

Annual Report for BGFI from April 2017 to March 2018

The last AGM of the Blind Graduates' Forum of India was held on Saturday 8th July 2017 at 3.00 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 2017 to March 2018.

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 -

BGFI Mentorship programme launch in May 2017, where Mr. Kartik Sawhney, Mr. Hari Raghavan and Mr. Sameer Latey were invited to launch the initiative and guide the young students to choose a suitable career path. This session was held at YV Chavan and attended by 25 participants

1. Session on Accessible Travel & Tourism held on Saturday, 10th June, 2017 by Neha Arora from Planet Aabled & Debolin Sen - Head at Enable Travel at National Association for the Blind (NAB),

Worli Seaface, Mumbai with 14 participants

2. A session on Independent Living on Saturday, 9th December 2017 - An open discussion to share the challenges faced in day to day living. This was conducted at National Association for the Blind (NAB),

Worli Seaface, Mumbai with 22 participants

3. An open house discussion on the Role of family members in the lives of persons with visual impairment on Saturday, 13th January, 2018 at College of Social Work, Nirmala Niketan,

Churchgate (East), Mumbai with 33 participants

4. A session On Safety And "Braille Me" on Saturday, March 24th 2018 by Ravi Kishore Donthikurthi, working with FedEx as a Senior Health and Safety Specialist. This was followed by a tech capsule on Braille Me by Tony Kurien. Braille Me is an affordable Braille display that can connect to a mobile or computer and provide access to books in Braille. This session was conducted at College of Social Work, Nirmala Niketan, Churchgate (East), Mumbai with 14 participants.

Knowledge sharing capsules on android accessibility

After the success of short android capsules launched in 2016, the team decided to expand their effectiveness by continuing with the trend. A detailed capsule on travel booking portals i.e. Goibibo, MMT was conducted by Mr. Ajay Minocha in June.

Ms. Aditi Shah also conducted another capsule on EYE-D (a multi utility app) and Be my eyes in December. After receiving encouraging feedback regarding the capsules from the members, the team looks forward to bring new topics in the future capsules.

New Graduates and Readers

Celebration of Readers' Day and Felicitation of New Blind Graduates was held on Saturday, September 23, 2016 where 4 readers, 8 graduates and 4 volunteers were felicitated at YashwantraoChavanPratishthan basement hall & we had as Guest speaker, Ms. NidhiGoyal who is a renowned disability activist. This event was attended by 50 participants.

Experiential learning and outdoor Activities

1. Visit to TheNehru Science center on 22nd July 2017. The Science center showcases science in an entertaining manner, letting the participants experience the day-to-day scientific principals through various senses. This is inline with our new focus on experiential learning programme.
2. One Day Trek to Ajoba Fort NearNashikon15th August 2017 in collaboration with the Young Zingaro trekking Club. We are extremely delighted to share that the trek has been seeing enthusiastic response since its inception
3. . The first ever accessible and inclusive tour to Mumbai FilmCity on 24th February 2018 in coordination with mumbaifilmcitytours.com. The trip was attended by 24 participants. The participants got to hear a detailed audio description of the studios and activities inside the filmcity and got to meet Mr. Mahesh Manjrekar.

Accessible Indian Currency Campaign

It was observed that the newly launched currency is not accessible for persons with blindness due to following reasons:

- a. **The size variation between the currency notes is not consistent and reduced to 3-4mm instead of minimum 10mm earlier**
- b. **The coexistence of old as well as new currency makes it extremely challenging to decipher the correct denomination of notes**
- c. **The bleed lines on the new notes fade away with little use, making them practically unidentifiable through touch**
- d. **Other mode of making monetary transactions such as mobile apps, websites, ATMs, etc. does not comply with accessible standards**

To make the government aware of this issue and to explore a probable solution, BGFI launched a nation wide initiative "Accessible Indian Currency Campaign".

The major steps taken during the campaign were as under:

- a. Drafted a detail representation post extensive national and international research on making all modes of making monetary transactions accessible.
- b. The representation on accessible Indian currency was sent to various stakeholders i.e. Prime Minister, Reserve Bank of India, Finance Ministry, Department of Disability Affairs, Human Rights Commission, etc highlighting the issues and potential solutions.
- c. Engaged with blind individuals, their family members, NGOs, legal and technical experts, influential leaders, volunteers and other stakeholders from all over the country to unite and secure attention of the decision makers.
- d. Enabled the mass reach of the campaign through television, print and social media, awareness ads, community radio and publications meant for blind.
- e. Launched a signature campaign on Change.org connecting people with the initiative by signing the online petition.

