

HELP THE BLIND FOUNDATION



ANNUAL REPORT 2023-24

VISION AND MISSION



Note : Mrs. Niti Patel with Bhumika, EMET trainer from Nagpur at the 2023/24 Annual Meet held in Bangalore in Feb, 2024.

VISION

To successfully elevate the economic status of the visually impaired and improve their image in the eyes of the society.

MISSION

To provide access to university education, thereby enabling visually impaired students to get jobs in today's modern economy.



Note : HTBF Staff and Trainers at the UCO Bank Training in Chennai



Note : Low Vision Assessment for EMET students

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Note (Clockwise, L to R): Students receiving laptops in B.H. Commerce & A.M. Science College, Nashik; Dr. Vijay Sharma and student at EMET Enrolment Ceremony held at DSMRU, Lucknow; Mr. Radhakrishnan presenting laptops to student at Ambedkar College, Nagpur

MESSAGE FROM OUR MANAGING TRUSTEE

BY MS. DEEPA KRISHNAMOORTHY



Note : Ms. Deepa with a student from Poonamallee Blind School, Chennai

It gives me great pleasure to present our FY 2023-24 Annual Report. I would like to share some of our achievements over the last year, and also inform you of some of our future plans.

I have only recently taken over as Managing Trustee since June 1st 2024, and much of the credit for the great performance last year must go to our former Managing Trustee, Mr Sivaji Rao who continues to tirelessly be involved in all levels of activity within our Foundation. I also want to thank the other Trustees who give so much of their time, effort and guidance so that we are able to effectively run our programs. A big thanks to all our donors, both corporate and individual, from India and around the world, who continue to support us year after year.

I would also especially like to mention and thank the Directors of Help the Blind Foundation Hong Kong, whose tireless efforts in raising funds for our initiatives helps us in maintaining a stable financial footing.

This year our scholarship program supported 2,509 students with an expenditure of just over INR 3 crore. This was in line with the number of students and amount disbursed in 2021-22. Again this year we faced some of the same challenges as in the previous year due to the prolonged effect of COVID-19 on the college semester timings and delays in receiving marksheets.

Our volunteers continue to give us tremendous support for the scholarship program, helping us in meeting and interviewing new students, assisting the students to apply and uploading various documents required by us to assess whether they qualify for scholarship. Every year we conduct an annual meeting, in person, to obtain feedback from our volunteers on their experiences and get more suggestions and insights on how we can make our scholarship program better and more helpful for the students. Based on their inputs, we have made some simplifications in our criteria for awarding scholarships this year. Another significant change is that we have added a new merit based layer, where we are giving an additional amount of INR 5,000/- to students who scored more than 80% in both semesters of the academic year, in their 2nd and 3rd year of college. This is with the aim of encouraging these students to continue their strong academic performances, and inspire their peers to strive for the same.

Our Skill Development program, EMET (Education, Mobility, Employability Training) has continued to run successfully. Since its inception 5 years ago, the EMET program has seen tremendous growth, not only in the number of students and colleges, but also in the number and quality of the staff we have employed as Trainers and Project Officers.



Note : Low Vision Assessment of EMET students



Note : Industrial visit in Delhi, F2 Fintech.

It is an encouraging sign that the demand for setting up such centers by other higher education institutes is increasing, and we are focusing more on strengthening our program and making improvements by leveraging the experience we have gained so far. We are also planning to open more Resource Centers in several colleges around the country, the first of which was set up in Devnar Degree College for the Blind, Hyderabad in March 2024, and subsequently in Madras Christian College, Chennai in June 2024, through the kind courtesy and support of Saint Gobain India Pvt. Ltd.

These resource centers will showcase and give access to several assistive technologies (such as smart vision glasses, screen readers, scanners, magnifiers, digital bar scan codes etc) that they can utilize towards achieving better outcomes in education and simplify a number of their day to day tasks.

We hope that these resource centers will serve not only the visually impaired community in the college, but also create more awareness among the sighted community about the types of technology available to assist visually impaired to do the same work that sighted people do.

As part of EMET, we distribute laptops and Smart Vision Glasses (SVGs) to students enrolled in the program. In December 2023, SHG, the company that develops and makes SVGs, launched the PRO version of their smart vision glasses, which is a lighter version of the old model and connects wirelessly to the user's phone. We continue to monitor the adoption and usage of these glasses by our visually impaired students. SHG, recognising that their SVGs are more suited to those with 100% visual impairment, have come up this year with a new variation to their glasses called Smart Low Vision Glasses (SLVG) which uses technology to magnify whatever the low vision person can see. We are currently testing these glasses with a small sample of our low vision students in Bangalore and hope to roll out these glasses on a larger scale too.



Note : EMET Enrolment Ceremony at DSMRU, Lucknow.



Note : Industry visit for students held in Delhi

During 2023-24 we started putting a lot more emphasis on helping our students to find employment. Currently, one of the biggest barriers preventing integration of visually impaired individuals into modern workplaces is a gap in understanding of what their needs are, what skills they possess and consequently what roles they can contribute in. To overcome this barrier, we are aiming to create more opportunities for interaction between visually impaired individuals and the sighted workforce, and thus both can benefit from a better understanding of each other's journeys and experiences.

Through the EMET employability module, we continue to take our students on company visits to get exposure to different types of industries. These visits also help us to create more situations for fostering awareness among private sector companies. This year we conducted a Diversity and Inclusion one day event in Hyderabad where private sector HR staff were invited to interact with visually impaired employed individuals and students.

The event generated a lot of interest amongst potential employees and was very successful in creating awareness. Such events are important to encourage open discussion and overcome doubts within the private sector on the potential of visually impaired individuals to have successful careers in today's economy. We hope to conduct more such events in different cities. On the upskilling front, we have conducted several short-term training courses for visually impaired graduates with specific industry requirements and skills in mind. As a result, some students have gained employment in BPOs and the finance sector.

Another trend we have observed among our beneficiaries is that large numbers of visually impaired students choose to pursue arts related fields (such as history, language or political science) for their undergraduate and postgraduate education. Visually impaired students are rarely taught, or encouraged to study science and mathematics in schools, as teachers who can understand their needs better, or teach them using tactile materials and other relevant tools, are in short supply. This feeds into their eventual decision to not pursue STEM, Commerce or other similar fields in their collegiate education, thereby putting them at a disadvantage when competing for jobs in today's economy upon graduation. Although we are working towards addressing the root causes in this area through our Early Intervention Program, we are also providing from this year additional financial support, above our regular scholarship amount, to students pursuing education in Professional Courses that have a higher chance of leading them to employment or help them secure jobs in high paying industries.

