



Inclusion: Breaking barriers through sports

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“My disability exists not because I use a wheelchair, but because the broader environment isn’t accessible.”

Stella Young

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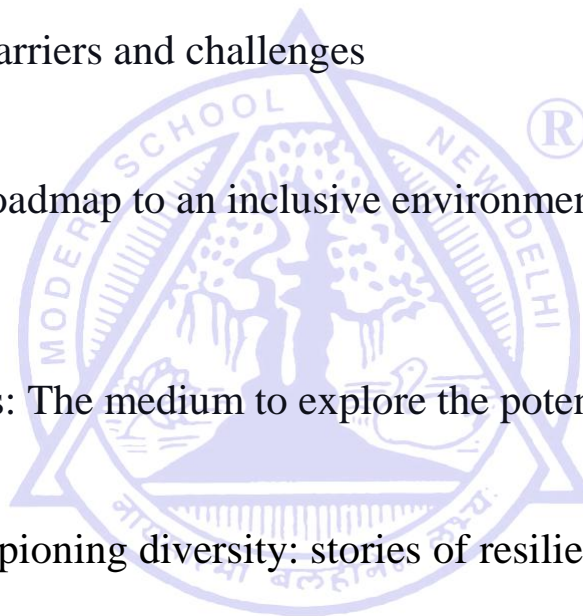
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Preface

We are very pleased to present to you a product of our Sportability project. A booklet on setting up a Sports program for Persons with Disabilities. The aim is to empower schools to conceptualize and maximize available resources to make provision for accessible and adaptive sports facilities with minimum investment, in turn making its contribution to the betterment of society. Additionally, it provides opportunities for Persons with Disabilities to access sports facilities culminating in seamless inclusion in society.

The guidebook also brings forth inspiring stories of individual triumph when provided with the best of the infrastructure and facilities.

The booklet provides insights, awareness, guidance, and advice on sports for Persons with Disabilities with a focus on enhancing users' knowledge and practice on inclusion.

A special thanks to Dr. Vijay Datta, Principal, Modern School, Barakhambha Road, whose guidance, dedication, and enthusiasm, has been the motivation in channelizing Sportability.

The MIE team would like to express its gratitude to Mr. Naresh Sachdev, supervisor of Sportability, who provided unwavering support, advice, and feedback while preparing the guidebook.

Introduction

According to the 2011 census, the percentage of Persons with Disabilities (henceforth be written as PwD) in the total population of India is 2.21 percent. The recently held National Family Health Survey-5 (2020) indicates that out of every hundred individuals four have some form of disability. With limited or no access to education, health services, and a healthy community life, this section of the population is missing from the action. Barring a few examples, most of them are excluded from the mainstream society. Meanwhile, the government has undertaken various initiatives to safeguard the rights of Persons with Disabilities through various schemes, Acts, and interventions. However, the data shows that there is still a long way to go in terms of their inclusion.

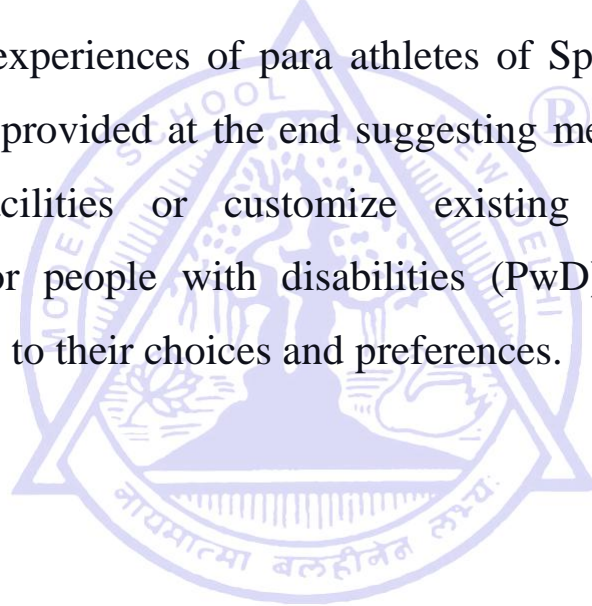
The term inclusion, the basic premise of which is based on the principles of social justice and equality of opportunities, originated from the social model of disability. According to the social model of disability, people are disabled by social barriers, not by their impairments or handicaps. There can be physical barriers, such as inaccessible buildings, or attitudes, such as assuming disabled people can't do certain things. The removal of these barriers leads to disabled individuals' equality, independence, choice, and control.

It is possible to overcome the physical barriers by thinking about how to design buildings, roads, and signage to fulfil the specific needs of PwD. The difficult part is to change the perception of both society towards persons with disabilities and the perception of disabled persons about themselves. Unless and until concerted efforts are made to create awareness about the challenges and issues PwD faces, more and more opportunities must be created so that PwD and Persons without Disability can meet and socialize, and the attitudinal barriers cease to exist. One such arena which provides such opportunities is the games and sports arena.

