



Nethrodaya
LET'S SHARE THE LIGHT

The Eyeopener...

Annual News Magazine

2016 - 2017

Celebrating life without sight...

...with foresight.



I, C. Govindakrishnan, started my life on the 10th of May, 1971 at Chennai, which has also been my home for the past 46 years. Despite being Visually Challenged at birth, my Parents insisted that I pursue my education in a general School rather than a Special School. Thus, I went on to complete my schooling and then my Bachelors and Masters degrees in English Literature. My College days were instrumental in shaping me as a person, as it was then that I interacted with several Visually Challenged Students, who were also my Fellow Students, and understood their plight. The seed for my passion for serving this sector of people, which was sown at that time, has grown massively today.

In an effort to make things easier for the visually challenged community, I have been instrumental in establishing various reading centers in several places across the Chennai city. I have also been active in mobilizing financial support for the visually impaired students, so as to enable the funding of their college education. I have also spearheaded several campaigns, movements and welfare activities for the visually impaired students both at the government and at the college levels.

After completion of my Education, I was presented with an opportunity to work with an organization for the Welfare of Mentally Ill destitute Women, as their Project Officer. During my Six Year Tenure with them, I found myself working with over a hundred destitute women, eventually leading to recovery and restoration with their family. From there on, I went on to pursue my PG Diploma in Social Entrepreneurship with the Center for Social Initiative and Management.

The year 2002 was a turning point in my life, as it was then that I founded Nethrodaya, an Institution for the Visually Challenged. Today, after 15 years of this journey, I take immense satisfaction in saying that the institution has successfully provided, and continues to provide, various Innovative Programs and Initiatives for the betterment of the Visually Impaired Community. Yet another moment of pride occurred when I was awarded by two Chief Ministers of Tamil Nadu, for my outstanding service to the Differently-abled Community. I am also appointed as a Member of several Committees constituted by the Government of Tamil Nadu to formulate Schemes and Policies for the Differently Abled population.

While it still puzzles me to think how my life would have been different had I been sighted, I can say with certainty that this life, that I have been living for the past 46 years has been a gifted and fruitful one. I was given a chance to convert my problem to an opportunity, and I am glad I took it, as it has helped me touch the lives of several differently-abled people today. The sense of satisfaction that I have achieved through this service simply cannot be put into words, but can only be experienced. I would like to conclude by saying that, the message that could be taken from my life is that, with the right amount of perseverance, thought and action, no problem, no matter how large it seems, could ever be a hindrance to one who wants to serve himself and also others.

Last but not the least, I would like to mention that the amazing support provided by several Volunteers and Donors has helped me tremendously in staying motivated and steadfast throughout my journey. I would like to take a moment to thank the wonderful souls who have touched the lives of those at Nethrodaya one way or the other; it would not have been possible to come so far without your support and benevolent presence!



Best Institution Award to Nethrodaya



Best Social Worker Award to C. Govindakrishnan

Nominations

- Member in State Advisory Board, Government of Tamil Nadu
- Member in Welfare Board for the Differently abled, Constituted by Government of Tamil Nadu.
- Member, Multi-Disciplinary Grant in Aid Committee, Department for the welfare of Differently Abled, Tamil Nadu
- Member in Special Schools Committee for Differently Abled – Government of Tamil Nadu
- Member, Executive Committee for implementation of Audio Alert System in City buses for the benefit of Visually Impaired Persons, Government of Tamil Nadu.
- Member in Technical Committees for the Welfare of Differently abled persons, Government of Tamil Nadu
- Advisory Committee Member in Program Designing for Mobile Therapy Unit for Department of Differently Abled – Government of Tamil Nadu.



Award from CM Palaniswamy

PROJECTS

Nethrodaya Higher Secondary School for the Visually Impaired (Recognized by Govt. of Tamil Nadu)

Nethrodaya has seen the establishment of a residential program for higher secondary classes of 6th to 12th, for the underprivileged, visually challenged students, so as to provide them with a wholesome environment for quality education. This initiative, which was set up in 2012, has been active for 5 years, paving a way for hundreds of visually impaired boys and girls, to get access to quality special education completely free of cost. Our special school has also been recognized by Government of Tamil Nadu.



