

MUSKaaN

...an incredible journey



Celebrating 40 years
1982 - 2022



our story

Muskaan is a story of collective will, determination and unwavering optimism. It was started in 1982 by parents and professionals fill up a void in required services and facilities for children and adults with intellectual disability (ID) and their families. Relentless hard work, honest intentions and clarity of focus steered the growth of Muskaan. The team had only one mission and that was creating growth opportunities and required services to enrich the lives of persons with ID. We knew that in order to live a fuller and dignified life, intellectually challenged children and adults needed education, vocational skills, employment and other growth opportunities. However, doing this had been an immense challenge. Every step that we took in this direction taught us about its pragmatics. Small achievements on the way kept strengthening our optimism and courage.

Celebrating Simple Joys



MUSKAAN
Spreading smiles among the differently abled

MUSKaaN

...an incredible journey

By Dr Shanti Auluck



National Award to Muskaan for its outstanding performance in the field of Welfare of Persons with Disabilities
by the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, in 2006

Guiding Vision, Mission & Values of Muskaan

Vision

A society which recognizes human diversity and respects the rights of all people irrespective of levels of abilities

Mission

MUSKaaN creates and provides opportunities for capacity development of Persons with Intellectual Disability and their families, advocates for their rights and legal capacity, collaborating, facilitating and promoting the creation of an enabling environment and an inclusive society.

Guiding values:

- Alleviation of as much suffering and discrimination as possible
- Dignity of all kinds of work, regardless of job titles
- Thoughtful usage of all the resources including special care for cost effectiveness
- Working with the spirit of mutual help and cooperation, sensitivity to other's needs and feelings and team spirit
- Creating and nurturing an environment which encourages each other's growth through communication of positives and negatives in an honest, detached and sensitive manner
- Integrity, transparency, and humanistic values
- Giving the best to our work motivated by internal rewards
- Service to humanity without personal publicity
- Healthy self-criticism, openness to new ways of thinking
- Promotion of democratic, decentralized and participative decision making
- Conflict resolution through caring and direct discussions with understanding

Preface

Time can stand still and yet it flows, taking us to unimaginable milestones. Forty years of Muskaan, being celebrated in 2022, is not merely a celebration of the productive years which have flown past, it is also a reminder of that moment in time when we affirmed our faith in our Intellectually Disabled students. It is an anniversary of our commitment to build a life with dignity and respect for them. And as we celebrate forty years, we reaffirm that faith and commitment, with even more conviction and zeal.

What an incredible journey it has been - of growth, of learning, of building an institution, of strengthening a cadre of trainers, of supporting each other through thick and thin, of building roads where none existed! But most of all, it has been a journey of building a family - carved on the foundation of love and care, faith and resilience, diversity and inclusion. And at the core of all our endeavours, all these years, have been our students. We have been led by our young adults and their abilities: holding our hands to guide us in this joyous route of building an inclusive world where all diversities can co-exist with mutual respect and dignity. Muskaan is an acknowledgement of that ability in disability: an ability that very few can see, and even fewer can nurture.

The two pillars the of Muskaan movement, the parents and the professionals, work together to sustain and nourish its ethos and culture. This partnership enhances mutual sensitivity and sharing of knowledge and understanding of the needs and concerns of each other. Parents and teachers are the warp and weft of the Muskaan cloth which gives it a distinct hue, colour and texture. Together the parents and teachers have joined hands to sculpt Muskaan in these four decades, shaping the lives and destiny of many adults with intellectual disability, but also transforming the attitude of the community and the society towards them.

Written by Dr Shanti Auluck, this book chronicles the unique journey of Muskaan. It also documents Shanti ji's journey with Muskaan. As a founder, she has remained the guiding force to shape the trajectory of Muskaan's growth, and in turn has been shaped by it. In her writing you will see an intermingling of the self and the institution; of a development which is external and also internal; a construction of a physical exterior and the shaping of a spiritual self. Muskaan is blessed to have her, and she is blessed to have Muskaan in her life. It is a journey worth documenting and celebrating.

Shalini Sinha
President, Muskaan
2022



This book is dedicated to persons with Intellectual Disability who have inspired us by their perseverance to build a better life for themselves, and for us.

“

“I vividly remember the day when in one of our executive meetings we were trying to choose a name for our training centre. We did not like a name that was condescending in its meaning. We wanted a forward looking and happy name and chose MUSKAAN. Years later we realized that it was the most appropriate name as persons with Intellectual Disability have a rare capacity to spread love and cheer around them. We feel blessed to work with them.”

”

Muskaan- an incredible journey

Muskaan's journey is also my personal journey in life. I don't feel like segregating the two because life changing situations and their demands on us change us in unimagined ways. Muskaan and its team, including myself, have grown together. What follows in these pages are glimpses into a human journey. In pursuit of our goals and aspirations, the human experiences often get eclipsed whereas it is these experiences alone which drive us on our path in life's journey; it is our learnings and insights which are our real gains.

Today, after 40 years when I think of Muskaan the first feeling that comes to my mind is "how did it happen"? The whole journey looks amazing. We did not start with any ambition or plan, it wasn't clear about what will happen or how it will happen. The one and only thought was that we owe it to the children with intellectual disability and their families, and we must work to create opportunities so that they can live a decent and respectful life. Their disability was not on my mind. I only thought of them as children and adults who, like everyone else, have an inherent drive to live with enthusiasm and fullness. Today, I feel as if all my learnings, incidents, perspectives about life and choices, were taking me in one direction i.e., the creation of Muskaan and my passionate understanding of people with intellectual disability and other disabilities, and relentless work for enhancing their lives. Two guiding lights in my life have been people with intellectual disability and my deep concern with existential questions in life which took me to the study of Vedanta and other spiritual traditions, an unparalleled knowledge system which transforms the way we think about ourselves, about others, and the whole world.

Each day in this journey was taken as it came, often with new demands and challenges. I was already trained by my son Puneet who has Down Syndrome, to shift my focus from problems to solution-oriented thinking and my mind was tuned to explore the ways to deal with challenges. I unhesitatingly asked for advice and support from people who could be trusted for their sensitivity and maturity. I was careful about my conversations with people so that others would not get the impression that I was either seeking their sympathy or boasting about whatever little I was doing. It taught me an attitude of humility in all my transactions with people. I also told myself very clearly that I may not always get a positive response from people, and I don't have to feel bad or offended by it. I was increasingly getting firmly rooted in the cause overcoming ego-centric needs, and that was the need of the hour. Social injustice to so many lives without any fault of theirs was too much for me to bear, so every step in this direction was an answer to the call of my conscience.



Puneet Auluck with his mother, Dr Shanti Auluck

Connect with parents & professionals

Being a part of a group of parents and caring professionals, mainly the doctors of the Genetics Department of AIIMS was very encouraging. It brought a kind of solace and confidence that was needed in the beginning years. Meeting with Dr. IC Verma, a pioneer in Genetics in India, was a significant event in the birth of Muskaan. His kindness, generosity and expertise in his field gave me and all other parents connected at that time, great strength and confidence to move on our path to create the needed services for children and adults with ID and their families.

For almost a decade we were using his office as our meeting place, using lecture halls and auditorium of AIIMS for many other functions. His team of doctors was always willing to help us in whatever we needed. Dr. Verma and his team stood like a rock behind us in the early years of Muskaan.

Diversity & inclusion

Life is a gift, and everyone enjoys it in one's own unique way. There are diverse ways of being in this world and each one is valid and authentic. We all are part of a larger order, not knowing why we are here yet keep judging everyone on some imagined criteria. What ultimately matters is that everyone should be treated with love and respect and get the opportunity for a full life as much as possible. That is social inclusion.

Looking back in time

It was not any ambition that resulted in today's Muskaan. Deep reverence for life and the distress at social injustice had been the driving force. I felt deeply disturbed by the discriminatory attitudes towards certain sections of humanity and it appeared totally irrational to me. Traditionally, Indian society had ignored the need for providing training to such children and accepted them as they were, sometimes out of compassion or pity and often getting amused by their awkward 'funny' and simple ways. Assumption of incapacity was dominant and training efforts depended on the mindset of the individual family.

Today's Muskaan has undergone 3 changes in its name:

1. Welfare association for Down Syndrome (1982-1990)
2. Parents association for the welfare of children with mental handicap (Muskaan) – (1990-2014)

Amidst such conditions, we a group of parents and professionals came together to form a society and registered it way back in November 1982. My son was born in 1976 and he was barely 6 years old then. I was still grappling with my personal challenges of mothering a child with Down Syndrome, commitments to my family, my passion for teaching Psychology in Lady Sri Ram College, as well as a fledgling organization that Muskaan was in its initial years. God has been very kind to place me in a caring and supportive family who always supported me in my pursuits.

