarterly e-newsletter. You can participate by writing an article or sharing your project experiences with us. If you have ideas on what you would like to see included in our newsletter, then we are all ears!

Please e-mail us your thoughts and ideas at samvaad@techmahindrafoundation.org

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