This document ventures out to delineate the usability of sports as inclusionary practices for PwD. It is an outcome of the experience of about two years of running a Program for PwD ‘Sportability.’

The experience is an eye-opener that a small attempt can yield such an overwhelming result. The responses from the winners and the champions of various sports are heart-warming and above all the pride and happiness they exude are worth the effort and time the Sportability invested in them. The document is divided into four chapters. The first chapter deals with the challenges, barriers, and issues that PwD face in their everyday lives. The second chapter provides an overview of the ways and means to empower PwD in general and inclusive practices in particular. The chapter also discusses the crucial government initiatives, acts, and landmarks to safeguard rights of persons with disabilities with particular reference to sports facilities. Sports, being one of the most effective means of

inclusion, and the focus of this document, has been discussed in detail in the third chapter. The first section of the chapter discusses the importance and benefits of sports for PwD followed by a brief discussion on types of sports for PwD. The third section delves into uncovering the trajectory of sports for PwD, its current status, and what needs to be done to empower them to participate in society. The fourth section summarises the chapter and introduces the readers to the upcoming chapter on the Sportability Program which runs in Modern school Barakhamba Road. The fourth chapter provides an account of the experiences of para athletes of Sportability Program. An annexure is provided at the end suggesting measures to establish new sports facilities or customize existing ones to provide opportunities for people with disabilities (PwD) to participate in sports according to their choices and preferences.



Chapter 1- The barriers and challenges

“If I have to be grateful for an accessible toilet, when will I ever have equal rights in the community?” – Judith Huemann

As the quote from the great American disability rights activist suggests, Person with Disabilities are expected to be grateful for the basic facilities provided to them. From completing daily tasks to participating in daily life, they have to overcome some sort of barrier at every step of the way. These barriers can be physical in nature, such as orientation and mobility difficulties for people with visual impairments or lack of ramps in public places for people with motor disabilities.

Participation is fundamental to a healthy life. For children, it is important for their overall development. The World Health Organisation defines participation as “involvement in a life situation”. Taking part in activities helps to learn how to manage situations in a variety of ways. It offers the opportunity to learn about society's expectations and how to communicate and interact with others, thus making friends. Most importantly, participation in activities plays an important role in developing the communication skills and competencies needed to live successfully at home, in the community and in everyday life. Environmental factors play an important role in the social and day-to-day activity participation of children with disabilities. Studies have shown that features of the home, school and community environment such as physical inaccessibility, lack of

transportation, lack of affordable assistive devices and technology are barriers for children with disabilities. In addition, the lack of ramps, accessible elevators or inaccessible entrances that restrict the movement of wheelchairs or the orientation and mobility of people with visual impairments or blindness sometimes limit their participation.

At the community level, lack of inclusive facilities like schools, transportation, recreation programs and adaptive equipment also limit the participation of PwD.

Besides, these environmental barriers there are some attitudinal barriers too, that hinder the active participation of PwD. Numerous studies have shown that the prejudices and stereotypes surrounding disabilities result in stigmatization and discrimination. The stereotypical imagery and low expectations about their capabilities act as a trap and lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy among PwD. They also begin to perceive themselves the way they have been perceived by society which negatively affects their performance and achievement. Naturally, it leads to limited participation of People with Disabilities (PwD) in many dimensions of day to day life, such as employment opportunities, social interactions, and public activities. Due to a lack of understanding and empathy, bullying and teasing of PwD targeted at their impairment and handicap is common practice at schools and workplace leading to their social exclusion and isolation.

The solution to attitudinal issues that affect PwD and society is to communicate and socialize more. When PwD interacts more with the public, they will feel more comfortable in social and personal situations, and as people begin to accept them as normal members of society, negative attitudes will decrease. Consequently, we need to either create these environments in existing places or design them from scratch. One of these places is the sports and play area in schools, which can be used to ensure that all people are treated fairly and equally.

Therefore, to minimize barriers, the environment needs to be transformed, inclusive resources made available, and opportunities for all types of social, recreational, educational, and employment opportunities created.

The next chapter provides an overview of the ways and means of creating an inclusive environment to help PwD achieve their full potential and participation in society.

Chapter-2

The roadmap to an inclusive environment for Persons with Disabilities

“Share our similarities, celebrate our differences.” – M. Scott Peck

Currently, there is a growing awareness of the rights of PwD in India and across the world. In the last few decades, the disability rights movement has gained momentum and has led to greater participation of PwD in various spheres of life. The movement provided the impetus to develop various models to perceive, analyse and understand disability not only as a result of impairments or disabilities, but as a result of society's failure to create the least restrictive environment for PwD. This concept, known as the social model of disability, paved the way for inclusion as a practise to bring PwD to the forefront of society. The basic premise of inclusion is based on the principles of social justice and equal opportunities.