For example, we are looking at providing additional support for students studying MBAs, law degrees, and even engineering subjects in prestigious educational institutions. This year, IIT Bangalore has enrolled 6 disabled students in their post graduate Digital Product Design and Management Course. Five of these students are visually impaired and HTBF is covering the tuition fees and half the hostel fees for three of these students. We hope this kind of support will lead to more students being able to break through these barriers, secure employment in the world of Technology and produce role models for future generations of Visually Impaired students to follow. Our Early Intervention Program, where we have started teaching school children from 9th to 12th standard basic Computer Skills and English to give them a head start when they enter college, has been running successfully in two government schools in Tamil Nadu. This year we have added a third school, also in Tamil Nadu. Apart from improving their skills from an earlier age, we hope to encourage these students to pursue college education, and guide them to join the colleges where we currently run our EMET program, or to colleges where they can get better infrastructure and support from the administration towards their education. Along with Computer and English skills we are also looking longer term, at other possible ways of improving science and mathematics teaching at the school level.

We are also in the process of getting our EMET program accredited by tertiary institutions so that students who graduate from our program can obtain a recognized diploma which should further help them in securing employment. Getting qualified teachers and trainers with specific skills in teaching visually impaired students continues to be a challenge and we are exploring ways to bridge this gap.

This year we have been very fortunate to bring together experts from various fields to form an Advisory Board to guide our work. The advisory board members are as follows :



Mr Sarabjit Ghose



Mr. Mu Ramanathan



**Mr Muthuswamy
Balachandran**



**Ms Rajashree
Natarajan**

The Board of Trustees are very grateful to them for providing their views, guidance and direction on our various programs. Lastly, we are making concerted strides towards bringing in funding from regions other than where our donor base is already well established, such as the USA and the Middle East, where we are in the process of cultivating active networks of volunteers and wellwishers. We firmly believe that diversification of our funding mix will help make our organization financially more secure and resilient, and help us execute our multi-year projects with much more ease.

I feel confident that with the support of our donors, well wishers, volunteers, employees and trustees we will continue to do our part in improving the lives of Visually Impaired students across the country.

OUR HISTORY

Special thanks to Mr. J.V. Ramani for his contributions to the content of this section.

2005



Mr. D.K. Patel and Mrs. Niti Patel,
Founders, HTBF Hong Kong

HTBF founded in Hong Kong in 2005 by Mr. D.K. Patel, a retired senior economist, with active support from his wife, Mrs. Niti Patel, and other prominent Hong Kong residents. Mrs. Patel continues to lead, guide and inspire the HTBF team with unwavering zeal even today.



St Louis School for Deaf and the Blind (Adyar, 2008), IAB School (Madurai, 2012) and Amalarakkini Special School for the Blind (Thiruvannamalai, 2014)

Initial focus was helping blind children in schools in India by building/improving the capacity and infrastructure of existing schools for the visually impaired.



Mr. Sudhakar, Teacher at St. Louis Institute for Deaf & the Blind

Focus shifted towards starting to provide informal financial assistance for students to gain admission into reputed colleges, with the assistance of Mr. Sudhakar, a teacher in St. Louis School for the Blind, Adyar, Chennai.

2010

HTBF, India was formally established in Chennai in 2010, with Mr. V.C. Ganesan as it's first Managing Trustee. He was assisted by Mr. S.M.A. Jinnah, the Founder of Indian Association for the Blind (IAB), Madurai, and Mr. Senthil Annamalai.



Mr. V.C. Ganesan, First Managing Trustee, HTBF India



Mr. S.M.A. Jinnah, Founding Trustee



Mr. Senthil Arunachalam, Founding Trustee

Mr. Seetharaman and Mr. J.V. Ramani, former volunteers with HTBF India, were inducted as Trustees in 2012. Mr. Narasimhan, Mr. N. Sivaji Rao and Ms. Mallika Ravi, Chartered Accountant who earlier joined as volunteers became trustees in 2017.



Mr. Seetharaman, C.A., Volunteer, Inducted as Trustee in 2012



Mr. J.V. Ramani, Ex Banker, Volunteer, Inducted as Trustee in 2012



Mr. N. Sivaji Rao, Ex Banker, Volunteer, Inducted as Trustee in 2017

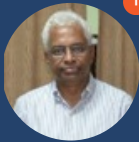


Ms. Mallika Ravi, C.A., Volunteer, Inducted as Trustee in 2017



Mr. S. Narasimhan, Ex Banker, Volunteer, Inducted as Trustee in 2017

2020



Mr. Nataraj Sankaran, Ex M.D. of Ralph Lauren India, was inducted as a Trustee in 2018. He initiated and expanded the activities of HTBF successfully in several areas like Education Mobility Employment Training (EMET) for job placements, the Early Intervention Program (EIP) in government - run schools for blind, and the distribution of Smart Vision Glasses (SVGs).



Mr. N. Sivaji Rao took over as Managing Trustee in 2020. He capably oversaw the expansion of HTBF's programs into several new areas beyond scholarships. Thanks to his stewardship, HTBF has now firmly established its unique presence in providing University Education and Employability Training for visually impaired students across India.

2024



Ms. Deepa Krishnamoorthy, Chemical Engineer and Certified English Teacher, Trustee since 2019 took over as Managing Trustee in June, 2024.



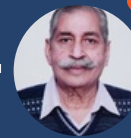
Mr. D.K. Sharma, Ex Banker, Inducted as Trustee in 2018



Mr. R. Sunder Kumar, Trade Specialist, Inducted as Trustee in 2022.

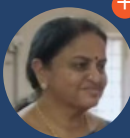


Mr. Kothandaraman, Ex Banker, Trustee since 2022, stepped down in 2023



Mr. Ramesh Puri, Ex Banker, Inducted as Trustee in 2023

SPECIAL THANKS TO



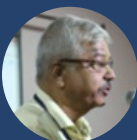
Ms. D. Vijayalakshmi, Ex Banker, Inducted as Trustee in 2023



Mr. J. Radhakrishnan, Ex Banker, Inducted as Trustee in 2024



Ms. K.M. Kanthi, Ex Prof. QMC, Chennai, Inducted as Trustee in 2019, stepped down in 2024



Mr. Bharadwaj (Volunteer, Delhi), spearheaded the organization's expansion in North India

Mr. Abdul (son of our Ex Trustee Mr. S.M.A. Jinnah), IAB, Madurai

Mr. J.L. Kaul, Secretary General of All India Confederation of the Blind

Mr. Sundermurthy (Volunteer, Tamil Nadu) for his tireless contributions in South India

Dr. Jerald Inico J, Head of the Computer Science Department at Loyola College, Chennai

Br. John Xavier, Former Headmaster of St. Louis Institute for Deaf and Blind, Chennai

