

## **A Study on Organisational Practices Towards Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities at Workplace**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Diversity has been a practice among organisations across the world. Various dimensions of diversity are considered such as gender, ethnicity, age-group, sexual orientation, physical ability etc. Among Indian organisations, consideration of physical ability has not been quite popular, particularly in non-government organisations. There are some organizations that have inclusion of persons with disabilities employees as a part of their diversity program; some consider it as a CSR agenda while others use it as a social image enhancement. Recently it has been observed that there are few organisations that provide employment to the persons with disabilities in the main stream jobs too.*

*This research paper aims to study the practices of such organisations which have considered their business model by taking the initiative towards the inclusion of persons with disabilities at workplace. An exploratory approach has been adopted in identifying organisations which has a significant proportion of their workforce as persons with disabilities compared to other competitors in the industry. Secondary data has been collected from web portals, research papers and various reports published by reputed bodies like World Bank, ILO etc. Qualitative approach has been adopted in analysis and interpretation of the data. Overall the research paper gives us an insight about such organisations which has understood the value of employing persons with disabilities at workplace.*

**Keywords:** Inclusion, Diversity, Persons with disabilities, Organisational practices.

### **INTRODUCTION:**

The practice of inclusion of persons with disabilities at workplace is going through a stage of reformation. Recently, the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 has been passed by the Govt. of India to fulfill its responsibility to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which India ratified in 2007. This Act has replaced the previous legislation, Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995. According to Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 the private sector employees are eligible for incentives in case they employ minimum 5 percent of their employees under disabilities category. The employer's contribution towards the provident fund (EPF) and employee state insurance (ESI) for the first three years for each Persons with disabilities employed within a monthly wage of up to Rs. 25000 and appointed on or before 01st April, 2008 will be reimbursed. However, the administrative charges of 1.1 percent of wages under EPF are required to be borne by the employer (DEOC, 2009). Reservation of 4 percent for Persons with disabilities is available in government jobs. 1 percent is reserved for blindness and low vision, an additional 1 percent for hearing and speech impairment, another 1 percent for loco motor disability including cerebral palsy, leprosy cured dwarfism, acid attack victims and muscular dystrophy and remaining 1 percent for autism, intellectual disability, specific learning disability and mental illness. In case of multiple disabilities including deaf-blindness, the Persons with

disabilities would be considered with persons in the either of the categories (Sharma, 2017). With the emergence of the new Act, the categories of disabilities have been increased to 21 from 8 by inclusion of dwarfism, Thalassemia, hemophilia, Parkinson's disease, cerebral palsy, learning disabilities, multiple sclerosis, chronic neurological conditions, acid attack victims etc. Even government machineries such as Ministry of Labour and Employment, Ministry of personnel, public grievance and pensions, Ministry of rural development, Ministry of social justice and empowerment etc. are present to support the employment of Persons with disabilities.

Currently there are many organizations that have initiated employing Persons with disabilities and have allocated not only elementary level of roles but also deputed at managerial positions too. Increased level of loyalty with good performance record added with low rate of attrition has been the outcome from hiring the persons with disabilities (DEOC, 2009). Apart from the corporate houses, there are a number of supported employment agencies such as Youth4 Jobs foundation, Enable India, Able Disabled Muskaan, Mobility India, All People Together (ADAPT), Association of people with disability (APD) and few others have collaborated with large scale organizations to assist in inclusion of persons with disabilities at workplace. Yet the real time scenario of employment status in India is not great since it is at an elementary stage. Out of 26.8 million Persons with disabilities in the country, only 5.8 million Persons with disabilities are employed (GoI, 2011). Among the non-government organisations, there are a handful of organizations that comprehends the value of employing Persons with disabilities that has the sense of commitment to transform the persons with disabilities into employees with disability (EwD). These organisations have the will to face the social stigma and give these disable people a new meaning to their life by providing them with social and financial independence, thus creating a positive imprint in the society.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW:**

In Indian context according to Section 2(s) of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 person with disability means, "a person with long term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment which, in interaction with barriers, hinders his full and effective participation in society equally with others". The benchmark to be categorized as Persons with disabilities is any individual who is suffering from minimum 40 percent of any disability from the categories mentioned and certified by an authorized medical practitioner is considered as a person with disability. (World Bank, 2009).

