

**OUR CITY, ACCESSIBLE CITY.**  
**LET US REALIZE THIS DREAM**  
**TOGETHER**

*“Independent Living does not mean that we want to do everything by ourselves, do not need anybody or like to live in isolation. Independent living means that we demand the same choices and control in our every-day lives that our non-disabled brothers and sisters, neighbors and friends take for granted. We want to grow up in our families, go to the neighborhood school, use the same bus as our neighbors; work in jobs that are in line with our education and interests, and raise families of our own. We are profoundly ordinary people sharing the same need to feel included, recognized and loved.”*

- Dr. Adolf Ratzka

‘Our city, accessible city’ focuses on a city enabling access for people with disabilities, or special needs. The word accessibility means access. It refers to the ability for everyone regardless of disability, to access, use and benefit from everything within their environment. It is the

degree to which a product, device, service or environment is available to as many people as possible.

Our mental equation is “Disability equals wheelchair, Accessibility equals ramp.” But majority of people with disabilities are not wheelchair users. They are people with neurological conditions, vision or hearing loss, psychiatric disabilities, chemical sensitivities and cognitive or learning problem. In truth, what keeps children and adults with the disabilities from full participation in our communities is more our limiting attitude and stereotypical thinking than the lack of a ramp. These abilities are seen as weakness in our society that hence contribute to the stereotype that leads to discrimination against the disabled.

It is the human nature to despise those that are different from normal. Everyone has a different perception of normal and when someone cuts the boundary it results in discrimination. Some people also tend to dislike the disabled due to their own failures they will look down upon the handicap to make themselves feel better. Also society perceives the disabled as useless, powerless and inefficient human beings, which also contributes to the

ideology that leads to the discrimination against the disabled. But fails to understand that ‘In many situations, the person with low vision and blindness will have a greater knowledge than the sighted person.’ It’s a complete role reversal.

***“Accessibility must be felt but not seen.”***

Accessibility is a process that begins in our hearts, with a gratitude of and a desire to eliminate existing attitudinal and physical barriers and to replace them with attitudes of welcome and acceptance. Accessibility is about the inherent worth and dignity of every one of us. Full participation of people with disability should be allowed. Ours is a theology of wholeness and justice. Accessibility is about social justice – civil rights.

TO CITE FEW:

- 1) Right to Work
- 2) Right to Liberty
- 3) Right to freedom of Expression
- 4) Prohibition of Discrimination
- 5) Equity in Social, Economic and Cultural Right.

Each and every citizen of the country has the right to move around according to his/her wish despite of any physical and mental barriers. Of course, the place whatsoever it may be doesn't matter. It can be within the city itself, other cities and state of the country and so on. A city where an individual resides provides accessibility to all the individuals. But it is us who create differences based on many assumptions and reasons. Discrimination of disabled in his own society is commonly found. But the fact is they are not disabled at all, they are 'Specially Abled People' having much talent and can do something great and unique. They are the one who are energetic and positive in nature. Given a platform and support to them, they do create wonders. One of the most inspiring story is listed below.

### **Kalgi Raval – Social Ambassador, Gujarat.**

Kalgi is a visually challenged girl but no one can challenge her to change her determination and she has determination to give new vision to the world. With this determination she wants to give new insights to those people who has dreams to see new world and to those who think that girls are nothing except burden. With this great purpose, Kalgi foundation is created. The team of this foundation took a step ahead with the campaign

“SAVE GIRL, EDUCATE HER.” And now working on the welfare of visually challenged children so they can get new sights to see the world and girls can get new directions of life. In this initiative, many individuals, social workers and NRIs have joined. Let’s together try to give new light to see this world to our daughters with the help of such foundation and many more.