Nethrodaya College of Special Education (Recognized by Govt. of India)

In a first of its kind initiative, the Nethrodaya College of Special Education was set up in August 2015 to provide Free Quality Teacher Education to the Visually Challenged/Physically Challenged Students (Boys & Girls), through a course in B.Ed. in Special Education. To facilitate better learning process and environments, free boarding facilities are also provided to students. The College aims to create a population of Teachers and Educators among the Differently-abled graduates. Our college is affiliated to Tamil Nadu Teacher's Education University and approved by the Rehabilitation Council of India.



Notable Residents of Nethrodaya

Our Unique Student - Padmanabhan Sir

Padmanabhan Sir, as he is fondly called, proves to be an embodiment of this quote every day. At 79 years, he is our oldest and wisest student. While several people either withdraw from life under the pretext of old age or just simply stop setting goals, Padmanabhan Sir spends his time at the School breaking all stereotypes and trying to learn something new each day. His mastery with Computer Systems have often been admired and appreciated by the Staff and Students alike. Always dressed in the traditional, crisp white Dhoti and Shirt, his majestic stance and impeccable manners never fail to put one to awe. While he is Visually Impaired, he makes it a point to ensure that his disability and old age do not get in his way and continues to be an amazing student. One instance where his 'never say die' attitude was proven was, when he successfully managed to type out a full seminar report, in Tamil, with the right alignment and formatting, after having worked on it for a full 15 hours. Yet another characteristic of this great man is his impeccable manners: he never forgets to greet Teachers or pay respect to them, even though he is several years elder to most of the Staff. Nethrodaya takes great pride in housing this man and hopes his perseverance and success in the face of a visual impairment and old age provides the readers with inspiration and motivation. To sum up this man in one sentence: if you always keep your heart and spirit young and healthy, old age and challenges would be nothing but pebbles along your path.



"You are never too old to set another goal or to dream a new dream" - C.S.Lewis

Shankar – Student of Nethrodaya



Shankar is currently a Student of 11th standard, and has an awe-inspiring story. The boy, who came out as the school topper in the last year's SSLC Exam, was once deprived of education due to his Visual Impairment. He was unable to continue his studies and had crossed the age bar for

Examinations. One thing to be noted is that, Shankar was not a Visually Challenged person from birth. He had lost his eyesight during his childhood, which led to discontinuing his Education. The trauma that such an incident can cause to a young teenage mind cannot be imagined, let alone put in words or experienced. From a humble household, Shankar found

himself unable to continue his education. When Nethrodaya came across this boy, we found a spark in him, which led to a number of counseling sessions and a hope for this boy to continue his education. With the right amount of guidance and motivation, the boy who had once lost hope went on to become one of the most interested and brightest Students. His respectful and dedicated nature saw him gaining affection and appreciation from his teachers, and he went on to become the School Topper in the 10th Standard Public Board exams. To have such a beautiful heart despite the pains he has undergone is indeed a great feat. For this, Nethrodaya commends him and wish him success in all his future endeavors.

Notable Residents of Nethrodaya

Rajesh – Student of Nethrodaya

McLaughlin once said, “A sense of humor is a major defense against minor troubles”. The story of Rajesh proves that it can also be a mighty defense against any major troubles that may come our way. Currently a student of class 11, Rajesh faced his first major setback in life when he lost his vision at a young age. Most of his time had to be spent on treatments; he could not continue his Education. The impact that constant visits to hospitals, failing eyesight and the thought of a

bleak future all combined together can have on a young mind is huge and daunting. Yet, the 2017 SSLC Public Exams saw Rajesh become one of the Top Scorers of Nethrodaya. The maturity needed to have such an attitude despite these struggles is to be highly appreciated. Nethrodaya realizes his struggle, hard work and perseverance in the face of adversity and wishes him all the very best for his future.



Meghala – Student of Nethrodaya

Meghala is currently a Student of Class 12 and is one of the most dedicated Students at Nethrodaya. While being a Visually Impaired person carries certain stigma in the Indian Society, being a girl who is Visually Impaired has its own effects. Yet, this girl has a curiosity and thirst for knowledge. The maturity that she displays within class and outside, and her uncomplaining nature in the face of difficulty makes her an amazing student. She is an example of the quote, “Work hard in silence and let your success make the noise”. Nethrodaya wishes Meghala every success and hopes that all her dreams come true.

