



Saha Jeevana Sangham

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A process note

COMMITMENTS - A PUBLIC TRUST

COMMITMENTS, a Public Trust was conceptualized with the primary objective of empowering rural poor from the most backward areas of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, India. In 2000, the organization recognized and realized that Persons with Disabilities are the most vulnerable among the underprivileged communities of people and took the decision to work with them.

The organization adopted the social approach than charity and hence commenced interventions through social mobilization in eight mandals of the Mahabubnagar district including Kosgi, Dowlathabad, Bomraspet, Balanagar, Maddur, Ghattu, Dharoor and Maldakal. These mandals were identified and selected as areas with a high prevalence of disability among the residents, with grim poverty and vulnerability in general. The Trust also initiated the interventions in Hyderabad city and supporting the Girls with Disabilities.



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(A Public Trust)
Committed to Poor & Rural Disabled

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Saha Jeevana Sangham is a association of parents of children and adults with severe/developmental/intellectual disabilities in rural India, Saha Jeevana Sangham is also the focal point of coordinated interventions for the CwDs.

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Commitments has been at the forefront of organising associations of parents of children and adults with severe/developmental/intellectual disabilities in rural India or Saha Jeevana Sangams as they are called in Telugu. Saha Jeevana Sangams derive their conceptual roots from well-known parents' associations, which have so far existed only in cities and urban locales. Pioneering the approach in rural areas, Commitments has organized eight such mandal level parents' associations in the Mahabubnagar district, across Mandals where Commitments is actively working namely Kosgi, Bomraspet, Maddur, Dowlatabad, Balanagar, Maldakal, Dharror and Ghattu mandals. These Saha Jeevana Sangams (SJS) are registered under the Societies Act and have applied for registration under the National Trust Act, 1999, and have a membership of 313 severely disabled children and adults in total.

Commitments has initiated various support services that foster the capabilities of the children with severe and profound disabilities and their family members living in the rural areas. In collaboration with various partners, Commitments has been responding to their basic needs pertaining to nutritional requirements, medical rehabilitation, educational and livelihood supports, and need for representation through participatory forums for children and adults with severe and profound disabilities and their family members. Saha Jeevana Sangams are these representational forums of parents of children and adults with severe and profound disabilities, which are also the focal point of coordinated interventions. Importantly, a multilayered organizational structure, with a battery of grass root workers along with coordinators and professionals (Physiotherapists, Speech therapists and special educators) at Commitments has been instrumental in facilitating these holistic interventions at the community and systemic level.

Practices and Experiences

Bringing together parents and other caregivers of children and adults with severe and profound disabilities intellectual/developmental disabilities, cerebral palsy, autism, and multiple disabilities—so that they can provide mutual aid and support to each other, and learn from their collective experiences.

Training parents in activities of daily living such as brushing, combing, tying shoelaces, and other skills important for independent living of their disabled family member. In addition to training their children, the parents also transfer these skills to their peers, that is, other parents with disabled children.

Bringing perceptible awareness about prevention of disabilities, access to rehabilitative and developmental services, government entitlements, knowledge and implementation of laws, particularly the National Trust Act (1999) for children and adults with severe and profound disabilities as well as their parents.

Working closely towards the implementation of National Trust Act (1999), a progressive legislation for people with intellectual, developmental and severe disabilities. This entails procuring legal guardianship for the family members of intellectually/developmentally disabled people, which is necessary for all practical and legal purposes.

Forming collaborations with the Parivaar group, a national level association of parents of children and adults with severe and profound disabilities, constituted under National Trust Act. The Parivaar group provides vocational training and mentorship to the fellow / member parents of children and adults with severe and profound disabilities, to promote self employment of the children and parents. At the same time, several cultural events like sports and games are also organized in order to bring out the latent talents of the children and adults with severe and profound disabilities both at the national level and at the level of the Saha Jeevana Sangams.



The concept and practice of Saha Jeevana Sangams is increasingly being adopted and integrated by various NGOs, GOs and CBOs, as a model to empower rural children and adults with severe and profound disabilities and their families, who are most often forgotten or worse, ignored due to lack of knowledge on what could be done for their empowerment. Commitments has been sharing its knowledge and experience gained over a period of time interacting with both the children and parents at various levels in order to reach out to as many as possible within its capacity. Its popularity among disability community, and its recognition by other organizations as an important intervention speaks of the value of an intervention such as this and Commitments' process of being part of this initiative.

Cultural activities with children with intellectual disabilities

The children with intellectual disabilities accompany their parents during the Saha Jeevan Sangham meetings held every month and the children are involved in the extra-curricular activities like singing, dancing, playing skits, etc. As part of this endeavor, it was decided by the members of the Sangham that a cultural event should be held exclusively with the children with disabilities, to showcase their talents for cultural activities and as a part of this, these children were trained in dancing and singing according to a structured plan for one week and at the end of this regular training, a cultural event was organized for the very first time in 2008, which has continued from then onwards.

It was felt by the parents that as their children with intellectual disabilities rarely interact socially, this event and events like these could be used for the best in bringing out the hidden talent in their children, but at the same time, make them more social and friendly and not shy and reticent, as they usually are. The training given in dance also gives them training in moving their bodies in a controlled way. This event is also an occasion for the parents to interact freely with everyone in the village as well as among each other and not feel reticent. This cultural event with children with intellectual disabilities is being organized once a year in all the Mandals .

The following activities are undertaken by the members of the Saha Jeevana Sangams on a regular basis:

- Review and training of the children and parents of the children with disabilities.
- Training and re-training to the parents on ADL skills.
- Plan and follow up of ATR services.
- Organising Special medical camps for the children with intellectual disabilities .
- Organising special Olympics for the children.
- Organising cultural activities for the children with ID, CP and autism.
- Formation of Saha Jeevana Sangham at Mandal level with the children and parents.
- Therapeutic sevevices for the children.
- Trainings to the parents on the developmental stages as per the milestones.
- Participating in Special Olympics.
- Trainings to the adolescent girls on personal hygiene and preventive techniques of disabilities.
- Enrolling the CwDs under NIRAMAYA health Insurance.
- Organising cultural programs in the villages and mandal level.
- Meeting with the officials for the special RBC and special care centres.
- Trainings to the persons/children with intellectual and psycho-social disabilities on the usage of medicines as per the guidance of doctors.
- Organising the Health Camps with the support of medical colleges on Dental, Ophthal, Psychiatric and medical.