

Daily News

Sri Lanka's National Newspaper Since 1918



Friday, 1 May 2009

Navajeevana

Holistic service for people with disabilities:

Text and Pictures by Ganga PRADEEPA in Matara

There are many misconceptions in society about disabled people or differently abled. One big misconception is they can't do anything for themselves. But they are not helpless. Sometimes they do need extra help but at some point in everyone's life, so do you. They can live independently. They have means of travel and this means they can get to work as well. Yes, work.



Some children in the Navajeevana centre

Navajeevana is a place where we see many people with some disabilities. But the special thing is they live very happily with their friends. They do not feel that they can't do anything. Navajeevana, meaning new life, is a non-governmental organisation based in the Hambantota district of southern Sri Lanka.

Navajeevana has been working to rehabilitate people with disabilities in southern Sri Lanka for over twenty years. Their vision is to see people with disabilities as equal and participating members of a non-discriminatory society.

We saw children were playing, singing and dancing as we approached the venue. Except them their were some adults who did some hand works such as painting, sewing and viewing. They were happy.

Navajeevana rehabilitation centre provides a holistic service for people with disabilities and work with the whole person from early identification, intervention, treatment and full rehabilitation, where the person is able to earn an independent income.

At their fully accessible rehabilitation centre in Tangalla they provide a range of paramedical services, including physiotherapy, prosthetics and orthotics, speech therapy, supportive seating, wheelchair production, audiological services and physiotherapy. They also run four special schools for disabled children, carry out community mental health work and work in and with the community to rehabilitate people with disabilities.

From its inception in 1987 Navajeevana has been the main service provider for the rehabilitation of people with disabilities in the Hambantota district.



The adults are viewing clothes

Our Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) programme is at the heart of Navajeevana approach. This is supported by a strong institutional based multidisciplinary approach that includes therapy and education to support all forms of disability. Our mission is to be a resource center to empower and promote equality and social inclusion of people with disabilities through rehabilitation, networking, capacity building and community awareness raising in prevention of disability said The Founder and the Chairperson, Kumarini Wickramasuriya.

Right now in Sri Lanka, disabled people are being denied access to the education, job opportunities and social inclusion that most of us enjoy without even thinking. People with disabilities are still excluded from traveling around our beautiful island on public transport, from getting the treatment they need and deserve at our hospitals, and from participating as equals in our society.

Despite twenty years of dedicated work by Navajeevana, living with a disability in southern Sri Lanka is not easy.



Children dancing

People with disability still face discrimination, stigma and poor services. The area has one of the highest levels of disability in the island, at 10 percent.

This is due to a combination of poor infrastructure, the remote location of rural communities, and lack of understanding amongst ordinary people about the prevention and treatment of disabilities.

Moreover, intermarriage and incest is still prevalent in this area, causing higher than average numbers of genetic and birth defectsâ€ she added. The majority of Navajeevanaâ€™s clients visiting the centre suffer from physical disabilities caused by neurological problems, accidents, stroke, cerebral palsy and hearing impairment.

Institutional Based Rehabilitation

Their dedicated Institutional Based Rehabilitation (IBR) Department caters to these clients; providing necessary services to back up community based rehabilitation efforts. The IBR department is broadly divided into units that deal with therapy offering physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy and counselling, and production of producing mobility aides (wheelchairs, crutches) special seating and prosthetic and orthotic devices.

Navajeevana knows that people with disabilities often need access to several different services. A stroke Patient, for example, may need physiotherapy, speech therapy, occupational therapy, counselling and help with generating an income in their own community, as well as a comfortable and functioning wheelchair that they know how to use. They also know that access to these diverse services across southern Sri Lanka is difficult. Sadly, people with disabilities are often denied access to the services they need the most because of poor infrastructure, lack of money or simply lack of awareness about what's available to them.



**The Founder and
the Chairperson,
Kumarini
Wickramasuriya.**

Responsible tourism

As part of Navajeevana's commitment to empower people with disabilities, they have undertaken a responsible tourism project in partnership with Mercy Corps. This project will contribute to the rehabilitation of marginalised groups including people with disabilities and those affected by the tsunami, through providing them with the skills and opportunities to make a valuable and lasting contribution to local tourism.

Under this project, people with disabilities are being trained in the production of quality and upmarket products, the sale of which will benefit them and support Navajeevana's services. A coffee shop and juice bar has recently been opened which will further contribute to bringing livelihood support to people with disabilities and their families

Objectives

**Identify and provide rehabilitation services to all people with disabilities who could benefit from any form of rehabilitation, in co-operation with stakeholders

** Strive for community participation and partnership in rehabilitation of people with disabilities

** Be a strong driving force for the cause of people with disabilities at regional, provincial and national levels

**Provide excellent medical and paramedical services

** Provide educational facilities for people with disabilities according to their abilities and adapted to their disabilities

** Provide facilities which will lead to the economical stability of people with disabilities

Problems faced in introducing income generation activities:

** Difficulty to raise capital for income generating ventures

** Difficulty to access traditional forms of credit

** Even other development agencies tend to by-pass disabled in their poverty programmes aimed at improving livelihood

** Employers reluctance due to social conditioning to accept disabled employees

** Misconceptions about productivity and work ethic of people with disabilities

** Securing markets for goods produced by self employed