Anthony – Student of Nethrodaya

One of the most enthusiastic and focused student at Nethrodaya, Anthony maintains an amazing Academic

record. Her interest in the subjects can be seen in the keen attention she pays during Class hours and in the way she does any work given to her on the same day, without fail. Yet another aspect to note about this girl is the quick grasp that she has on the subject matters, and her habit of reading Newspapers, which she claims to do whenever possible. Nethrodaya wishes Anthony a life time of success and happiness in all her wishes and endeavors.



FACILITIES AT NETHRODAYA

Computer Lab



To keep our students updated with the increasingly digitized world, we have set up a Computer Lab, and offer foundational Computer Training Courses (MS Office, Internet) equipped with voice enabled screen reading software and a digital Braille printer. Thousands of visually impaired students have benefitted from this practice, which has been active for the past 15 years. In addition, we have also set up a browsing center exclusively for the visually impaired, so as to give them an opportunity to explore the world of internet.

Digital Audio Library

Nethrodaya has been the pioneering Organization to set up a Digital Audio Library, an alternative for Braille. It offers numerous digitally recorded Audio Study Material on Text Books, for Competitive Exams, Special Education Books, etc. These Study Material can then be listened to, and used for preparation for Board Exams. These Study Material have been supplied to over 5000 Visually Impaired Students across various Districts of Tamil Nadu, over the past 15 years.



Reading Center

To help the Visually Impaired Students enjoy the pleasures of reading, Nethrodaya has set up a Reading Center, which plays host to a variety of Books. Nethrodaya also reaches out and invites a number of Volunteers, to share their eyesight for the Visually Challenged for a few hours every day, by reading out Printed Content to them. This gives the Students a chance to interact with people from the outside world, in addition to being able to enjoy Literary Activities.

Fitness Center

We recognize that to be strong, comprises of both Physical and Mental Strength and aim to cater to the Physical Fitness needs of our Students. Nethrodaya has set up a “State of the Art” Fitness Center, with various Equipments meant to train the body. The Fitness Center is used by the Students for Stress Relief after a long day of Academic Learning.

Music Center

To help interested students develop their musical talents as part of the extra-curricular activities, Nethrodaya has set up a Music Center comprising of



various Musical Instruments. Often populated with those interested in Music, this Center has inspired several Students to appreciate the Art and speculate about careers in the field.

Library

Nethrodaya has set up a library that is a haven of



Information to both Student and Staff Members alike. With several Audio Books to help the Visually Impaired Students Academically, and reference Books to further enrich the knowledge of the Staff so as to facilitate better Teaching, Nethrodaya plays host to a number of such resources.

Free boarding facilities

A warm, healthy, safe environment is as essential to academic excellence as the right soil is needed for the growth of plants. Keeping this in mind, Nethrodaya offers Boarding and Lodging Facilities to its Students and provides them with a place to stay and three meals a day for Free. Meals are planned to be Healthy and Nutritious, so as to ensure that the Children get all the necessary Nutrients for their proper growth and development.



Free Lodging Facilities

Nethrodaya tries to create a “Home away from home” environment for its Students by providing free Lodging facilities. Each Student is provided with a Storage Unit to keep his/her belongings safely and also with a Bed to rest. The Dormitories are kept clean and neat at all times. To provide a breather for the students from their Curricular Activities, we have also incorporated a



Projector Room, where Screenings of Movies are done once in a while. Thus, Nethrodaya provides a wholesome environment for the development of Students.

Free Braille Books

Despite the advent of Technology, there is little that can replace the satisfaction that one gets from holding a Book in hand, taking in the smell of the Papers as we slowly get mesmerized by the Content of the Book. Nethrodaya feels the need to provide this experience to its Students. Hence, we have created a resource pool of Books in Braille, which can be used by Students to read as and when they feel like. This method of Braille reading also provides a sense of independence to the Students, as they no longer have to depend on others for reading out study material. This way, they can spend some quality time by themselves while simultaneously improving their intellectual capabilities.



