

Greetings from Special Olympics Bharat

## A partnership inked with the Delhi Government on the Global Day of Inclusion



The SO Bharat Delhi State Chapter, this morning, 20 July, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Directorate of Education, Government of NCT of Delhi that promises to promote Inclusion in the education system through Sports. The key MoU made Delhi the very first state, in India, for signing an agreement with the Govt to partner with Special Olympics to bring about Inclusion in schools. **Dr Mallika Nadda, Chairperson of SO Bharat** inked the document following aggressive outreach to the Governments and their representatives at various levels for several months before

reaching the desired outcome. **Mr Himanshu Gupta, Director, Directorate of Education - Govt. of NCT of Delhi** signed delightfully, welcoming inclusion through sports within the educational space.

Speaking on the occasion, Mr Himanshu Gupta said: *It has been our endeavour to build an environment of equity & overall development in educational spaces, preparing sensitised and responsible citizens, many of whom would be leaders of tomorrow. Special Olympics stands apart from the Olympics and the Paralympics, as it organises sports for persons with Intellectual Disabilities, a space where very little work has been done and there is a great possibility to do a lot of work. We look forward to introducing Unified Sports. This agreement substantiates our commitment towards celebrating diversities and bringing about Inclusion.*

**Siya, Powerlifter –determination of an athlete as much as of the state**



Siya Sarode maintained a calm visage, successfully concealing the turmoil that swirled within, as team India left for the World Games on 12 June 2023. Unable to understand why she was denied the travel while all others left for Berlin, she continued to stay calm but keep her hopes alive. On 14<sup>th</sup> of June Siya was granted the visa, being the only one confirmed, out of others who were re-considered. Adept at winning battles, Siya won this one too. 17 yrs and in need of a consent letter to be able to get a chance to compete at the world games, revealed her story. Siya has a faint memory of her mother who she lost when 9 years of age. Before that she had already been abandoned

by her father, who could not accept the diagnosis that spelt her disability. Siya was introduced to sports

when she joined the Sanjay Center for Special Education, Curchorem, Goa, mentored by her Coach Gautami Dessai.

Siya's achievements may have been deferred had it not been for the timely and heart-warming support extended by the authorities of the state. Due to being under age she was required to produce a guardian consent certificate, which at the first go was not accepted. The legal document required authentication of the state authorities, bringing together the Hon'ble Chief Minister Mr Pramod Sawant, Social Welfare minister Mr Subhash Phal Desai and the state commissioner for PWD , Mr Guruprasad Pawaskar. The documentation having been expedited through the authorities, Siya's journey was ensured and, the opportunity stamped. She travelled to Berlin

Siya won four medals including two Gold (one each in Deadlift and Squat), one Silver in Combined and one Bronze in Bench press at the Special Olympics World Summer Games held in Berlin Germany in June 2023

## Medical Screening of Young Athletes



Listening ears, an organization engaged in early intervention and educational inclusion services, partnered with SO Bharat for the first time in conducting audio screenings at the Air Force Golden Jubilee. The event potentially has opened doors to another partnership in Health. Recently, the Ananth Centre for Learning & Development and the Air Force Golden Jubilee School, New Delhi held pediatric screenings, supported by the Gates Foundation. 85 children between 2 and 7 yrs were examined across several medical parameters as part of the Special Olympics Health program.

Dr Arun Wadhwa and Dr Puja Kapoor led the screenings, supported by volunteers from the Amity University UP NOIDA, Yashoda Super specialty Hospitals, Kaushambi and Listening Ears. The Clinical Directors, in unison, opine that pediatric screening requires more time, patience and individual focus to assess the medical status holistically.

Healthy Young Athletes is a holistic pediatric screening offered to children 2 – 7 years old, with and without Intellectual Disabilities, is an early intervention aiming to complement a child's primary care with a review of his/her health and development.

## The Welcome of the Athletes in Puducherry



The welcome ceremony of the Athletes in Puducherry while celebrating the homecoming of the Berlin Athletes also drew attention of several organisations and individuals towards the abilities of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities. Individuals including some National level players across few sports reached out to the Puducherry State Chapter to understand how to join the unified sports program

An immediate outcome developed in the form of two MoUs signed between the SO Bharat state Chapter and Narendra Volleyball Club and the other with the Union Territory of Puducherry Roller-skating Club , both on 11 July 2023. Mr

R.Thomas, the General Secretary of the Roller Skating Club was training a few special children earlier as well but, was interested in entering a formal program that would ensure regular inclusive participation. Both the MoUs reflect a joint commitment for engaging the youth inclusively on and beyond the sports field, specifying creating a Youth Council that would function inclusively. *“Inspired by*

*the interest generated by people from different arenas, we are hopeful to expand our reach , engaging the Athletes with a cross section of the society, thereby better preparing them for meaningful inclusion”, says Ms Chitra Shah, Area Director, SO Bharat Puducherry*

On 30 June, the Athletes of the Union Territory were welcomed and honoured by the Lieutenant Governor, Dr Tamilarasai Soundarajan at Raj Niwas and by the Chief Minister, Thiru. Rangasamy at the Assembly Hall. The Lt Governor presented a shawl each to the Athletes along with a book by Swami Vivekananda, titled, 'Young India Arise'. Mr Rangasamy interacted with the Athletes, also seeking more information about Special Olympics and its mission from the Area Director. Showing keen interest, he advised the State Chapter to register with the Sports Council of Puducherry. The Athletes and Coaches also had an audience with the Speaker, Mr Selvem and the Social Welfare Minister, Mr Theni C Jayakumar.