Muskaan/Parents Association for the empowerment of persons with intellectual disability (2015 onwards)

The change signifies the broadening of our perspective and philosophy.



Muskaan defines our approach

I vividly remember the day when in one of our executive meetings we were trying to choose a name for our training centre. We did not like a name that was condescending in its meaning. We wanted a forward looking and happy name and chose MUSKAAN. Years later we realized that it was the most appropriate name as persons with intellectual disability have a rare capacity to spread love and cheer around them. We feel blessed to work with them.

We refused to accept the prevailing attitudes of hopelessness and wanted to do something to improve the lives of intellectually challenged persons. My subject Psychology taught me how to simplify learning situations and the significance of strengthening their cognitive functions. We had no model to follow, no chartered path to walk on. It meant doing small experiments with minimal resources and carve out a plan and programme, aiming at capacity building of children and adults. People from the larger community came forward to support us in many ways--some giving their time and skills, some contributing finances and infrastructure and others with ideas. It strengthened our faith and confidence, and inspired us to go along with our resolve. The journey had not been an easy one. We went through several ups and downs dealing with the lack of financial and other resources. Often we found that in times of crises, support came from unexpected quarters. We knew that our task was not easy, and we had to find solutions whenever difficulties came up. Our determination kept us going all the way.

As I reflect I feel immense satisfaction about an important landmark decision which we took in March 1989, to start a vocational training centre named MUSKAAN, where we could explore the possibility of training our students with intellectual disability in some simple vocational skills and prepare adults with intellectual disability for a productive life i.e., work and employment. The choice of the name meaning SMILE (always there on our student's faces) played a very significant role in defining our approach as taught by our students. We started with three trainees and one teacher in a small garage. Finances for one year were raised by organizing a fund-raising programme, a musical evening where famous singers Rajendra and Nina Mehta sang for Muskaan. Rotary Club of Delhi Rajdhani greatly helped us in organizing the event and raising funds.

Persons with intellectual disability have a rare capacity to spread love and cheer around them. They may feel rejected but are never envious of other's success. They aspire but never compete. They do not grudge, rarely complain and lead a very ego free and in-the-present existence. But that is not to say that they lack psychosocial intelligence. Often, they feel deeply -from grief to happiness, rejection and appreciation, marginalization and acceptance.



The success of our trainees in learning vocational skills was inspiring. It encouraged us to expand the vocational Training Centre. We moved from a garage to a barsati in Safdarjung Enclave and then to a basement in Hauz Khas in 1994. The Late Mrs. Sabitri Das Gupta, whose daughter was receiving training in Muskaan, gave us the basement of her house for three years without charging us any rent. It was a 900 sq. ft. area which housed storage, work area as well as the office. Forty trainees with eleven staff members and few parent volunteers happily worked there meeting all challenges and constraints with perseverance and a smile.

I used to come to Muskaan after my teaching schedule in Lady Sri Ram College and that was possible only once or twice in a week. I did not like the cramped space where our students, teachers and volunteers worked. I always felt that our team deserved a decent place of learning and working. Slowly it dawned upon us that further growth of Muskaan could happen only when we have our own space as the rental places were too expensive. We approached Delhi Development Authority for the allotment of land in 1994. Officers in DDA were very receptive to our need and allotted us an acre of land in Vasant Kunj with the maximum possible concessions. We are particularly thankful to Mr. Ashok Pahwa, then Vice- chairman of DDA, and Mr. P K Dave, Lt. Governor of Delhi, for the allotment of the land in 1996 in Vasant Kunj, Delhi. My husband Santosh Auluck and all his architect friends and colleagues in DDA were extremely helpful at every stage in this process. They all knew our son Puneet and loved his friendly temperament.

“

I particularly remember my conversations with professionals who felt that parents should take up the task of advocacy rather than get involved in creating services. However, I always believed in grassroot work that could enhance the lives of people with intellectual disability. The time has revealed that 80-90% of the services in this sector have come up only due to the initiative of parents' associations all over India

”



The Muskaan Executive Committee, which heads the governance structure of Muskaan includes parents as well as staff of Muskaan. Although the role of the EC is advisory in nature, many amongst the EC, step in whenever needed, to strengthen the hands of the Muskaan team. Parents and teachers are the two pillars on which Muskaan is built. Photo of Muskaan EC members and Muskaan team 2019

Creation of infrastructure

We had no resources to construct the building and determination to have a place for our trainees where they could learn, work, and play in a decent environment. The Muskaan Executive Committee, which heads the governance structure of Muskaan includes parents as well as staff of Muskaan. Although the role of the EC is advisory in nature, many amongst the EC, step in whenever needed, to strengthen the hands of the Muskaan team. Parents and teachers are the two pillars on which Muskaan is built. People from the larger community helped us in raising resources for the construction of our building. Many friends and well-wishers of Muskaan helped by donating funds for the construction of the building. Notable among them were the Japan Embassy, Akhouri Foundation USA, Aid Muskaan USA, Mr. Ramesh Kochhar from USA, and Tultul Sarkar Foundation and several individual donors who generously contributed funds towards construction of rooms in the memory of their parents or family members. Many people have also helped in raising funds from their own circle of friends. It looked like a miracle that 1.8 crore of rupees could be raised for the construction of the Muskaan building. It did require lot of personalized effort which was amply rewarded by the support that we got in this process. It was a huge amount 20 years back (2001-2002). The Executive Board of Muskaan that consisted largely of the parents, worked like a strong team guiding and supporting at every step of the process.

The community of friends and supporters of Muskaan contributed equipment and furniture etc, new or old that took care of the needs of Muskaan. The same continues till today and friends from the community keep fulfilling Muskaan's needs.

Top professionals of Delhi dedicated their honorary services by designing the building, planning structures, services, electrical design, landscape etc. The building construction was taken up by the reputed firm, Ahluwalia Contracts. With the dedication and commitment of all who helped in this effort, it is no wonder that people who visit Muskaan often share that they feel a sense of serenity and joy when they enter the building; it is imbued with positive energy. Could it be any different when so much selfless feeling and work have been poured in by so many people. Above all, our students humanize the whole environment through their purity, unconditional love and happiness, and unsullied humanness; one can't remain untouched by it. We feel blessed to work with them.

The architectural design of the Muskaan building was done by a parent - Mr Santosh Auluck –who is also Dr Shanti Auluck’s husband. Many visitors to Muskaan are awe struck by the unique circular structure of Muskaan building which is designed to cater to all the needs of Muskaan today, and in the future. The building has stood the test of time, by continuing to accommodate Muskaan’s growth in the past twenty years. When asked what inspired him to design this building, Mr Auluck modestly remarks “I wanted to create a beautiful, simple and aesthetic structure, amalgamating it with safety, accessibility and utility.”

Photo of the Muskaan building in Vasant Kunj, New Delhi



Understanding the training needs and its challenges

Training of people with intellectual disability demands creative ways to reach out to them and provide needed support. As every teacher knows well, education and teaching-learning itself is a very creative process and more so when the student has problems in learning.

A creative journey with students

Working with students at Muskaan and my son Puneet at home brought immense depth to our understanding of the mind and its functions. When we think of a person, we don't know the multidimensionality of the inner world, vaguely called as mind in popular terms. Indian psychology (psychology in Indian spiritual traditions) identifies four aspects of inner world:

MANAS—mind with its needs and desires

BUDDHI — intellect that cognizes and knows everything

CHITTA— impressions created by past memories

AHANKAR—ego, the integrating centre within

Like everyone else, people with cognitive or intellectual disabilities share all these dimensions except that intellect is not optimally developed. Psychology further analyses intellect and the process of knowing and understanding to 7 functions:

- Attention ● Memory ● Thinking ● Problem solving
- Perception ● Concept formation ● Reasoning

Intellectual disability occurs due to sub-optimal development of the above functions, affecting overall cognition. Strengthening of these functions through a variety of learning experiences or training, enhances cognitive capacities. People with intellectual disability have difficulty in abstract thinking and therefore academic learning remains limited. However, they are good in concrete thinking and therefore good in doing concrete operations involved in simple manufacturing as well as those jobs which do not require complex judgement or reasoning. Teaching itself is a very creative process and more so when the student has problems in learning.

