



IMPACT REPORT 2018-21

PUBLICATION DATE: MARCH 2023

Purpose of the Report

This report intends to communicate the impact of Wipro Cares' engagement with Society of Parents of Children with Autistic Disorders (SOPAN). It captures the context of SOPAN's work, its engagement with Wipro Cares and impact of the program Wipro Cares has supported during 2018-2021 and recommendation for the way forward. The impact assessment has been completed by Higher At Work, an independent research and strategy organization.

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Summary

Inclusion has been an abiding value for Wipro Foundation over the last two decades. Children with Disabilities (CwDs) face multiple barriers impeding their access to mainstream education. The rights and entitlements guaranteed to people with disabilities, by various Acts and legislations, have not translated into enabling learning environments and stigma free institutions and communities for CwDs. Wipro Cares has supported a wide range of CSOs working with CwDs to bridge critical gaps in the system, to ensure that CwDs have access to education as well as avail other critical support.

SOPAN (Society of Parents of Children with Autistic Disorders) has been a significant partner providing a range of opportunities to empower persons with autism and developmental disabilities and their families. SOPAN's mission is to empower the children and their families so that they become and are recognized as productive members of the community. It follows a life cycle approach supporting them from addressing early interventions until enabling livelihoods for Persons with Disabilities (PwDs). It runs a range of programs addressing early intervention, diagnosis, assessment, special education, mainstreaming CwDs in regular schools, therapy, job readiness training, teacher and parent education.

Wipro Cares has engaged closely with SOPAN through volunteering employee time and contributing critical financial resources, for its programs. The partnership began in 2015 with Wipro Cares supporting SOPAN's Mahanagar Vishesh Shala Divyang (MVSD) project, a Public Private Partnership, in collaboration with Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai. Wipro Cares renewed its funding for MVSD for a second grant in 2018. This report reviews the impact of WF's support to SOPAN-MVSD during this grant period 2018-2021. MVSD's focus is to provide educational

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and therapeutic services for children and adolescents who belong to urban disadvantaged communities. Guidance and counselling to parents is a key aspect of the project.

The impact of SOPAN's work at MVSD can be understood in three key areas:

SOPAN has increasingly enabled access to education for CwDs by providing quality education and therapy to most vulnerable children. It has created a range of age-appropriate services and provides them free of cost. SOPAN has worked consistently to facilitate the families of CwDs to understand their rights and entitlements, simplifying access to different government departments and their schemes. SOPAN has actively participated in round tables and discussions that ensure mainstreaming inclusion of CwDs. Many children have successfully joined mainstream schools. SOPAN moved all its services online during the Covid-19 pandemic, ensuring both teachers and parents transition to online methods and different teaching-learning techniques.

SOPAN works intensively on empowering multiple stakeholders for educating, mainstreaming and inclusion of children enrolled at MVSD. It has created visible and tangible changes in the lives of children by building age-appropriate skills for growth and independent functioning. They go onto become functioning and productive adults, (many) finding gainful employment. It has empowered parents of CwDs to break cycles of isolation, step out of their homes and connect with communities with confidence. They begin to see their children as persons with equal rights and presence in society. It has significantly enabled educators' personal and professional growth as they develop deep resilience and creativity to work consistently with the CwDs for many years. SOPAN has worked towards creating

an enabling supportive system for the CwDs, in creating multiple opportunities for training of educators through short and long-term courses, creating a pool of trained special educators, in collaboration with mainstream institutions. It has worked closely with state nodal agencies and other smaller CSOs, to sensitize and empower these institutions on aspects of inclusion. It has over the years mobilized and built a strong local network of local councillors, corporates, banks and small businesses which contribute to the resource pool on a regular basis.

While SOPAN has clearly grown in strength and depth of work it needs to overcome a few challenges to move to the next stage of growth and impact. SOPAN looks towards its long term donors to provide connects and platforms that can advocate for needs of PwDs, which is hard to establish for an organization on its own. It is constantly looking for pre-vocational programs and job opportunities for the PwDs, to provide decent livelihoods. It also needs corporate volunteers to create structured events focused on promotion of inclusion of PwDs.