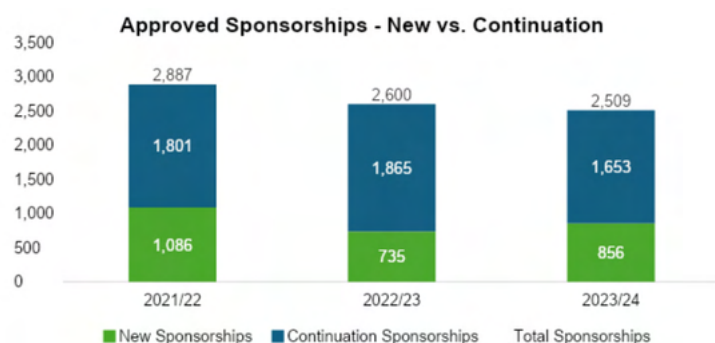
 >> Currently active on the Board of Trustees

Ms. Pooja, Program Coordinator, EMET, undergoing low-vision assessment

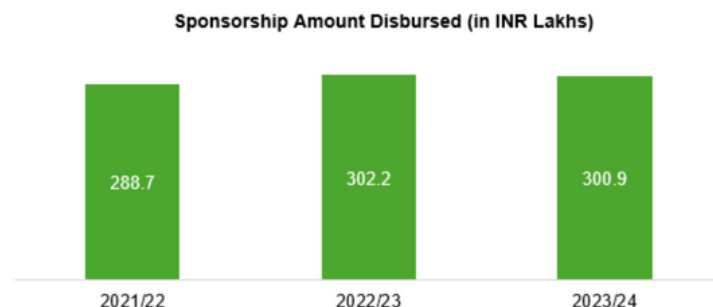
Our Current Programs

SCHOLARSHIPS

In 2010, HTBF started with the core mission of enabling access to collegiate education for underprivileged visually impaired students. Through systematic partnerships with education institutions and cultivation of a dedicated volunteer network, the foundation to date has financially supported over 6,000 students across 15 states in India, towards completing undergraduate as well as postgraduate education in fields of their choosing.



Note : The higher number of scholarships in financial year 2021/22 is attributable to expanded financial support offered to visually impaired students by relaxing the sponsorship evaluation criteria during the CoVID-19 pandemic.



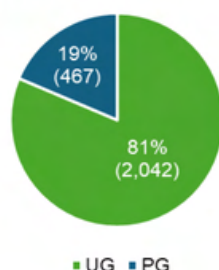
Note : Sponsorship amount in each year is a sum-total of funds disbursed to beneficiaries and fees directly disbursed to their academic institutions by HTBF India, HTBF Hong Kong and Cognizant Foundation.

The key challenge that HTBF sought to address through its Scholarship Program were two pronged : low rates of collegiate enrolment among visually impaired students in the 18+ age bracket, as well as high dropout rates among them. Financial instability was often the major hurdle that these students faced, rendering them unable to cover their tuition and/or hostel expenses without putting their family's quality of life in jeopardy. HTBF stepped in to aid these students in successfully completing their degrees, thus taking an important next step towards financial freedom and transforming the economic realities of their loved ones.

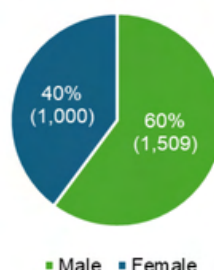
KEY HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE YEAR 2023/24

- We vetted and approved scholarships for 2,509 students across 14 states in the academic year gone by. We are proud to state that this academic year marks the 4th iteration of our push towards 100% digital operation of our scholarships process – this includes accepting and evaluating sponsorship applications from candidates and online payments made to beneficiaries.

By Degree Type – 2023/24
Total Approved Applications = 2,509



By Gender – 2023/24
Total Approved Applications = 2,509



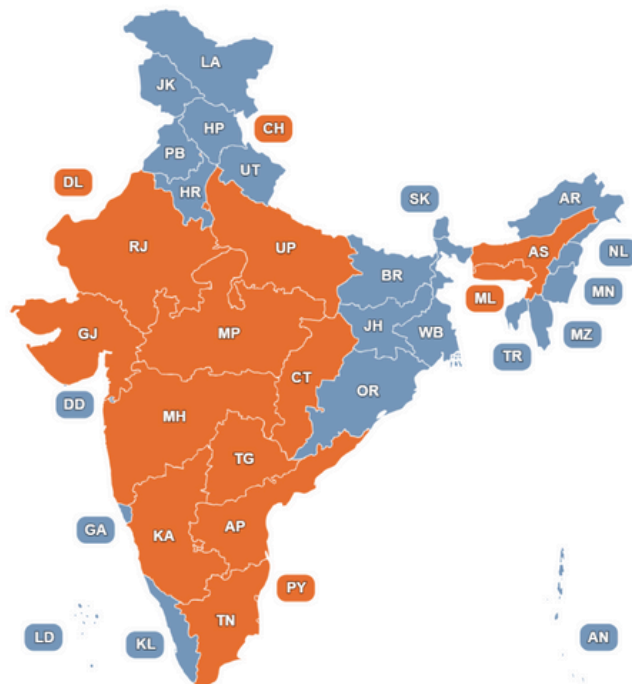
- A total of INR 3.01 Crores was disbursed to beneficiaries in the form of scholarships. Of the 2,509 scholarships administered, 856 were awarded to first time recipients and 1,653 were disbursed to beneficiaries who had previously received financial support.
- 81% of the 2,509 scholarships were awarded to students pursuing undergraduate degrees. 40% of the recipients were women.

State-wise Reach	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	Cities	Colleges
Delhi	743	639	543	1	39
Tamil Nadu	454	444	446	14	59
Maharashtra	468	444	405	9	36
Karnataka	309	341	317	9	41
Gujarat	309	234	203	5	23
Telangana	152	147	181	1	7
Uttar Pradesh	124	100	134	3	3
Madhya Pradesh	145	112	94	1	4
Rajasthan	35	19	57	1	2
Chandigarh	38	42	52	1	4
Andhra Pradesh	75	45	41	5	7
Assam	7	12	13	1	1
Meghalaya	10	13	12	1	1
Pondicherry	17	8	11	1	1
Chhattisgarh	1	-	-	-	-
Total	2,887	2,600	2,509	53	228



Note : Students at Devnar College, Hyderabad

“HTBF has touched the lives of thousands of visually impaired students across 15 states and union territories in India.”



EDUCATION, MOBILITY AND EMPLOYABILITY TRAINING PROGRAM (EMET)

Through the first 10 years of administering scholarships to students, some important trends emerged, which helped the foundation evolve its understanding of the landscape and the scale of the challenge that we were confronted with. In spite of the increase in STEM institutions across India, visually impaired students gravitated in larger numbers towards non-STEM fields, and a large percentage of them were unable to leverage their degrees towards securing meaningful employment upon graduation.



