



Spearheading the testing times of COVID – Help The Blind Foundation convenes 10th Annual Meet online

Help The Blind Foundation has completed 10 long years of pioneering Service in helping out the Visually Impaired students to pursue and complete their university education. What makes the 10th year remarkable is our growing fraternity and their commitment par excellence. The meet commenced with a moving commemoration of our Founder Mr. D.K Patel.

The meeting was held on 19th June, 2021 through Google Meet. It also marked the first time the event was streamed live through Facebook. And we are glad that for the 2-hour meeting participation neared the 100-mark permissible through Google Meet. Trustees, friends from Hong Kong Help the Blind Foundation, various other dignitaries from various sectors, beneficiaries and well-wishers of the foundation took part in the event.

The online meet was made possible through the tremendous efforts and coordination of our trustee, Mr. Nataraj Sankaran, who worked behind the scenes until

Music is at the core of her being

Sukriti Pal, HTBF beneficiary from Benaras Hindu University, is pursuing her Master of Performing Arts (MPA) course at BHU.

Sukriti has been interested in music from an early age, and is adept at playing the sitar. Although it is complicated, Sukriti has picked up the finer nuances of



the day of the meet to meticulously plan and run the entire programme smoothly without a glitch.

He also put together several interesting videos including the curtain-raiser.

HTBF extends its thanks to all who made this meet a success, especially its beneficiaries who became the voice of HTBF. We are extremely proud to see them coming to the forefront and executing the meet flawlessly.

this beautiful instrument. A recent video of her playing Desh raga on the sitar went viral on social media. In a recent podcast with Sukriti, we chatted about her passion, and her special journey. “My ambition is to serve my country as a teacher, a Professor,” she stated confidently.





What's her experience with HTBF? "I got to know about HTBF through friends at college. I learnt that they help with scribes at exams, and also help financially. They relentlessly work for our future", she said.

Sukriti feels that her visually-impaired friends should pursue their passions and not be daunted by their disability. You can listen to the full podcast by clicking on this link:

<https://podcasts.google.com/feed/aHR0cHM6Ly9hbmNob3luZm0vcy81ZTFkODg4OC9wb2RjYXNOL3Jzcw/episode/MjU0OTc2MjYtZTQ2My00YmVmLWl0ZTktNjhiZWYyN2EzMGUy?sa=X&ved=0CAUQkfYCaHcKEwiwzauKulvYAhUAAAAAHQAAAAQBQ&hl=en-IN>

Path Which I Tread.....

Ms. Vasudha, Professor & EMET trainer

Everyday activity or a small wish is very easy to accomplish without any effort, but it is not so when it comes to a Visually impaired person. Everyday activity I mean..... chopping nails, boiling milk or even using a smart phone.

I am sure when we held the smart phone for the first time we all had a small hiccup to know how each app works. Most of us who are born in 60s, 70s and early 80s who are digital immigrants must have taken our own time to explore, whereas the same is not true to a digital native because even the two-year-old knows how each app works.

These are not as easy as we feel it is, for the Visually Impaired. My close encounter with the Visually Impaired is only from last two years and I have been witnessing and hearing challenging stories about how they have learnt certain lessons in a hard way.

Here are three stories which touched my heart...

Ranganath "My path towards being independent"

When I was in the 5th standard, I had 3 days' holidays. Most of my friends in the hostel went home. Even I wanted to go home but my parents told me – "one

whole day goes travelling and just one day to stay at home and then return on another day! So stay back and

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you need not come this time next time you can come home.”

I felt sad and approached my brother-in-law. He told me, “Don’t worry I will come and take you”.

The next day he came to the hostel at 3pm in the afternoon. Finally, my day’s waiting to go home came to an end. He took me to Majestic, got me half plate pani puri and made me sit on a cement bench in the bus station. He told me that he would find out if there was any bus so that we could reach home the next morning. I sat there and I was waiting for him to return, from 4pm it became 6, then 8, then 10pm in the night. It was very cold. I was holding on to all the three bags which I had with me because the announcement in the station said that there were thieves all around and one should be careful of their things. I was hungry, had no money, and didn’t know whom to ask for help. It must have been around 3am when I went to sleep. When I woke up, I could smell tea as some people were talking and drinking tea in front of me. I asked them if they could give me some water - they slapped me hard.

Till today I don’t know why they did that to me. After some time, a Hindi speaking youngster came to me and asked if I want any help. I asked him if he could take me to washroom. He did and I came back and sat in the same place. In the afternoon around 2pm a few cops came to me asking why I was sitting there from yesterday. I started crying and I told them everything. One of the policemen gave me Rs.20 and put me in the bus which goes to my village and told the driver to drop me to the place nearest to my home.... I reached home around 11 that night.

I didn’t know why some people were kind to me, and some were cruel to me. Later I came to know that my

brother-in-law got drunk and he had gone home. I learnt two life lessons from that unforgettable incident.



First of all, I should listen to my parents because they care for me the most.

Secondly, I should learn to be independent and courageous in any given situation.

