

## **ENGLISH A LIFT UP FOR WHEELCHAIR BASKETBALL PLAYERS IN NEPAL**

Recently ENGAGE completed its first pilot project focused on promotion of English language for members of two wheelchair basketball teams who have been partnering with ENGAGE and which were also part of the recently concluded Turkish Airlines ENGAGE Empowering League, the first ever wheelchair basketball championship played in Nepal.

Fifteen youth, mostly from B.I.A. and N.S.C.I.S.A teams, both representing two leading social purpose organisations active in the disability sector in Nepal, have been taking weekly classes on each Saturday for five months.

It was the first time for ENGAGE to work on the English language even if we have been cooperating in the past with the British Council for some free courses for persons with disabilities.

It took a while to design the course, mostly focused on imparting basic grammatical and speaking skills for youths who never really had the chance to properly study English as most of them have been enrolled in public schools where the language is neglected.

It was particularly difficult to find a volunteer teacher ready to travel all the way to Jorpati, a locality situated in the suburbs of Kathmandu where there is a high concentration of persons living with disabilities.

Eventually thanks to the involvement and help of a brilliant young English Language Lecturer, Laxmi Prasad Ojha, we found a superb and passionate teacher in Naresh Tiwari who agreed to spend his Saturday afternoons, the only day of holiday here, crossing the entire Valley to teach English.

At ENGAGE, we believe that English can be really considered as a “lift up” for youths who are disadvantaged and live at the margins of society.

Even in a county with a strong attachment to the national language and a myriad of indigenous idioms like Nepal, being able to master the English language can really boost the chances of finding an internship, get a scholarship or even land a job especially in Kathmandu with a high number of international organizations, Nepali returnees after long spells overseas and expat community.

On the 30<sup>th</sup> of September, we conducted the final evaluation test and it was also an occasion of celebration as we handed out the certificates to all the participants.

While some of them really improved a lot, we are well aware that there is still so much to for them to reach a proficiency level.

Nevertheless it was a great joy to see the smiles in the faces of our friends who really were eager to have the chance to start studying with a great teacher.

Luckily the *Pollination Project*, a USA based charity, will support a second phase with a seed grant of 1000 USD, where we will be able to raise the bar and put in up to 120 hours of classes with two weekly classes.

Students will not only be able to continue to improve their grammar but with the new course, which will start within November, adopting a methodology that enhances the so called “communicative competence” conceptualized by British sociolinguist Dell Hymes, they will learn by talking and discussing about real issues affecting them and they society where they live.

The long term goal is to use the lessons learned of this upcoming second phase and design a new program that can progressively be expanded to all the wheelchair basketball teams with whom we are working with.

As in this first pilot, we will be always remain open to other youths with disabilities who do not play any sports but still are very keen to push themselves.

A particular feature is that students themselves helped a lot in the organisation of the course.

In particular Laxmi Magar, one young talented player with N.S.C.I.S.A team, provided an invaluable help as community organizer, reminding his colleagues about classes and homework and helping us with all logistics.

Youths like Laxmi represent the promising future of this country and they deserve more support to succeed and thrive at life. English language together with other leadership skills can be really a lift up for them.

*The Author is the Co-Founder of ENGAGE*