The insights in this report, give possible ideas for the Wipro Cares team to deliberate on the way forward. This reflection and impact report provides the context and opportunity for SOPAN and Wipro Cares to identify future strategies that will help enhance its transformative work on the ground.

Background

Every child in India is guaranteed education under the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act (RTE), 2009. The 'no rejection' policy under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) has effectively paved the way for inclusion of all children into mainstream schools. However, for the country's marginalized children, most of whom come from low-income communities, this access does not lead to staying in schools or achieving desired learning outcomes.

For Children with Disabilities (CwDs) this problem is further compounded with multiple barriers impeding their access to mainstream education. As per the Survey of Persons with Disabilities during the 76th round of National Sample Survey (NSS), nearly half (47.8%) of the population of persons with disabilities of age 7 years and above were illiterate. Only 62.9% of PwDs population (aged 3-35 years) were ever enrolled in ordinary schools. The educational attainment among PwDs remains low with only 19.3% of them (aged 15 years and above), educated to secondary level and above.

The Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act, 2016 directs the government to ensure that people with disabilities have the right to equality, dignity and respect. However, this hasn't translated into enabling learning environments and stigma free

institutions and communities for CwDs. Key stakeholders in lives of CwDs are not equipped and prepared to enrol and retain them in schools. Most schools are unable to enrol and support CwDs. Even when CwDs are enrolled, institutions and educators are not equipped to deliver on desired learning outcomes. Poor access to teaching/learning aids, assistive technology, lack of special educators, inadequate space and resources are significant barriers that prevent CwDs from enrolling, staying and learning in schools. Parents of CwDs faced with limited access to quality education for their children, prefer to keep them at home.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is the third most common developmental disorder in India. Some current estimates put the number of people with ASD to be more than 2 million (Ref: Rehabilitation Council India). However, it is one of the least understood disabilities by the general public. ASD is often seen as a form of intellectual disability and children are treated mistakenly for neurological disorders. In India, autism came to be recognized as a separate form of disability only after the RPWD Act was passed in 2016. There are reports stating that children with autism and cerebral palsy are among the least likely groups to be enrolled in schools.

About Sopan

Society of Parents of Children with Autistic Disorders (SOPAN) is a Civil Society Organization (CSO) providing critical services to children with autism and other disabilities and their families. It started in 2002, when provision of services for children with autism was at a nascent stage. There were significant challenges in detection and diagnosis of children with autism. Little to no avenues for education, therapy and support to children with autism and their caregivers, were available. Children with autism often would not get admission in mainstream schools or in special schools. A group of parents led by Dr. Rubina Lal decided to setup SOPAN to provide quality education and therapeutic support to their children with autistic disorders and their families. It later expanded its services to include other developmental disabilities. SOPAN supports about 300 CwDs with a staff strength of 42 people which includes special educators, therapists, administrative staff, care givers and auxiliary staff.

SOPAN's mission is to empower people with autism and developmental disabilities, and their families so that they become and are recognized as productive members of the community. It works to mainstream inclusion of CwDs in communities and institutions and facilitates their rights and entitlements. It starts with addressing early care needs of CwDs, extending its services until enabling livelihoods of Persons with Disabilities (PwDs). It runs multiple programs addressing early intervention, diagnosis, assessment, special education, mainstreaming CwDs in regular schools, therapy, job readiness training, teacher and parent education.

SAMARPAN

Early Intervention group (younger than 7 years) receive individualized therapy in language and communication, and sensory integration.

SPANDAN

Community-based program to provide early intervention services to CwDs under the age of six years identified through a survey of communities belonging to the K Ward of the Mumbai Municipal Corporation.

MAHANAGAR PALIKA VISHESH SHALA DIVYANGJAN (MVSD)

Learning centre for the urban underprivileged CwDs from the K ward in Mumbai. Started in collaboration with Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai.