MUSKAAN PROJECTS

Muskaan is working with the following objectives:

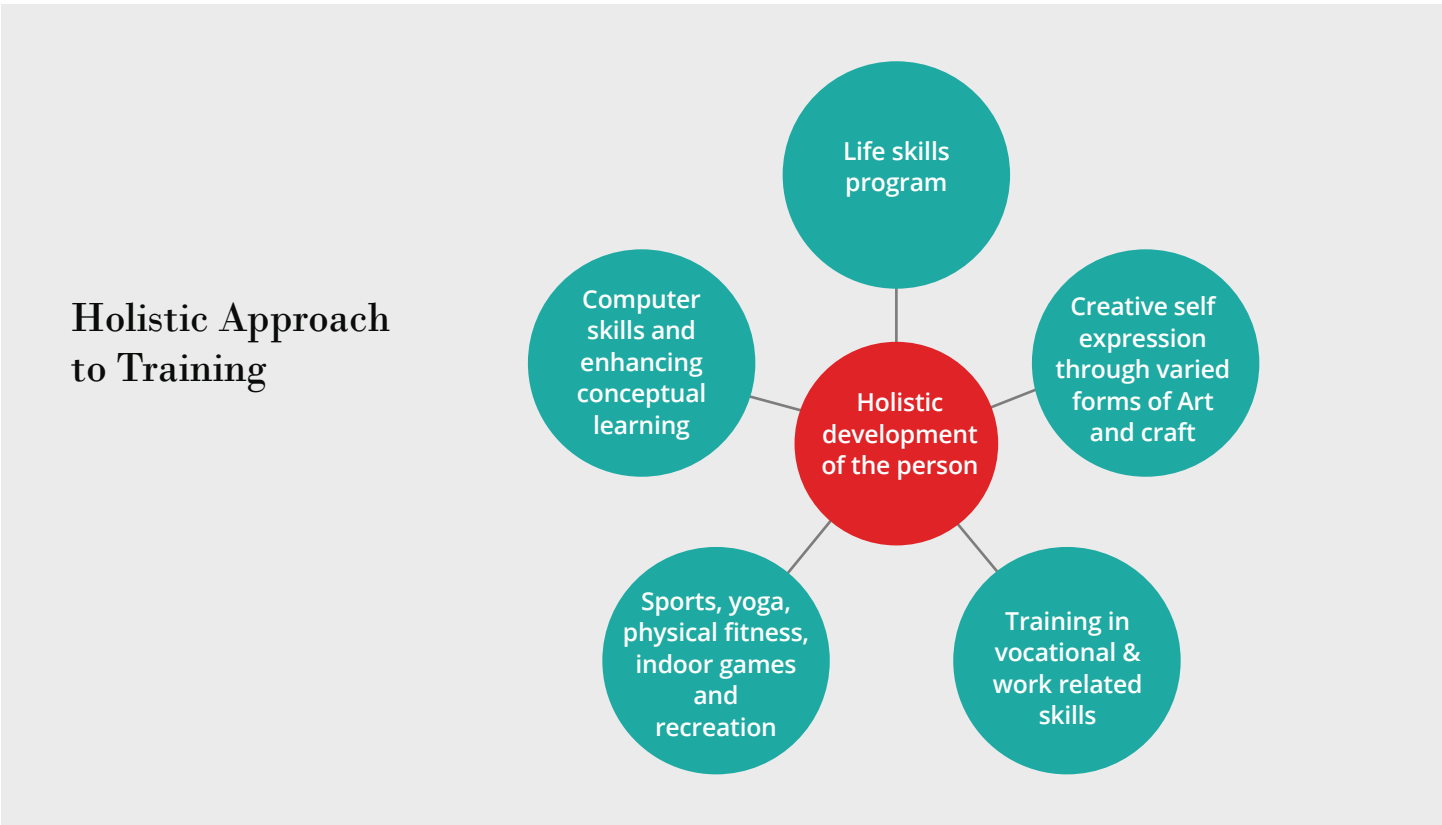
- Provide comprehensive education and training including vocational training and employment opportunities to persons with intellectual disability.
- Empower the parents through emotional support and appropriate information by organizing training workshops, lectures and counselling services etc.
- Provide a safe and dignified life to intellectually challenged adults through the assisted living facility of a group home, especially when parents become old or pass away.
- Raise awareness in the society about the capacities of persons with intellectual disability and to foster recognition and respect for their rights and dignity.
- Advocacy with the Government and other stakeholders to create adequate, appropriate and quality services and facilities for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

While each of Muskaan's programs are independent, they feed into each other too, just like the lived realities of persons with intellectual disability. Over the years, Muskaan has designed and developed the programs and interventions in response to the needs and demands of the adults with intellectual disability and their families; they have remained in focus in all reviews and revisions done from time to time.

Students at Muskaan have humanized the whole environment. Humanization may mean several things: a degree of closeness and informality in interpersonal interactions, a stress free work environment, cooperative efforts, openness in dialogue, caring relationships and ownership of the cause for which the entire Muskaan team is relentlessly working.



Muskaan never diluted its focus on capacity building of children and adults with intellectual disability. Everything else remained secondary except the enabling training programme that grew more and more in quality and depth. Periodical reviews helped the team to make all programme and activities more relevant to the needs of our students. It resulted in twofold dimensions of growth of our training programme; one emphasizing vocational and work-related training and other pertaining to life skills or in other words, personal growth-oriented programme. The latter included training activities for cognitive enhancement, social-emotional understanding, self-discipline and regulation, independence in daily life, and knowledge and awareness of physical and social environment. Thus, both types of training programme were aimed at contributing to a fuller life.



These areas are important for every person but more so for people with intellectual disability. In other children we assume that with general exposure to varied life situations they will learn and grow in these areas. However, people with ID require help in developing these skills as we need to go to the basics of these skills and then choose simple ways to facilitate their learning. Persons with intellectual disability vary from mild to high level of disability. Muskaan experience has shown that everyone of them can be trained and engaged in work as per their ability.

All such interventions require a humanistic perspective, and one needs to bring a shift from the utilitarian approach. Every person needs to be valued, irrespective of his/her level of achievement and ability; it contributes to the emotional wellbeing of a person. Muskaan’s experience has shown that every one of them can benefit from such learnings and can be trained and engaged in productive work as per their ability. This approach and attitude have a transforming impact on teachers as well as students.

Muskaan charted its own path in developing training programmes for adults with intellectual disability. We made a conscious choice of working with adults in the 16 + age group, as nothing existed for them at that time. There was a dearth of teachers in the decades of 80s and 90s. The special educators are not well prepared to work with persons with special needs because a deeper knowledge about mind functions is missing from their syllabus and training. This prevents them from comprehending the reasons for learning difficulties at a deeper mental level. In such a situation, we needed to enhance the knowledge base of the teachers and work at their capacity building so that they could understand the mind functions of a person with intellectual disability and appreciate their mental space, making teaching more effective.

The demand of this sector in terms of creating the required growth opportunities for children and adults with intellectual disability continues to be huge and resources are greatly limited. Our students kept driving us to find solutions to every challenge. It was thrilling to walk on the path of mind-building which gave rise to several fundamental questions related to the human mind and intellect. I realized that even the discipline of Psychology had very limited understanding about such issues. It inspired our imagination and encouraged us to explore the world of a person whose cognitive faculties were not optimally developed.

Working with persons with intellectual disability makes one realize the authenticity of diverse worlds that we all entertain. The tragedy is that we are busy all the time to validate our own conceptions and views disregarding the beautiful diversity that is all around us. We are living in a relative world; there is no single version of a true world. Einstein's theory of relativity shows us that even time is not absolute; what is happening in distant galaxies now, will actually happen for us in the distant future. Long time back in ancient times, the Upanishads, a great treasure of thought for all humanity, declared the nature of the universe to be an apparent reality. What meets the eye and the mind is not necessarily the truth, the absolute reality. We assume that everyone is living in the same world. Can we say the same for fish, bird or animal? When it comes to a human world, we assume it is same with everyone even though our experiences indicate it to be contrary. Similarly, a person with sub-optimal intellectual development or autism has his/her own uniqueness of mental space. Appreciation of this diversity transform the way we look at disability.

