



# EYE OPENER



*Our Journey*



I was born with visual impairment but I first woke up to it when I was in Class 3 at the Sacred Heart School in Mogappair, Chennai. I realized I could not see as well as I used to. Initially, my parents and I thought glasses would solve the issue, but medical tests indicated otherwise. My vision started getting worse, leading to a long-drawn phase of turmoil filled with the darkest hours of my life.

It took me a long and agonizing time to come to terms with my changed reality. I felt completely alone in my predicament.

Only when I went to college did I come in touch with other visually impaired students. I realized I wasn't alone.

This helped me understand my problem much better. Many of these students were enrolled in the city colleges for higher studies and were staying in the government hostel for SC/ST students. I discovered that as many as 22 students were crowded together in a room that was a mere 14 feet by 12 feet. The students had to sleep on the terrace or wherever there was space. Living conditions were way below even the lowest standards.

Another factor that deeply affected me was the lack of reading facilities for the visually challenged. By and by, I felt determined to change this entire scenario for the visually challenged. I decided to paint a different picture.

I organized for reading centers all over the city in places like Valluvar Kottam and Thirumangalam, with able volunteers to provide excellent reading services. I also started fighting vigorously for various causes like the issue of free bus passes, scholarships and employment for the visually challenged, many times going to prison for the same. Once, when I protested for the employability for the visually challenged, I was put in the Central Prison for 12 days. I must admit that the food wasn't as bad as I had imagined.

It was to take some time before I could translate this understanding into action. After graduating from Pachiappa's College, I joined an NGO as a Project Officer. Working there gave me invaluable hands-on experience in managing social initiatives. Then, in 2001, I earned a Post-Graduate Diploma in Social Entrepreneurship from the Centre for Social Initiative and Management (CSIM) in Chennai.

The project component in the curriculum during the diploma studies was what created a huge impact. It provoked me into spearheading a campaign for the cause of the visually challenged. As a part of the survey, I realized that the visually challenged students were left to fend for themselves.

The suburban railway network of Chennai happens to be their best livelihood option. On this network, I noticed that:

1. 119 visually challenged persons had been reduced to begging
2. Shockingly, 82 of these 119 people were educated
3. They also took to selling various household utility items and lottery tickets

I resolved to do something about this problem that not only affected the visually challenged but also the society as a whole.

Thus was born Nethrodaya on Oct. 2, 2002, with the single-minded mission of giving education and respect to the visually challenged.

I am happy to share that the journey has been eventful, challenging and very rewarding.



# In-house Services at Nethrodaya

## Free Boarding & Lodging

(Visually, Physically Challenged & Speech Impaired Boys & Girls)

**Nethrodaya** is a self-help institution for the differently abled. Started in 2002, it provides a host of career-enabling facilities to underprivileged boys and girls, most of them hailing from rural areas. For many of these boys and girls, aged between 18 and 30, **Nethrodaya** is their only resource for free boarding and lodging as well as many other facilities. While most of the residents are visually impaired, **Nethrodaya** does integrate people with other disabilities. **Nethrodaya**, which operated from rented premises for six years, built its own building in Chennai in 2008 on land allotted by the government. Between years 2002 and 2009, around 2000 students benefitted from Nethrodaya.



## Computer Training Classes

**Nethrodaya** equips the visually challenged with basic computer skills. Its part-time MS Office course is accommodated along with their main stream of study.



## Yoga Classes

Twice a week, a qualified instructor comes to **Nethrodaya** to teach residents simple yoga asanas that help them stay in a state of good physical and mental health.



## Music Classes

**Nethrodaya** offers free music lessons to its residents every day of the week. Classes are conducted in keyboard, tabla, rhythm pad, and vocals. Since music as a profession is commercially sound, the visually challenged are immediately absorbed into musical troupes after finishing the training. We too have a full fledged music troupe. We perform at weddings and other special functions.