SANKET

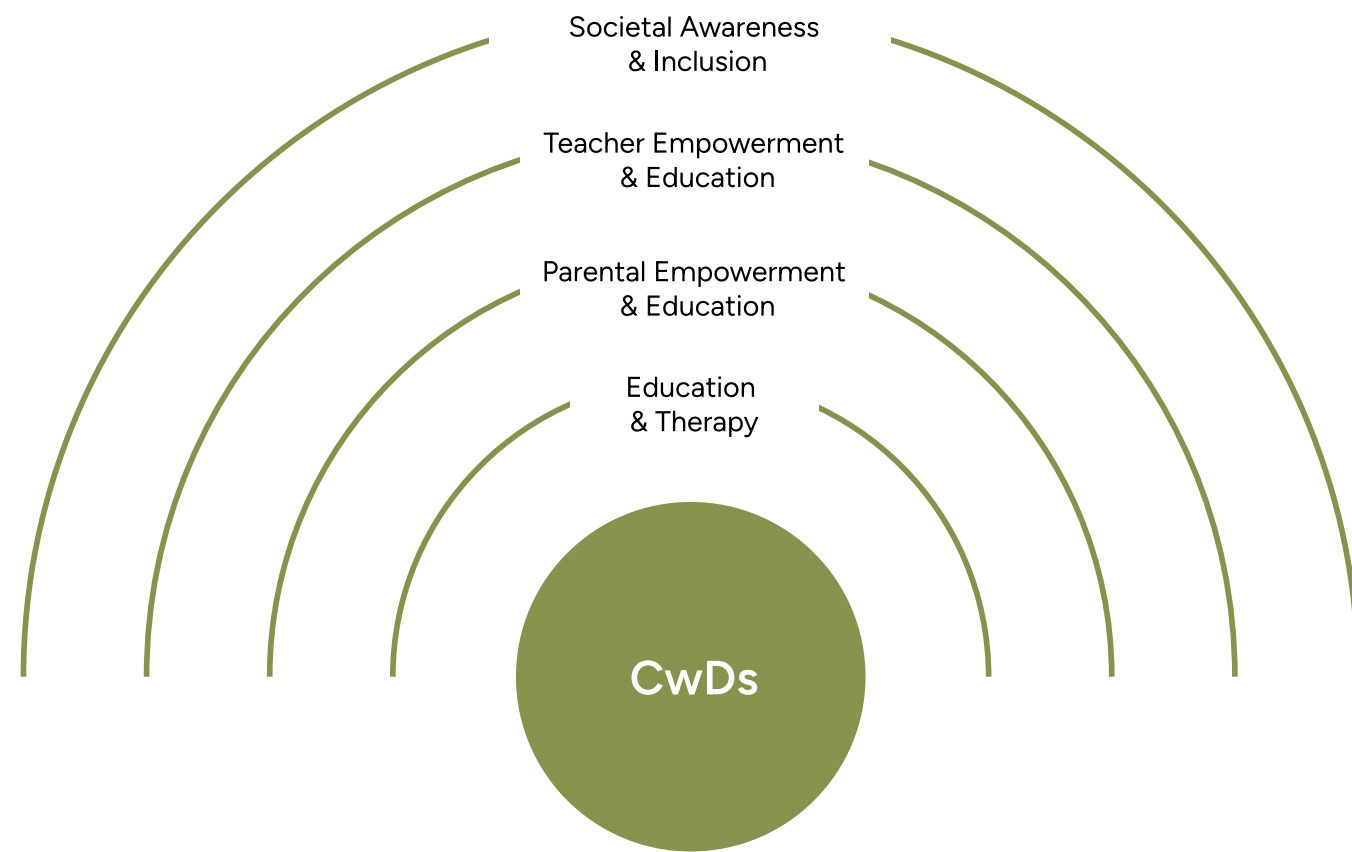
ICT training for job readiness of children and youths with autism and intellectual disability.

SHANAY AUTISM RESOURCE CENTRE

Education and training facility with 3 units - School and Vocational Unit, Research and Resource Development and the Respite Care Unit.

SUVIDYA CENTRE FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION

College affiliated to the University of Mumbai and recognized under the Rehabilitation Council of India. Suvidya conducts many short-term and long-term degree and certificate courses for professionals, pre-service and in-service teachers and parents.