State owned organizations such as NTPC, BPCL, BEL, HAL and State bank of India who recruits people with disabilities to a large extent. As on 2015, the prominent public sector employers are State Bank of India followed by Punjab National Bank, BHEL, BPCL and ONGC (Shenoy, 2011).

With regards to the private sector, many organizations have realized the importance of employing Persons with disabilities in their workforce. They are flexible, cheerful, responsible and grateful to their employers (Rose, 1999). Inclusion of disabilities has been considered as a new source of value for the organisations to retain employee and this practice portray a positive public image too (Friedner, 2013). Employers have expressed generally favourable attitudes regarding the ability of the PwD to perform productive work (Levy et al. 1992). PwD have accomplished extraordinary tasks despite of their disability and even positively influence co-workers (Gustafsson et al. 2013). In the diversity and inclusion award with category called, "outstanding work in the persons with disability category" conducted by NASSCOM Wipro Technologies emerged as the winner in this category (NASSCOM, 2017). A report by American Indian Foundation stated a list of twelve organizations from the private sector which are prominent in employing Persons with disabilities in India which are Vindhya E Infomedia, Titan, Revive Enterprise, Miracle Couriers, Lemon Tree Hotels, ITC hotels, Aegis and few others too. Mphasis has been the winner of Shell Helen Keller Award (most prestigious Indian benchmark for honoring people and organizations which have been working towards promoting employment opportunities for persons with disabilities) (DEOC, 2009).

A report on Persons with disabilities and Indian Labour Market Challenges and Opportunities by ILO states that apart from these organizations, there are few private players who run training centers specifically for people with disabilities. For e.g. TATA motors, L&T, Dr. Reddy's Foundation, Centum learning ltd (DEOC, 2009)

Public-Private Partnership ventures such as NSDC and Center for Persons with disabilities livelihood (CPDL) has tie-ups with provide employment opportunities for people with disabilities (DEOC, 2009). Apart from the initiatives from Government, private employers, public-private partnership firms, NGO's, there are industry associations such as NASSCOM and CII who are also working towards generating employment of Persons with disabilities (DEOC, 2009).

## **METHODOLOGY:**

An exploratory approach has been adapted to study the initiatives taken by 8 selected organizations towards employment of persons with disabilities. These organisations have been selected based on the percentage of persons with disabilities working in these organisations. A cut-off percentage of 10 percent of the total workforce as persons with disabilities in the organisations have been considered and presented in form of case study. Each case presented here with their unique experience in managing Persons with disabilities. The research objectives have been explored with varying levels of depth since this is an initial research, which will form the basis of more conclusive research. More over rarely any research has been done till date regarding employment of Persons with disabilities in Indian context hence this is an attempt to gain further insight. Qualitative approach of data collection has been planned though in-depth analysis of the available secondary data. Various reports published by reputed bodies such as World Bank, International Labour Organisation, American Indian Foundation etc. have been explored which shares the macro picture about managing Persons with disabilities in select organizations. Apart from these reports, Census data, articles published in websites, online version of newspapers are the other sources from where the secondary data has been gathered related to various initiatives that the organizations take towards employment of Persons with disabilities.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION:**

### **Case 1: Mirakle Couriers**

Mirakle couriers is a unique example of providing employment of persons with disabilities in India. The organisation commenced with one deaf man and 10 shipments and today it currently employs 60 people with hearing and speech impairment handling more than 2000 couriers per day (Vitta, 2016). People from backward economic strata are selected, trained and employed which helps them to be financially independent with a career and just not a job (Shenoy, 2011). The USP of Mirakle is that it employs only persons with disabilities in hearing-impaired category for the position of delivery boys and various other roles. Mirakle couriers have been awarded with the prestigious Hellen Keller award in 2009 and National Award for the Empowerment of People with Disabilities in Dec, 2010 by the President of India.