Spoken English

Students of Nethrodaya, as part of the Curriculum are provided with Spoken English Classes every day, where they learn to employ the learning from the Academic Subject. This also gives them a view into the Culture of certain Foreign Cultures, thus expanding the scope of Knowledge, while providing them a chance to learn one of the most used languages in the World.



OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

Nethrodaya's self-employment schemes for the visually challenged families

Initiated 14 years ago, this scheme aims to provide a way of livelihood for families of Visually Challenged, by providing them with Seed Capital in the form of Marketable Products. These Products can be sold in the Suburban Train Network. This paves way for the Visually Challenged to make a sustainable Monthly Income and lead a dignified life. This noble scheme, with the objective of preventing the visually impaired from begging, has helped over 5000 visually challenged persons over the years.



Assistance to educate the Children of Visually Challenged Parents



Having understood the plight of Visually Challenged Parents, who give birth to sighted children, in both sustaining their livelihood and also educating their child, Nethrodaya has been lending a helping hand by supporting the Educational Expenses of the child. This scheme has benefitted over a 1000 students since its inception and has paved a way for the children to take care of their Visually Impaired Parents in the later stages of their lives.

Individual Cattle Rearing Unit for Visually Challenged Rural Families

In an effort to reach out to the Illiterate Visually Challenged Population in remote areas, Nethrodaya has been offering a helping hand by purchasing a Female Cow with Hybrid Calf and handing it over to the families. The cows are insured, which makes the families feel safe. In addition, Nethrodaya also arranges for a tie up with the local milk vendor, so that milk can be procured on a regular basis. Thus, we have helped several families live with self-esteem and a stable income.



Nethrodaya's Free Medical Helpline

Since its inception 14 years ago, Nethrodaya's Free Medical Helpline has helped over a 1000 Visually Impaired Patients get timely Medical Help and Assistance. We aim to provide Free, Quality Medical Services to the Visually Challenged Patients who have met with accidents or who are suffering from physical ailments round the clock. The 24/7 Free Medical Helpline has helped several differently abled people get access to Medical Amenities, Surgeries, Timely Medication etc., and continues to serve the people till date.



Distribution of white canes

It becomes immensely difficult for the Visually Impaired to commute without a White Cane, and Nethrodaya recognizes this difficulty. Hence, we provide White Canes 24/7 for any Visually Impaired Person who is in need. Anyone who has broken or lost their canes can walk into our premises and leave with a free new one for support. Over 5000 Visually Impaired people have benefitted and continue to benefit from this scheme.

EVENTS

The 14th Anniversary Celebration of Nethrodaya



Nethrodaya celebrated its 14th Anniversary day on 20th November 2016 in its premises. The Memorable Event saw the participation of Visually Challenged people from several Districts of Tamil Nadu with great enthusiasm and fervor. The Event saw the gracious presence of several eminent personalities such as Hon'ble Justice Tmt. Pushpa Sathyanarayana, The State Commissioner for the Welfare of the Differently abled, Government of Tamil Nadu, Thiru. S. Murugiah IAS, renowned Play Back Singer Shri. Senthil Dass. Mr. N. Sambasivan and Ms. P. Aruna Devi, two outstanding visually challenged achievers, were honored with Awards of Eminence and Citations, for their significant contributions towards the Welfare of the Differently abled Community.



State Level Conference on Career Counselling and Guidance

In a bid to enlighten the Visually Impaired Students of Tamil Nadu about the various options that lie ahead of them, Nethrodaya organized a State Level Conference on Career Counseling and Guidance on 28th January 2017. More than 300 Visually Challenged Students, of Classes 10th and 12th, hailing from Remote Villages of Tamil Nadu participated in the Prestigious Event. The participants were enlightened on the various techniques required for the Board Exams, discussions on various Subjects, Pattern of Questions etc. to enable them to become more independent. The program, which several participants deemed to be "The Festival of Education", saw the inspiring presence of young Visually Challenged Achievers from the fields of Psychology, Education, Entrepreneurship and also Government Officials. The interaction of students with these Visually Impaired Achievers boosted the confidence of the Students, while also reinforcing the fact that physical disability need not stand in the way of one achieving his/her dreams, which is a value strongly advocated by Nethrodaya.