Note : Mr. Nataraj Sankaran at MoU signing with the administrators of DSMRU, Lucknow



Note : Industry visit for students held in Delhi

With “digital-first” becoming the norm in several industries, visually impaired students in general were finding it difficult to compete shoulder to shoulder with their sighted peers in the job market, as there were few accessibility forward avenues for them to boost their employability. To address this gap, the foundation in 2020 launched the Education, Mobility and Employability Training Program (EMET). EMET aims to equip students with foundational mobility, digital and interpersonal skills, that enable them to integrate better into the modern workforce and at the same time, improve their overall quality of life. To date, EMET has trained over a 1,000 students across 10 major cities in India, and has been instrumental in helping several students secure well paying and stable employment in large multinational enterprises.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE YEAR 2023/24

- A successful rollout of the EMET program to beneficiaries in Lucknow brought the tally to 10 cities across the country.
- Owing to the impact of CoVID-19, the program continues to operate in a hybrid mode. However, in AY 2023/24, the delivery was shifted more towards offline (60%) vs online (40%) sessions, which led to greater attendance and noticeable improvements in candidate involvement and performance.

EMET Students - by State	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	Colleges
Tamil Nadu	108	150	148	15
Delhi	118	148	169	11
Gujarat	67	95	100	3
Karnataka	71	81	49	3
Maharashtra	-	24	55	1
Madhya Pradesh	56	53	64	2
Uttar Pradesh	41	20	-	1
Total	461	571	585	36
EMET as a % of UG2/3 Students	32%	41%	46%	-
EMET as a % of Total Students	16%	22%	23%	-

- In November 2023, Deloitte India partnered with us in Chennai and New Delhi, allowing for a one-of-a-kind networking opportunity between our beneficiaries and several successful industry professionals.
- Similarly, we opened several avenues for our beneficiaries to gain a variety of industry exposure, such as career awareness workshops and a variety of job-specific training bootcamps.

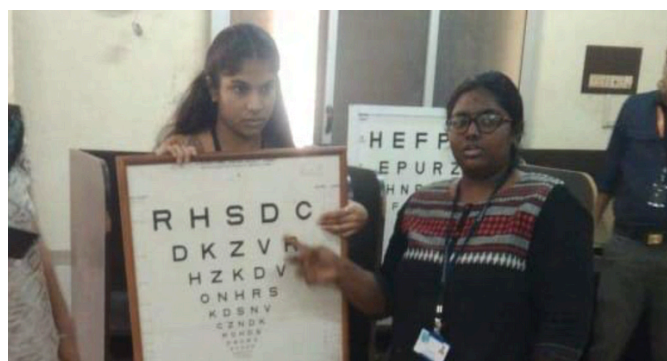
LOW VISION ASSESSMENT

In conjunction with several reputable eye health clinics and hospitals, we successfully launched pilot vision assessment checkups for low-vision beneficiaries in 4 cities. Through these screenings, we aim to equip low-vision beneficiaries with the most appropriate doctor recommended assistive devices suitable for them. Screenings have been completed for EMET students in Ahmedabad, Chennai, Bangalore and Coimbatore.

Additionally, our technology partner SHG Technologies Pvt. Ltd. is in the process of developing an assistive device that aims to address the needs of individuals on the low-vision spectrum. Being their long-standing partner, we are collaborating closely with SHG in the development of this product. A select group of our trainers and beneficiaries who are confronted with low-vision are currently piloting these devices, and we are relaying their feedback to SHG to help them improve its design and functionality, as they move towards a broader rollout in 2025.



Note : Low-vision assessment of EMET students in Ahmedabad, Gujarat.



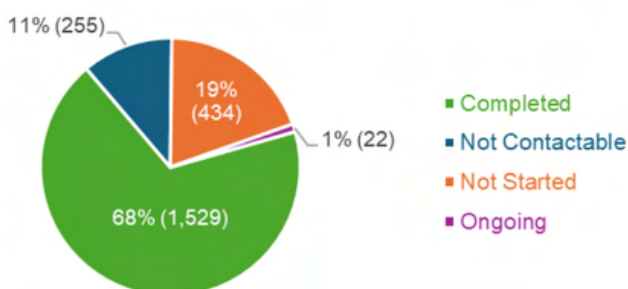
Note : Low-vision assessment of EMET students in Ahmedabad, Gujarat.

ALUMNI SURVEY

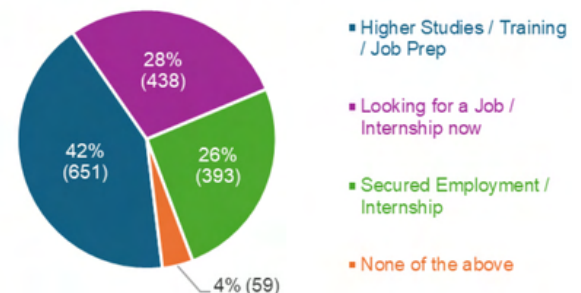
In 2021, with the help of a few EMET interns we collected data on graduating beneficiaries, with a view towards matching their skills with employment opportunities that would be suitable for them and that were in line with their aspirations.

Although the initiative was run for a short time only, it helped us better understand the needs of students after graduation, while simultaneously establishing an open line of communication between them and the students. The learnings from this initiative gave us a better understanding of what our students were doing after their graduation and also helped instill confidence in the students that HTBF would be there to help them even after they graduated from their courses.

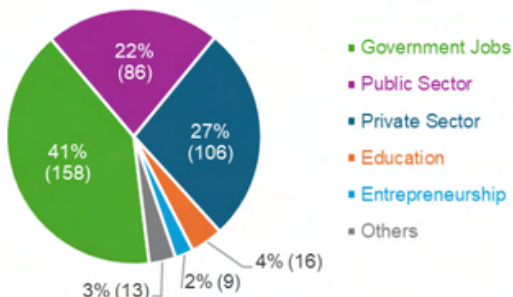
Survey Completion Status - Across All Batches Surveyed
Total Graduating Students = 2,240



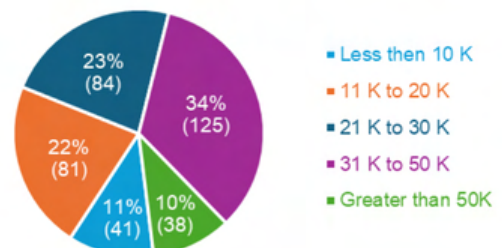
Employment Status - All Batches Surveyed
From Completed and Ongoing Surveys



Employment Sector - All Batches Surveyed
From Completed and Ongoing Surveys



Salary Ranges (in INR) - All Batches Surveyed
From Completed and Ongoing Surveys



What this first push helped us achieve was a better understanding of the needs of students post graduation, getting a better grip on what our programs were able to reach and where there were areas for improvement.