Inclusion specifically for Persons with Disabilities can be defined as the practice or policy of creating opportunities for PwD to enable them to pursue education, find employment, participate in social activities and lead healthy, successful lives. It means fostering an environment that recognizes and respects their abilities and gives them the opportunity to succeed regardless of their disability or impairment. The goal of inclusion is to give PwD a sense of belonging, participation and contribution, thus promoting a more equitable and encouraging society or community. The philosophy of

inclusion is perhaps best summarized by the following statement: “Although some children, particularly children with severe and multiple disabilities, have unique ways of learning, separating them from others who learn in a different way is unnecessary and may prevent them from reaching their full potential” (Downing, 2008, p. xii).

The implementation of inclusive development demands altering and adapting situations to the specific needs of PwD. It also requires a paradigm shift while designing and conceptualizing the development plans to customize them and make them accessible to them. They need to be enabled to function at their optimum potential and participate in all activities.

Rights of Persons with Disabilities in India

Creating an accessible environment with adequate infrastructure and human resources filled with positive attitudes will ensure equal rights and opportunities for PwD.

India, being a signatory to the Declaration on the Full Participation and Equality of People with Disabilities in the Asia Pacific Region, and to the Biwako Millennium Framework for action towards an inclusive, barrier-free, and rights-based society, has undertaken numerous steps for their inclusive development. Since enacting the “Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights, and Full Participation) Act, 1995” India has made a significant progress, from ratifying the Convention on the Rights of Persons with

Disabilities in 2008 to enacting the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act in 2016. To protect their rights, India enacted the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act in 2016. It states: “A person with a disability” is a person with a long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment which, in interaction with barriers, hinders his or her full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.” The law not only recognizes the health problems associated with disabilities, but also emphasizes the barriers that hinder the equal participation of people with disabilities in society. The law emphasizes non-discrimination, full inclusion and equal opportunities for people with disabilities. It promotes respect for diversity, accessibility, gender equality and development of abilities among children with disabilities. The Act reflects the shift in the perception of disability as a human rights issue rather than a welfare issue and provides specific guidelines for institutions to facilitate the smooth inclusion of PwD by making the premises accessible, accommodating and supportive and sensitizing all stakeholders to ensure a conducive learning environment for them.

The act ensures equal access to inclusive education, vocational training, self-employment, recreational activities, and sports activities.

Inclusive education

Education is the most powerful tool for social development and change. In the age of a knowledge-based economy, education is the key to long-term and sustainable development. To ensure sustainable

development, the provision of "education for all", including people with disabilities, is essential. Inclusive schools must recognize and respond to the diverse needs of their students, both by accommodating their different learning styles and paces and by ensuring quality education for all through appropriate curricula, organizational arrangements, teaching strategies, use of resources and partnerships with their communities. There should be a continuum of supports and services in each school that matches the continuum of special needs.

Vocational training

Social inclusion and development cannot be achieved without gaining financial independence. It is essential to provide vocational training to develop an inclusive workforce. Government, private sector companies, and NGOs can collaborate to develop an ecosystem that respects PwD and modifies work and other related environments to meet a wide range of requirements. It will ensure financial independence as well as a diverse workforce.

Accessible infrastructure and technology

This includes ramps for wheelchairs, the creation of accessible transportation and the creation of a pool of low-cost assistive devices and technologies. Given the importance of digital devices in the modern world, websites and digital platforms must be designed to be disability friendly.

Raising awareness to change the perception of disability

Achieving inclusive development requires a change in perception, attitude, and belief about the abilities of PwD. Raising awareness, campaigning, and sensitization about Person with Disabilities is the way to develop an inclusive culture. This will also lead to empathy, tolerance, and respect for people with disabilities among the masses. Sports can play a crucial role in empowering PwD by promoting social interaction, developing skills, and fostering independence. Therefore, Section 30 of the Act provides guidelines to promote the effective participation of Persons with Disabilities in sporting activities. The guideline states:

- The Appropriate Government should ensure effective participation in sporting activities of persons with disabilities.
- Sports authorities should recognize the right of persons with disabilities to participate in sports and make provisions for their inclusion in promotion and development schemes.
- Measures should be taken to restructure courses, redesign infrastructure facilities, develop technology, provide multi-sensory essentials, allocate funds for state-of-the-art sports facilities, and promote disability-specific sporting events for persons with disabilities.

Considering these guidelines, the 'Khelo India' scheme launched by the Government of India, made specific provisions for the

encouragement and promotion of Sports for PwD. It has designated three different sports bodies to implement the 'khelo India' scheme for PwD. The Paralympic Committee of India is responsible for sportspersons with Physical disabilities, Special Olympics Bharat caters to persons with intellectual disabilities, and the All India Sports Council of Deaf serves sportspersons with hearing or speech impairment.

Regardless of these remarkable achievements in the field of disability rights movement, Disability inclusion in India is still in its early stages. Persons with Disabilities face societal, institutional, and systemic challenges, which lead to exclusion from education, employment, and community living. Lack of accessible infrastructure and discriminatory policies are major obstacles for individuals with disabilities in all spheres of life. In spite of this, there are organizations and advocacy groups that are working tirelessly to bring PwDs into mainstream society using the resources they have at their disposal.