EVENTS

State Level Felicitation for the Visually Impaired Women

Nethrodaya organized the State Level Felicitation for the Visually Impaired Women on July 15, 2017 in its premises. While the Visually Impaired Men usually have better access to money and resources for proving their mettle, Visually Impaired Women are most often left to toil without proper Guidance, Motivation, Resources and above all the Initial Investment for starting even a Small-scale Business of their own. The first of its kind in India, Nethrodaya has identified highly aspiring Visually Impaired Women in dire need of a Capital Investment for starting their own Shops, Handcraft Works and other such Businesses, who were provided with Initial Investment so as to enable them to become Self-Employed. Inaugurated by the The Madras High Court Judge Huluvadi G Ramesh. The Event was Sponsored Velammal Group of Educational Institutions



South Indian Level Chess Tournament for the Visually Impaired.

On 9th September 2017, Nethrodaya organized a Free South Indian Level Chess Tournament for the Visually Impaired, at Hotel Radha Regent, Chennai. The Event



saw the participation of National Level Visually Impaired Chess Champions from the states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. The Tournament, which aimed at promoting the Sporting Talent of the Visually Impaired participants, was inaugurated by Hon'ble Justice

Thiru. Rajiv Shakhder. The rules of the Tournament were of National Standards as were the Referees. After several intense Battles of Brains, the Eventful Tournament came to a conclusion with the Prize Distribution and Valedictory Function, which was presided over by the Member Secretary, Sports Development Authority of Tamil Nadu.



Parent's Thoughts on Nethrodaya

Muthukrishnan's Father:

It is said that, when you need something all universe conspires to help you get it. Our story with Nethrodaya stands proof to this statement. My son, Muthukrishnan, is currently a Student of Class 10 at Nethrodaya. A few years back, his Academics and Personal Life were severely affected due to his low vision, to the point that the future of his Academic Career seemed bleak. It was at a difficult time like this, when we had lost all hope, that his Team of Doctors informed us of Nethrodaya, a School for the Visually impaired. This proved to be the Turning Point both in my son's life and my hope for his life. The atmosphere in the School was so nurturing and positive that we began to observe a change in



our son's attitude, an increase in his interest and confidence levels. The child who had previously found it extremely hard to give his best let alone excel, in his academics, is now receiving positive feedbacks from his Special Educators. The School has developed in him a Positive Attitude, the Desire to Excel, and more importantly, the Confidence that he too can shine in his life. As for me, a few years back I had lost all hope for my son's Education; but today, not only has my hope been renewed, but also a new inspiration and desire to give my son any Degree of Higher Education he desires and requires has been born. Thanks to Nethrodaya, we now have our Light at the end of the Tunnel.

Harishankar's Father



My son, Harishankar, who is currently pursuing his 10th Standard at Nethrodaya, has multiple disabilities - he has low vision and also a learning disorder. As parents, we were extremely worried about his future, as it seemed that he would need someone to take care of him at all times. How would his life be, when we are no longer able to look after him? Who would take care of him then? But, once he began his Schooling at Nethrodaya, our fears have been laid to rest. The support from the Staff (both Teaching and Administrative) at the School have not only helped him improve Academically, but has also helped him develop the necessary life skills. In addition to pursuing his Education which would enable him to have a Self-Sustainable Livelihood, he is now able to

take care of his daily chores on his own, without having to depend much on anyone else. It is also of great help that Nethrodaya provides Education and several other facilities including Boarding and Lodging completely Free of Cost. In one line, we can say that Nethrodaya has given us the confidence that even after our time on Earth, our son's life would be a happy, complete one.