Disability is a part of variety of human experience. People with disabilities are ordinary people. This is not about “US AND THEM”, this is about “US AND US”. In no way disability prevent people from enjoying full participation in the life of a congregation – in worship, in leadership, in study and in service. Disability refers to the disadvantage or restrictions of activity caused by the way society is organized which takes little or no account of people who have physical, sensory or mental impairments. It is the unfortunate part of human life which can effect only the natural way of a living but also despair component strength and power.

Disability Management (DM) is a specialized area of human resources, to support efforts by employers to better integrate and retain workers with disabilities. Some workplaces have policies in place to provide “Reasonable Accommodation”, for disabled. The Government needs to launch more social security schemes for disabled sections and generate more employment opportunities for them. Several schemes and benefits conference on the disabled persons has come up as relief and as successfully served to provide equal opportunities to the disabled section.

The present situation that we have can be overcome by small initiatives. It is not too late yet. But it is a time where one should be aware. We can start by setting up an accessibility committee that includes people with disabilities. Then can decide on initial projects like training greeters how to welcome people, offering alternative formats for printed materials, creating buddy systems for people with behavioral problems, installing and assistive listening system. Start with one success and build on it. Maybe our congregation’s journey starts with a ramp – or may be it doesn’t. Also seminars and programs should be conducted in various villages and cities across the country to create awareness among all kinds of people and providing them knowledge about the

problems faced by disabled, teach them to accept and always appreciate the efforts of disabled. Each and every corner of the country should be made available so disabled too may move around freely and have refreshment.

Adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) face many challenges. Although some are able to work and be relatively self-sufficient, others require more guidance, supervision and care. Recreation and leisure activities, particularly those that foster social bonds and friendships, are critical to support the quality of life in people. Several activities can help adults socialize, express their feelings and stay healthier. These activities are most successful when tailored to a person's skills and abilities. Some of the best activities are-

(1) Physical activity :Exercise and physical activity can helps adults reach their potential, both physically and mentally. Swimming, dance, exercise classes, bowling and team sports are activities that can be fun and health-promoting. Combining the exercise with group activities and social interaction may enhance participant motivation and enjoyment.

(2) Music Therapy :Use of music to improve physical and emotional health is known as music therapy. Activities can be as simple as clapping hands or tapping feet to music. Playing percussion instruments is another popular music activity, where the rhythm and vibrations can be felt. Music stimulates the senses, and can help to improve an individual's mental, social and emotional well-being.

(3) Art Therapy :Art provides a means of expressing feelings and emotions, particularly when the person is unable to -- or unwilling to -- articulate these to others. It also encourages creativity.

(4) Nature Activities :Nature walks provide an opportunity to be out in the open air while learning more about the environment. People of all ages tend to enjoy nature activities. Summer camps, retreats or day camps for adults offer a range of services from therapeutic horseback riding to vocational courses.

Adults benefit from social interaction -- forming friendships and feeling a part of the community around them.

Society teaches us to be embarrassed and ashamed of disability, but disability is just part of life. Only 15% of people are born with the disabilities, even though many of

us acquire all kinds of physical, emotional and cognitive disabilities in later part of the life. Just imagine the situation in which you are born normally and you have ignored the disabled in need around you and got some accidental disability few years later. How would you feel if ignored by others? What when you have dependency for everything and you are not being helped? Same is the case of disabled when they are not helped or are ignored in their society. You would not tolerate the exclusion of people because of color. Why then, would you tolerate the exclusion of people because of physical or emotional disabilities?

It doesn't matter what you look like on the outside, it is what's on the inside that counts, but our society lacks to understand that. In today's time different is not accepted, people that are different are discriminated, looked down upon and usually picked on. People with disabilities are seen as different creatures by most people. The disabled don't choose to be the way they are, but still our society alienates them.

*“Lack of accessibility, other people’s assumptions, body ideals and a lack of self confidence among people with disabilities are often the biggest barriers for diversity.”*

**- Henrik Ib. Jorgensen**

We need to create a place where there is a space for differences. Hence we should realize this dream together and make Our Society; Our City – “AN ACCESSIBLE CITY.”

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