The philosophy of the above initiative was actually carried forward with an aim to collect updated and robust data on each student and utilize this data to both find out the impact created by our programs and provide targeted support to students as needed. The intention was also to make this initiative recurring, the data easy to capture, store and reference in the future.

Thus, the survey was integrated into our scholarships portal to leverage the data we had already collected on students, giving us the platform to make the conversations more fruitful and warehouse all the data on students in a centralized repository.

A total of 2,240 students who graduated in 2021, 2022 and 2023 were contacted by our pan-India volunteer network. The response from students has been very positive. Out of the total, 68% (1,529) students have successfully been surveyed, and only 11% have not been contactable.

*Note : Rudolph Godson, our beneficiary,
who is a musician.*

Student's Success Stories



SANGEETHA GV



Sangeetha achieved her educational and professional milestones, being the first graduate from family, she earned a BA in Sociology from QMC and an MBA in Human Resource Management from Madras University. Her journey was supported by Help the Blind Foundation (HTBF), which provided her with a scholarship and a laptop

Sangeetha was also part of the inaugural batch of HTBF's Education, Mobility, and Employability Training (EMET) Program in Chennai. Currently, Sangeetha works at Atypical Advantage as a Community Partnerships and Hiring Lead. This position represents a notable achievement in her career, especially considering her background and visual challenges.

Yashas was a student from 2021-23 EMET Batch in Bangalore. Initially struggling with stage fright, he developed into a confident speaker capable of handling various situations. The training enhanced his English proficiency and taught him to express himself effectively, particularly in interview settings. Yashas gained valuable computer skills, mastering Excel formulas and PowerPoint, while also learning to create accessible documents using the NVDA screen reader. The employability component of the program equipped him with interview techniques, stress management, and anger control skills.

This comprehensive two-year program not only honed his abilities but also led to his employment as a Promoter at RIMS Manpower Solutions (India) PVT LTD. Yashas expresses deep gratitude to his trainers for their guidance throughout this life-changing experience.



YASHAS B.L



BULLE MAHESHBABU



From Anantapur, Andhra Pradesh, he joined the EMET program in Bengaluru in 2022. Over two years, he developed crucial skills in English, mobility, computer literacy, and employability, overcoming challenges with support from the HTBF team. The program significantly improved his English communication and computer skills, essential for his career advancement. Maheshbabu emphasized how EMET's focus on independence profoundly impacted him, especially in enhancing his environmental navigation skills and overall autonomy.

His dedication culminated in securing a position at Amazon as a Manual Tester for the Alexa Device Support Team in 2024, showcasing the program's effectiveness in preparing him for a successful career despite his visual impairment.

"I credit my success to the unwavering support of the HTBF team, who provided the EMET course free of cost. I am especially grateful to Valarmathy Madam, my English teacher, for her motivation and educational guidance, and Ambadevi Madam, my computer teacher, for her friendly and effective teaching methods."

~ Mahesh Bullebabu

Born and raised in Chennai, Godson's passion for music blossomed early, and his talent in piano led him to receiving certification from Trinity College of London. During his time at MCC, he achieved the unique distinction of becoming the first visually challenged Music Director and Producer in Tamil cinema.

Through HTBF, Godson was fortunate to receive scholarships, which were more than just financial aid; they allowed him to focus on his studies and personal development. His musical accomplishments include winning "Best Musician" and the Championship of College Auditions in 2019. HTBF has additionally supported him by helping him procure musical instruments that will be beneficial to his career.

He has also served as MCC's cultural convenor, the first visually challenged person in the college's history to hold the position.

His experience extends to teaching music and working in film industry, where he has inspired young students by leading choirs, arranging concerts, and organizing musical events. He has composed music for several Tamil films, including theme songs for political rallies.



RUDOPHL GODSON



*Check out his
Instagram Page*



*Listen to his
Music !*



GEETA MAHTO



Geeta participated in the 2019 National Cricket Tournament for the Blind, and her interest in other sports grew steadily. With dedication and hard work, victories began to follow. After completing her intermediate studies, she excelled in the merit list of Delhi University and secured admission to Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar College for her graduation, aspiring to build a career in the government sector.

Today, Geeta leads the Jharkhand state team and, through her impressive performances in national games, achieved her dream when she was selected to represent India in the India-Nepal bilateral series held in Mumbai in December 2023. As the first woman from Jharkhand to join the Indian team, Geeta has become a role model for her peers and made her mark in the state's sports history.

Karthika has achieved remarkable success in her B.A. Tamizh examinations, outperforming even her sighted classmates. Her academic prowess extends beyond her major, as she surprised observers with her fluency in English.

She shared her talents and delivered an inspiring message to other visually impaired students: "You can do it". Ms. Karthika's success challenges societal perceptions and serves as a testament to what can be achieved with proper support and determination. Her story is not just one of personal triumph but also an inspiration for greater inclusivity in education.

Looking ahead, Ms. Karthika is now preparing for her civil services entrance examination. We extend our best wishes to her as she pursues this ambitious goal, continuing to pave the way for visually impaired individuals in academia and public service.



KARTHIKA R.



*Note : HTBF Annual Meet held at the
School of Ancient Wisdom, Bangalore in
Feb, 2024*

Our Volunteers, Our Backbone

TECHNOLOGY AS AN ENABLER OF SOCIAL CHANGE

BY MR. HARISH KOTA

Six years ago, when I joined the Help the Blind Foundation (HTBF), I never imagined how transformative this experience would be. Working with HTBF has opened my eyes to the powerful role technology can play in creating accessibility and empowering individuals, especially the visually impaired.

My journey with HTBF began in 2018 after I left my corporate job. Mr. Ramani, a family friend and HTBF trustee, asked for my help with their website. However, upon visiting the office, I saw a much larger need—sponsorships and other processes were being managed manually in Excel, creating inefficiencies. I realized that I could help streamline these processes, so I dove in without knowing how significant my contributions would become.

At the time, HTBF's website was managed by another company as a CSR initiative, and it required developer intervention for even minor updates. I saw potential to improve the website, but I also identified a more pressing issue: the manual process of managing sponsorships. I suggested using Google Forms to automate this process, which quickly proved transformative. This was the start of HTBF's digital journey, making a major impact by reducing errors and simplifying management tasks.



Note : Mr. Harish Kota, our volunteer, with his family



Note : Mr. Harish Kota, our volunteer, with his wife

One of the most important lessons I've learned at HTBF is that "technology is an enabler, not a solution." Implementing the Google Form system highlighted that even simple solutions could bring big benefits when applied thoughtfully. It taught me to communicate technical concepts clearly, especially since what I assumed to be common knowledge wasn't always the case for everyone. This skill has since improved my professional interactions, making me more mindful about breaking down ideas in a way others can understand. Before HTBF, I had limited exposure to digital accessibility. Working with visually impaired (VI) students made me realize how crucial it is for technology to be inclusive.