Chapter 3

Sports: The medium to explore the potential

I have a Disability yes that's true, but all that really means is I may have to take a slightly different path than you.” — Robert M. Hensel

It is widely recognized that sports activities are beneficial for all children including children with disabilities. Sports can play a key role in their lives. Numerous research studies show that participation in sports and physical activity improves functional status, quality of life, physical health, and well-being of PwD. Furthermore, it enhances self-confidence, social awareness, self-esteem, thereby empowering them. Research also shows that access to sports is quite beneficial to PwD in terms of developing social communication skills, cooperation, teamwork, and learning to become self-sufficient and independent.

Breaking barriers through sports is not limited to physical activity, it also has a profound impact on fostering inclusivity and understanding in society. Individuals from diverse backgrounds come together to participate in sports. Making it the perfect ground to break stereotypes about disabilities and develop healthy and positive attitudes among people concerning what PwD can and cannot do. The process cultivates empathy and understanding through shared experiences, identity, and collective pride. There is evidence to show that Special Olympics participants experience increased self-esteem, perceived physical competence, and peer acceptance. It also promotes social

adjustment, life satisfaction, family support, and community involvement. It also has been proven beneficial to the society as a whole. The sports arena surpasses all the societal and cultural barriers and makes it the most useful platform for inclusion. The therapeutic benefits of sports and play for PwD help in channelling energy positively and building physical competencies and mental grit. In addition, it supports individuals especially at younger ages to build the needed skills to perform daily chores independently and successfully integrate into society. It acts as a great tool for holistic development, supporting them in classroom learning by tapping into the multiple intelligences of children.

Types of sports for Persons with Disabilities:

Generally, the sports played by PwD are of two types: Adaptive sports, and Parasports. **Adaptive sports** refer to modified activities for PwD, aiming to ensure equal participation. Wheelchair basketball is an example of adaptive sports.

Parasports are sports designed for Persons with Physical Disabilities, with their own rules and equipment, like goal balls designed specifically for persons with visual impairment. Adaptive sports are more flexible, whereas Parasports are more specialized. Adaptive sports can be integrated into mainstream settings, while Parasports have separate events. Both promote physical activity and social integration for PwD.

In a nutshell, it can be said that Adaptive sports emphasize making pre-existing activities inclusive, while Parasports create sports that are

specifically designed to meet the talents and challenges of PwD. Both are essential to encourage physical activity, competition, and social inclusion for PwD.

Considering the efficacy of sports for the overall development of children with disabilities and their inclusion in society, the responsibility to make sports facilities accessible and available to them should not only lie with the Government but the society and community as well.

Para sports in India

Sports for the PwD have been around globally for over a century and the first sports club for the deaf was founded in Berlin in 1888. However, it only gained momentum after World War II to help wounded war veterans. India made its first Paralympic debut in 1968 in Israel. It first participated in the 1977 Deaflympics in Romania and won its first medal at the 1981 Deaflympics in Cologne, Germany.

The Indian para sports section in an organized manner started when Arjuna awardee and Paralympian M. Mahadeva founded the "Physically Handicapped Sports Association" in 1992. Later, in 1994, it was registered as the Paralympic Committee of India (PCI), which now governs Paralympic -sports in India. PCI aims to promote sports for PwD, identify sports talent among PwD nationwide, and help them get necessary support services to prepare for state, national, and international sports meets. The organization is affiliated with international organizations such as the International Paralympic

Committee (IPC), International Federation of Wheelchair and Amputee Sports, Far East and South Pacific Games for the Disabled (FESPIC), and Asian Paralympic Committee to participate in international sports meetings. PCI is recognized by the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) and the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Government of India. They collaborate with National Sports Federations and State Paralympic Associations to develop and promote Paralympic sports.

However, India's participation in international Paralympic events predates the formation of the Paralympic Committee of India. The performance of Indian Paralympian is quite sporadic with winning medals in 1972 for swimming, in 1984 for shot put, discus throw, and Javelin throws. Following this success, Indian athletes faced a medal drought from 1988 to 2000. The most successful Paralympics for India was 2016 with 2 gold medals, 1 silver, and 1 bronze.

Despite their impressive achievements, athletes with disabilities still face several obstacles such as a lack of public awareness, infrastructure, and financial support. Many para-athletes find it difficult to prepare and compete due to the lack of accessible infrastructure, training facilities, and tailored training. In addition, disability is stigmatized and viewed negatively, which makes life miserable and difficult for PwD. The government has introduced various measures to address these problems. Under the Khelo India program, para-sports are also covered. In addition, the government launched an Olympic podium program to find and help future medal

winners. The Sports Authority of India provides training facilities, equipment, and financial support to para-athletes. It has also set up a National Center of Excellence for Para Sports and a special sub-games scheme for para-athletes at Gandhinagar.

