



NEWSLETTER

April 2023 – June 2023

An occasion for celebration!

We are delighted to announce that 12 Visually-impaired candidates have been hired by Sutherland, thanks to the persistent and laudable efforts of the HTBF teams at Chennai and Coimbatore, led by our Trustee, Mr. Nataraj Sankaran. Among the twelve, three are from our current EMET (Education, Mobility and Employment Training) batch from Presidency College, nine from other sources (we facilitated the whole interview process, accommodated them in Chennai for short term training before their final interview and paid for all their expenses too).

They will get trained for the non-voice process and will go through various types of training before being fully absorbed.

In the first week of April 2023, we placed one of our EMET trainers, Bilal, at Sutherland and he will be providing them on-the-job assistance. In total, we have so far placed 26 visually-impaired persons at Sutherland this year including our two senior trainers Bilal and Vikas. Bilal and Vikas will not only train the new candidates, but also help Sutherland and their clients improve the accessibility of their software to the visually-impaired.

While quite a few of our students are getting placed at various banks and corporates, this is the single biggest batch of candidates trained with a well-structured need-based training program and employed at one single corporate.

In all, 56 of HTBF's graduates trained through the EMET Programme have got jobs thus far, in different sectors and companies.

We thank Sutherland for their help and active cooperation in the training and absorption of these candidates and for their interest in increased inclusion in their company.

We actively seek the support of other such well-meaning Corporates in providing jobs to the visually-impaired. Let's take inclusion a step further, NOW!

Smart Vision Glasses (SVG) make inroads into several cities



Figure 1 An HTBF beneficiary receiving an SVG at a distribution function in Madurai

In our constant endeavour to elevate the status of the Visually Impaired students, HTBF has already adopted technology in teaching the V I Students through the EMET program.

As a next step closer to technology, we have identified an assistive device which would turn the visual capacity of a V I from darkness to a more interactive, interesting and an innovative world and Smart Vision Glass Project is being launched.

Objectives of the project:

1. To enable the blind and visually impaired to live a life of independence and dignity by helping them gain access to a world class AI - powered assistive device.
2. To jointly support a promising technology that in the future can significantly transform the lives of people with vision impairment.

Salient features of the device:

- Things around you- All kinds of objects in front of the device are identified
- Reading Assistance- Can read books, road signs and newspapers and manuscripts.
- Walking Assistance - It recognizes objects in its view such as vehicles, obstacles, traffic signals, zebra crossings, furniture.
- Facial recognition - Identifies people, approximate age, expressions and recognizes people if a name is attached.
- Can talk in Indian regional languages such as Hindi, Tamil and Telugu
- Give directions to a destination when asked, using GPS.

To begin with 400 devices will be donated by Cognizant Foundation and Vision Aid India (200 each).

We are delighted to announce that we have successfully enabled better vision to several of our visually-impaired beneficiaries through the distribution of 115 Smart Vision Glasses from April to June 2023 in Coimbatore, Nagpur, Bangalore, Thanjavur, Trichy, and Chennai.



Figure 2 All excitement after the distribution of SVG

“Walking with a friend in the dark is better than walking alone in the light.” – Helen Keller



A further 145 beneficiaries from Ahmedabad, Indore, and Delhi will receive these Smart Vision Glasses between July and August 2023.

We are also happy to say that these glasses have been received very well so far, although their usage requires familiarity and practice. We are in the process of collecting feedback from users.

We are deeply thankful to Cognizant Foundation and Vision Aid India, without whose support this would not have been possible.

Feedback on Smart Vision Glasses (SVG)

Pavan is a HTBF beneficiary from the Nagpur region. He started to use SVG in his daily life. He gave feedback about SVG that it's a very nice assistive technology. "It helps us to read the text, books, and newspapers, he so much likes the emergency trigger options. Walking assistance needs improvement. Hope in the future we'll have this device in an upgraded version and it will help us in day-to-day life", says Pavan.

Feedback from **Sonam Thakre**, 2nd year student, Ambedkar College, Nagpur:

"Thank you, Sir and HTBF for working for us for so many years. Thank you for providing us Smart Vision Glasses which is very useful. We, I especially feel the training is useful and we will surely use what we have learnt. I will tell my juniors - the 1st year students that they must attend these courses, never miss them.

Thanks again to the foundation for the laptops as well as the glasses. During the EMET training they also told us about 3 or 4 common attitudes, they run tests for us, explain and clarify our doubts clearly.

We feel there's a connection between us and HTBF. Thanks to HTBF, our career life will be super. Now we should do smart work more than hard work.

