

AMBASSADOR'S REPORT

Livelihood Opportunities for People with Musculoskeletal Conditions

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Musculoskeletal conditions are a leading cause of disability all over the world but especially so in developing countries. People with disabilities, many of whom belong to the low economic sector, face a huge number of barriers accessing affordable Health care, education and employment thus condemning them to a life of perpetual misery. Most children with disabilities often drop out of school because of the unavailability of suitable transport because of which they are, in effect, excluded from the job market. Women with disabilities in particular face overwhelming social stigmas and are considered a burden on their families and society. It is with this in mind that PSRD initiated two projects to help such people with income generation.

| SHELTERED WORKSHOP |

The Sheltered Workshop is a project of the Skills Department of Pakistan Society for the Rehabilitation of the Disabled. The idea came from the realization that people with musculoskeletal conditions and disabilities, due to their lack of education, are unable to get employment. Even if they are able to get a job it is usually a menial job, the working environment is often not pleasant and, because of their musculoskeletal conditions they are unable to keep to the rigorous job hours. . The Sheltered Workshop was to enable such people to make a reasonable income in a sheltered environment under good and flexible working conditions.

Anam is a young woman whose life was ruined when she developed polio at the age of 5 months. Her father was a poor rickshaw driver who tried to bring up his four children in his very limited resources. Anam is the oldest child and because of her disability was unable to attend school until her family found out about the PSRD School. Here she was provided basic schooling for four years. She is now 18 years old. Employment and economic independence are key issues for PWD's. However with just basic education and her physical disability which made it difficult for her to travel on public transport, finding a job and earning an income was impossibility for Anam. It was for people such as Anam that the sheltered workshop project was started. The project makes contracts with commercial companies to manufacture simple items like shoe bags and paper shopping and gift bags, (which people such as Anam are able to make easily), purchases the raw materials and then delivers the finished products to the contracting outlets. Free pick and drop facilities are provided to the workers with disabilities. Anam earns Rs 7 per bag. Being rote work each bag takes only a few minutes to make. She is able to make 500-600 bags in a month which earns her about Rs 4000 (\$40) per month. Her family is very happy that this daughter who was previously a burden to them is now adding to the family income.



Amina is a young woman of 23 years who was diagnosed with severe back problems at the age of 12. The problem got worse with the passage of time and she faced great difficulty in walking and other activities of daily life. She has 2 other sisters and they are orphans. Their father was shot and killed by dacoits and her mother passed away soon after. Amina's care was taken up by her grand parents but they also passed away after some years leaving her to the care of her paternal uncles who did not treat her well because of her disability. This greatly depressed her so much so that at times she even thought of committing suicide. Because of her depression and family situation, she was unable to continue her studies beyond the basic level and faced a very bleak future. It was then that a friend referred her to PSRD where she was given work in the Sheltered Workshop and provided pick and drop facilities. Now she earns Rs. 7000 - Rs. 8000 (\$70 - \$80) per month which is enough for her own personal expenses. She has got back her zest for life, gained the respect of her family and feels that instead of being a useless burden she is contributing to the family income.



Zahida is a girl of 22 years from Pak Pattan, a village a few hundred miles from Lahore who also works in the Sheltered Workshop. When she was 2 or 3 years old and walking in the fields, a snake bit her on the leg. Due to non-availability of proper and timely medical care in her village, the leg got infected and gradually the infection reached the bone due to which her leg had to be amputated. She managed to study up to Class 3 but due to transportation problems her parents could not manage to let her continue her studies. Initially she was brought to PSRD to get fitted with an artificial leg. Once that was done and she was able to walk again, she was offered work in the Skills Department of PSRD which manages the Sheltered Workshop. She has been working there since 2009 and now earns around Rs 8000 - Rs. 10,000 (\$80 - \$100) per month on average making bags for a shoe retailer. She is so happy that she is able to manage her own needs with the money she earns and is not a burden on her family. She is now happily married and looking forward to a bright future.



I MICRO CREDIT PROGRAM I

The micro credit program is another project to help people with musculoskeletal conditions earn an income. What differentiates it from other such programs is that it is interest free. Small loans of Rs. 30,000- Rs 50,000 (\$300 - \$500) are provided to people with physical disabilities to set up a small income generating business. The loans are repaid in easy instalments with a grace period of six months.

Abdul Majeed is one such person who has been helped through the micro credit program. Now 23 years old he was born with a severe deformity in both legs which was put down (through local superstition) to effects of the lunar eclipse at the time of his birth. Because of his disability he had great difficulty in attending school. He had to be physically carried to school by his mother and brothers. He dropped out of school after studying till class VII and took up an apprenticeship as tailor working with a friend.

One day while traveling to work he met someone on the road who directed him to PSRD for a loan. He set up a small store near his home with the first loan he was given. But it was not profitable. So he took up making shoe uppers for a shoe factory near his house from where he picks up the uppers. After returning the first loan he took a bigger loan with which he bought two machines. Now he sits in the comfort of his own home preparing the shoe uppers which are then delivered to the factory for completion of the shoe. With the income he is making every month he has already paid back most of the loan and has a small amount left to pay back. He is also able to afford to keep a helper thus, in his turn, providing employment to someone else. He is a good example of a person with severe disability who has been able to rise above his condition and become a productive member of society.



Majeed Ahmad is another person who has been helped through the micro credit program.

Now 42 years old he suffered from polio when he was 2 or 3 years old. His father was a farmer in Bahawalnagar, a village 500 km from Lahore. There were 8 siblings in all- 5 brothers and 3 sisters. Most of his brothers are working in the fields. Majeed, despite suffering from his polio related disability came to Lahore and worked in a hosiery factory for 15 years. However he had to give up his job when his eye sight weakened. He started working in a newspaper kiosk selling newspapers. Soon he got the idea to set up his own Kiosk. But he did not have the means to do so. It was then that he found out about PSRD from a friend of his. He took a loan of RS 40,000/- (\$400) three years ago and bought his own Kiosk. With the income he made he was able to return the first loan three years. He took a further loan of Rs 40,000 and bought another Kiosk at a different location. From both Kiosks he is earning Rs 30,000 (\$300) p.m

He is also employing two helpers to run the two stalls and he has bought a tri motorcycle to help him get around. He is very happy that he has been able to stand on his own feet. He is married with five children who are all studying in good English medium schools. He is very thankful to PSRD for the interest free loan which helped him set up his successful business and has himself referred 15 people to the micro credit project for loans.



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