## Spoken English Classes



## Advanced Tamil Coaching Classes



## Chess Coaching Classes

## OUTREACH PROGRAMMES

### Rehabilitation of the Visually Impaired Beggars

To bring back the dignity and respect into the lives of the visually challenged who have had to resort to begging, **Nethrodaya** provides a seed capital of Rs. 500/- worth marketable products to start a small business independently. Under this scheme, 250 visually challenged persons have obtained financial assistance.



### Free Medical Helpline (24 x 7)

**Nethrodaya** provides immediate medical attention to the visually challenged. **Nethrodaya** has a tie-up with leading city hospitals for providing quality medical care. **Nethrodaya** provides a 24/7 help line (44-26530712) for urgent medical issues and accident cases. Around 300 persons have so far benefitted from this arrangement.



### Supporting Children of the Visually Challenged Parents

In our country, the quality of education is affected by affordability. **Nethrodaya** provides financial assistance to those visually challenged parents who find it difficult to afford good education for their sighted children. The money is paid directly to the schools.



### Shelter for the Shelter-less Visually Challenged families

Most visually challenged men and women find it difficult to shell out the initial advance though they are capable of paying the monthly rent. **Nethrodaya** bridges this gap by finding a home, paying the advance money, and finally handing over the key to the individuals, hence providing a suitable shelter to the homeless. Close to 100 people have benefitted so far.



### Nethradhenu

Donating a cow for the visually challenged in rural areas

Under this scheme, a cow is provided to the visually impaired adults in rural areas to augment the family income. By this, the prestige of these individuals is restored. As many as 14 districts have been covered under this project.



### Audio Study Material for the Visually Challenged underprivileged Students from Villages

10th & 12th Std

To provide better academic assistance to the visually challenged students in rural areas, **Nethrodaya** runs a fully functional audio library. This is a faster alternative to Braille, which has been the only educational resource for many visually challenged in India. Audio learning has proved to be a boon.



## INITIATIVES

### Browsing Centre exclusively for the Visually Challenged

**Nethrodaya** has a special browsing centre where the visually challenged can access ebooks, send emails, browse websites and chat with friends. Around 150 persons are availing this facility.



### State Level Career Counseling & Guidance for Rural Visually Impaired Students

**Nethrodaya** organizes an annual state-level career counseling and guidance workshop for 10th and 12th std students from villages. Close to 300 students every year benefit from tips and tricks shared by experts, some of whom are also visually challenged.

### South Indian Level Sporting Events - Chess, Volleyball, Cricket

Impairment is not a limitation, absence of imagination is. As an innovative organization, **Nethrodaya** has actively promoted different sports for the visually challenged. The games are specially packaged and designed. It is a visual feast to watch how well the fully and partially blind adapt and compete with vigour in various tournaments: volleyball, chess and cricket.

### Release of 'Vaippugal' comprising G.O.s & Applications for the Visually Challenged

### State Level Media Eye Conference

The first of its kind, The Media Eye is a conference organized by **Nethrodaya** to discuss why and how the media looks at and portrays the visually challenged. It highlights the media's role in enhancing the image of the visually challenged and their innate capabilities. The participants include eminent media personalities like journalists (print and mass media), film directors, and actors.



### Legal Aid Services for the disabled

### Award of Excellence for visually challenged achievers during the year

Visually Impaired can not only receive, but can also give. They are versatile, have excelled in different fields and their achievements speak volumes. We, as a community, need to recognize them as individuals in their own right. **Nethrodaya** has taken the first step in this regard by applauding and celebrating outstanding achievements of visually impaired people every year.