I have a suggestion - wonder if you think it's appropriate or not - it would be nice if you can run a program for all the groups together so they can meet each other - like Nagpur ones can meet Indore ones etc. Thank you once again."

EMET Annual Meet 2023

The annual meeting of the Help the Blind Foundation's EMET team was held from May 15 to May 18 at School of Ancient Wisdom, Bangalore. Ms. Pooja, the Project Officer-Skill Development, welcomed the participants. In his introductory remarks, Mr. Nataraj Sankaran, Trustee, outlined the purpose of the annual meeting. The sessions and events on each of the four consecutive days



Figure 3 Pavan, HTBF beneficiary, trying out his new SVG

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were meticulously planned and well organized to help the project team acquire new knowledge and better prepare themselves to serve on the ground.

The technical team from SHG Technologies, Bangalore helped run training sessions to make sure that all visually-impaired trainers had the technical know-how they needed and to encourage their development as adept SVG users.

With facts on progress, issues, and future plans, regional presentations covering the period from August 2022 to April 2023 were made. A group comprising trustees and volunteers who evaluated the information each trainer had delivered, gave the Indore region the honour for the outstanding presentation. The SDF (Student Development Forum), GLC (Guest Lecture Committee), and Assessment & Report Committee members each gave an overview of the activities of their respective committees in addition to zonal presentations. Former HTBF trainer Mr. Vikas did a fantastic job of describing how he switched from HTBF to Sutherland and the successes he has made there as a Customer Support Associate.

In an attempt to drive teams to engage, celebrate, and enhance cross cultural connections, a cultural programme was also set up on the first day's evening.

Through the presentation of the project officer for Planning and Fund management, specifics regarding donors, the budget approved to execute the EMET Programme, and a few suggestions for future interventions were discussed. The Team members were acknowledged for their contributions through accolades such as Star Trainers, All-Rounder, Best English and Computer Trainers, Pillar of HTBF, Best Budding Trainers, and Best Supporting Staff.

Mr. Nataraj Sankaran, Trustee, reiterated the organization's vision and goals, the value of teamwork, and the significance of creating a culture of team work. He also inspired the team by discussing *"The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People"*, admirably creating a mental picture of a win-win scenario, SMART Goals and the steps the team needed to take, with a focus on priorities and



Figure 4 The EMET team caught in a relaxed setting soon after the meetings, at the Annual Meet, 2023

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keeping the end in mind. He accentuated the idea's transition from independence to interdependence and the synchronization of efforts to accomplish the common objective.

As part of their participation in the annual meeting, Ms. Jency and the team from Enable India presented information on various aspects of inclusion and social integration projects to incorporate in the EMET training. The development of a Comprehensive Action Plan (CAP) with solutions for the various problems the EMET team has been encountering into was one of the major outcomes of this annual meeting. By analyzing the progress, facilitating idea-sharing to fill in the gaps and finding solutions for the team's main hardships, determining course of action, and fostering team spirit, this Annual Review Meeting provided an ideal atmosphere to create a Robust Project Management Plan (RPMP) for the period that lay ahead. With the gift-giving and the concluding remarks of Mr. Nataraj Sankaran, Trustee, HTBF, the Annual Meet came to an end.

World Blind Cricket Championship – we have got the ball rolling!

We are happy and proud to inform that seven HTBF beneficiaries - Mr. Maharaja Sivasubramanian of 3rd year B.A., from Thiagarajar College, Madurai, Mr. Irfan Dewan from Hindu College, Delhi, Ms. Gangavva (Vice Captain), Ms. Deepika , Ms. Varsha, all from Karnataka, Ms. Simu Das from Delhi College (hailing from Assam), and Ms. Ganga Kadam from Mumbai - have been selected to be a part of the Indian cricket teams to take part in the World Blind Cricket Tournament to be held in Birmingham, England in August 2023.

We are truly blessed and do whatever we can to further their interests. We congratulate Maharaja, Irfan, Gangavva, Deepika, Varsha, Simu and Ganga on their splendid achievement and hope they bring laurels to our country soon! Well done, 🙌🙌🙌!



Figure 5 The Indian Blind Women's cricket team with HTBF beneficiaries Gangavva, Deepika, Varsha, Simu and Ganga



Figure 6 Maharaja Sivasubramnian



Figure 7 Irfan Diwan

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Critical resources: Laptops donated in Pune

Did you know?

People who are visually-impaired can, and do use computers, phones, and other electronic devices just as much as sighted people. They just have different ways of accessing these devices - they use what's called assistive technology, including screen readers, refreshable braille displays, and digital screen magnification to interact with high-tech products.