The entire business runs on sign language. The delivery staffs obtain information via SMS regarding the client's pick up address details and the time. A confirmation message is sent to the manager at branch after the consignment has been collected from the customer. The female staffs do the sorting, processing and preparation for the delivery after all the couriers are brought to the branch post collection from the customers. Each document is assigned a tracking code which helps in maintaining the track of every courier and the delivery personnel. The customer receives a proof a delivery within a day of the delivery to the respective party. A telephone operator has been assigned to sort out any issues regarding the address and would get it clarified from the customer. Due to the effective transportation system in Mumbai, the delivery staff uses the public transport system. Indian Sign Language (ISL) has been kept as the official communication medium at Mirakle courier. The leading clients of this company are Godrej, Aditya Birla Group, IDFC, Blue Star, Forbes India, Mahindra, DSP Blackrock and many more.

### **Case 2: Vindhya E Infomedia**

It is a business process outsourcing company located at Bangalore that deals with data management, data entry, data processing, data conversion works. This BPO is different from others. Most of the employees employed here who are orthopedically handicapped or and hearing impaired or even some with autism. It commenced in 2006 with 2 staffs and today it has 1400 employees out of which 75 percent of the employees belong to persons with disability category. These disabled employees have been not only assigned data related works but also many of them manage corporate profiles such in the HR department, loan processing and claims processing responsibilities. Candidates who apply are expected to have elementary level of English comprehension and computer usage skills. These employees with disabilities are trained to utilize specific software and correspond in English language. Along with the formal training, there are ways of informal training imparted to the employees such as reading English newspapers and speak with other employees in English. Indian sign language has been made as the official language at Vindhya. All staffs are trained at communicating through the sign language.

The entire training handbook is made in simple English with illustrative photographs to demonstrate the process which is mandatory for the employees at job. A screen reading software is deployed with every computer which helps the disabled employees to independently use a computer with keyboard, speech or Braille display. The initial sources of recruitment were from NGO's who use to train the persons with disabilities candidates and prepare for the interviews, but later on various camps have been established in Tier II cities to build awareness

about the employment avenues and recruitment process being conducted. Employee referral has proved to be the best source of recruitment. During the initial days of commencement, Vindhya also went through rough financial stage like any other start-up. They had a difficult time when they were unable pay salaries to their staff, yet the employees didn't quit. They had requested for food and accommodation which the company could accommodate using their office premise for accommodation and food for three times (Rajayer, 2015). With such stage the company initiated its operations and presently they have the best clients. In fact many employees found like-minded people working in the organisation and decided to accept them as their life partner (Kodakkal, 2010).

According to a report from NASSCOM, the attrition rate in the business processing outsourcing industry is 30 to 40 percent but in case of Vindhya it is in single digit, i.e. 5 to 8 percent. This impacts the business positively too. The clients were happy due to the low the turnaround time (TAT) due to the high level of efficiency displayed the employees. Even the attitude of the employees is very positive that molds them a super achiever. It has won the prestigious recognition 'Shell – Helen Keller Award' for the employment of Persons with disabilities.

Today the organisation has major MNC clients from various segments such as Yes Bank, Janalakshmi Bank, and IndusInd Bank from the banking and financial sector, Wipro, SAP, Schneider and many more IT industry (Mishra, 2018). Vindhya aspires to recruit 5000 employees and expand their operations in other cities too by 2020 which will lead to generation of more employment avenues for persons with disabilities and transform their lives as financially independent individuals.

### **Case 3: Lemon Tree Hotels**

Lemon Tree Chain of hotels started in 2002. Persons with disabilities inclusion in the organisation began on 2007 and emerged as a winner of the prestigious Shell Helen Keller Award in 2010 for policies, practices and belief in equal rights and employment for persons with disabilities. Lemon Tree has been awarded as the Best Employer for the Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities' by the Ministry of Social Justice And Empowerment in 2011. Inclusion of disabled staff commenced by hiring two to three speeches and hearing impaired employees. Today the organisation has more than 400 employees in the persons with disabilities category. Majority of them i.e. 350 employees are speech and hearing impaired, 100 physically handicapped and even 14 employees with Down syndrome (Saha, 2016). It has transformed the CSR model into its business model. Currently the Lemon Tree has 33 hotels spread across 21 cities comprising of 13 percent of the workforce as persons with disabilities. Initially the staffs with disabilities were restricted to back end jobs but now they are open to guest contact areas.