### Coaching Classes for Competitive Exams for the differently abled

### Exclusive Shop for the Visually Challenged

## Nethrodaya's appointment with humility in person

We, at **Nethrodaya**, had gone to meet the Chief Justice of Chennai, Hemant Laxman Gokhale, to invite him for the South Indian Sports Meet. It pleasantly surprised us when he personally came and warmly welcomed us inside his room. It was not at all like a first time meeting as he talked to us in Tamil, about the explosive achievements by the visually challenged in innumerable fields today and also about his family's inclination in supporting such causes. He readily accepted our invitation without a second thought, despite having an appointment the very next day to conduct the swearing in ceremony of the Governor of Pondicherry. We were truly touched and amazed when he stayed for the entire sports meet valedictory function and then left for the swearing in ceremony straight from the function. We were yet again pleasantly surprised, when we had gone to show him the photos taken during the function. In spite of the long queue waiting to meet him, he immediately met us and even shared his dessert of mangoes. We came back enriched in a lesson or two in humility.



## A Politician with a Difference

Thiru Parithi Ilamvazhuthi, is indeed a man who the entire family of **Nethrodaya** reveres. In today's world, where everyone is busy worrying about themselves, it is only a few who take time to think about others. Thiru Parithi Ilamvazhuthi, Minister of Information, has been someone who has been with us through thick and thin, someone who gave us a hand when we had succumbed to legal obstacles. It was indeed a special moment for everyone at **Nethrodaya**, when he was moved to tears on the Building Inauguration day, and he donated Rs.1 Lakh for the development of **Nethrodaya**. His support to **Nethrodaya** has been unconditional and determined. We at the **Nethrodaya** family take this opportunity in wishing him and his near and dear ones good health and fortune.



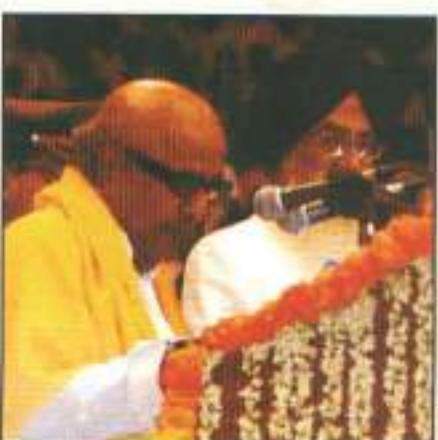
Tmt. Geetha Jeevan, Minister for Social Welfare,  
Thiru. Sekar, I.P.S., @ Nethrodaya



VIPs' @ Nethrodaya



Thiru. Radhakrishnan, I.P.S., ADGP  
@ Nethrodaya



We at **Nethrodaya** are extremely proud to say that both the DMK and AIADMK governments have supported us throughout. In 2003, the AIADMK government proposed the allotment of land to **Nethrodaya**. In 2006, the DMK government magnanimously took up the proposal and allotted the land, cutting across all boundaries. We thank all our benefactors for their everlasting support.



## Your Share

1. Share your vision for a few hours by providing reading services, guiding in everyday activities and volunteering services for special events.
2. Celebrate your special days with us:

Breakfast	Rs.1000/-
Lunch	Rs.1500/-
High tea	Rs. 300/-
Dinner	Rs.1500/-
3. Sponsor a Student's expense for a month: Rs.1650/-
4. Donate a Stick for the Blind: Rs.125/-
5. Contribute towards Medical Expenses: Rs. 10,000/-
6. Donate Audio Books
7. Donate Old Clothes, Furniture and Utensils
8. Contribute towards Recurring Expenses like Electricity, Water, Telephone, Salaries, etc..
9. Sponsor Events like The Media Eye Conference and Career Counseling & Guidance Program
10. Sponsor Picnics, Tours and Sports Events
11. Contribute towards the Nethrodaya Corpus Fund

## SUPPORTERS

Anna Nagar Times  
The Bridge  
Kovai Pazhamudhir Nilayam  
A R R Charitable Trust  
Brakes India Limited  
Sundaram Finance Limited  
Turbo Energy Limited  
Infosys Foundation  
Give India Foundation

Wellingdon Corporate Foundation  
Saritha Jain Foundation  
Velammal Group of Institutions  
Scope International  
Force 1 Guarding Services Pvt. Ltd.  
Pushpa Video  
Infinite Dimensional Charitable Trust  
Sri Iyyappa Seva Samaj  
Hot Breads  
Builtech Consultancy