Samarpan Centre for Autism Spectrum: Early Intervention

Spandan: Community Project for Early Intervention

Mahanagar Palika Vishesh Shala Divyangjan (MVSD): Education and Therapeutic Support for 6-18 year old CwDs

Sanket ICT: ICT Training for Job Readiness

Shanay Autism Resource Centre: Education and Training Facility for Autism

Suvidya Centre for Special Education: College for Teacher and Parent Education

Figure 1: SOPAN's focus areas and current programs



Engagement with Wipro Cares

Wipro Cares' partnership with SOPAN began in 2015 with it supporting the Mahanagar Vishesh Shala Divyang (MVSD) project. Previously known as Centre for Developmental Disabilities (CDD), MVSD started in 2010 in collaboration with Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (MCGM) for the urban underprivileged CwDs from the K ward in Mumbai. It provides free education and therapeutic support to children aged 6 to 18 years with developmental disabilities. The services offered range from psychological assessment, special education, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, and speech therapy.

Wipro Cares renewed its funding for MVSD for a second grant in 2018. The grant period was from 2018-2021 with a sum of INR 1.4 Crores disbursed over the 3 years. This report reviews the impact of WF's support to MVSD during this grant period (2018-2021).

MVSD is a Public Private Partnership (PPP) project to educate and train children and adolescents with disabilities in Mumbai. These children belong to low-income families and have never attended school or had any access to training and therapeutic intervention. The space for the centre is provided by the MCGM and SOPAN provides free educational & therapeutic services to CwDs with intellectual disability, cerebral palsy and autism among others.

MVSD, with its multidisciplinary team offers Individual Education Programs (IEP) for each child.

2018 TO 2021

MVSD
WF FUNDING - INR 1.4 CRORES

The services offered range from psychological assessment, special education, occupational therapy, to physiotherapy, speech therapy and more recently art based therapy. The centre has 6 classes - Pre primary, Primary I and II, Intermediate, Secondary and NIOS Pratham. Students are placed in appropriate classes based on their age and ability. IEP is created for each student in close partnership with the parents and caregivers. Guidance and counselling to parents is an important component of the project. This enables them to work with their children at home and reinforce the learning from the centre.

SOPAN attempts to provide the best possible education and therapeutic support to the CwDs in MVSD. It maintains an impressive educator child ratio at 1:6 (as compared to 1:15 in many other special schools) to facilitate effective education and therapy. The children are given exposure to