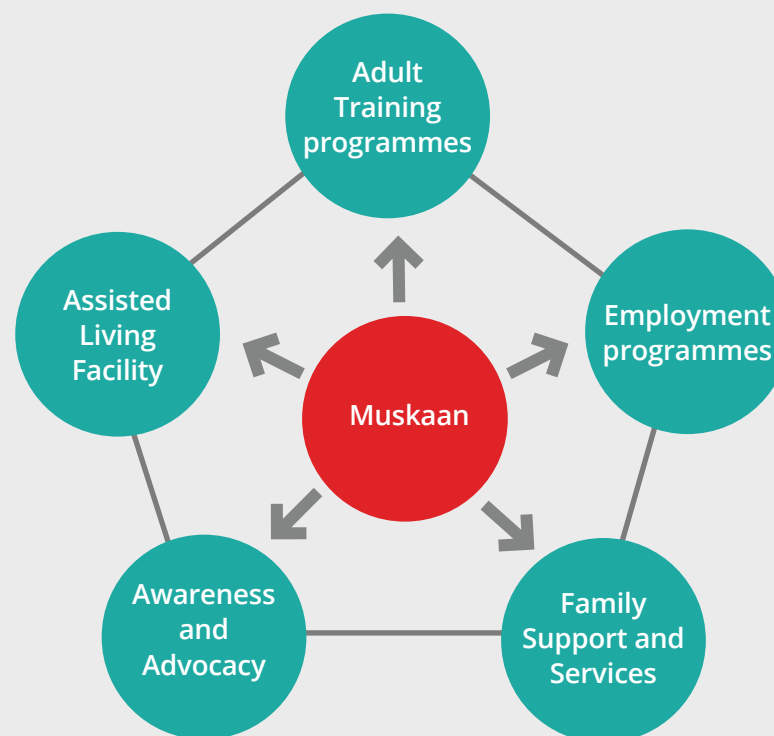


Every project of Muskaan came up to address the needs of our students and their families. it resulted into 4 main projects:

- Vocational and life skills training and employment of adults with intellectual disability
- Assisted living facility for senior adults as their parents were getting old and were worried about the future safety of their ward
- Family support services
- Awareness and Advocacy

Work in all the above areas aimed at providing growth opportunities to persons with Intellectual Disabilities. Families with a member with intellectual disability need support services, guidance, knowledge, and emotional support to be able to meet multiple challenges. Similarly, an accepting and inclusive society needs to be free from prejudices; it needs the right kind of information, understanding, and awareness.

Muskaan Projects





WORK is central to all adult life, as it is to the students of Muskaan. Work and employment gives adults with intellectual disability a sense of contribution, of having a meaning in their lives. It marks their development from childhood to adulthood, it gives a purpose to their adult life! When working in the production of goods, they enjoy the satisfaction of creation. Those involved in services, in mainstream employment enjoy the interpersonal connections during work and draw a lot of psychological sustenance from it. With training, adults with intellectual disability can actively participate in assembly line production, including meeting target deadlines and hygienic and environment friendly production.

Assisted living facility- an answer to ‘Who after us?’

Looking back in time, I wonder how I gathered the courage to initiate this project. Debating it for almost one year in the executive board, thrashing out all doubts, apprehensions, and uncertainties, we resolved to start this project in 2012. By then, I had seen how Muskaan tackled so many challenges in the past 30 years. The biggest source of confidence came from our students because they always rose to the occasion and never failed us in any of the programme designed for them. We finally started the project with 6 residents (4 men and 2 women) with the faith that we will be able to handle the difficulties as they come. Taking lifetime responsibility at a time when parents also may not be there, was quite a bold step. One thing was clear in my mind that if not Muskaan, who else would do it. Single or senior age parents were coming to meet me to do something for long term security and safe living of their wards so that they could die peacefully. It had to be a group effort and that too by the parents' initiative as is the experience all over India, and in other countries as well. Securing necessary services could come only through a parents' movement.

Muskaan confirmed my faith time and again that honest, sincere, and focussed work brings results. With support from the National Trust, one community centre with 3 acres of land in Dera village (part of South Delhi) was given to Muskaan for running an assisted living facility. A community of friends and relatives of residents and other team members donated generously to make the building habitable with good infrastructure including greening of the surrounding land.

A new team was built under the leadership of a newly appointed professional to establish this project. She herself has a daughter with multiple disabilities. Intensive work with residents required much more staff than any other residential facility, and that escalates salary expenditure. Funds were collected through generous donations by large hearted people because it would have been a huge expense on the part of parents to fully fund the regular expenses. Constant support by the executive board, National Trust and parents of residents, led to a successful creation of the assisted living facility for 20 adult men and women. Our vision was to create a home away from home where residents can participate in its running as per their ability. Residents participated in consultations about the food choices, outings, celebrations, games, sports, and other recreational activities. They were going to Muskaan for vocational training and employment. Residents went home for short vacations, as connect with their families was seen to be important for their emotional wellbeing.

The entire residential complex became so attractive to the villagers of Dera that they later started demanding their community centre back for their own use. The concerned Government Department buckled under their pressure and did not extend the lease beyond April 2021. We shifted the entire residential facility to Muskaan premises in a newly constructed wing as per building norms of the Govt. This was hugely supported again by the caring community of individual and organizational donors.

At the Muskaan residential facility, all efforts are made to keep the atmosphere 'home-like', and hobbies, likes and dislikes of each resident is built into the programme. Training in independence in daily living to addressing health needs and recreational demands are factored in. In many situations, their aspirations are also sensitively handled, as they would have been in a family situation.

The 'fun' element marks the ethos of running the residential facility.



Experiments with dharmic ways of living

If Puneet forced me to question unhelpful attitudes in many areas of life including the underestimation of their capacities, Muskaan forced me to look at my own conduct. I could not have expected other people in the community to change their attitudes unless I myself was changed deep down within. Gandhiji's famous quote "Be the change you want to see in society" became a constant reminder to bridge the gap between ideas and practice. With Muskaan I got a chance to practice what I truly believed. There was never any kind of pressure or comparison with anyone. It had already dawned on me that many common pursuits that we undertake in everyday living, lead us nowhere. It puts us into a vicious circle of wanting more and more to fulfill our own needs and aspirations. Need for recognition is another trap which can misdirect one's thoughts and deeds and deprive one of the real gain in life i.e., emotional and spiritual growth. Moreover, gratitude was becoming my way of responding to the world around me. Our children have such a feeling of camaraderie that they teach us lessons in cooperation and care rather than competing with others. They may get unhappy if one ignores or neglects them, but they don't get hurt if someone excels.

My study of Vedanta strengthened my resolve to always follow the truth and never compromise the value system. It became a sort of experiment/adventure to deal with various demands as a sense of duty and commitment. It precludes pretensions which are encouraged by personal and social situations to gain short term results. It encourages objectivity and a scientific approach. It makes one see through the trick that the mind keeps playing and keeps us entangled in the futile pursuits of life. It demands that things need to be seen as they are, rather than what we would like them to be. It demands growing out of egocentrism which pushes us towards coloured perception to suit our needs. Being authentic requires inner strength and maturity.

This kind of honesty within oneself becomes a source of conviction and courage. It enables one to become transparent in thought and action. Pursuing a larger cause, demands transcending narrow self-interest and concerns. The more one can do that, it attracts more and more people to join and support the mission.

Vaidik dharma defines a dharmic way of living in this world that places duties above rights. Vaidik / Sanatana dharma arrives at the centrality of universal humanistic values that remain relevant to humanity in all times and places. It is based on a deep understanding of human life and mind. It gives a very fine logic why all human pursuits—artha and kama should be guided by righteous virtues and what it does to spiritual growth.

The 21st century is witnessing a rise in awareness about human rights rejecting discrimination and inequality in human beings. Rights and duties complement each other. One person's right is someone else's duty; duties will automatically take care of rights also.

Besides vocational training, students at Muskaan are given many other kinds of training to prepare them for an independent adult life, and for their holistic development



People-centric management

The same universal laws govern every human being irrespective of time, place, culture or ability. Every person wants to feel good and enjoys the trust that others place in him/her. If we can respect and value everyone, it brings forth positive energy that lies within. Compassionate understanding is an expression of love, respect, and trust.

The work at Muskaan needed empathy and service orientation. It is easier to teach skills and impart knowledge but empathy and service orientation required a change in attitude that is hard to build though it can be encouraged and facilitated. Thus, those who chose to work with Muskaan and continued with it had already in some measure, ensured these qualities in themselves. The challenge was to sustain it and demonstrate in one's conduct, daily interactions, and decisions. One cannot expect from others without exemplifying it in one's own thoughts and actions.

Practical demands of implementing programme and activities through skilled teachers and other team members, and developing a team of caring staff members required a delicate balance of both. Neither could there be a compromise in the quality of work with students, nor could one overlook the unhelpful attitudes which some team members may have. It means a personal connect with every member of the team, understanding their needs and sensitivities, recognizing their vulnerabilities, and finding ways to make them feel empowered and valued.



Working with the students demanded a lot of perseverance, patience, and continued efforts on building their knowledge and skills. It is not a simple task. One needed to find creative ways to reach out to them. It required a great deal of discussion with teachers to build a deeper understanding of challenges that students with intellectual disability face and use of appropriate methods and strategies for facilitating their learning in several areas of life. It needed personalized efforts with each individual student.