## **A silent struggle overcome by Akshar, the roller skater from Berlin games**



Akshar's father is a labourer and his mother cooks at people's homes to make ends meet, in the Anand district of Gujarat. Akshar was often seen wandering around, not speaking to anyone. His disability was not really understood by his parents. In 2010 he joined Gurukripa, a residential special school in Anand district of Gujarat, where he got a chance to play sports. He participated in Roller Skating and Cycling and enjoyed participating in sports that also gave him a chance to build friendships.

Three years back he was nominated to pair up with Havya Thakkar, a youth without Intellectual Disabilities, to ideate and implement a project under the Innovation Grant. The project opened new avenues as he, along with Havya went from one school to another to spread the Special Olympics movement. While doing so he gained more confidence and now is also assisting his mentor, Jignesh Thakkar, in training other Athletes, in sports and in leadership roles.

Akshar participated in Roller Skating, winning a Silver in 30 Mtr Slalom and a fourth position in 30 Mtr Straight. While his mother had always been devoted to caring for Akshar,

his brother and father never really did. A change was evident since the time Akshar qualified the Nationals. Akshar's abilities that they never imagined to have existed has impacted their behaviour. The World Games has established an identity for Akshar within his community and even more, within his immediate family.

## **Engaging with the youth clubs to enhance inclusive engagements and sports**



The city of Guwahati in Assam boasts of several youth clubs that organise sports, tree plantation drives, festive celebrations etc underlined with the presence of the youth at all levels. Karbi Youth Club is one of them located in Kamrup, close to Ashadeep Special School. The club has always been there with few members always present at the grounds. A few months back as part of the Unified Champion School programming youth leaders from two colleges along with the Athletes from Ashadeep conducted unified football matches with the club members playing as unified partners. The members were oriented to SO Bharat and brainstormed 'Intellectual Disability' and Inclusion.'

“Since then, a gradual and a heart -warming interaction has unfolded between the youth members of the club and the athletes of Ashadeep. The ice melted in small steps, the members who would only see the athletes earlier, gradually got to meet them then and interacted, they trained the athletes in football and now even played with them. “This is typically how we have seen and would always aim to see the members of the society get up-close with the athletes and change from being an audience or a sympathiser to joining them on and off the field” – says Ms Priyanka, Youth Coordinator, Assam.

For many months now the space is also a Sports Centre that opens for regular sport activity under guided supervision of a Coach and an Assistant coach, with the maximum number of Athletes accessing the facility, compared to all others around the country, so far

**The Special Athletes are slowly but steadily on the path of change**



Himachal Pradesh was the first state to open the first Sport Centre in October 2022, inaugurating one in each of its nine districts, supported by NHPC (National Hydroelectric Power Corporation), a public sector hydropower company. The centres have become a regular source of sports and change, providing access to about 400 Athletes across all the districts. Since its inception, the registrations having increased by 27.6% in less than a year, substantiating its objective of establishing and substantiating sports culture at local levels. Each centre conducts Athletics along with one more sport, like Badminton, Basketball, Cycling and volleyball. Regular practises have significantly improved the stamina of the Athletes. According to examples cited by Mr Ajay Kumar, Program Manager, SO Bharat Himachal Pradesh, an athlete who would complete 100 mtrs with great difficulty can now run 200 mtrs. The regular fitness regimen has given a boost and brought flexibility that positions them to attempt a range of sports. Racquet control, basic understanding of the game, accuracy etc are areas where improvement is conspicuous, according to the Coaches.

Outside of the field, a change in their behaviour is overwhelming. Patches of injury would always be seen on Sudama's face, an Athlete in the district of Sirmaur. Aggression was his overarching behaviour pattern and he would often cause self-harm and would be seen crying as well. Having joined the sports center there and playing sports regularly has helped in a positive utilization of his energy levels and he can now be seen calm, after over six months of regular sports & fitness.

## **The Jharkhand Chapter partners with the Jindal Steel and Power Foundation**



In February 2023, Mr Satbir Singh Sahota, Asst Area Director SO Bharat Jharkhand, on behalf of the state & with an aim to expand their network, reached out to Jindal Steel & Power (JSP).

In a span of six months the partnership boasts of several sessions and interactions. February witnessed a Young Athletes session, Coaches training & Family forum, supported by Jindal Steel & Power Foundation, Asha – The Hope, an institute at Patratu, Jharkhand. The Centre is part of the campus of Steel Plant that provides rehabilitation services to children with special need. Mr Shahi Kesari , a former TFA (TATA Football Academy)cadet, presently working with JSPF supported the SO Bharat team throughout the events. Mr Satbir commenced with issues of concern expressed by the families, beginning with UDID (Unique Disability Identity) card, health screenings etc along with the objective of regular YA sessions

On request by them a Coaches training was held again in the first week of August featuring Athletics, Badminton, Bocce & Football. The training was conducted by Mr. Bikas Tantubai & Mr. Ajay Mishra , Coaches, SO Bharat. 12 Coaches of JSP have been trained by the state Chapter. They have been educated about the SOI online portal as well. The same premise runs the OP Jindal School that has a strength of about 2400 students with a dedicated sports faculty.

The management of JSP also felicitated the Athletes of Jharkhand on their return from Berlin, while having supported hoardings highlighting the Berlin Games.

## PARTNERS IN INCLUSION



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