benetech
TECHNOLOGY
SERVING HUMANITY

> " *How do you make education inclusive for students with disabilities? Technology is the solution! Anyone who is skilled at using a computer can succeed in school and find work.* "
> —**BHARAT VAYA, SCHOOL PRINCIPAL, GUJURAT, INDIA**

CHALLENGE

Blind since birth, Bharat Vaya has experienced the limitations of traditional education for the visually impaired. As a young student, Bharat had access to braille books in basic subjects. When he reached university, however, not one single braille book was available for his courses, so he had to record lectures on cassette tapes and recruit students to read textbooks aloud for him. In spite of limited resources, he earned a bachelor's degree and two master's degrees. Not all students are so successful. "Many fail to complete their education and obtain jobs because they don't have all the necessary resources and skill sets," explains Bharat.

SOLUTION

"The solution is introducing technology at an early age," says Bharat, "so future generations don't experience this barrier when they graduate from school." Bharat started his own technology journey in 2003 when he acquired computer skills. In 2010, he started using Bookshare, an ebook library for people with reading barriers, to read books in English, Hindi, and Gujarati on his computer, mobile phone, and talking book player. "Bookshare is wonderful because I can download so many books including reference manuals for software apps and the internet and books for pleasure reading."

Bharat brings his advocacy for technology to his position as the principal at one of the leading institutions in Vadodara in the state of Gujarat. Serving visually impaired and special needs students, the school is supported by a partnership between a philanthropic foundation and the Department of Social Justice and Empowerment. Under Bharat's leadership, students learn braille, computer and internet skills, orientation, and mobility.

IMPACT

Bharat uses the power of technology to transform education for students with visual impairments and make it possible for them to succeed in mainstream classrooms. His school provides accessible versions of required textbooks in Bookshare so the students can read the same books in class alongside their peers. "The potential for increased education and employment opportunities is huge for students with computer skills who have access to ebooks," he says.

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.

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