

Sensitising the Teachers

sensitising the teachers to motivate the students to leave their class and attend a 40- minute remedial session every day.

Joshi explains, “ We also adopt conventional play way methods using sand, pebbles and mud to make the kids understand tables. Our whole idea is not to teach students but instill the method in them.” Joshi is happy with the milestones that her NGO has achieved and says that she could make this journey with the backing of two organisations — Unltd India and Atma, that support NGOs. However, she admits that she still has miles to go. “ Our biggest challenge was to convince parents that their children can have learning disabilities.

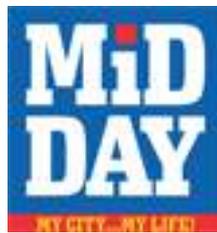
We offer kids the remedial measures at no cost. But even today funding is a huge problem for us. However, in the long run, we want to partner with other NGOs, start supporting their remedial measures and gradually expand our roots.” Delivering happiness Founded in 2010, Mirakle Couriers employs only deaf adults. Started by Dhruv Lakra, an MBA from Oxford University, the firm has grown to operate in two branches in Mumbai, employing 70 deaf employees and delivering over 65,000 shipments per month. Winner of the 2009 Helen Keller award and the 2010 National Award for the Empowerment of People With Disabilities, the establishments back office is run by 20 deaf women while on the field they have a team of 44 male deaf courier agents who use public transport to make deliveries. The companys clients include Mahindra & Mahindra, The Aditya Birla Group, Victory Art Foundation, JSW Group, Indian Hotels Company, Godrej & Boyce and Essel Propack.

What prompted Lakra to set up Mirakle Couriers was his personal experience. Once he was travelling in a bus while a young boy seated next to him seemed restless and was looking around anxiously. Lakra asked him where he was going but the boy did not respond. It took him a few seconds to realise that the latter was deaf. Lakra wrote on a piece of paper in Hindi asking him where he wanted to go. It suddenly dawned on Lakra how difficult life is for the deaf.

He says, “ You can not know when someone near you is deaf as there are no obvious physical attributes, and so its totally ignored. There is very little public sympathy for the deaf, and a severe lack of government support for them in India.

Particularly when it comes to employment there are no opportunities because no one has the patience or the foresight to learn sign language. After the bus incident, I learnt the Indian Sign Language and decided to set up a courier business because it requires a lot of visual skills but no verbal communication. The deaf are extremely good at map reading, remembering roads and buildings because they are so visually alert.” There is a systematic process through which the delivery of packages is done. The companys field agents, who are responsible for a designated area of delivery, receive instructions via SMS of a clients address and a time for when documents need to be picked up. Upon arriving at the clients office, the shipments are counted and a confirmation SMS is sent back to the branch supervisor.

Once the packages arrive at the branch they are sorted, processed and prepared for delivery. The female staff sorts out the shipments based on pin codes, while further sorting is carried out by field agents. Once sorted, each document is given a tracking code and entered into the system. Proof of Delivery or a digital delivery status report is then returned to the clients the day after delivery.



Founded in January 2010 by Pooja Joshi (right), today Mimaansa teaches 60 kids with learning disabilities using conventional methods like snakes and ladders to make them understand directions. They also use unconventional tools like a Tablet to help children communicate. Joshi says the idea is not to teach them by rote but instill the method in them. PIC/SAMEER MARKANDE

Mirakle Couriers has given a new lease of life to deaf adults by making them self-reliant and independent.

The 31-year-old social entrepreneur reveals that working with the deaf has been an eyeopener.

“ I have learnt how deep rooted the problem is and a lot more needs to be done for them.” Listening is the new tool Set up in 2010, Sign n Talk helps the deaf to communicate with friends, families, associates, colleagues via an interpreter who knows sign language.

Registered users log in to [www. signntalk. org](http://www.signntalk.org), fill in their call details such as their name and number and get connected to the Sign n Talk interpreter.

The interpreter communicates the messages between the deaf caller through sign and speaks to the other contact over the phone. The only requirements of using the service is having a computer with internet connectivity to log on to Sign n Talk website and a decent camera so that whatever the deaf caller signs the Sign n Talk interpreter can see clearly. The project is in beta stage, but already has about 2,500 registered users, who are able to use the phone for the first time ever.

A joint initiative of Barrier Break Technologies and The Deaf Way Foundation, right now Sign n Talk is a free service.

Shilpi Kapoor, managing director of Barrier Break Technologies, says, “ We want to make it self-sustainable and turn it into a business model to have a wider reach.” Kapoor, a Microsoft Certified Systems Engineer, admits that setting up Sign n Talk has been a huge challenge. She says, “ The deaf community needs to have access to technology. Also they communicate only with their family or friends. We have to make them aware of their rights and create the need in them to communicate with society. We create this awareness by conducting seminars.” Apart from working for the cause of the disabled, she also hires them as employees.

Working with them has been an eye- opening experience, she admits. “ I have learnt to adapt to them and work with them as a team,” she signs off.

rinky. kumar@ mid- day. com Mirakle Couriers has given a new lease of life to deaf adults by making them self- reliant and independent Founded in January 2010 by Pooja Joshi (right), today Mimaansa teaches 60 kids with learning disabilities using conventional methods like snakes and ladders to make them understand directions. They also use unconventional tools like a Tablet to help children communicate. Joshi says the idea is not to teach them by rote but instill the method in them. PIC/SAMEER MARKANDE After working with the deaf I have learnt how deep rooted the problem is and a lot more needs to be done for them DHRUV LAKRA Founder of Mirakle Couriers that employs deaf adults The deaf community needs to have access to technology. Usually they communicate only with their family or friends. We have to make them aware of their rights and create the need in them to communicate with society. We try to create this awareness by conducting seminars in deaf clubs Shilpi Kapoor Managing director, Barrier Break technologies and founder of Sign n Talk