The employees display a card which states that they are speech and hearing impaired, thus the guests at the hotel are given a pen and paper to jot their service requirements. The initial training is given by training partners such as Noida Deaf Society and the Sai Swayam Society that trains the speech and hearing impaired people, Efficor managing the orthopedic impaired, Sarthak Educational Trust training the multiple disabilities category. Not only this there are many supported employment partners such as Muskaan, Tamanna, DSWSC, Youth4Jobs, Dialogue in the Dark, Blind People's Association which helps in talent transformation. A mandatory training on sign language called "Expression" is conducted to for all employees. Every employee must score a minimum of 85 marks. During the orientation program, 10 to 15 days of training is given on sign language. Thereafter four hours of training is imparted every month. In fact the appraisal includes complete awareness of sign language since once the employees are promoted to a managerial role; they would need to manage staffs with disabilities who would understand only the sign language.

The new employees are observed, after which with the assistance of NGO's hand holding is done in the presence of the supervisors which makes all of them to a common platform. 6 months of paid traineeship is given for persons with disabilities with down-syndrome and autism which is delivered by NGO staffs. The training period might get extended to 8 months to one year. During this training the trainers from NGO stays full time with the Persons with disabilities trainees initially and gradually reduce their proximity. It reaches to a stage when the trainees gain a confidence of performing the tasks independently. For getting a better understanding about the talent transformation, the parents are also involved in the training. The candidates with disabilities are employed after the satisfactory performance during the training phase.

Speech and hearing impaired candidates are employed through direct recruitment mode where the decision is made depending on their performance in interviews. A short training of 7 to 10 days is imparted. In fact Lemon Tree is developing a software that will be attuned with the Job Ability with Speech (JAWS) with the operating system of the hotel for the visual impaired persons with disabilities (Umoja, 2014). These training programs aim at integrating the persons with disabilities staffs with non-disabled employees. Under the 'Skill India'

initiative, the organisation is now working with the Skill Council for Persons with Disability (SCP persons with disabilities) and the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), to develop training manual for the people with disabilities for various jobs.

It has been observed that the efficiency of employees with disabilities is not only same as the other employees but even exceeds the expected level too. These employees do not chit-chat with other staffs for a longer period like others and utilize more time productively which helps them to achieve quality. Moreover no guest complaint has aroused till date against these employees with disabilities.

#### **Case 4: “Revive Enterprise”**

Revive Enterprise deals with the rental business of sound, lighting and karaoke systems. It provides employment avenues for only visually impaired, both as frontline and backline staff (Sapra, 2014). The workstations would comprise computer keyboards in Braille, phones with Braille writings on it. Right from the reception, until the employees are all vision impaired. The founder, Mr. Karan Thakur believes that a suitable training can help these persons with disabilities to get selected into the mainstream professional instead of only sidelined jobs. The employees with disabilities are found arduous, carrying a good sense of humor and possess a capability to build a friendly atmosphere all around they work (ET Bureau, 2010). Revive enterprise could be excellent example of breaking the glass ceiling and the attitude of thousands of people who don't believe that visually impaired people also can achieve the similar job which others can perform, in fact can do better than the non-disabled people.

#### **Case 5: “Mirchi and Mime”**

“Mirchi and Mime” is a unparallel organisation that has established the benchmark for employment of persons with disabilities. The distinctiveness of this organisation is that they operate their business solely with employees with disabilities i.e “Mirchi and Mime” employs all staffs with hearing and speech impaired (Gulati, 2016).

It is an innovative eating house within Powai area of Mumbai started in March 2015. Once the founders of ‘Mirchi and Mime’ restaurant heard of a restaurant called Signs based at Toronto that operates a restaurant on an identical philosophy and pattern, the concept of opening a restaurant run by hearing and speech impaired employees in India evolved in their mind.

In fact, they additionally received customer complaints that evidenced that the customers are treating this restaurant like several other restaurant and not considering a charity that is predicated on compassion and sympathy. This was a positive sign to grow. The founders have a robust belief that the staffs with speech and hearing impaired are hired for their abilities and not for their disabilities.

The founders of ‘Mirchi and Mine’ Prashant and Anuj believed that in business generating individual wealth is essential but it is much more important for each business to create wealth for the society as well. When the founders communicated the concept to the persons with disabilities candidates, they received a positive response from them. For the disabled candidates, it had been a chance to prove that they were equally competent as others.