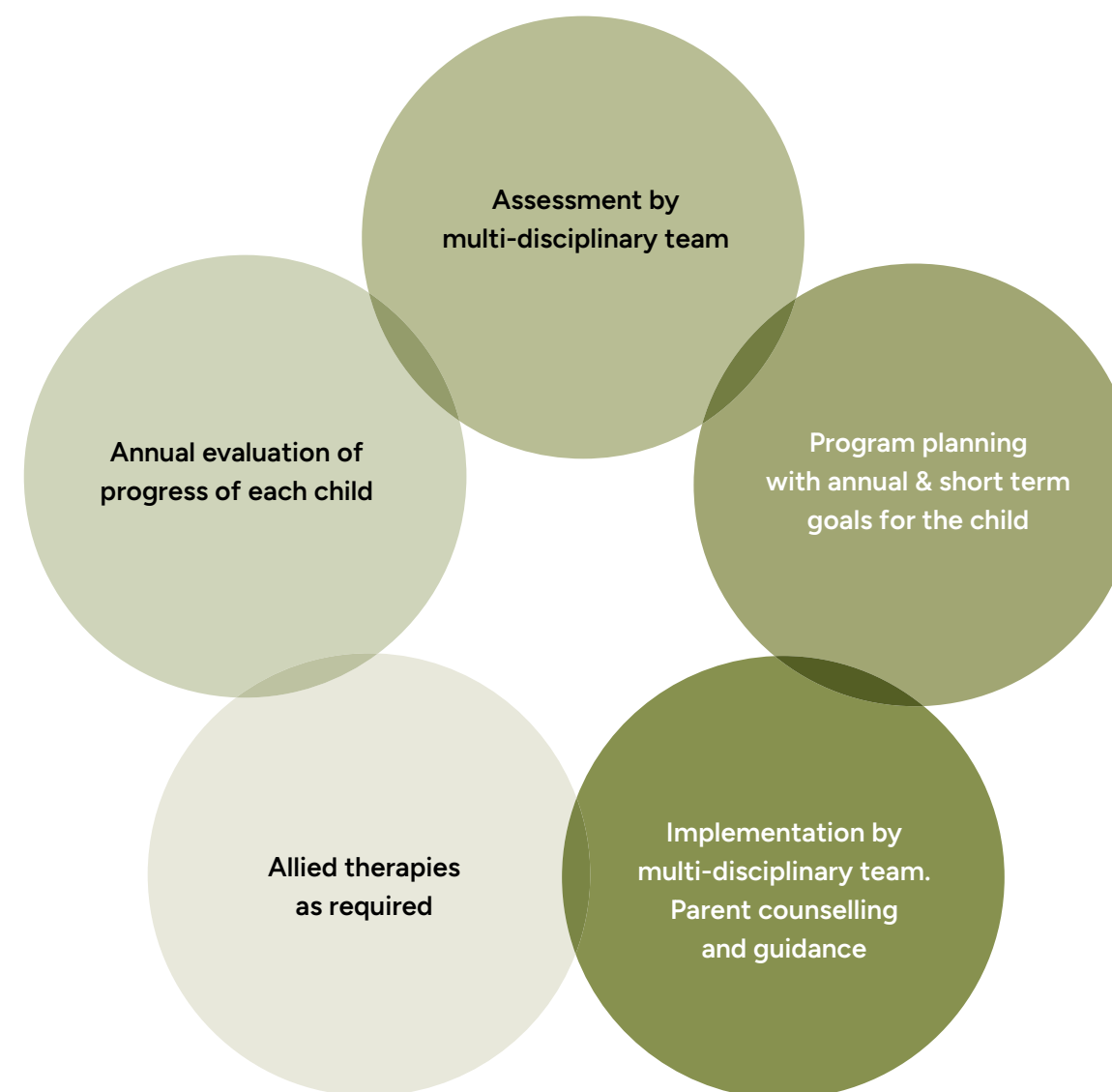


Figure 2: Individual Education Programs (IEPs) Process

visual arts, dance, music, yoga, vocational skills. Care is taken to ensure that there are sufficient opportunities for socialization and community interactions through celebratory events, competitions and excursions. The centre also provides supportive and bridge education to help children with learning disabilities who are enrolled in general schools. This is done to help the CwDs cope with the demands of their class curriculum.

Wipro employees have over the years volunteered at many SOPAN events under the employee engagement programs. Children and youth with disabilities from SOPAN participate in celebratory events held at the Wipro campus in Mumbai on a regular basis. Although the Covid-19 pandemic impacted such events and activities significantly, Wipro's employee engagement with SOPAN is reviving now.

02

02 Impact

impact
impact



ENABLING ACCESS TO EDUCATION FOR CWDS

Providing quality education and therapy to most vulnerable children

130*

No. of CwDs supported at MVSD every year

300

No. of CwDs supported by SOPAN every year

Majority of children with disabilities enrolled in MVSD come from low-income families who cannot afford or access education and therapy for their children elsewhere. At MVSD they access quality education and therapy free of cost. CwDs and their families also access language and social skills training, pre-vocational training and parents counselling. WF's funding for MVSD over this grant period, and earlier, has helped SOPAN create services that fulfil many unmet needs of CwDs and develop a range of age-appropriate services at MVSD. It has created and implemented programs incorporating multiple sensory approaches and integrated rehabilitative therapies.

During the pandemic all classes and activities of SOPAN moved online. It was a challenging transition for teachers and parents. Considerable orientations and handholding went into ensuring that parents could manage many activities at home via different teaching techniques and audio/video calls. Parents received orientation on physiotherapy, fine motor skills, sensory activities, to speech and language skills and more. Counselling and capacity building of parents continued through webinars, zoom sessions and individual video calls.

“It’s very difficult to get a school like this where the service is so good and at no cost. Also, this building is big and spacious, and this is a posh area. It’s not like the small rooms that many other therapy centers have. My son is so happy to come here every day.”

Parent of a 10 year old child with autism, MVSD

*SOPAN was able to reach fewer children during 2020-21 due to the pandemic. It reached 76 CwDs and their families through regular contact classes and 28 through telephone and video calls.