Some NGOs and private organizations are promoting para-sports in India. Among them are the Aditya Mehta Foundation (AMF), Go Sports Foundation, and many other non-profit organizations, helping PwD in sports and offering grants, training opportunities, and other types of support to them. Modern School, Barakhamba Road also promotes para sports and adaptive sports in its unique way. One of the leading elite schools in India, known for its educational heritage of over 100 years, it offers the best sports facilities for children in all of Delhi. It is the only school with an Olympic-sized swimming pool and two sports field for sports like Football, Hockey, Cricket, etc. Modern School, together with the non-profit organization UMOYA Sports, initiated an inclusive sports program "Sportability" to create and facilitate opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (PwD) to help them realize their unique potential in sports.

This inclusive Sports program is a one-of-a-kind sport, fitness, and recreational club for PwD- a platform to provide safe space to these persons for building life skills necessary for an enriched future with overall physical, mental fitness and wellbeing.

A glimpse of how PwD's life has been transformed by sports is given in the next chapter.

Chapter 4

Championing diversity: stories of resilience and grit

“Sports is my life” — Shivam Verma

A total of five persons with disabilities were enrolled in the academy at its beginning in 2022. Currently, there are more than seventy. As well as increasing their physical strength and fitness, these PwDs have also gained self-confidence since enrolling in the academy. They have



found the purpose of their lives and are relentlessly pursuing it. Their parents have also become optimistic about the life and future of their children to a great extent. This sports academy has given a ray of hope not only to the PwD but also to their families.

However, to dig deeper to understand the impact the Sportability Academy has on these people/children and their parents' lives, the kind of assistance they are receiving here, their experiences with Sportability, and many more queries, Mrs. Abha Sadana, Director of the Modern Institute for Education, spoke with a few coaches, PwDs, and their parents to learn more about their experiences. The emerging stories were so overwhelming that it was felt that these inspiring stories must be shared with others. Who would have imagined that such a small effort could have yielded such a significant impact on the lives of not only PwDs but their parents as well? This chapter will give an account of some of the success stories of the academy.

The shining stars-Our champions

Ayush- The badminton and swimming champion



Ayush is one of the exemplary students of the academy with a locomotor disability. He had never played before joining the academy. We started introducing him to various experiences to assess his skill sets and potential. After evaluating his needs, we concluded that he should strengthen his upper body.

Upon realizing how passionate he is about sports, we introduced him to a variety of them. We began with basic skills, such as how a wheelchair works, how to perform simple physical activities, and how to strengthen the muscles. We also need to work on his weight because he was a little overweight. It is interesting to know



that he resisted going in the water for over a week when we first started coaching him to swim and once he experienced the joy of it now he didn't want to get out of the water. He has been a member of the academy for over a year and has competed in swimming and badminton events at the state and national levels.

He has won gold and silver medals at both the state and national levels. Ayush shared his experience and said, “I didn't know about any sports before joining this academy. Here, I met a lot of people, played a variety of sports, saw how they played, and made comparisons between myself and them.” When asked what he wants to be in life? he declares, “I want to focus solely on sports and pursue it in the future too.”

Shivam Verma — “Sports is my life”

Gaurav Dutt, Ravi Chopra, and Shivam Verma with Developmental and intellectual disability studied judo at the Academy for some time.

Since joining the academy, these children have gained significant control over their motor skills, learned to be calm and composed and they have become more independent in their daily tasks. According to Shivam, the first thing he learnt here is to develop a positive bond with the coach.

Second, they learn the importance of understanding and following the coach's instructions to keep things on track and bring discipline and inculcate routine into their lives.



According to him, the next step in training was to work on basic skills, and only then did they start learning judo techniques. When asked what he liked most about the Academy, he replied: "I love sports. I like to learn new things every day. I am an athlete. Sport is my life. After graduation, I want to be a sportsperson and a sports coach like Naveen Sir."

I want to pass on what I have learned from my coaches to other children who for various reasons cannot seek help from people. I liked the academy because it helped me make new friends."

Meet the coach -Mr. Naveen Kumar- "I am blessed that Modern School has provided such a beautiful infrastructure for these children."



Mr. Naveen Kumar is a judo coach and father of a child with Autism. He understands the daily struggle of parents of children with disabilities and tries to unite them and practice empathy for their children. He volunteers in sports and teaches physical fitness and judo students.

Here is his account of his experience at the academy in his own words. "I am the father of a special child. My son has represented India at international events.

I sacrificed a lot for him. The problem is that parents who have children with autism or other disabilities are most worried about their child's future. However, we considered it a gift from God and expressed gratitude that we were chosen to serve him. I don't differentiate between my child and the children I coach. I feel the same way about them. I am blessed that Modern School has provided these children with such a beautiful infrastructure. I fought for a long time to get facilities to train these children. I thank this Academy for

allowing us to be here regularly and use this infrastructure for such a noble cause. I am a judo coach. Most of the students here are moderately disabled. However, some of them have Down syndrome. I train them according to their abilities. I have to tell you that I am involved in sports federations like Indian Judo and Special Olympics that organize sports for PwD.”

