

Celebrating Care

On the Republic Day this year, LVPEI was honored with the *Governor's Award for Excellence in Divyangjan Welfare* in recognition of our work supporting people with disabilities. Beula Christy, who leads LVPEI's **Institute for Vision Rehabilitation (IVR)**, received the award from the Honorable Governor of Telangana, Shri Jishnu Dev Varma. The ceremony was attended by dignitaries including Telangana's Chief Minister Mr. Revanth Reddy, Chief Justice Mr Alok Aradhe along with numerous MPs, MLAs, and others.

LVPEI is one of the few eye institutes globally that integrates vision rehabilitation services into its core offering. Right from our formative years, we have remained committed to improving the lives of people with vision disabilities by providing support, not only for daily living skills but also for livelihood opportunities. Through initiatives like inclusive education, skill development, and direct support, we strive to empower individuals to lead independent, fulfilling lives.

Beula and her team have countless stories of individuals who, despite their disability, have thrived with training and support, excelling in both personal and professional spheres. The IVR team continues to offer these individuals a helping hand, ensuring they don't just survive, but thrive.

The journey began early, as we looked to setup rehabilitation services right after our foundation. In 1992, with generous support from Dr P. R. K. Prasad and his family, we were able to establish services for the blind and visually impaired at our Banjara Hills campus (now the Kallam Anji Reddy campus). In 1996, we added low vision care to our services, supported by the Meera and L B Deshpande's family. Today, these services are available at all our tertiary and secondary eye care centres as well as through unique community-based rehabilitation programs. What began as a small initiative has grown into an Institute of Excellence, continually expanding under Beula's leadership. In 2022, the IVR group began providing specialized support for individuals with cortical or cerebral visual impairment - a condition where the eyes are normal, but the cause of vision impairment lies in the brain – and hosted the first international conference on CVI at our Kallam Anji Reddy campus late last year.

To date, our team has provided more than 280,000 rehabilitation services; empowered 600 individuals through job placement or self-employment and guided nearly 50,000 children through educational support. Do join me in congratulating the IVR team on this well-deserved recognition.

This is an exciting and deeply rewarding journey, but one not without challenges. A fully integrated eye hospital offering comprehensive eye care—that is, including vision rehabilitation for those with irreversible sight loss—had no real-life example when we set out to do it. Our ability to achieve this vision was fuelled by the support of long-standing partners--both individuals and institutions—whose contributions have been pivotal in making this vision possible.

Organisations like the Tech Mahindra Foundation, Microsoft, Cognizant Foundation; and individuals like Meera and L. B. Deshpande, Praveen Gottipalli, P. R. K. Prasad and many other countless individuals gave their time, talent, and treasure to help us deliver world-class rehabilitation services to those in need.

The IVR story is a powerful example of the transformative potential of strong partnerships. At LVPEI, we have forged many such long-term partnerships that are playing a pivotal role in helping us in our vision of eliminating needless vision impairment. Our deep relationships with ophthalmology and optometry institutions, and with renowned practitioners have been a key strength. In December this past year, while many were on holiday, Prof Jost Jonas and Songhomitra Panda Jonas chose to spend a week with us sharing their expertise on a wide range of eye care topics, from myopia to macular degeneration.

Last week I happened to meet Dr Venkat Jasti, CEO of Suven Life Sciences and a long-term supporter of LVPEI. We got talking about partnership and healthcare and I asked him to write to me about his motivation to partner with LVPEI. This is his response (edited for length): “We really like LVPEI’s persistent pursuit of excellence in education, care, service delivery, and outcomes. Our partnership has led to visible outcomes, where we are helping to provide health care to the needy.” It is true that the success of our long-term engagements depends on a clear alignment in goals and values. I would like to thank all our partners and convey my gratitude for bestowing their trust in our efforts.

Today, the world is struggling to achieve the goal of “health for all”. Despite vast advances in health care technology, close to a billion people who need eye care have never gotten an eye exam. In these circumstances, “health for all” can only be realized through building successful partnerships. Such collaborations can drive innovation, improve access to care, and address systemic challenges in healthcare systems globally—much like our Institute for Vision Rehabilitation.

-Prashant Garg