Mainstreaming inclusion of CwDs

SOPAN facilitates awareness of rights and entitlements of CwDs enrolled in MVSD and its other programs. There are many government schemes for CwDs but they are hard to access due to poor implementation, lack of information and awareness among families of CwDs. Different government departments offer their own schemes applicable for the CwDs. However, they work in silos and the schemes and services from different departments are not integrated. For families of CwDs, it is very complex to navigate through the government systems as their children grow and need to access different departments and schemes.

WF's long-term support has enabled SOPAN to work consistently to facilitate CwDs and their families to understand their rights and access their entitlements. Partners advocate for rights, educate families, and ensure that they can access entitlements. SOPAN has brought visibility to CwDs and their issues through its participation in disability awareness events and roundtables. It has also created volunteering and engagement opportunities for corporate employees and students.

SOPAN identifies and works with CwDs and facilitates their access to mainstream education where feasible. Many children from MVSD have successfully joined mainstream schools.

EMPOWERING MULTIPLE STAKEHOLDERS

SOPAN works intensively with multiple stakeholders for educating, mainstreaming and inclusion of children enrolled at MVSD. It creates tangible impact on the lives of multiple stakeholders and not just the CwDs. This impact is visible in a better quality of life of stakeholders, beyond education of CwDs. Stakeholders experience a shift in their understanding of disability and what is needed to help CwDs become independent, functioning members of society.

Changing lives of children

SOPAN has worked consistently to nurture the personhood of CwDs and provide them opportunities to develop to their fullest potential. Its programs are designed to respond to children at each life stage and build age-appropriate skills and knowledge to transition to the next stage of their development. All through these stages the emphasis is on enabling CwDs with appropriate social, life and livelihoods skills that help them lead a productive and independent life.

After enrolling in MVSD, CwDs (along with caregivers) step out of the house and are able to access education designed to meet their needs. They develop critical skills for growth and gain possibility of independent functioning. With

focused attention, many children are able to listen and understand instructions. They are able to achieve developmental milestones, which they otherwise may have achieved with significant delay or not achieved at all. Many have been able to become functioning, productive adults, working in a range of jobs. Every year about 10 SOPAN alumni succeed in finding gainful employment. This may be in entry level jobs in data management, hospitality, local firms and family owned businesses.

“Our children have been taken care of, they are guided, taught and have become capable. Rizwan now washes his hands, takes a bath, manages his toilet, clothes... So I feel relaxed that tomorrow if something happens to me or his father, he can manage. If he feels

hungry or thirsty he tells, so he talks about his needs to whoever is there. If he had been on the bed fully, then we would have always had this worry, what will happen to him after us. Now at least he comes to school, expresses what he feels.”

Parent of a 11 year old child with autism, MVSD

Empowering parents of CwDs

SOPAN work with parents of CwDs enrolled at MVSD to shift mindsets and provide crucial support that empowers them. As more and more parents step out of their houses with their children and gain access to quality therapeutic care and education, it helps them break out of the cycle of isolation and stigma holding them back. Parents experience a journey away from dejection and shame to one of hope and confidence. Meeting other parents and children that they can relate to helps them significantly in coming to terms with their children's disabilities. The periodic celebrations and community events at SOPAN bring families of CwDs and their educators together and give everyone opportunities and spaces to relax and connect with each other.

Parents' (especially mothers') understanding of disability is enhanced through multiple formal and informal courses. These training programs orient parents to learn tools and practices to support the learning of their children. They also learn to contextualize use of simple material and home-based techniques to assist their children in therapy and support their children's Individual Education Plans (IEP). Some parents even work with other children under the supervision of the SOPAN staff.

SOPAN's efforts in counselling and training parents of CwDs has helped parents recognize their children as persons with equal rights and presence in the society, capable of becoming independent, productive members.

"We did not have so much experience earlier. When we came to school (in MVSD) then the teachers would explain to us and we started understanding all the activities- how to do them, how the children learn through them. If we follow the practices at home then the progress is better for the children. We can see the improvement. They tell us what to do so that the child becomes calm."

Parent of a child
with autism, MVSD

Enabling educators' personal and professional growth

"My wish is that till I have physical strength I will keep on working. I get a lot of happiness, as what I can do is very important, and that's why I keep doing it. Working with small children is very motivational."

