

A Road Map of Success for Differently Abled Adolescent Girls Residing in Pune, Maharashtra, India

Authors : Varsha Tol, Laila Garda, Neelam Bhardwaj, Malata Usar

Abstract : In India, differently-abled girls suffer from a “dual stigma” of being female and physically challenged. The general consensus is that they are incapable of standing on their own two feet. It was observed that these girls do not have access to educational programs as most hostels do not keep them after the tenth grade. They are forced to return to a life of poverty and are often considered a liability by their families. Higher education is completely ignored. Parents focus on finding a husband and passing on their ‘burden’ to someone else. An innovative, intervention for differently-abled adolescent girls with the express purpose of mainstreaming them into society was started by Helplife. The objective was to enrich the lives of these differently abled adolescent girls through precise research, focused intervention and professionalism. This programme addresses physical, mental and social rehabilitation of the girls who come from impoverished backgrounds. These adolescents are reached by word of mouth, snowball technique and through the network of the NGO. Applications are invited from potential candidates which are scrutinized by a panel of experts. Selection criteria include her disability, socio-economic status, and desire and drive to make a difference in her own life. The six main areas of intervention are accommodation, education, health, professional courses, counseling and recreational activities. Each girl on an average resides in Helplife for a period of 2-3 years. Analysis of qualitative data collected at various time points indicates holistic development of character. A quality of life questionnaire showed a significant improvement in scores at three different time points in 75% of the current population under intervention i.e. 19 girls. Till date, 25 girls have successfully passed out from the intervention program completing their graduation/post-graduation. Currently, we have 19 differently abled girls housed in three flats in Pune district of Maharashtra. Out of which 14 girls are pursuing their graduation or post-graduation. Six of the girls are working in jobs in various sectors. In conclusion it may be noted with adequate support and guidance the sky is the limit. This journey of 12 years has been a learning for us with ups and downs modifying the intervention at every step. Helplife has a belief of impacting positively, individual lives of differently abled girls in order to empower them in a holistic manner. The intervention has a positive impact on differently abled girls. They serve as role models to other differently abled girls indicating that this is a road map to success by getting empowered to live with full potential and get integrated in the society in a dignified way.

Keywords : differently-abled, dual-stigma, empowerment, youth

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