The path which I am treading right now is to make myself as independent as possible. I am making sincere efforts to learn from every given opportunity, be it my college classes or the EMET classes given by HTBF to enhance my computer and spoken English skills. I participate in all the Saturday activities conducted by HTBF”.

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Nagalakshmi: "How I learnt mobility"



"Two years back I went to a doctor for a minor illness. I went with my father and I didn't know how to use a cane then. I held on to my father wherever I went. The nurse in the hospital gave a visiting card to my father and asked him to visit this Blind Association which teaches

necessary skills to the visually impaired. I got myself enrolled in that blind association for various skills to be acquired. I had to stay there for a month. One day they took me out to teach me how to walk independently. One of the coordinators asked me to stand in the corner at around 10am, telling me that she would come back in a few minutes. But none of them came back. I was waiting for a long time. I didn't know if I could sit in that particular place, at around 1.30 in the noon. Another person from the same blind association came and took me back to the hostel. At around 3pm the coordinator came and told me.... "Nagalakshmi I forgot that I left you there."

I felt like crying but later on I came to know that they were observing me...and wanted me to learn to take help from the passers-by. I felt it was cruel to teach mobility in that way. I decided that I would take the initiative to teach people in a softer and smoother way. I taught many blind people to use cane in the right way and to be independent". I have been exerting myself to learn all possible things to make my life easier so that I can be a role model to many visually impaired, be it the degree which I am pursuing, computer skills, spoken English or cooking.

Srinivas: "Annoying mobile to the most dependable gadget"



"I always depended on my brother to read for me again and again so that I could remember what they taught me in college. He would read most of the time but sometimes he would get annoyed. One day he tried to teach me how I could make use of the Smartphone which he had bought for himself. In the beginning I would go back to asking him to open one app after

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another to listen to lectures on You Tube; he tried to teach me to use the same with the help of talkback, I tried learning it but would get irritated as I could not get the hang of it. I used to throw it back to him saying I can't.

Now I feel that the smartphone is my best friend and the most useful gadget I ever could have. I know that initially to learn anything new I would hesitate; but I have learnt that a little bit of annoyance has to be undergone to learn to make our life better. I am able to attend my online college classes, classes from HTBF on computers and English”.

Surya Sekar – Budding talent In pursuit of Music, life & spirit...

Shakespeare spoke of Music as food of love but Surya. S, a HTBF beneficiary, believes music to be his labour of love.

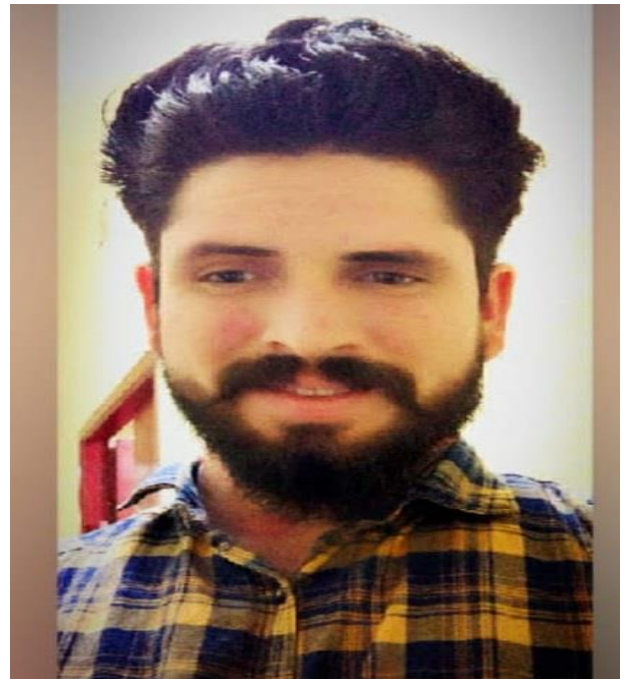
Surya is from Tiruchi , the city in Tamilnadu famous for its Rockfort temple. The young man has not let visual impairment stand in the way of pursuing Masters in Tamil language along with nursing his passion for light music.

Inspired by the lyrics of national award winning Tamil lyricists Vairamuthu and Thamarai, Surya wanted to become a poet in his school days. This pursuit led him to singing his own songs, thanks to the encouragement he received at his College- Srimad Andavar College, Trichy.

Winning awards in college and University level got him noticed by peers and the opportunity to write songs and compose music for a short film made by a friend. With the desire to further enrich his language skill, Surya joined M.A. in Tamil literature after graduating in B.A. English.

His dream to be recognised as a freelance musician under the name "Surya Maathav alias Isaiyan" seems to be coming true as Sharechat, the messaging app and Moj, the short videos app have noticed his talent and are planning to promote him as " first visually

impaired independent artist in Tamil " through their medium.



While music has a special place in his life, Surya is pragmatic to realise that only steady employment would provide the economic support required to lead a dignified life. Towards this goal, he has been preparing for competitive exams and also applying for private sector jobs.

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Instilling a competitive attitude

Ms. Gayatri S.V., EMET Trainer



I'd like to start this letter by thanking each and every one who believes and acknowledges our students' efforts, hard work, and curiosity towards learning. I'm very proud to say that these significant changes haven't happened overnight. Competitions held in the past weeks made us understand the positive changes that happened in the students' attitude and their good traits induced me to share with you so that they multiply.