We have been trying to procure laptops for our visually-impaired beneficiaries across India. Imagine our happiness when this effort was fulfilled by the magnanimity of the KCET (Kishinchand Chellaram Educational Trust), who donated 50 laptops in one go!

The laptops were distributed to visually-impaired students at Wadia College and Modern College, Pune. A big thanks to Kishinchand Chellaram Educational Trust (KCET), represented by Dr. Deore, for their generous and most thoughtful donation.



Figure 8 Pictures from the laptop distribution function at Pune

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A big welcome to new trustees, staff and volunteers!

Our two new trustees viz., Ms. Vijayalakshmi and Mr. Ramesh Puri joined the Board of Trustees formally in June 2023. We welcome both of them and wish them the very best of luck.

We are pleased to welcome Mr. Mahalingam and Mr. Purushottam, both experienced professionals, as volunteers to HTBF. Mr. Mahalingam is an Ex-Bank of India senior manager and Mr. Purushottam is a senior financial consultant. Both are based in Bangalore.

Our Chennai office has seen a flurry of recruitment:

Mr. S. Rajamani has taken over the role of General Manager at HTBF Chennai.

Ms. Kudhamani. D as taken over the accounting responsibilities.

Mr. B. Lakshminarayan has joined us as Placement Officer to support us in the EMET Team, which is our major focus area in the coming year.

Ms. Divya Sara Eisen has joined as Junior Placement Officer in the EMET Team to assist him.

Mr. Devaraj has joined us as Junior Project Officer in the EMET Team.

Ms. Vanitha has joined us as Officer (Scholarships).

Ms. Gomathy Uthirapathi has joined as Accounts Assistant.

Meet HTBF beneficiary Mr. Dhinesh

Meet HTBF beneficiary and accomplished artist, Dhinesh D., who did his M.A. in Tamil Literature from Loyola College, Chennai. Hailing from a village in Thiruvannamalai, Dhinesh migrated to Chennai with his visually-impaired father and partially disabled mother to complete his studies. Being interested in art from his early childhood, Dhinesh pursued his keen interest through college, even though he did not have the means to buy expensive art materials. He was helped here by two mentors from HTBF. He also worked part-time as examiner, tea-seller, and did odd jobs to raise money for his art and to take care of his parents. His passion is to paint at live shows - he has performed on Colours TV to showcase his artistry. He is ever ready to experiment and works with all mediums of painting. His desire is to own a laptop with a camera, which he can use to record his work. He is available as a commission artist and can be reached at +91 7502 7502 57. You can view his work at: <https://youtube.com/@pattampoochiarts>, and at https://www.instagram.com/pattampoochi_arts/.



Figure 9 Dhinesh presenting one of his drawings to Mr. Udhayanidhi Stalin

Dhinesh was felicitated at St Joseph's College Of Engineering, Chennai at the inaugural function of IGNITE 2023 Sports Event For The Visually Impaired, by the chief guest Mr. Udhayanidhi Stalin, Minister for youth welfare and sports development of Tamil Nadu, when Dhinesh's drawing was presented to them.

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A big thanks to our donors!

Apart from our corporate donors, we would like to express our heartfelt thanks to the numerous individual donors from all over the world who do not find mention here, without whose help and support we could not have achieved so much in such a short time.



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Two-day training program held in Tanjore



Figure 10 Trainers with some of the trainees at the event

A 2-day program was organised for the Plus 2 students of Tanjore Blind School and our trainers Ms. Swathy and Ms. Padmavathi with the support of our volunteer Dr. Ganga, conducted a basic awareness on the use of computers, accessing the internet, use of talk back, etc. The principal of the school appreciated and thanked HTBF for offering the program and are looking forward to more such in the future.

How to donate to HTBF

We appeal to our donors and other well-wishers to continue to support us in providing college education, skills and employability training to our visually impaired students. On the Employment front, if you can provide employment or refer an employer for giving jobs to our students, it will be a great help. You can also contribute by speaking to your friends and relatives and create an awareness among the general population about the capabilities of our students.

For donations – Contact: Ms. Kudhamani at +91-9551243750, Email: info@helptheblind.in

If you want to remit the donation online, (**for Indian Passport holders ONLY**) please send it to:

BANK ACCOUNT – ACCOUNT NUMBER: 50100269779772,

ACCOUNT NAME: HELP THE BLIND FOUNDATION,

NEFT IFSC CODE/RTGS: HDFC0000206

ACCOUNT TYPE Savings

BANK: HDFC Bank, G. N CHETTY ROAD, CHENNAI

Foreign passport holders wishing to donate are requested to collect details by writing to:

donor_connect@helptheblind.in

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