With Mirchi and Mime, the obstacle started with staff recruitment. The initial challenge in hiring Persons with disabilities was the founder's inability to speak with them hence they communicated with the persons with disabilities candidate's parents who would clarify it to their children. Once the candidates responded with the sign language, the parents use to translate back to the founders. Since this approach became hectic and quite tiring, they learnt the sign language. The founders started interacting with the candidates and received an extremely positive response from them, however the challenge was to encourage their parents, since they have taken care of their children in over-protected manner and suddenly leaving their children for a full time job and without any support appeared risky and unbelievable.

When people found that the entire restaurant is managed by a group of hearing and speech impaired employees, the perception of customers initially without trying out the first time would be doubtful with regards to the entire process and experience expected. However anyone who has visited the restaurant has never forgotten the smiling gestures of the stewards and the cordial reception of the staff (Gulati, 2016).

In case of ‘Mirchi and Mime’ it's a diverse know-how all together to have a meal. Here the process is dissimilar, yet quite simple. The menu list not only has the available food written on it but also additional details concerning the portion sizes and other eating stuff like salt, pepper, spices, sauces, and even cutlery. An illustration which shows the hand-gesture in sign language is printed beside every point of information. Customers are expected to use the copy the hand gestures illustrated beside each item listed in the menu to place the order. Not only this, there is no scope for any mis-communication. Once the dish is ready and bought at the table of the customer, the name of prepared dish is additionally shown by a placard. This confirms the precise the order given by the customer.

Within a year, 'Mirchi and Mime' became a distinct segment restaurant and initiated opening other branches. The rating given at Zomato, on-line food ordering based Ecommerce website was 4.8 out of 5. This restaurant became a hub wherever at one place where amazing food, excellent service and great ambience were available at nominal price point. It is clearly evident that without possessing a sense of comprehension, commitment, spirit and collaboration such organisations cannot be designed with mere CSR agenda.

### **Case 6: Metta Foot Spa**

The word "Metta" derived from Pali language which suggests 'loving kindness'. What makes this spa completely different from others is that it employs solely visually impaired masseurs. The founder of Metta foot spa, Ms. Joanita Figueiredo is professionally qualified in foot reflexology at the Old Medicine Hospital in Chiang Mai, Thailand. The employees employed at the spa hail from villages across the country however all of them are certified as massage therapists after a six months course in reflexology massage at NAB (National Association for the Blind) which incorporates application of pressure to the feet with the specific thumb, finger and hand techniques on 'reflex points' that is related with a selected organ and glands in the physical structure. Not only regarding the functional skills, these persons with disabilities had to go through the fundamental training concerning the usage of western toilets, method training for wiping, cleanup etc. (Nair, 2015).

Once she had got a call from the National Association for the Blind (NAB) requesting her to train their students' foot reflexology. Here she had observed that these persons with disabilities had a stronger level of competence than the non-disabled persons that she had trained earlier. Throughout the training program when she appreciated the trainees, the response from the students was "Only you say we tend to be good but no one gives us jobs." This provoked her so she spoke to few spa owners if they offer any chance to those visually impaired students from NAB however those owners were skeptical regarding the thought thinking that visually impaired staff wouldn't suit the image of a spa or parlor kind of business. This gave her an inspiration to go beyond the standard means of doing a parlor business. In 2007, Metta Foot Spa started in Mumbai with four staff by selling off her ornaments and borrowing cash to pay off the initial remuneration of the staffs. In fact the place for beginning the venture was given by one of her yoga students reciprocally of no matter money that she could give in return. Today there are 15 visually impaired staffs employed and leading a financially and socially independent lifestyle. Metta spa has even distended at high end hotels in Mumbai such Trident, Olives etc and even to classy restaurants at Mumbai (Basu, 2016).

While the staffs were trained, they weren't perfect at the theory however when it involves practical tests, they were above expectations. The massage which is given at Metta foot spa isn't an ordinary one, it has medical edges too. In spite of the standard, the rates are reasonable affordable. An half an hour of foot massage will value Rs. 300 while an hour-long one that features feet, back, shoulders, hands and head will cost Rs. 400 throughout the week days. Any customer who has availed the service once became a fan for the lifespan; such is the opinion from the customers. This spa is a demanded by corporate clients as a stress relieving center. Not only them, it is a happening center for even ladies from classy Bandra locality. In fact it's not a spa, it's a healing center claimed by customers (Modi, 2013).