I began learning about accessible web design, screen readers, and W3C standards, gaining a new appreciation for the real-life impact of these tools. When Mr. Sivaji Rao, another trustee, asked if our website was accessible, I researched government mandates for accessibility and adapted HTBF's digital tools accordingly. This journey was humbling, and it gave me a profound understanding of the role thoughtful design plays in empowerment.

The independence and confidence of HTBF's VI students continue to inspire me. I've seen students adeptly use Google Pay for transactions and book rides on their smartphones. Yet, many people, even in the tech industry, underestimate what visually impaired individuals can achieve with the right tools. Through my work, I hope to help bridge this awareness gap. Looking to the future, I'm excited about expanding HTBF's Education Mobility Employment Training (EMET) program. If we can introduce assistive technologies at the school level, VI students can gain independence early, unlocking new opportunities. Technology has already transformed many lives at HTBF, and with more resources, I believe we can amplify this impact.

EMPOWERING DREAMS BEYOND VISUAL CHALLENGES

BY MR. NAGENDRA BHARDWAJ

After retiring in 2013 from over 36 years with the Bank of India, I knew retirement would be a new beginning, not an end. I wanted to continue contributing to society meaningfully. When I was introduced to the Help the Blind Foundation (HTBF) by Mr. D.K. Sharma and Mr. Ramani, I felt an instant connection with their mission to support visually impaired students. Their passion inspired me, and I felt a calling to get involved. Over the past seven years as a volunteer with HTBF, I've found immense fulfillment and purpose.

Throughout my life, I've been fortunate to receive support and opportunities for growth. Volunteering with HTBF has allowed me to give back by helping create a world where everyone, regardless of their challenges, has a chance to succeed. HTBF's mission resonates with my belief that success lies in uplifting and empowering others.

One of HTBF's core goals is to help visually impaired students gain self-sufficiency and confidence. In India, there are around 4.95 million blind individuals and over 70 million with visual impairments—an incredible potential often overlooked. Working with colleges, HTBF equips these students with essential skills, from computer literacy to workplace readiness. We also partner with corporations to secure employment opportunities, enabling them to contribute to society as skilled, capable individuals.



Note : Mr. Nagendra Bharadwaj with Mr. Ramesh Puri at the Annual Meet in Bangalore, Feb 2024



Note : Mr. Nagendra Bharadwaj with his family.

A memorable experience was visiting Miranda House College in Delhi, where I met a young Muslim woman from Bihar who had been disowned by her family for pursuing higher education. With nowhere to go, she found support at Miranda House and was able to continue her studies. Stories like hers remind me of the importance of HTBF's work—everyone deserves a chance to realize their potential, regardless of the obstacles.

A common misconception is that visually impaired individuals are merely recipients of support. In reality, they possess the same potential as anyone else to contribute meaningfully to society. Through HTBF's programs, we aim not only to provide assistance but also to advocate for their inclusion, helping them build confidence and independence. Together, we're creating a supportive environment where they can thrive and be seen as valued community members. Volunteering with HTBF has been a journey of growth, skill-building, and collaboration. I encourage anyone with time to consider volunteering with HTBF or a similar organization. Your efforts can make a meaningful difference and help align with broader government and corporate policies for an inclusive society.

Currently, I'm also serving as Chairman of the Board of Management at The Kangra Co-op. Bank Limited in Delhi. Volunteering with HTBF has shown me the power of positive impact, teaching me that true vision comes from an open heart and a compassionate mind. Inspired by the resilience of those we serve, I look forward to continuing this journey to build a brighter, more inclusive future.

Note : HTBF Annual Meet held at the School of Ancient Wisdom, Bangalore in Feb, 2022

Promoting Accessibility & Inclusion

Over the years, we have made efforts to level the playing field for visually impaired individuals to be able to compete shoulder to shoulder with their sighted peers. Subscribing to the age old saying **‘Change begins with you’**, we have in our limited capacity strived to make HTBF an inclusive and accessible workplace, while simultaneously sensitizing the corporate ecosystem, our donors and partners on the potential of visually impaired individuals to excel in various spheres in life. At its core, we want accessibility and inclusivity to be at the heart of every decision we make, and we are striving to stay true to this overarching philosophy.

While we have made a strong beginning in this direction, we humbly recognize that there is still a lot of work to be done, and we aim to systematically work towards incorporating these in every aspect of our operations and decision making going forward. Enumerating some of the key areas where we have concerted aimed to make a difference :

IN OUR WORKPLACE

While we continue to push for equal opportunities for the visually impaired in the modern economy, we do realize that to drive meaningful change, we have to embody its importance and lead by example. We have strived consistently to allow greater representation of visually impaired individuals among our own staff, as we do find that from setting policies to their implementation and from designing curriculum to training, we understand the needs of our beneficiaries much better and are able to take appropriate actions towards their betterment. ~50% of our staff is visually impaired (both low vision and 100% impairment).

Their success in performing well and integrating with the rest of the organization is a testament to why employing visually impaired individuals not only promotes more inclusivity, but also unlocks tremendous value for organizations. Additionally, our office has been designed with accessibility in mind, and we utilize hardware and software internally that is compatible with the needs of our visually impaired staff, and can easily be interacted with by our beneficiaries too.



Note : Short Term Training conducted at Bangalore in association with Winvinaya Foundation



Note : EMET Program Mobility training in the rain

IN OUR DIGITAL MEDIA AND PUBLICATIONS

Be it on social media, content that we add to our website or is disseminated to our key stakeholders, we are striving to make sure that each piece of content that we send across can be easily consumed by visually impaired individuals. Our aim is to create content about developments and experiences that benefit the visually impaired, and present it in a manner that they can interact with and enjoy the content just as much as their sighted peers would. Some examples of how we are moving towards making our content accessible :



Note : SVG distribution in Government Arts College, Chennai



Note : Khushboo Bariya - Vadodara Region - EMET 2023 - 2025 Batch - Receiving SVG from College Professor

- **Website** : usage of colour schemes that are low-vision friendly, providing screen magnification and assistive controls, developing a mobile friendly version of the website, simplistic user interface.
- **Social Media** : Embedding alt-text in all our social media posts, be it on Instagram, LinkedIn or Facebook, using appropriate tags to make the content easily discoverable.
- **Publications** : we carry forward the same underlying design principles in the production of publications that we circulate among stakeholders periodically (such as our annual reports, newsletter, updates on specific initiatives etc.). We are moving towards the integration of audio into our publications to make consumption more convenient for visually impaired audiences.