He further adds, “I met these parents at the Special Olympics just like a parent. I always felt that as an athlete I had to do something for these kids. I met Sir and he assured me that he would do something for me. He asked what are my expectations in terms of honorarium.



And I replied that I would do it of my own free will. I just want space and infrastructure, that would be enough for me. I just ask parents for time too. I ask them to make time for their

children and bring them here, I will take care of the rest. I ask them to give time to their children. I can help them reach their full potential. I want these kids to do as well as my son did. I want these kids to represent India at international level. I trained these kids from scratch. I am proud that these children are getting the same level of education as a normal child. I have children with physical challenges, speech challenges, developmental challenges, etc. I divide the children into groups according to their level and follow a five-day exercise program. For example, children who obey orders are placed in one class; those who need training to follow instructions are placed in

another group; and so on. The difference between the paid Academy and Sportability is that the training here progresses flexibly. I'm trying to make these kids independent and self-reliant.”

The Parents- “The best part is infrastructure. One of the biggest places the child can have to run, roam, and play, and be in touch with beautiful nature.”

The interaction with parents exhibited the revolution Sportability is bringing in the lives of countless families. Almost all parents expressed joy over finding such an open and huge infrastructure coupled with expert coaching in one place. In the words of one of the parents, "The best thing is it's all open, one can see the child all the time, that's what the biggest thing for us." According to parents, their children have improved a lot in terms of controlling their emotions, following daily routines, instructions, with improvements in their health and strength. Moreover, they have found the love of their life as some of them enjoy swimming, and some others are more into yoga and fitness regimes.

Parents said these regular visits to the academy proved beneficial not only for the players but also for their families. Acting as a stress reliever, the parents get an opportunity to spend quality time together, sharing their children's experiences, trials, and achievements. In addition, this forum acts as a support network, bringing together families who share common experiences and challenges. In the words of one parent, "Another positive thing that happened to us is the opportunity to meet other parents. We sit together, talk, and share our

experiences. When we share our children's achievements with parents of normal school going children, they don't realize it. What seems normal to them may be quite commendable to our children. But the parents we meet here share similar feelings and are appreciative of the achievements. Being a special parent and discussing with a special parent is an altogether different feeling because not every parent can understand the emotions we are going through. It serves as a remedy for our stress. And the team, the efforts they put in while planning the fitness regime keeping individual needs in mind is I am appreciative about." Another parent who has a son with Autism shared that he has improved a lot since he joined the academy. When probed further about the improvements she said, "The biggest issue with Autism is that children do not have patience. Neither do they understand instructions nor do they wait for anything. Ever since my son joined this academy, he now understands and follows the instructions, and knows that he has to wait for his turn to tick mark the register or to practice physical activities. He is gradually becoming physically fit. It's been almost six months here and I see a lot of improvement in him."

Krishna has been coming to this academy for the past eight months. He learns swimming and football here. He comes every day with his mother. When asked what more you need for your son here, she replied, "I am getting everything. The ambiance of the school, the love and care my son receives from the coach and the whole Sportability team is enough for me."

It is evident from the interactions with children, their parents, and coaches, that the academy is doing a great job. The infrastructure and facilities available here are excellent. For such children, being close to nature is incredibly important, and they get that here. The second most commendable thing is that the environment is very safe. Everyone at this place looks after these kids and is constantly aware of their needs. Along with this, these children are getting world-class coaching without any expense. To sum up, the Sportability Academy, an initiative of Modern School, Barakhambha Road, is doing an incredible work and is a ray of hope for children and parents alike.

Epilogue

Sportability: Empowering inclusion and enriching lives through sports

The term ‘Sportability’ is an amalgamation of ‘Sport’ and ‘Ability.’ It is an initiative to promote inclusion by Modern School New Delhi, which has practiced for over a century, and continues to have at its heart, acceptance of diversity.

The issue is simple: many educational institutions have playgrounds and sports fields that are underutilized after school and during holidays. The purpose of this initiative was to create a model of how school resources could be used for the benefit of the most marginalized group in our society - people with special needs, neurological and/or physical problems. The concept was developed to

be purposeful and practical at every stage of planning, organization and implementation. The many tasks included, in addition to the initial vision, the design of a functional model, where the placement of personnel and sports equipment is difficult, and which now allows several sports to be practiced in a safe environment for special needs. The success of the project is due to the teamwork and dedication of the school board, principals, teachers and socially conscious students. It's been over a year since we launched Sportability and now around 70 people (of all age groups) are benefiting from our commitment to providing our assets, organizational skills and resources. Many sportsmen have won national and international laurels and made us proud. In addition, the main success of the project is to enable people with special needs to have fun, exercise and have higher self-esteem. I see it again as a testament to the Modern School's century-long commitment to inclusion. A lesser-known fact is that one of the main motives behind the creation of the Modern School in 1920 was to provide girls with a modern education in an era when girls' education was limited and they were often confined to their homes. Physical and mental health benefits of incorporating a sports program into everyone's life are well known. Our society has been torpedoed towards a sedentary lifestyle and poor eating habits in recent decades, and the impact of this change is clearly seen in the rise of lifestyle diseases and mental health problems. Increased screen time has resulted in reduced functional use of our bodies and poor posture. The general benefits are no different from an exercise program for people

with special needs. For example, from some polio participants we understand that swimming helped to strengthen the muscles, which makes it possible to play table tennis better. Or that yoga classes allowed greater flexibility to play cricket better. A general sense of well-being and better self-esteem is a well-understood consequence of sports.

