

Annual Report for BGFI from April 2016 to March 2017

The last AGM of the Blind Graduates' Forum of India was held on Saturday 13th August 2016 at 4.30 pm at National Association for the Blind (NAB), 11/12, Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan Road, Worli Seaface, Mumbai - 400 030.. This report lists all the activities and events that were held from the financial year April 2016 to March 2017.

Executive Committee Update

The Executive Council was unanimously elected and ratified in AGM in August 2016 with the following members -

Mr. Vishal Kumar - President
Mr. Suhas Karnik - Vice President
Ms. Payal Jethra - Hon Secretary
Mr. Ajay Minocha - Hon Secretary
Ms. Saveeta Rao - Hon Treasurer
Mr. Dinesh Saraiya - EC Member
Ms. Shaila Dsouza - EC Member
Mr. Sanjeev Chaudhari - EC Member
Mr. Abhimanyu Rao - EC Member
Mr. Santosh Salian - EC Member

We also have the following invitees who have been active core members of BGFI:

Mr. Harish Kotian
Mr. Niraj Saxena
Mr. Paresh Satra
Mr. Sagar Sodah
Ms. Tanya Balsara

Monthly Sessions Update

We have organized knowledge sharing sessions with a view to expand our knowledge in all aspects including science and technology, politics, career, personal growth, social issues and many more. The following sessions were held in the last year -

1. Session on Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) held on April 2016 by Priyadarshinii SS at Kamala Mehta School for the Blind with 36 participants.
2. Session on Disability Laws and Policies held on May 2016 by Advocate Uday Warunjikar at Yashwantrao Chavan Pratishthan with 25 participants
3. Session on Health Problems, Prevention and Cure held on June 2016 by Dr. Shweta Dharmarajan at Yashwantrao Chavan Pratishthan with 6 participants

4. session on Importance of extensive reading by Amrut Deshmukh & Knowledge capsules on mobile apps at Kamala Mehta School for the Blind on Saturday, November 26th, 2016 with 20 participants.

5. Session on a discussion on the RPD act 2016 on 14th January 2017 at Yashwantrao Chavan Pratishthan basement hall, with 44 participants. Mr Amar Jain, Ms. Shilpi Kapoor and Mr. Rajesh Asudani were on the panel.

Session on tax planning by Prodent asset management 6 in March 2017,. Mr. Ravi, Mr. Yashvant educated the participants on the options and benefits of investing including in equity markets and mutualfunds. The session was attended by 33 participants.

Introduced knowledge sharing capsules on android accessibility

Recognizing android's wide reach as a mobile operating system and lack of a structured training module for screen reader users, BGFI launched knowledge sharing capsules on android accessibility in Nov 2016. Mobile capsules will form a short component of the knowledge sharing sessions. Mr. Ajay Minocha has delivered presentations on an introduction session in November covering Basic accessibility using talkback, an overview on Independent travel, Mobile banking, Food and grocery ordering, book reading and note taking etc. And a session on using smartphones using physical keyboard and voice to text in March 2017

New Graduates and Readers

Celebration of Readers' Day and Felicitation of New Blind Graduates was held on Saturday, September 24, 2016 where readers and graduates were felicitated at Yashwantrao Chavan Pratishthan basement hall & we had as Guest speaker, Mr. R. Dharmarajan Iyer who is Working as Director in RDMEO,NITI Aayog, Mumbai

Launch of the book 'MindTransformer' by Priyadarshinii Samudre on Kindle and Bookshare on 30 November 2016.

This was BGFI's Tribute to Priyadarshinii Samudre, our most appreciated guest speaker on her first birthday after her untimely demise. BGFI in collaboration with Madhuri Samudre (Priyadarshinii's mother) and Bookshare team published Priyadarshinii's first book for over 2.3 lakh print disabled readers worldwide.

Outdoor Activities

1. One Day Trek to Dhantewada Fort Near Saphale on 15th August 2016 in collaboration with the Young Zingaro trekking Club.