Special Educator, MVSD

For educators, working with CwDs at MVSD sets in motion a journey of significant growth. They face many challenges in their work, from making correct diagnoses to creating effective solutions. Any change in CwDs is slow and only visible after years of consistent effort. Educators and therapists have to stay the course and develop deep resilience and creativity to continue working effectively with CwDs. Educators feel that working with CwDs has brought them immense personal and professional growth.

ENABLING A SUPPORTIVE ECOSYSTEM FOR CWDS

Educating Educators

There are not too many institutions offering good quality, affordable courses for training educators of children with autism. To address this gap SOPAN has initiated many short and long term courses to create a pool of trained special educators. It offers a 2 year B.Ed. in Special Education (Autism) as a pre-service training of teachers. As part of in-service training of teachers it offers Continuous Rehabilitation Education (RCE) courses. It also offers short term courses for parents of children with autism. A 4-week certificate course in Shadow Teaching has also been designed to address the need for supporting inclusive education of children with disabilities.

Sensitizing and empowering other institutions

SOPAN is the State Nodal Agency Centre (SNAC) for Maharashtra, under The National Trust - an autonomous organization of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India. In this role it mentors small NGOs, facilitates formation of Parents' Associations and Disability Persons Association and conducts orientations, trainings and courses on disability in the state for government officials, local level committees, registered organizations and many other stakeholders.

Mobilizing a local network to support CwDs

SOPAN has established a network of relationships with local stakeholders like Mahanagar Palike, local councillors, corporates, banks and small businesses which functions as a reliable resource pool for contribution on a regular basis. Their partners fund annual celebrations or one off events, support long term programs, volunteer for specific celebrations, make small donations ranging from stationary to appliances and aids or lease out infrastructure for a physical space/centre to provide therapeutic services to children with developmental disabilities.



03

03 Way Forward

way
forward

way forward



While MVSD would continue to need WF's support, with current or higher grant size, the partnership has potential to create more meaningful impact by reflecting on new opportunities. SOPAN in particular is looking for support in curating collaborations with specific objectives.

Curation of Collaborations

SOPAN is looking to Wipro Cares to play a more facilitative role in connecting it with other organizations and platforms. Wipro Cares can help build synergies that individual organizations cannot by themselves. It can bring organizations together to appreciate complexities of disability and the nuances of problems and solutions. For instance, it could promote Roundtables on Disability like Azim Premji Foundation (APF).

Livelihood Opportunities

Providing decent livelihoods for the CwDs it has been supporting is the next big challenge for SOPAN. It has initiated a pre-vocational program that needs to be significantly strengthened. SOPAN is looking to Wipro Cares to link to relevant job opportunities and placements within the Wipro ecosystem.

Volunteer Engagement

SOPAN engages many volunteers as part of Wipro Cares (as from other CSRs) and thinks it would benefit greatly if the volunteers focused on promotion of inclusion of PwDs. This could be through ensuring SOPAN's regular participation in company events where they could get opportunities to sell products created by PwDs at its centre. Volunteers could also facilitate promotion of merchandise made by PwDs on e-commerce platforms.

05. Conclusion

Wipro Cares has had a successful, long-term partnership with SOPAN, supporting the MVSD project. This support has enabled SOPAN to offer much needed critical educational and therapeutic services to CwDs. SOPAN has gained tremendous experience and expertise from its work on MVSD over the years. This has helped it develop its other programs within the organization and provide valuable support to government and other stakeholders. The partnership has potential to create even more meaningful impact going forward by creating new opportunities for livelihoods for PwDs and by encouraging organizations to come together to champion for inclusion of CwDs and PwDs in every sphere of life.

06. Annexure

Methodology

PRIMARY RESEARCH

In order to arrive at insights on SOPAN's model of work and its on ground impact, we conducted in-depth interviews with its Leadership, Function heads, Therapists and Special educators. All these were conducted in person and on site in Mumbai. We also conducted in-depth interviews with 3 beneficiaries- parents of children enrolled in the MVSD program. We observed the MVSD project site in action.

SECONDARY RESEARCH

We conducted a desk review of reports shared by SOPAN and Wipro Cares in addition to other organization collaterals, and the website. We also referred to other reports on access to education for CwDs.

Note: We have relied on SOPAN for access to beneficiaries and this will inevitably result in a small degree of bias in choice of sample.

wipro: foundation