There was no adult training programme when we started our vocational and life skills training centre for adults with intellectual disability. Muskaan built its own syllabus, curriculum, learning activities, pedagogy, and learning material. We devised assessment methods to record progression in learning. A constant effort has been made over the last three decades to improvise our training programme and it will continue in future also because we are discovering more and more potential in adults with intellectual disability. In some ways, it is an ongoing research programme that helps in understanding the ways in which the human mind functions when there is a compromised intellect, which does not impact emotions, aspirations and needs of the person.

Human centric management is the biggest challenge of organizations like Muskaan that is working with people who need extra sensitivity and penetrating insights into their mind. Keeping alive that spirit is a big challenge, and it needs a humanized environment. The whole team including teachers, management, and other team members are constantly exposed to humanizing experiences while working with the students who always emanate love, care, happiness and respect.

The management team needed to have a fine balance between task orientation and people oriented attitude and approach. I have intrinsic faith in people. I always start with trust in my relationship with people, though keeping needed cautions in mind regarding human vulnerabilities. Most of the time I never felt the urgency for instant corrections that may be needed in different situations.

I believed in the inherent human tendency to be good, and felt that its expression needed a certain kind of atmosphere of acceptance, self-correction and self-improvement. Dishonesty, cheating, and untruth had no place where everyone was engaged in improving the lives of others. Creating conditions which are conducive to self-introspection, are far superior to other ways in bringing long term changes in oneself and others.

I also thought that people are sacrosanct; their psychological needs and feelings matter much more than anything else. Thus, a caring attitude towards others not only empowers but also enriches everyone's life including oneself. Our children give us immense opportunities to learn the value of humanistic approach and make a shift from ego-centric to human-centric attitude.



Towards empowerment of people with ID

Our students' enthusiasm for learning has been a constant source of inspiration to all of us. They are always willing to engage in learning if the teacher takes interest in teaching. Sustenance of teachers' motivation is more challenging. Personally, I feel fascinated by their world and it keeps generating several questions in my mind which need a deeper probe. I often put myself in their world and find it fascinating to think how the mind can create a diverse world. Each one of us is living in our own unique world. The question arises-- is there "the world" out there? It is an explorer's spirit that becomes a powerful intrinsic driving force to travel the path less trodden.

It is often assumed that people with intellectual disability are not capable of working with machines and technology. At Muskaan, with training, and under close supervision, many students demonstrate a capacity to independently undertake difficult and skilled tasks - often working with machines in units such as baking, stationery and food processing.



Teachers Speak

It is said that teaching is as much a learning process for the teacher, as it is for the student. Teachers at Muskaan reflect on their learnings from working closely to build the capacity of people with intellectual disability.

- I have become much more patient during my years at Muskaan. I also don't get angry easily. I carry this forward into my personal life, too. My students have made me a better person
- We began with only three students. Even then, our biggest challenge was devising teaching methods, as the needs and abilities of each student are different. As it is now!!
- One of my students has low vision, yet he managed to get a job in Lodhi Hotel. I was worried, so I went to see him there. I was told he needed help only on the first day, and is managing independently on his own. He was so eager to get and keep the job, he put in his full efforts. I learnt that desire to create a better world can overcome many barriers
- Teaching physiotherapy online during the lockdown seemed impossible at first. I had to overcome my techno phobia and then think creatively to address the needs of our students. Yet I remained concerned. But I found that the students and their families adapted very well. In fact, the students' communication skills and use of technology both improved visibly
- Whatever our students do, they do it with a pure heart and a clear intent. There is no malice, no ego. This is a life learning for us.



Meeting wonderful people

As far back as I can remember, I never had negative experiences with people. Or it may be that those did not register strongly in my mind. Many people were willing to support the cause directly or indirectly. Muskaan started to build its own circle of friends including school and college students, volunteers, parents and donors. They gave us a lot of optimism to carry on with our goal of establishing required services and growth opportunities for persons with intellectual disability. Being a mother helped in developing the trust with new acquaintances. I have seen so much positivity in people that it became an overwhelming experience and impacted my overall attitude towards others. It taught me the perils of a judgemental attitude towards others. Whenever I met someone to seek support, I used to prepare myself for insensitive comments or attitude. Though I rarely came across that, it helped me to insulate myself from disappointments as I told myself that if people were helpful that is Muskaan's gain and if not, then why should I expect everyone to feel for the cause which I value so much.

I remember, how our friends and architects (Mr Suri, Mr. Babber, Mr Khanna and Mr. Auluck) persuaded Mr. Ahluwalia to agree to take up the construction of the Muskaan building at Vasant Kunj. The building is appreciated by all for its design and quality of construction. Top professionals of Delhi Mr. Mahender Raj, Mr Kewal Krishen, Mr Vinod Gupta, Mr Satish Khanna, Mr. Babber, Mr. Auluck and Mr Virender Khanna took up various specialized aspects of building e.g. the design of the building, designing electrical and plumbing system, landscape, structural design etc. without any charge. Several officers from DDA and other concerned Departments. helped in getting the required clearances. The list appears to be endless.

Raising an amount of Rs. 2 crores for the building in 2001 was a huge effort. The first major funding of Rs. 35 lacs came from the Japan Embassy through the efforts of Mr. and Mrs. Kukreja, parents of our student Raman Kukreja. Akhauri Foundation of USA, Ms. Sushma Kumar, Ms. Sudha Auluck, Mr Ramesh Kochhar and many others from the USA raised almost one-third of the total building cost. Many people gave donations in the name of their parents. Mr. Sarkar, a friend of Dr. Basu a parent, gave Rs.15 lacs in the name of his son who died at a young age.

Muskaan needed funds not only for creating infrastructure but also running its programmes that involved a substantial amount of recurring expenses. Crowd sourcing has been our main source of funding Muskaan projects with occasional bigger donation from corporates and individual donors. Mrs. Indira Narain from the Indira and Jai Foundation has been a constant support for Muskaan for the past several years.

It is amazing to see so many people who helped without seeking any recognition.

Ever since we entered our new building, a new set of requirements came up as it was another phase of Muskaan's growth. Many parents of Muskaan and professionals who were intimately connected with Muskaan had put in a lot of effort in not only raising financial resources but also a knowledge base for managing a growing organization.

I could only name a few, but there are many more people who selflessly gave their time and expertise to get Muskaan where and what it is today. I have an overwhelming sense of gratitude for everyone; I can't imagine Muskaan without them.



Japanese volunteers



Shri Ram school visit for sensitization



Employee engagement program with XL India

Leadership & its challenges

Building an organization which always remains tuned to its mission with focussed efforts demanded full time engagement, 24x7 involvement. Life became an experiment and Muskaan became my Karmabhumi that was creating challenges at every step of the way.

All decisions and responses had to be carefully chosen. The foundational values were very clear in my mind. I could never accept a hierarchical attitude and believed in the wisdom of every person. A strong team necessitates recognition of collective wisdom, and complementary efforts.

Participatory discussions and decision-making proved to be very helpful and it allowed team members to accept decisions more readily. It is important to recognize and appreciate the inter-dependent nature of human society; team spirit brings so much wisdom and efforts to any endeavour. Asking for support became natural because no one can claim complete independence and perfection in life. Differences of opinion which arise in democratic functioning, pushed for greater clarity in thinking. Having a sense of gratitude for everyone's contribution started showing in a caring and focussed team and its work. The leaders need to be very clear in their thought process so that the rationale can be shared for every decision and action. Willingness to accept one's limitations or mistakes gives extra push to a respectful relationship.

Building and sustaining the ethos and culture of an organization, particularly an NGO, is paramount. Its foundational values are important for moving towards its mission. Gandhiji's famous saying that whenever taking any policy decision, think of the last person in the social hierarchy who will get affected, became my guiding principle. Every decision had to be evaluated by its contribution towards enriching the lives of persons with intellectual disability and their parents/families. The wellbeing of the members of the Muskaan team always remained central without crossing boundaries unnecessarily.



Advocacy for rights

Being a part of the larger disability sector was important to advocate for the rights of people with intellectual disability. I personally learnt a lot under the leadership of Late Mr. Javed Abidi who was a very dynamic leader and held a powerful voice within the sector of people with disability. His political acumen made him a good interlocutor with the Govt. During this time, I met many inspiring persons who worked with limited resources all their lives, and raise a voice for the rights of people with different disabilities. Many of these people themselves had varied disabilities. They changed my notions about people with disabilities. I saw that their challenge was not their disability but lack of growth opportunities to live a full life like every other citizen.