Advocacy

- **Obtaining a judgment towards amending Country Town Planning Act regard to the RPD (Right of Person's with Disability).** The success of the legal battle for an amendment in the Town Planning Act according to the RPD was yet another Legal Milestone for Nethrodaya. With Legal Services of Mr. R. Prabakaran, the Town Planning Act, which levied an Infrastructure and Amenities Fee for the Construction of Classrooms for the Visually Impaired Students was amended to exempt not only Nethrodaya but also other similar Welfare Institutions from paying this Fee.
- **Inclusion of Differently Abled Ministry into the positional description of the Social Welfare Minister.** When the Ministry for the Differently Abled Community was formed, there was an ambiguity in the Leadership of the same, as no Minister had formally been allotted to the Department. Hence, to enhance the proper functioning of the Ministry, Govindakrishnan had appealed that the Department be formally assigned to the Ministry of Social Welfare, and that the Title of the Social Welfare Minister be changed to that of “Minister for Social Welfare and Differently-Abled Department”. He was successful in the same and thus, ensured that proper representation and appropriate importance was given to the Differently-abled Community.
- **Block level Differently-abled Welfare Officers to be appointed instead of District Level Officers.** In an effort to provide amenities and protection to the Differently-abled Community, Govindakrishnan appealed that the Differently-abled Welfare Officers be appointed at Block Level instead of at District Level. This move aims to increase the man power dedicated for the Differently-abled Community as a whole and to increase their representation, so that sufficient resources are available for their integration into the everyday world.
- **Appointment of Directors or Nominee from within the same Department on a Promotion basis rather than appointing Directors who come in from other Departments.** Govindakrishnan appealed that, the Directors of the Department of the Differently-abled be appointed from those people who have already been working with the Department rather than appointing Directors from other Departments, so as to ensure that the Department is in the hands of those who have known and understood the difficulties of the Differently abled people.

Volunteer Speaks

Aishwarya Ramesh

At 21, having just completed my engineering degree, I wanted to do something that would make a difference, to others and also to me. The universe granted more than what I wished for, in the form of Nethrodaya, as it remains one of the best opportunities I have received in my life. One of the primary reasons I say this is that, no achievement or award that I have received so far has come close to giving me the satisfaction that comes from seeing the happiness in the face of These Visually Impaired Students once they have understood a concept; or the determination on their faces when I motivate them to do a difficult task; or the way they say “Thank you” every time they do something they previously thought was impossible. Another thing that has to be mentioned about Nethrodaya is the inspiring presence of the founder Mr. Govindakrishnan and his wife, Mrs. Usha, both of whom strive very hard to create a familial environment and both of whom show you that no matter what obstacle you face, determination, a hint of kindness and a good heart can take you a long way. While it is an amazing thing to donate a part of your earnings, for those of us who are not in a position to do so but want to help, spending some of your time for voluntary activities such as the work of scribes, or helping with the recording of study materials, or reading out of the text materials to the students is a great way to give back to the community. In fact, we have a number of retired officials who chose to spend their evenings reading or coaching our students. So, if you are someone who is looking to find the more enchanting aspects of life, or someone who wants to be there for other people, or someone who wants to know how beautiful you can be, I would like to suggest that you spend some time helping out in any way you can. After all, isn't time the most valuable thing one can spend?



Appeal for Support

Donations:

In Cash:

- Celebrate your Special days such as Festivals, Birthdays, Wedding Anniversaries, Remembrance Day
- High Tea: Rs.250 Breakfast: Rs.1250 Lunch: Rs.1750 Dinner: Rs.1750
- Sponsor a Student's Monthly Expense: Rs.2000
- Donate a Cow to a Visually Impaired Family (For their Self-Employment): Rs.30,000
- Donate towards the Medical Expense of a Visually Impaired: Rs.1000 and above
- Donate towards the Corpus Fund of the Organization

In Kind:

- Donate old Furniture, Utensils and Clothes
- Donate Provisions, Groceries and Sanitary Essentials

Contributions by cheque or demand draft may be drawn favoring “Nethrodaya”

Donations are accepted under FCRA





Volunteering Opportunities

For Academic purposes:

To read Text Books; To write Assignments,
To record Lessons; To be a Scribe for their Exams

Volunteer for our events

Professionals in the fields of Motivation, Counseling and Spoken English/Communication can also share their expertise.

Help the students develop Extracurricular Skills such as Sports, Music, Martial Arts etc.



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Public Charitable Trust Registration Number & Date: 430/2002/4 dt 21st June 2002 **All Donations are exempted under Section 80G of IT Act Registered U/S 12A Appn # 2(213)/02-03**

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