2. Visit to The Chhatrapati Shiwaji Vastu Sangrahalaya (KalaGhoda Museum) in December 2016 with participants. This is an accessible museum for visually impaired with an audio description available for all the 30 exhibits showcased. This is in line with our new focus on experiential learning programme.

3. An awareness session at the Vivekanand college by BGFI Members - Vishal, Tanya and Dinesh for a session on living an independent life with blindness on the occasion of World Disabled Day.

4. . Annual Picnic on 11th & 12th February 2017 - a weekend visit to an army base workshop, a manufacturing and maintenance unit of the battle tanks. And an Overnight camp at Valhi village near Pune with 42 participants.

Presence on Social Media

Two whatsapp groups viz BGFI Connect (for sharing ideas & friendly chats) & BGFI Programmes (for updating members on events & having them connect & share ideas thoughts & feedback) were created during January 2017. This has widened our reach.

In January 2017, the BGFI Face Book & Twitter accounts were created and have become functional now:

Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/Blind-Graduates-forum-of-India-BGFI-1830653997215702/>

Twitter:

https://twitter.com/blind_grads

Designing a Mentorship Programme

BGFI decided to launch a mentorship program for youngsters as the first priority. The aim of this programme is to connect the aspiring students with the industry experts in different fields. This is expected to benefit students from the entire country and enable them to take a fulfilling education and career choice. The mentorship programme has been designed and is scheduled to be launched in May 2017.

Research on Persons With Disabilities

In the EC meeting of September 2016, It was decided that the BGFI will take initiatives to support research on Persons With Disabilities.

1. BGFI collaborated with **Massachusetts Institute of Technology, USA**, for a **research on setting up an ecosystem on designing products for persons with disabilities.**
2. BGFI supported Shikha Agarwal, a PHD student of Indian Institute of Technology, Mumbai for her research on making local trains accessible for people with visual impairment.

Accessibility of the BHIM app on IOS & Android

BHIM app is used for making digital transactions with was launched by our honorable Prime minister Shri Narendra Modi. The BGFI team has reached out to National Payment Corporation of India (the developers of BHIM app) to make it fully accessible with screen reading software across all mobile platforms. A report by Mr. Sagar Sodah and Mr. Ajay Minocha has been submitted to the company containing the accessibility issues on IOS and android as well as probable solutions to overcome the same.

Setting up an Accessibility Center in Mumbai University

BGFI formed a team in collaboration with XRCVC and Donna Reen, a literature professor at Mumbai University to set up a Disability Center for the students of Mumbai University. A proposal has been drafted which needs to be presented to the Vice Chancellor of Mumbai University.

Membership Update

At the time of the last election in 2014 (i.e. June 2014), we had 96 members in our register. Till now we have added 44 members to the list getting the total number of members to 140 (10 of them being Associate Life Members). We currently also have 19 members in the Nagpur Chapter.

Survey on BGFI's effectiveness among its members

The team conducted a survey with 72 out of 139 responses received as of year end. The main objective of the survey is to establish a better connection of BGFI with its members and make our activities more relevant. The key findings from the survey are as under:

- a. **Maximum number of members i.e. 59 prefer to receive the communication about the activities through Whatsapp followed by 35 members through SMS. A BGFI programmes group has been created especially for this purpose**
- b. **More than 50% participants use local train for commuting to the venue. It is imperative therefore, to have a venue closer to railway stations. Since majority of the members are located on Western line, The team is exploring MNB Jogeshwari for the activities.**
- c. **The primary motivation for most of the members to attend the session is good and relevant speakers followed by meeting their friends. However, Most of the participants have attended 0-1 session last year. This can mainly be attributed to members being not aware about the activities. We hope that our Whatsapp/ social media reach should help us overcome this barrier**
- d. **Since most of our members are employed with public sector companies, the members prefer the sessions to be held on 2nd or 4th Saturday in afternoon**
- e. **Most of the members suggest the sessions to focus on Technology, career counseling, Outdoor activities and independent living**

Honorary Secretaries
Aditi Shah, Ajay Minocha & Payal Jethra.

AJCM