I realized the tyranny of misconceptions and prejudices of the larger society. By and large society thought that

impoverishment of their lives arose from their disability whereas the truth is that it was the lack of needed facilities which was the limiting factor. Thus, as I got more and more familiar with the lives of so many people with disabilities, my resolve to counter social injustice to people with intellectual disability grew stronger and we at Muskaan kept making efforts to enrich their lives through creating growth opportunities for them. The Muskaan team became a part of the larger community fighting for the rights of people with disabilities.

It is a common observation all over the world that social awakening for the rights of people with disabilities came up only when they themselves raised a voice against the discriminatory attitude of society. In case of people with severe disabilities, parents/families became their voice giving rise to parents' movement.





Time has shown that many adults with Intellectual Disability, with training and support, can find employment in the real world, contributing to their employer and to the team they are a part of. Often their employers sing praises of their dedication, commitment and work ethics. Investment in time and resources in training them pays out, many times over, with the contribution they make to their company and to the employer.

Deep learnings

- It is possible to be happy without putting any conditions to it. We lose so much in life by pondering over what we do not have.
- The true meaning of reverence lies in accepting and respecting all forms of creation: plants, animals or humans; a part of the larger mysterious order of the universe including us
- Unconditional and selfless love is difficult but it enriches both the giver and the receiver. The more we can cultivate selfless love and care for others, compassion becomes a way of responding to the world.
- The cultivation of a valuable attitude of patience for everyone made life much easier and peaceful; it helped in facing many difficult situations in life.
- We waste so much energy in seeking our own glory and forget that it is an emotional need of everyone. It helps to build understanding and sensitivity for all.
- Every difficult situation in life has the potential to make us more mature and stronger. The key lies in how we respond to the challenge.
- Life is simple and beautiful if we do not create unnecessary complications in it.
- In the humdrum of life, we forget to celebrate the simple joys of life.
- Learning to remain focused on what one considers right irrespective of praise or criticism from others.

Deep learnings

Anecdotes -Mothers reflect

Mithu is a young man 30 yrs of age. His entire body including neck and hands are non functional and he cannot speak. His teacher Rashmi keeps trying various activities with him. One day she used dhapli for Mithu to play and strike. Mithu was so happy with it that he kept striking and enjoying Dhapli for several minutes even though his hand functions are highly limited -----indeed an expression of an urge to live fully ???

Puneet age 46 yrs went for a spine surgery in 2019. A night before the surgery he saw me worried and tired and told me that you look very tired, please go to sleep. Whenever I am sick he often comes to ask how am I feeling and tells me that I should take some tonic. There is no parallel to their simple care and affection

He was 20 when his sister got married and left for USA with her husband. After seeing her off in the airport he came home and went to her room. He kissed all his photos and said a little loudly which I could hear in adjoining room “ Rani, main akela ho gaya hun”. It was very painful for me to hear that and I cried and cried that day.

Who says that our children do not know their condition and also that they are different from others in certain ways. Once Puneet was watching a program on TV, it was a programme on children with intellectual disability. I entered his room and casually asked which programme he was watching? He said “ mere jaise bachhon ka programme hai”.

When my older son left for the USA for study, I felt I was the strongest member of the family and would not cry. The first time he called after he reached there, I cried while talking to him - I clearly belied my own expectations of being the strongest member of the family. It was then my younger son Arnav (with intellectual disability)said - Mom don't worry, be happy (that was a very popular thing to say then) bhaiyya will be back soon - not knowing how much duration a year or more meant before we would meet him. I thought to myself - who is stronger???

Securing the future

Muskaan will remain strong if it can take care of two important factors: financial stability and its ethos and culture. Both will carry it a long way. Its management has to ensure that its human orientation always remains strong. It is easier said than done. That is true of all social causes. All NGOs are moved by certain human conditions, either underserved areas or neglected areas, therefore, their focus remains on such causes. Muskaan was formed to enhance and enrich the lives of persons with intellectual disability and there is a lot to be done. Society does see and recognize the genuineness of spirit and work and that is the best way to ensure its future.

Muskaan is undergoing a transition phase. The old guard amongst the parents have to pass the baton to the leadership of younger parents. Management of an organization whose mission is to create equity and justice for those who live neglected and marginalized life in the society, is not easy. It needs spirit of service and sacrifice. It demands a great deal of human sensitivity at every level without compromising efficiency. It is like tight rope walk. Politics has no place in such type of work-spaces. I trust that the parent community of Muskaan is capable of that.

There is a long wish list of Muskaan with regard to the role of the state in addressing the needs of our sector. However, we see Muskaan as an exemplary organization in terms of the quality of all its services. We have emerged as the creator of models with regard to the training and employment of adults with intellectual disability as well as assisted living facility where residents participate in taking up responsibilities as per their interest and capacity.

We see two more areas where Muskaan needs to start working 1) group homes where 4-6 senior adults with ID live together assisted by their parents, professionals and caring staff. Muskaan can take the monitoring, supervisory and training role. We still feel that the family is the best place to live one's life but it may not be a viable option for all.

Another area where Muskaan needs to work is a teachers' training centre. The Muskaan team has valuable experience of learning from its students, understanding their needs and strengths. It can add much value to teachers' training programmes.

Muskaan's work is like a drop in the ocean. It is painful to know that almost 90% of people have no access to any kind of services. The parents/families are facing immense hardships due to the absence of such services. Voluntary organizations alone cannot fill this gap. The state has to provide support to scale much required services in the sector of intellectual and developmental disabilities.

What the state needs to do

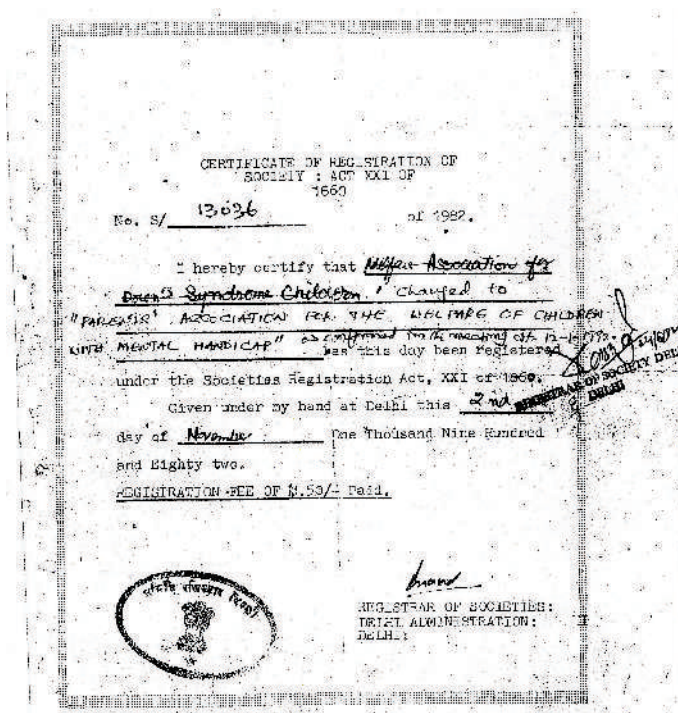
- 1** A mass awareness programme needs to be taken up which disseminates appropriate information to build a healthy attitude. A national campaign (like pulse polio) needs to be undertaken to bring awareness among the citizens
- 2** Special efforts need to be undertaken to sensitize medical doctors as they are the first contact points for the parents if their child has difficulty/disability. Disability should be a part of their curriculum.
- 3** Early intervention centres comprising of well equipped team should be there. Part of this work can be taken up by existing NGOs with good quality of services but they should be supported to sustain these services. The same centres could provide counselling, guidance and knowledge support to parents through short term parents training programmes.
- 4** Selected schools need to be equipped to address the educational needs of the intellectually and developmentally challenged children.
- 5** An Education Board, a sub-committee of mainstream school education boards, needs to be constituted which formulates and guides the schools in setting up a curriculum, programmes and activities and monitor the quality of education and training and certification at the end of the training. The training has to focus on capacity building including life skills approach and employability ensuring as much self reliance as possible.
- Muskaan and some other NGOs in the field can support such an initiative.
- 6** People with severe and profound levels of disability have as much right to being provided with training and other services to facilitate their development, and support services to their parents. They should be provided these services in the schools mentioned above. Such persons and their parents are living under great stress without any societal support.
- 7** Work opportunities should be created through various models e.g. supported work centres, self-employment and open employment. Parents/families and professionals should be encouraged to start the work centres and it should be supported by the Government in public-private partnership. The Government should support at least 50% of the salary expense and appropriate norms should be developed in consultation with well functioning NGOs in the field.
- 8** The salaries of all the teachers, professionals and other staff should be supported by the Government. It means salary support for professionals working at early intervention centres, schools and work centres. Moreover, their salaries should be governed by the same norms as their counterpart in schools and other rehabilitation centres. This area has been grossly neglected so far resulting in no or at best poor training

