

“ Having access to books means having choices and exercising control to read what I want, when I want, in the format that I want. ”

—MOSES CHOWDARI GORREPATI, PROGRAM MANAGER-HEAD, ENABLE INDIA



CHALLENGE

As a boy growing up in Andhra Pradesh in southeastern India, Moses relied on others to read to him due to a visual impairment resulting from glaucoma and corneal dystrophy. He had to wait all day until his mother finished her housework and could read the cricket scores in the newspaper to him. “That used to hurt me a lot. I wanted so much to be independent,” says Moses. He learned braille in school, but there were few books available. He had access to some books on tape, but the selection was limited, and it took a long time to record new books. The only way he could succeed in school was to schedule friends to read to him. With their help, he made it all the way through the University of Hyderabad and earned a master’s degree in English Literature. Unfortunately, his dependence on others caused him to miss out on many student activities and opportunities for social development.

SOLUTION

After graduating in 2009, he discovered Bookshare, the world’s largest library of accessible ebooks. Says Moses, “having access to books in Bookshare means more than just getting the information in the books. It means having choices and exercising control to read what I want, when I want, and in the format that I want.” Moses reads on his computer and on his smartphone using the Go Read app. He often downloads books for offline reading when traveling. Now that smartphones are more affordable in India, more people have them. People with visual impairments can use low-cost DAISY players in rural places where internet connectivity can be unreliable. Moses mostly reads books in English, but also enjoys a growing collection of books in Telugu and Kannada, two regional languages.

IMPACT

Moses recalls a proud moment when he brought home his first paycheck. His parents had been saving money each month, assuming they would have to provide for him his entire life, and they were so pleased that he acquired skills and knowledge to gain employment. “On that day, my life changed and so did the lives of everyone around me. I proved to them something that I believed all along – I could provide for myself. It was an incredible feeling.” When a person with a disability learns how to access books and improve themselves, it gives them a good feeling to be independent. That feeling is contagious and motivates the person to learn new things. Another benefit is that people can have conversations with colleagues and function successfully in the workplace. Books are not just for acquiring knowledge, but also for enhancing the range of social experiences and fostering inclusion in the work environment.

Contact for Bookshare Asia & Africa: zainabc@bookshare.org // +919650211575

Benetech is a nonprofit that empowers communities through software for social good. Our work transforms how people with disabilities read and learn, makes it safer for human rights defenders to pursue truth and justice, and connects people to the services they need to live and prosper. We’re constantly pursuing the next big social impact.