Competitions impart some cool attitudes like winning with grace, taking risks, the spirit of sportsmanship, dealing with stress, self-discipline, etc. For example, we could see in the past events (for trainers), as we had expected, a good relationship has been built among them. Students sent from all the regions by the trainers formed a group.

Initially some of them had some challenges communicating with their mates but others lifted one another by passing positive phrases that made us feel like we were halfway through. We had 13 in the group along with 3 trainers. All 10 of them had crucially but happily worked for about a week (about 2 hours a day except their class hours) to make the event successful.

It helped them to understand and learn the importance of planning, coordination, negotiations, management, teamwork, receiving feedback, and whatnot. We had seen them bringing different ideas every day and also accepted the flaws indicated and corrected them without hesitation.

Below are some of the most beautiful and vivid descriptions of the students about their experience at the event.

Shiv says, "Thanks a lot to my trainers and team for giving me this great opportunity to carry out the planning of this event. Without my trainers' and team's help I could not do anything. My thanks to Gayatri, Kirtana, Avni ma'ams and Ghanshyam sir for supporting us to plan. I got to learn many things from this event.

Pooja from Madurai says, "I enjoyed a lot by hosting the entire celebration. Thank you so much for the wonderful opportunity. We are feeling proud of ourselves. Thanks to all the ma'ams and Ghanshyam sir for supporting us throughout this week to conduct our celebration."

It's our pleasure to conduct such a celebration with the whole HTBF family. At the same time, our family members were surprised and participated eagerly in all activities.

Thank you so much to our friends for giving great ideas. Without their ideas, our celebration would not have been meaningful.

"Nothing is impossible if we put our heart and soul into it."

When we started this event plan only about 10 students were participating and now we see 50 -60 are coming

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forward and indulging themselves with all the confidence. It's great for us to see. Those who were reserved, are becoming more and more involved which is transparent and good evidence of success.

On top of all, our trainers and trustees, and volunteers are more curious about the events along with our students. Our team is as strong as steel and working hard to bring some notable changes to the society for whom we work. Thank you from the event committee.

A million good reasons to remain relevant

Having started the EMET programme for skilling the current students and paving way for their employment, we at HTBF wanted to do something similar for our alumni - our student beneficiaries who have already graduated and looking around for jobs.

A group of volunteers got hold of the data collected on the alumni by the EMET students as a part of their internship programme and analysed and have started contacting each of the alumni who are unemployed. The idea is to find out the abilities and interests of each candidate to link them to the jobs suitable for them and to provide them training accordingly. In the initial phase 40 such candidates have been identified and the



HTBF volunteers are in constant contact with them individually to understand their current status and aspirations for the job. A second batch of 120 students is in line to find suitable opportunities.

Words may fall short to express our gratitude to our volunteers, without their selfless service and determination we would not have been able to identify and set the goals to be achieved in this regard. We appreciate the efforts put into this exercise by Mrs.Vijayalakshmi, Mr.Sundaramurthy, Mr.Kothandaraman, Mr.Sudhir, Mr.Radhakrishnan, Mr.Parthasarathy, Mr.K.S.A Iyer and Mr.Sahaya Bhaskaran.

Soheb Ahamad - Stacking the odds, relentlessly towards Success



Soheb Ahamad's pursuit to become the first Visually Impaired young man pursuing B.Tech, Computer Science from the Institute of Information Technology, Design and Manufacturing, Hyderabad. His journey towards fulfilling his dream to study science and to prove his calibre is truly an inspiration. To know more about him and his exceptional triumph you may listen to the first ever podcast of Help The Blind Foundation in [spotify.com](https://open.spotify.com/show/2pGMPjHeYe2szscT44Lwil):

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We are deeply touched...

It is always an honour to be recognized. HTBF was deeply touched to receive a letter of gratitude from Wilson College of Chowpatty, Mumbai, thanking us for our contributions. Addressed to our Mr. Krishnamurthy by the Principal of the college, it acknowledged the efforts and financial support given to its students. The letter reads as given;

“We would like to thank your persistent and sincere efforts in providing scholarships to our Andrew’s Vision Centre (AVC) students for the academic year 2020-2021. This year we have received sponsorship of Rs.1,00,000/-, Rs. 10,000/- for 10 students,” wrote Principal Prof. (Dr.) Anna Pratima Nikalje.

We thankfully acknowledge the deep honour bestowed on us.

Appeal

With the COVID situation, online learning has become the norm for all visually-impaired students. However, many of them do not have access to laptops or smartphones, which are essential for full and active participation in the online learning sessions.

We earnestly appeal to all our supporters to donate laptops and smartphones to enable their online learning. Your donation would throw a lifeline to needy students. Please come forward to donate your old laptops/ smartphones.

Please contact sivaji@helptheblind.in for more details. You can also contact us at info@helptheblind.in or call us at +91 90033 30197

Comments, Questions?

Please write to sivaji@helptheblind.in with “newsletter feedback” in the subject line.