- 9** Group homes should be supported by the allotment of land or Govt. flats providing assisted living specially when parents are very old, sick or are no more. All residential projects by Government/ semi Government organizations must reserve a percentage of flats to be allotted to NGOs for running Assisted Living Centers for persons with intellectual and other developmental disabilities.
- 10** Social security allowance should be given to all children and adults with intellectual and developmental disability. There can be a graded system of disability allowance depending on the income of the parents/families.
- 11** Procedures for obtaining family pension for dependent challenged wards should be simplified to ensure easy access.
- 12** National Trust needs to be galvanized to respond to the sector by appropriate policies and management structure.
- 13** National Survey Organization should carry out a stand alone sample survey to determine the extent of persons with intellectual and other developmental disabilities in terms of economic profile, geographic spread, rural/ urban ratio and accessibility to state support



Milestones in program development

Year	Important highlights
1982-91	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Journey of Muskaan started from Genetics Clinic, AIIMS Delhi ● Registration of society as "Welfare association for Down Syndrome ● Counselling and guidance of the parents at AIIMS Genetics OPD clinic every Monday to empower parents with hope, understanding and nurturing the growth of their children with ID ● Lectures, workshops and multi-services camps for parents and their children and adults with Intellectual disability ● Efforts to enrol parents to become members of the society were driven aggressively as we were aiming to make it an advocacy group as well. ● Early intervention programme was started to help parents understand the growth needs of their children. ● Sports activities were initiated for children to have fun.



Year

Important highlights

- First newsletter in the name of "Down Syndrome News Letter" was brought out in March
- Established vocational training centre named "Muskaan" in a garage at 26, Mehtab Dharamshala, Kalkaji Mandir Complex, New Delhi
- Kapil, Sanjeev Jain and Devinder were the first three students to join Muskaan
- Candles, ground spices, few stationary products were the initial products of the vocational training centre
- Sham-e-Ghazal was organised in January 1990 to raise funds to start a vocational training centre for adults with ID. Famous ghazal singers Rajender and Neena Mehta presented a musical evening. Rotary club of Delhi Rajdhani was a partner in organizing the event and raising funds
- The name of the society was changed to "Parents Association for the Welfare of Children with Mental Handicap".
- Another fund raising show was organised with the help of Inner Wheel Club, Delhi North, in March. It was a play titled Dulari Bai presented by the Little Theatre Group Repertory, Delhi.



Year

Important highlights

1992

- Moved from Kalkaji garage to a barsati in Safdarjung Enclave
- Expanded vocational activities to include a wider range of ground spices and dal powders



1993

- Got our first bulk order for candles from the Meterological Department of India



Year

Important highlights

1994

- Muskaan Vocational Training Centre shifted to a spacious basement in A-28, Hauz Khas. Mrs. Savitri Dasgupta, mother of our student Sutapa, gave it to Muskaan without charging rent.
- Within 3 years many more vocational activities were added e.g. variety of gift stationary items, block printing and diya decoration.
- Started the greeting cards project to raise funds and create awareness about people with intellectual disability
- Muskaan organised a Diwali Bazaar for the first time.



1995

- Delhi Development Authority allotted an acre of land to Muskaan in Vasant Kunj for running a training centre for youth with intellectual disability.
- The number of students and staff increased, more vocational activities added, funding sources increased through donations from Muskaan's friends in USA and a grant from the ministry (MSJE, Govt. of India).

Year

Important highlights

- Our first ever initiative for employment was taken in 1995 with the creation of a Supported Employment Centre within Muskaan giving them a monthly stipend.



1996

- Organised the third fund raising event through a medical camp on 29th September.
- Muskaan started monthly jam sessions of dance and fun where Parikrama band joined and played the music. Mrs Indeera Chand coordinated the monthly event



Year

Important highlights

1997

- Organised another fund raising event “Muskaan Moments of Inspiration” with the help of Parikrama and Friends of Music near Qutub Minar lawns.



1998

- Bhumi Pujan for the Muskaan Building was done in February



Year

Important highlights

1999



- Celebrated ten years of the Vocational Training Centre on 24th December in the AIIMS auditorium



2000-2001

- Construction started for the Muskaan Building at Vasant Kunj
- First mainstream employment of four students of Muskaan at Balloon export house
- Massive fund raising efforts for the construction of the Muskaan building
- A fund raising event was organized with the presentation of "Ghasiram Kotwal" by National School of Drama



Year	Important highlights
2002-03	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Started operating from the new building at Vasant Kunj. This enabled Muskaan to expand its training programme, namely regular yoga and sports, computer training, life skills training, cognitive enrichment programme, training centre for severely challenged adults, Counselling and Guidance Clinic (Buti Health and Research Centre) and increase in the number of students and teachers, Art and Therapy Centre especially for high support needs persons, sale and marketing systems. ● Major efforts at streamlining all the training programmes in terms of formal curriculum development, assessment, teaching strategies and improved work structures in the supported employment centre of Muskaan. ● Added training programmes for persons with high support needs. ● Started voluntary work with families.
2004	  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Formal inauguration of the new Muskaan building at Vasant Kunj by Ambassador of Japan Mr Yasukuni Enoki in March ● A new vocational unit of bakery was established, started making various bakery products.

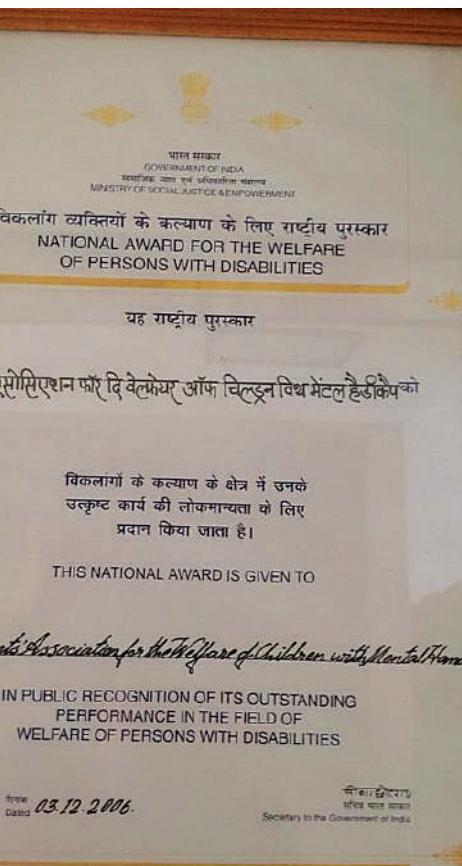
Year

Important highlights

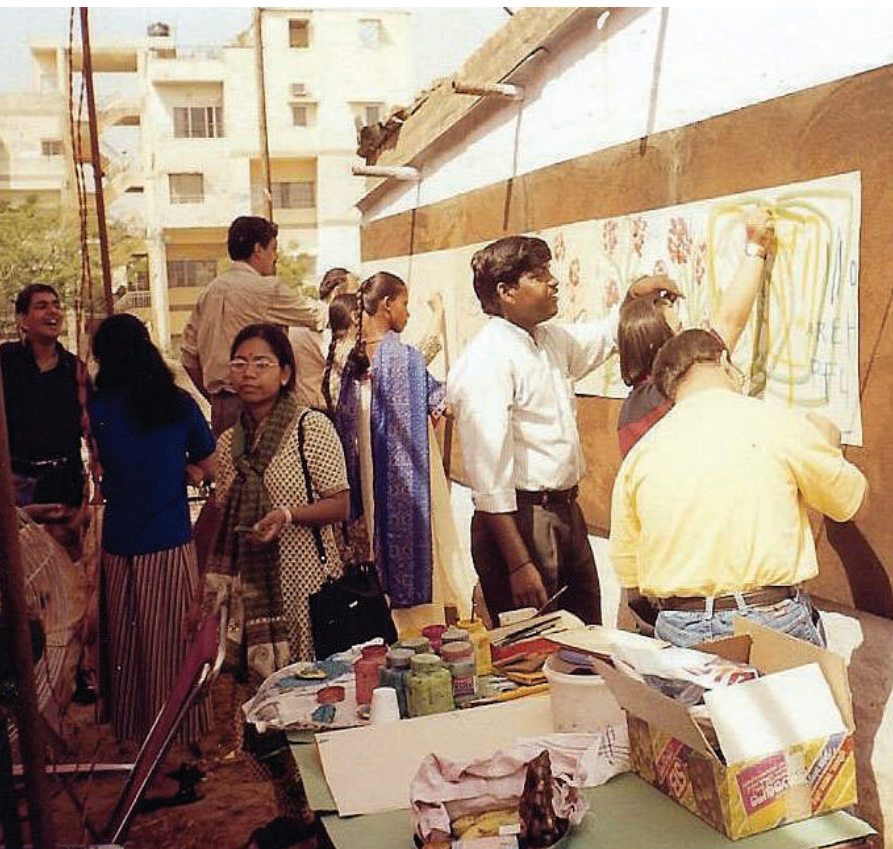


2005 2006

- Lemon pickle and lemon squash unit was established with the full support of Mrs Neelam Johar Malhotra (prof. of Economics at the Lady Sri Ram College) and her family. This turned out to be a unique and favourite product made by Muskaan students.



