When Vijay Krishnamani was in school, he was once made to stand outside the class as punishment. When his mother went to pick him up she was surprised to see him standing outside. Upon enquiring with the teacher about the reason for the same, his mother was extremely Happy. The reason was ‘the child had been talking too much in the class’.

Surprised? Why would a mother be happy to see her child getting punished? Vijay’s case was different. He was born with almost 100 percent hearing loss. While most of the kids with hearing impairment do not develop proper abilities to speak due to lack of early intervention and support system, Vijay’s parents worked hard to develop his communication skills. This was something his mother was very proud of. And him “talking too much in class” was no less than great news for her.

“From Day 1, I was encouraged to develop social skills and be a part of mainstream society. Just learning how to listen doesn't mean you can be part of mainstream. You need to develop social skills and be ‘street smart’,” says Vijay.

When Vijay was born in 1979 with hearing impairment, there was not much awareness about it. When it happens to any child, the parents would mostly live in denial and there was nothing much that was done to look for possible solutions to make them part of mainstream society. Plus, Hearing Impairment is an “Invisible disability”.

But Vijay’s parents thought otherwise. His father was in Indian Police Service and his mother was a loving housewife. Both his parents were determined to give Vijay a life which he deserved - not the one he should just “settle with”. After the initial hard work, they sent him to a mainstream school and never treated him as a special child. Their efforts continued and included constantly talking to him, making him practice his speech and language daily, and using every possible opportunity to educate him.

“After some time my father and mother had more or less come to a stage where they realised I was standing on my own two feet and could figure things out on my own (learning from my own mistakes is a great teacher). That is when Vijay’s parents along with a few other amazing parents of hearing impaired children started an NGO called Suniye in 1995 in New Delhi, India. The objective was clear - to help other parents and their hearing impaired children acquire speech, language and become independent citizens.

**Suniye is a support school, which encourages inclusive education while helping in developing speech and language. Through various activities and counselling sessions, it is empowering hearing impaired children and their parents to lead a “regular” life and not a “special” one.**

“One important factor is that parents of hearing impaired children when they hear about the problem for the first time, they tend to live in a state of denial. They refuse to believe that their child could have a problem. No parent thinks their child will ever have a problem,” he says. Suniye team first assesses the level of hearing loss which can range from just 15 percent (decibels) to 100 or more decibels. This is followed by conducting home visits, counselling parents and their immediate circle of friends.

After the initial study, Suniye team help fit suitable hearing aids, which can either be purchased by the individuals themselves or the team helps them get it for free if they don’t have enough resources. We encourage the parents to teach the language that is normally spoken in the house for maximum exposure to the child. It is normally either English or Hindi since we are based in New Delhi. We then start a program of education for each child to enable them to learn speech, language, general knowledge and social skills necessary to be part of mainstream society.

“**Our USP is that we do not teach sign language since we believe that every hearing impaired child can learn how to listen, speak, read and write. None of our students go to special schools.** We insist on them joining mainstream schools since that is so important,” he says. If the school refuses admission to them, Suniye team either helps by appealing to the concerned higher authorities or by going to the principal to sensitize them.

Most of Suniye’s students have continued with them over their entire school careers from nursery/1st class all the way to 12th class and sometimes beyond. ”In fact, we are very happy if they do not need us anymore since that’s when we know they are independent,” says an upbeat Vijay.

The biggest challenge when it comes to initiatives like this is when parents expect immediate results and discontinue the sessions when they fail to see that. Suniye has also cracked that through various counselling sessions, which they organise for parents. “We conduct parents get-togethers where they talk to each other, support each other through the lows and that’s an environment which helps a lot,” says Vijay.

**In its journey of 20 years, Suniye has reached out to over 1,000 kids so far successfully. And the impact can be seen through the change of attitude and lifestyle of the kids.**

“It is not just them becoming independent citizens that has been important, but also the emotional factor. Their parents at the beginning had no idea or hope for their child. Now their parents can be rest assured that their children are self-reliant. With every milestone achieved, their ambition and aspirations for the child grows. Now children are able to choose their career paths a bit more easily,” says Vijay.