Sports and education

It is a known fact that the education of a child involves much more than merely literacy and numeracy. For societies to progress, among other activities, it is necessary for communities to come together so that nobody is left behind. In our digital age, we should not lose sight of the softer but far more important values of compassion and empathy, which cannot be replaced by any AI software, as it is our humanism and creativity which create solutions for humanity. It is a complete fallacy that learning and giving is a one-way street – everybody gains from human interactions, the givers and the receivers. By opening its doors to a very differently abled population set, the school aims to awaken the conscience of the students to their privileges as well as responsibilities to their community. Inclusion is also a major objective of the program. Playing team sports together, while taking advantage of different strengths and making allowances for each player's weakness holds a larger lesson than just that of the playfield.

Challenges

Public infrastructure for differently abled persons in India remains inadequate. Many interested and potential participants are discouraged by long commutes. In some cases, we arranged the transportation – but this is not a core objective. Ideally, every neighbourhood with a school and a playground should embrace the concept, so that many persons have a safe place to play. The cost of providing coaching and support staff is minimal and can be borne by an established institution. The returns are huge! ®

Why sports

All our participants are deeply appreciative of having an opportunity to simply play, as almost all had no or low access to sports infrastructure. Our biggest success story is that the lives of all our participants have been enriched; with fun, exercise and with opportunity they did not have. We feel joy in being able help our fellow citizens realize their full potential, acquire vital social skills, develop independence, and become empowered to act as agents of change. For our competition-level participants, we are delighted and proud. Participants from Sportability have represented Delhi in parasports meets and in National-level games in badminton, cricket, table-tennis, and swimming. A few of our players have won laurels in international tournaments and are enthusiastic and optimistic of representing India in the future. The participants who have achieved

personal or team laurels, are now ambassadors themselves for the many who until now have not had the chance to access sports resources.

Future path

Educational institutions must understand that empowerment of the disabled is a multidisciplinary process involving intervention, education, health care, education, rehabilitation and social integration. Sport can break down prejudices and promote inclusion in communities. I hope and expect that many will use the Sportability model to extend its reach to more schools. The concept must become a mirror image, so that society begins to look at disabled people with skills that can be perfected and no longer only looks at the person's disability. Finally, I would ask you to imagine a tall building without an elevator or stairs. How useful or functional would it be to someone - how would someone get to the top floor or any of the floors? EVERYONE needs access and resources to rise. Basically, everyone needs resources to realize their potential. A society that does not help each member maximize their potential is like a building without stairs. Schools can and should help society by raising more compassionate citizens. I believe that activities that help India create a more inclusive society must become an integral part of school life.

(Ambika Pant, Secretary, Board of Trustees, Modern School)

(Originally published in the 'Career Ahead')

Annexure



Suggestive guidelines for setting up sportability academy in the school premises

The information provided below suggests general recommendations from our own experience by running the academy in Modern School premises. UMOYA Sports: Play Beyond Barriers has been the knowledge consultant in designing and curating this program.

It is suggested to the user to customize it after assessing the available infrastructure, funds, and risks associated with the particular sport and activities. It is suggested not to follow it word by word but by informed decisions. In addition, assessment of the participants is crucial before following the instructions provided in this handbook.

Sportability academy may be truly inclusive, welcoming children with a wide range of disabilities. It may develop programs that cater to various disabilities, including physical, sensory, and intellectual challenges.

In practice, academy should engage the children in the intensive sports sessions, life-skill integrated, debriefs and team cool-down sessions. It is heart-warming to see the children building socio-

emotional skills with strong mental well-being. It should work on the following pillars:

- Provide a platform to build competitive sports skills and create pathways of opportunity for young budding athletes with disabilities
- Help in generating self-awareness and communication to be a team player
- Build problem-solving skills of the participants

Curriculum Design

It is suggested to create progressive curriculum plan for every child with clear goals in the areas of

- Identified sport
- Goals and targets on the sports chosen:
 - Physical competencies: developmental skills
 - Skills of sport chosen
- Understanding the play strategy
 - Group play vs one-on-one
 - Indoor play vs outdoor play
- Training program

The programs should be offered to children and youth as per their age, skills, strengths and interest areas. The focus should be on Head-Heart-Hand based activities which will also help them to

develop skills to perform their daily tasks independently to the best of their abilities.