Year	Important highlights
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Muskaan completed 25 years and Silver Jubilee was celebrated in February 2006.● Muskaan got major recognition through national awards by MSJE, Govt. of India and Godfrey Phillips.● Two Muskaan students were placed in the packaging Department of Indira Gandhi National Open University, Delhi.● Muskaan came in the forefront of advocacy for the Rights of people with disability. It developed strong network with other similar organizations, Government bodies, NIMH, National Trust and Disability Rights Group led by the Late Sri Javed Abidi● Regular awareness programmes were conducted for school and college students by organizing their visits to Muskaan and making presentations in their schools and colleges.



Year

Important highlights

2007-08

- Muskaan started an Art centre which included extra-curricular activities such as pottery, painting, jewellery making , using flowers for making Holi colours, plantation , dance , music etc



2009-10

- Awarded for Outstanding Annual Report by CSO Partners.
- Signed an MOU with National Trust to start a residential facility for adults with intellectual and other developmental disability in the Multi Purpose Community Centre, Dera village, Delhi.



Year	Important highlights
2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Muskaan was awarded two national awards by National Trust, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Govt. of India; Best Parents Association and Best Local Level Committee. ● Movement towards greater professionalization in the working of Muskaan including adult training and employment with formal curriculum, assessment and periodical review to find out the strengths and limitations of the system. Management systems e.g. personnel policies, financial management, rules and regulations for students teachers and families, strategic planning with clear objectives and plan of action etc. The hallmark of Muskaan's functioning is reflected in its core value. ● NCPEDP-Shell Hellen Keller Award for Creating Employment Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities. ● Avtar Trehan Technology Centre was started with financial support from Ms. Nimi Trehan in memory of her husband Mr. Avtar Trehan.



Year

Important highlights

2012

- Started a residential facility at Dera village in partnership with National Trust (a statutory body constituted by the Government of India for taking care of the needs of people with autism, cerebral palsy, intellectual disability and multiple disabilities).



2013

- Muskaan became the State Nodal Agency of National Trust for Delhi state.



Year

Important highlights

2014

- Started mainstream employment in partnership with Lemon Tree Hotels; first batch of five Muskaan students got employment at Redfox hotel of Lemontree as guest service associates.



2015-16

- Started data entry unit with twenty students.
- The training programme addressed the learning needs of adults with varying levels of ability. It resulted in three models of employment: employment in mainstream organizations, employment in supported work centre and placement of persons with high support needs in the Art & Activity Centre which later became another employment model for adults with high support needs.



Year

Important highlights

2017

- Partnered with the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Govt. of India in creation of vocational training opportunities for people with Intellectual Disabilities.



2018

- Another Vocational Training Centre was started at Sahibabad in East Delhi, which later got funding support from APPI (Azim Premji Philanthropy Initiative)



Year	Important highlights
Muskaan today	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Another Vocational Training Centre started in Gurgaon in 2021 with funding support from APPI● Our Training and Employment model has won national and international fame. It provided a respectable space for adults with ID enabling them to live a fuller life with dignity.● Visitors to Muskaan witness the sheer delight with which our production associates produce over 200 beautiful quality products, which are then retailed at various outlets. The popularity of Muskaan products is steadily increasing the demand for bulk orders, especially at Diwali time.



Year	Important highlights
Muskaan today	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Muskaan has endeavoured to create a residential facility that could set an example showing the possibility and practicality of the Assisted Living model where residents are participants in running the home.● The Muskaan team is aware of the need for family support services in the form of knowledge building through training programmes and advocacy. By building the confidence and optimism of the family we try to help in creating an enabling home environment for our students and other family members.



Year

Important highlights

- We are also doing different outreach programmes such as Social Sector Consultancy , awareness events, advocacy on different issues of the sector, NGO training etc. On an average 20+ schools and colleges, employees from several corporate offices and visitors from other countries visit Muskaan to understand its training and employment model.
- The Muskaan team started online training for students because of restrictions arising from Covid -19 that prevented our students from coming to Muskaan. It required the creation of digital learning content, use of virtual platforms, and new methods of reaching out to students and families. It resulted in a novel creation of a digital resource library.
- Creation of the Digital Resource Library: Covid pandemic was taken as a challenge by the Muskaan team and turned it into an opportunity to create a digital platform for students' programmes, contact with families and many other management tasks.



मुस्कान के चालिस वर्ष पूर्ण होने के उपलक्ष्य में

स्नेह दिवस

श्री सुखदेव कोहली

भारत वर्ष में जन्मे हैं , हम निज संस्कृति अपनाएंगे ।
 मुस्कान की समृद्धि को हम लोगों तक पहुँचाएंगे ॥
 चालीस साल की उपलब्धियों पर खुशियों हम मनाएंगे।
 इस दिवस को स्नेह दिवस के रूप में हम मनाएंगे ॥
 होंगे जहाँ भी आज दिवस में हम गुरु संदेश अपनाएंगे ।
 माला - फूल से थाल सजा कर सुंदर दीप जलाएंगे ॥
 इस अवसर पर हमसब मिलकर संकल्पों को दोहराएंगे ।
 जो भी होगी भूलें हमसे , कभी ना उसे छुपाएंगे ॥
 नेक राह पर हम चलेंगे , अवगुणों को दूर भगाएंगे ।
 माता - पिता के सब हैं दुलारे, प्यार सभी का पाएंगे ॥
 सच्चाई की राह पर चलेंगे , नेक इंसान कहलाएंगे ।
 अपनी मेहनत और लगन से मुस्कान का गौरव खूब बढ़ाएंगे ॥
 जो कुछ सिखा अनुभवों से, उसको अपने जीवन में अपनाएंगे ।
 सोचों ऐसा करने से कितना आनंद हम पाएंगे ॥
 जनम लिया है इस धरती पर , हम इसका कर्ज चुकाएंगे ।
 मुस्कान की यह विजय पताका, हम सारी दुनिया में लहराएंगे ॥

Acknowledgements

I have captured this journey of Muskaan which was a collective journey of our students, teachers, volunteers, parents and executive members since the early years. It has been a mutually encouraging and inspiring journey. My sincere gratitude to each one of them who have walked with me on this road; directly or indirectly supporting Muskaan in several diverse and valuable ways. It is a work of the Muskaan team which speaks through these pages.

This publication would not have been possible without valuable support from Ms. Shalini Sinha and Ms. Smriti Shankar who worked tirelessly to produce this book. My friend Shalini Sinha, President of Muskaan, encouraged me to go on with this work that strengthened my resolve to complete this narrative. My sincere gratitude for her support and valuable inputs. My sincere thanks to Mr. Jayant Sahay, Prof. Shashi Motilal and Prof. Indira Prasad Bahuguna who read through the entire narrative and helped with their comments and editing remarks.

My appreciation and gratitude to Ms. Sushmita Sen who has been involved in several discussions while the book was being conceived. She also did the difficult task of proof reading.

Finally my utmost gratitude to all students of Muskaan and my son Mr. Puneet Auluck who opened my eyes to a beautiful, loving and happy world which they bring to us if we drop our conditioned ways of thinking. I feel blessed in being with them and learning from them.

Life is a gift, and everyone enjoys it in one's own unique way. There are diverse ways of being in this world and each is valid and authentic. What ultimately matters is that everyone should be treated with love and respect and get opportunity for a full life as much as possible. That is social inclusion.



Shalini Sinha with her son Kartik Sahay | Photo credit: Rendezvous with Rashmi.

MUSKaaN

...an incredible journey



muskaan-paepid.org

Muskaan – PAEPID

Plot no. -3, Sector-B, Pocket-2, Vasant Kunj, Delhi, Pin-110070 | Contact no.-41761873, 41761874 | Email: muskaan@muskaan-paepid.org

Copyright Muskaan 2022 | Photocredits: Rendezvous with Rashmi | Designed by Naveen Siromoni | Printed by Satyam Graphics