AMONG OUR CORPORATE PARTNERS

We have been rolling out initiatives that aim to serve as a platform for our beneficiaries to connect with their sighted peers and seniors who are employed by our partner corporates. We have highlighted some key examples below :

- **Industry Visits** : Such exposure has not only been beneficial for our beneficiaries, but has also helped the corporate executives develop sensitivity towards the needs of the visually impaired, while simultaneously experiencing first hand their skills and potential.



Note: Laptop distribution at Devnar College, Hyderabad supported by Saint Gobain



Note: Laptop Distribution in Ahmedabad, Gujarat for EMET 2023-25 Batch

- **Accessibility testing** : Additionally, we have engaged constructively with partner organizations on several occasions towards helping them gain more perspective on how they can make their products and services relevant and useful for visually impaired audiences. Our trainers and students have regularly worked with our corporate partners by testing their products and providing them feedback on what improvements they can make to their products.
- **Accessible workplaces** : In select cases, we have even helped in transforming our partners' office environments into more VI-friendly workspaces, to make the navigation and movement of visually impaired individuals easier and encourage their independence in corporate setups.

IN LEARNING AND EDUCATION

From an early stage, we understood and began harnessing the power of technology to create better outcomes in education for visually impaired students. From hardware such as laptops and smart vision glasses to software such as screen readers, we have consistently aimed to equip students with technology that will help them not only perform better in their academics, but also improve their overall quality of life.

One of our key focus areas over the past few years has been to address and improve the infrastructure needs of our partner colleges and organizations. We have directed funding towards equipping colleges with tech-forward resource centers and trainers, so that any gap in their learning potential can be bridged appropriately.

Note : Ms. Ambika Seetharaman, EMET
Program Coordinator, presenting at the
Annual Meet in Bangalore, Feb 2024

ATTENDANCE PERCENTAGE - 2023 - 2025 BATCH



Financial Overview FY 2023-24

SUMMARY ASSETS

Financial Year	FY 2023/24	FY 2022/23	YoY Change (%)
As on Date	31/03/2024	31/03/2023	
Assets	In INR	In INR	%
Fixed Assets	-	-	-
Investments	59,000,000	60,500,000	(2%)
Loans and Advances	355,163	338,830	5%
Current Assets	792,931	616,739	29%
Accounts Receivable	904,190	510,469	77%
Cash and Cash Equivalents	10,657,877	11,799,166	(10%)
Total Assets	71,710,161	73,765,203	(3%)

SUMMARY LIABILITIES

Financial Year	FY 2023/24	FY 2022/23	YoY Change (%)
As on Date	31/03/2024	31/03/2023	
Assets	In INR	In INR	%
Corpus Fund	10,000	10,000	0%
General Fund	29,052,243	27,450,384	6%
Endowment Fund	42,000,000	42,000,000	0%
Ear Marked Fund	-	4,070,957	(100%)
Current Liabilities	647,918	233,862	177%
Total Liabilities	71,710,161	73,765,203	(3%)

CONDENSED STATEMENT OF INCOME

Financial Year	FY 2023/24	FY 2022/23	YoY Change (%)
As on Date	31/03/2024	31/03/2023	
Income	In INR	In INR	%
Direct Income			
Donations (FCRA)	12,542,982	19,533,921	(36%)
Donations (Non FCRA)	49,383,825	53,967,805	(8%)
Indirect Income			
Indirect Income (FCRA)	3,155,393	2,327,650	36%
Indirect Income (Non FCRA)	608,205	268,216	127%
Total Income	65,690,405	76,097,592	(14%)



Note : Mr J V Ramani attending college function in Nagpur.



Note: HTBF beneficiaries presenting in IIT BHU, Varanasi.

CONDENSED EXPENDITURES

Financial Year	FY 2023/24	FY 2022/23	YoY Change (%)
As on Date	31/03/2024	31/03/2023	
Expenditure	In INR	In INR	%
Direct Expenditure			
Scholarships	23,689,475	27,609,488	(14%)
Special Recognition Sponsorship	847,660	50,000	1595%
EMET Program	29,987,080	36,987,799	(19%)
Assistive Devices	3,665,890	-	-
Infrastructure	836,768	-	-
Total Direct Expenditure	59,026,873	64,647,287	(9%)
Indirect Expenditure			
General & Administration	2,484,129	1,992,837	25%
Awareness Programs	389,475	4,000	9637%
Depreciation Expense	-	552,815	(100%)
Salaries and Professional Services/Consultants	2,188,069	2,151,494	2%
Total Indirect Expenditure	5,061,673	4,701,146	8%
Total Expenditure	64,088,546	69,348,433	(8%)
Excess of Income over Expenditure	1,601,859	6,749,159	(76%)

CONDENSED CASHFLOWS STATEMENT

Financial Year	FY 2023/24	FY 2022/23	YoY Change (%)
As on Date	31/03/2024	31/03/2023	
Cash Balance	In INR	In INR	%
Opening Cash in Hand	1,255	7,822	(84%)
Opening Cash in Bank	11,797,911	8,050,499	47%
Total Opening Cash Balance	11,799,166	8,058,321	46%
Cashflows from Operations	(67,587,800)	(68,863,351)	(2%)
Cashflows from Financial Investments	5,019,705	(897,530)	(659%)
Cashflows from Financing/Liquidity Providers	61,426,807	73,501,726	(16%)
Total Closing Cash Balance	10,657,877	11,799,166	(10%)
Closing Cash in Hand	9,600	1,255	665%
Closing Cash in Bank	10,648,277	11,797,911	(10%)
Rounding (if any)	-	0	(100%)

Our organization continues to remain on stable financial footing, thanks to the unwavering support of our donor base both within and outside India. Our emphasis over the past 2 years has been to engineer a balance sheet that is resistant to risks, shocks and fluctuations and can support our programs with a runway of at least 1-2 financial years. We plan to continue proactively improving our financial strength, which will also give us much needed confidence to execute strategically on multi-year projects and investments. As in the past, we continue to ensure that over 90% of proceeds from donations are channeled towards programs and initiatives that directly benefit students.

Please see below links to our audited financial statements, duly supplemented with notes and the auditor's view on our financial position :

- Consolidated Financial Statements for FY 2023/24 ^①
- FCRA Financials for FY 2023/24 ^①
- Notes to Accounts for FY 2023/24 ^①
- Auditor's Report for FY 2023/24 ^①

Note: Ms. Gayathri, our EMET trainer at Annual meet 2024 in Bangalore.