### **Case 7: Arpan Dabba Service**

'Dabba' means Tiffin. This organisation is managed by small team of 10 persons with disabilities. All of them belong to either down-syndrome or autism or intellectual disability that operates a tiffin service provider in Mumbai. These tiffins' are home cooked and delivered during their lunch hours from Monday to Friday. The content of the lunch box would include a rice item, dal/ gravy, chapattis (Indian bread), salads and a vegetable or a non-vegetarian dish depending on the customer's order. This initiative has been commenced by Yash Charitable Trust, an NGO that assists adults with developmental disabilities. The entire operation is managed in association with the trust and a resident Nutan Chandra residing at Khar(Mumbai), who operates a tiffin service called 'Simply Ghar Ka' (The Guide Team, 2015).

The central kitchen is located in Juhu which is a place owned by the trust. Here under the guidance of two supervisors, all the ten persons with disabilities and manage the entire show. Each employee of Arpan manages their respective roles. Right from purchasing ingredients, cleaning and chopping vegetables, packing, billing food till delivering the tiffin is being managed by these disabled employees (The Daily Pao, 2015). Mrs. Nutan Chandra, a Punjabi home cook does the cooking. Generally a vegetarian 'dabba' is priced Rs.120.

Initially it was run on trial basis. During the first few days the physical arrangements were worked out. It has been observed that in spite of all hassles every employee would carry their work with a smile without any complaint. Earlier these persons with disabilities use to perform one task at a time but gradually they learned

doing multitasking. In the beginning, someone had to escort these staff to the market, but gradually they learned to purchase all the requirements such as vegetables, eggs or meat, manage the money independently and bring back a receipt (Team Express Foodie, 2016).

The customers' feedback has been great till date. In fact social media promoted the venture and now they are ready for expansion mode (Seth, 2016).

### **Case 8: Echoes Café**

Echoes café was started by a group of six friends – Sahib Sarna, Shivansh Kanwar, Gaurav Kanwar, Sahil Gulati, Prateek Babbar and Kshitij Behl, all driven by the same passion in December 2015. The staffs carry a smile on their face, the dishes here has distinct codes and signs, the customers are given notepads to write their orders, there are placards for frequent requests and each table has a light bulb to call out for the stewards. There are cards that say 'Water', 'Bill', 'Fork', and other basic things that customers are likely to ask for in the cafe. This venture started in Delhi's Satya Niketan area that employs people with hearing and speech impairment. Now they have expanded to Bangalore too. With a seating capacity of close to 40, the café currently employs six to seven persons with disabilities in each café (Ritika, 2018). The café has variety of cuisines such as Continental, Italian, Mexican, Chinese, and American. It's a located in the areas which is a quite popular among students. Initially, the founders had visited the Noida Deaf Society, a school for the hearing impaired, who helped them get the right people to recruit as their staff. The staffs are recruited through employee referrals and online sources. The staffs are trained in certain soft skills. The domain-specific skills are imparted on the job. When they are hired they are trained using the standard set procedures for a few days and few days of on the job training (Sharma, 2017).

### **CONCLUSION:**

The fear of social stigma and perception about the competency level of employees with disabilities (EwD) are two such evils which impede any organisation to provide employment of Persons with disabilities but this does not apply to the four organisations about whom the cases have explored. There are many organisations in today's world that employ persons with disabilities in the name of CSR, some in order to improve their social image and few to avail the benefits of incentives of employing persons with disabilities but these organisations has established a benchmark in employing the persons with disabilities. This has been possible due to the level of comprehension towards the abilities of the disabled, maintaining a consistent level of commitment and dedication in improving the social status of the disabled ones, overcoming all obstacles which came on their way with utmost courage ignoring all general perceptions and collaborating all stakeholders thereby converting their ideas into logical outcomes for creating world class organizations. All these organisations hired Persons with disabilities for their abilities and not for their disabilities.

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