- The student coach ratio will depend on the benchmark of disability
- Scheduling minimum of 2 or 3 days per week sessions

Progressive nature of sports program

It is suggested that the curriculum of the programs should be progressive in nature to cater to the needs of PwD at multiple levels. Therefore, the activities need to be designed after assessing the applicants interest, abilities, potential, and needs.

The activities may be divided into following three categories:

1. 'FUN'damental Play and Movement

- Imbibes elements of Ability Spark program with age, and skill-appropriate play activities integrated with Early Childhood and intervention focus areas
- Integrate object (ball) control activities to build needed skills and enjoy sports
- Play-based fun activities with the focus on building fundamental developmental and movement skills such as fine and gross motor skills, motor-coordination, (vestibular) balance

2. Foundational Sports and Fitness

- Introduction to skills of sports, manipulative drills through multi-sport program approach

- The Multi-sports to be included are selected to build all skills needed in sports which are team games, individual games, ball based games, object striking,
- Team and individual games

3. Adapted Sports

Sports programs for individuals with physical disabilities to participate recreationally and hone their skills of sports

Most suitable for children above 12 years with requisite skills needed for the particular adapted sport which can generally be implemented in the school premises are:

- Para sports – badminton, swimming, basketball, athletics
- Wheelchair – cricket, basketball
- Blind sports- blind cricket, blind football and goalball

Typical Session Plan

The duration of the session plan can be kept for about one hour thirty minutes. The detailed break-up of the time can be as follows:

- Greet and warm up - 15 minutes
- Theme based sports activity 1 - 65 mins
- Recreational game integrating program theme of the day - 30 mins
- Life skills and reflection (Cool-Down) - 20 minutes (reflection in circle time, sharing experience, learnings – highlights (aha moments) and challenges faced by participants in the day)

Equipment & Gear

For the warmup session following equipment are found very relevant.

- Fitness: ankle weights, weight ball, steppers, thera bands, skipping ropes
- Agility and physical development: hurdles, markers, cones, hoops,
- Adapted sports equipment: therapy ball, sensory balls, audible sound balls

In addition to above mentioned equipment, the sports specific equipment can be added to the list.

Always maintain separate kit bags with inventory count before and after the session.

Legal Structure

- Obtain No Objection Certificate from parents
- At all times, there needs to be a parent guardian or helper along with child with disability
- All rules of school will apply wherein there are children with and/or without disability
- Sportability, the sports academy has to be a separate entity from the school

Promotion and Outreach

To raise awareness about the academy in the community it is suggested to reach out to the organisations working in the field of disability such as:

- Parents self-help groups of children with disabilities
- Special schools and special needs centres
- Disability community and word of mouth
- Therapists and therapy centres

Besides, these groups, social media should also be used optimally. To generate interest among the larger community the following events may also be organised at regular intervals:

- Host fun and recreational days to promote inclusion and outreach for the program in the community
- Inclusive Sports Days
- Participating in various competitive events for inclusive sports

Qualified Staff

There are two ways to provide support:

One is that the school can hire support staff or garner support from volunteers and interns. another way is to allow teams and individual sports persons to bring their support staff.

The Sportability team should consist of

Designated Program coordinator from the school, and specialists like sports coaches, special educators, therapists, and medical attendants, who should have:

- Minimum required qualification, certification, and training
- Experience in the desired field, and preferably experience working with PwD
- Mandatory experience and knowledge related to the field of disabilities
- Have a thorough understanding and expertise in sports and curriculum design
- Strong communication skills and experience in coordinating with multiple stakeholders

A designated support team from the school

The support team needs a combination of technical and non-technical staff.

- Technical team
 - Manages the facilities, equipment, athlete services, administrative tasks, and medical and health support
 - Support the ground team working with children with disabilities, especially with Intellectual and developmental disorders
- The non-technical team includes cleaners and helpers

Volunteer Engagement

Students enrolled in professional courses related to disability studies may be approached to intern and volunteer with Sportability team.

Parents of PwD are another critical resources with intrinsic understanding and knowledge of their ward and hence are generally sensitive to the needs of these individuals. They can be actively engaged as volunteers to serve this community of the academy. It is important to follow the guidelines mentioned below in order to involve them:

- Provide training for them to become play buddies and supporting their child in sports
- Train them on disability awareness, effective communication, and techniques for working with PwD
- Clearly define their roles and responsibilities to avoid any confusion
- Recognise and appreciate their efforts regularly

Safety Measures

Implement safety measures such as first aid training for staff and the presence of medical professionals during sports activities, especially for activities with a higher risk of injury.

Ensure a physical safe play space by having access to indoor and outdoor play areas. The indoor play areas should have soft mats and

not hard flooring, similarly the outdoor space should be flat even surface, ideally with grass, without any pebbles.

The Way Forward

In case, you are interested in creating a safe, inclusive, and vibrant sports academy that fosters personal growth, promotes physical and mental well-being, in the spirit of inclusivity, you may approach Modern Institute for Education (MIE) for any guidance and professional help needed.