Following are the major outcomes of the campaign:

- a. Represented the blind community for meetings with Mr. BP Canungo, Deputy Governor, RBI and Department of Currency Management, RBI.
- b. The meetings with RBI authorities played a critical role in obtaining their acknowledgement on the need of making all modes of making monetary transactions accessible for blind. Also in having them evaluate and consider the solutions proposed for necessary actions.
- c. Received over 5500 signatures within 1.5 months on change.org which was handed over to the authorities
- d. Over 10 NGOs from across the country sent formal representations on behalf of the blind community to RBI and Government of India
- e. Over 30 individuals sent mails / letters to authorities highlighting the challenges faced due to inaccessible currency
- f. Obtained media coverage in over 10 mainstream print and television publications. Also over 350 active followers on Accessible Indian Currency Facebook page

We acknowledge and thank the support of the blind individuals, NGOs, volunteers, experts, RBI authorities, media and all the mentioned stakeholders across the country in strengthening the voice of blind and towards making Indian currency accessible for blind.

Mentorship Programme

It was observed that the mentorship programme has potential to widen its reach across the country. BGFI launched a campaign through audio advertisements and wider communication channels to reach out to relevant students across India.

Accessibility of key apps on IOS & Android

Realising the importance of mobile applications in every person's life, BGFI has been working closely with App developers to make them accessible for persons with visual impairment.

- a. BGFI have been working with Ola cabs to make their app accessible for screen reader users. The Ola team have made considerable enhancements in both Android and IOS apps which has helped in making blind more independent across India.
- b. BGFI had reached out to National Payments Corporation of India to make the BHIM app accessible last year. Many of the BGFI's recommendations on making BHIM app were adopted by NPCI. However a need for having such organizations adopt accessibility in all subsequent updates was felt to make it sustainable. With recent Center for the Internet Society guidelines on accessible mobile applications, we hope to continue to work closely with app developers to increase the accessibility of various relevant mobile applications

Representation on accessible Information and Communication Technology to TRAI

A detail representation on Accessible Information and Communication Technology has been filed to Telecom Authority of India. This was in response to their paper inviting public comments on the mentioned topic released in December 2017.

Encouraging Future group for accessible shopping experience at BigBazar

BGFI had requested the Future Group to make the shopping experience accessible for persons with disabilities over a year ago. We appreciate and thank the Future Group for taking it up seriously and creating the first accessible shopping experience in India. BGFI contributed in spreading the message during their soft launch of accessible shopping experience for persons with disabilities in October 2017.

Research

BGFI continues to support various students and professionals in identifying and conducting research on areas relevant for persons with disabilities

BGFI had collaborated with Massachusetts Institute of Technology last year for a research on creating an ecosystem for accessible products in India. The team continues to work towards a detail study with certain potential actions in future.

BGFI's reach on Internet and Social Media

BGFI's website is revamped with the latest information about our key activities. Additionally, we have simplified the association process for new members as well as volunteers by hosting the relevant forms on our website. BGFI is able to tap a larger pool of participants in its sessions through the social media channel's adopted last year. In addition to the updated website, We post regular updates on all the channels along with recordings of the sessions to make them reach the entire country.

Membership Update

We had 158 members till March 2017. Till now we have added total 17 members to the list getting the total number of members to 175 (10 of them being Associate Life Members and 19 members from the Nagpur chapter). An exercise was conducted to update the records of the members and to assess the number of active and inactive members.

Nagpur Chapter Update

BGFI currently has 19 members in its Nagpur Chapter. Free classes in computers and competitive exams are being conducted for blind college students at Nagpur. About 15 students have benefited this year. Out of which, 3 students have joined government jobs. Additionally, A picnic to Raman science center, Nagpur was arranged for students in the month of January, where they had a chance to experience various scientific ideas through interactive modules.

Honorary Secretaries

Aditi Shah, Ajay Minocha & Payal Jethra.

AJAY