Suniye has several such success stories, which restore our belief that a positive impact can happen and that too in such amazing ways:

* Aditi Dubey is presently studying in Class X in Kendriya Vidyalaya, New Delhi. She was given National Child Award for exceptional achievement in Roller Skating in 2009 and the Best Student award in her school in 2013. She represented Delhi in the Junior National Badminton Championship held at Meerut in September 2014 and secured third position.
* Prateek Asnani secured 85% marks in the 12th board examinations and did his BE (Mechanical Engineering) from Netaji Subash Chandra Institute of Technology, Dwarka. He is currently in the process of seeking admission in some top-tier MBA institutes.
* Rajat Verma did his B.Com and a Software Engineering course in NIIT. He has recently joined Nucleus Software Exports Ltd., Noida, as a Trainee Software Engineer.
* Cheenu Madan who has profound hearing loss did his BE in Computers from Delhi College of Engineering and his Masters from University of Florida, USA. He founded Clinchpad – a modern CRM application which unlike traditional CRMs focuses on deals rather than contacts. He has also founded Wanto.in – an android app where users can discover products from more than 100 online stores in India.
* Vijay Krishnamani did his B.Com and MCA and thereafter worked for 13+ years as a software professional in companies like Nucleus Software, Infosys BPO and Citibank Singapore. He now works as Assistant Consultant, Tata Consultancy Services, Singapore. He got the National Award for the Best Employee from the Government of India in 2008 and the Infosys Excellence Award for Diversity in 2007. He also co-founded DEOC – Diversity and Equal Opportunity Centre - an inclusive social enterprise with the vision to promote equal opportunity and inclusion. He also co-authored a book “A Values Route to Business Success: The Why and How of Employing Persons with Disability”.

Suniye provides all its services for free to those who cannot afford them as 90 percent of their beneficiaries are from low-income groups (including house maids, roadside vendors, security guards, drivers, casual workers etc.,). We only charge a nominal annual membership fee. Those who are from well to do families support the team by giving donations.

**Suniye runs its School at Sector II, R.K.Puram, New Delhi. The ground floor was completed in 2008 and has four classrooms, one conference hall, one meeting room and one executive room.**

**Suniye is looking to get the first floor constructed so that they can provide a more holistic experience to hearing impaired children and their families.**

**Completing the school would allow us to:**

1. Establish the first model support school for hearing impaired in Delhi with world class facilities.
2. Hire more quality teachers thereby increasing our student intake capability manifold.
3. Create resource center for other NGOs to learn about quality education for hearing impaired.
4. Enable increased training to mainstream school teachers for bringing in inclusive environment.
5. Make the Government policies more disabled friendly.

**They seek to raise 50 Lakh INR which will be used to complete the construction of the building, hire more staff and reach out to more students. They have started a fundraising campaign to support construction of their new building:**

**- For online donations: please donate at www.ketto.org/suniye (accepts both INR and USD)**

**- For cheque or direct bank transfer: please find the bank details at: www.suniye.in/donate.php**

*All donations to Suniye are eligible for exemption u/s 80G of the income Tax Act as per order no. DIT(E)/2011- 2012/S-1828/3664 dated 16.11.2011 of the Director of Income Tax (Exemptions), Delhi. We are also registered vide 231650952 under the Foreign Contributions (Regulations) Act, 1976, to receive donations.*

In future Suniye team wants to continue their amazing work with more expertise and engage with more kids and their families.

**“We are very keen to share our methodology with everyone interested and help them set up more centres. We are not interested in becoming a chain of schools. We want to encourage others to set up on their own and provide them materials, methodology-based support. We are willing to do anything to help more hearing impaired children learn how to listen. But all these start from one thing.... a complete school building,” says Vijay.**

To know more about Suniye’s work, check out their website and Facebook page and get in touch with them at

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Linkedin: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/suniye>

Youtube: https://youtu.be/1iU9d4UYHKU

Slideshare: http://www.slideshare.net/VijayKrishnamani/suniye-an-ngo-for-hearing-impaired-48620173

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