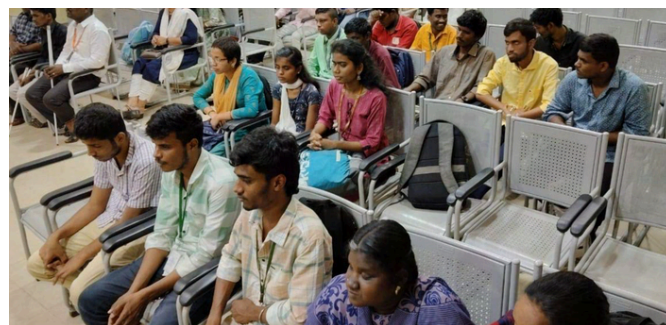
Upcoming Year's Objectives

SCHOLARSHIPS

- Commence efforts towards introducing a layer of additional support and mentorship for students interested in pursuing professional courses.
- Roll out special incentives for high academic performers.



Note : Laptop distribution at Raja Serfoji Government College, Thanjavur



Note : Laptop distribution at Raja Serfoji Government College, Thanjavur

- Simplify the application and approval process for continuation sponsorship students so that the overall sponsorship processing proceeds more efficiently.
- Develop a new in-house application to enable all key stakeholders in the sponsorship process to seamlessly play their part.

EDUCATION, MOBILITY AND EMPLOYABILITY TRAINING PROGRAM



Note: Mumbai volunteer, Prakash Kadrekar at SVG Distribution, Mumbai



Note : Laptop distribution at Raja Serfoji Government College, Thanjavur

- Focus for the coming 2 academic years is to stabilize, strengthen and improve the performance of existing projects.
- Work in conjunction with the placements team towards getting more of our beneficiaries placed in Government, Public Sector and Private Sector jobs.
- Continue working towards a higher % of employment in the academic year 2025-26, through intensive corporate outreach, awareness programs and beneficiary training.

ASSISTIVE DEVICES

- While, being in the process of introducing robust controls around asset tracking and usage monitoring for all devices granted to beneficiaries.



Note : Laptop and SVG distribution in Surat, Gujarat.



Note : Laptop and SVG distribution in Surat, Gujarat.

- Aim to roll similar regular vision assessment checkups out to our beneficiaries pan-India, thus enabling us to improve our understanding of their issues and better serve them. Based on the recommendations by doctors from the checkup, we are matching them with the right assistive devices, such as appropriate glasses and reading magnifiers.
- We are in talks with several technology players specializing in assistive devices to collaborate with us as partners (alongside SHG Technologies). We aim to leverage their groundbreaking technological innovations and diversify the options available to our beneficiaries, thus making sure that the full spectrum of needs from low-vision to 100% visually can avail the best tech-enabled solutions to supplement their abilities and improve their quality of life.
- Encourage more students to use their laptops to submit academic assignments and write exams.

PLACEMENTS AND ALUMNI SURVEY



Note (Clockwise, L to R): Industry visit to AirBnB for students in Delhi; Industry visit for students at Cognizant Technologies, Chennai with Mr. John Wheeler; Industry visit to Coca Cola manufacturing unit in Lucknow

- Support our alumni who have indicated via the alumni survey that they would like help in preparing for competitive exams (specifically for central/state government posts and public sector banking). We have begun enabling access to competitive coaching classes for them in select locations and intend to continue expanding it to the alumni base pan-India. Additionally, we are aiming to roll-out short term training programs to help alumni upskill further and compete effectively for jobs in the private sector as well.
- Leverage the power and receptiveness of HR leads (from the session in Hyderabad) forward and conduct more such awareness sessions pan-India. This is on the heels of positive reception our initiatives received during corporate awareness sessions in Chennai, Coimbatore, Hyderabad and Bangalore, on the potential of students taking up jobs in various sectors.
- Make the alumni survey exercise a recurring activity for all future batches, starting with the batch graduating in 2024 who will be interviewed in Jan-Mar 2025.

THANK YOU TO ALL THE FRIENDS OF HTBF

- To all the donors in India and around the world, for their contributions and continued support towards the cause.
- Cognizant Foundation, Saint Gobain India Pvt. Ltd., Koshambh Multitred Private Limited, Guru Krupa Foundation, Kishinchand Chellaram Foundation, Brookefields, GLG Group, NIIF Infrastructure Finance Limited and Aseem Infrastructure Finance Limited for their unwavering support on all our partnerships project initiatives.
- Enable India for their consistent support as our knowledge and training partner.
- Karnataka Bank and Centbank Home Finance for their valuable contributions.
- Richard Hua Foundation, Zoroastrian Charity Foundation and other key founding donors from Hong Kong, who have been the backbone of our organization and instrumental in our successes to date.
- Mr. M Balasubramaniam (Director, Brookefields), who helped us secure a wonderful office space in Chennai.
- Our Indian Bankers - IOB, HDFC Bank and SBI - for their immense support.
- Our lawyer, Mr. Sridharan, for his astute guidance and assistance with regulatory compliance.
- Our auditors, A. John Moris & Co., for assisting us with financial compliance and helping us continue on steady financial footing.
- The administrators and staff of our 300+ partner colleges.
- Our global network of directors, volunteers and well wishers, spanning across Hong Kong, Singapore and the USA.
- Our 50+ office staff and trainers, for their tireless efforts towards delivering value to our beneficiaries.
- Our volunteers, who are the backbone of our scholarship program and whose tireless efforts help us in all college and student interactions.
- Guidestar India, for recognizing our commitment to transparency, accountability and governance by awarding us their top-tier Platinum Certification in 2023.
- Our esteemed founder, the late Mr. D.K. Patel's family for their support and guidance.

LIST OF CURRENT TRUSTEES OF HELP THE BLIND FOUNDATION

Trustee Name	Background	Key Focus Area	Email ID
Deepa Krishnamoorthy	Engineering & Education	Managing Trustee	deepa@helptheblind.in
N Sivaji Rao	Banking & Finance	Resource Mobilization	sivaji@helptheblind.in
S Narasimhan	Banking & Finance	Scholarships	snnhtbf@yahoo.com
D K Sharma	Banking & Finance	Scholarships	sharmadk30@yahoo.com
Nataraj Sankaran	International Supply Chain & Operations	Employability & Skill Development	nataraj@helptheblind.in
R Sunder Kumar	International Trade & Commerce	Resource Mobilization	sunderkumar@helptheblind.in
D Vijayalakshmi	Banking & Finance	Scholarships & Assistive Devices	dv@helptheblind.in
Ramesh Puri	Banking & Finance	Scholarships	rameshpuri@helptheblind.in
J Radhakrishnan	Banking & Finance	Scholarships, Employability & Skill Development	radhakrishnanj@helptheblind.in

BECOME A PART OF THE MOVEMENT



Help The Blind Foundation
Unit No. B3A, Phase 1, Office Lobby Basement,
Spencer Plaza,
769 Anna Salai, Chennai 600002
Email : donor_connect@helptheblind.in



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