

A Fellowship Journey with Satya Special School

- Padma Sambhita Vadapalli

As an American India Foundation's Banyan Impact Fellow placed with Satya Special School in Puducherry, my journey has been nothing short of transformative. With a master's degree in Biotechnology & Genomics, I had entered the Banyan Impact Fellowship as a fresh graduate, eager to apply the knowledge that I had and learn from new experiences within the Indian developmental sector.

As I went through the process of attending multiple interviews and calls with host organizations, I found that I was immediately drawn to Satya Special School due to its dedication to its mission of empowering people with disabilities, and its multidimensional approach to addressing systemic and infrastructural inequities in healthcare, livelihoods, education and policymaking.



Outside the gates of Satya Special School



Engaging with the children in one of Satya's classrooms

Though I was a first timer in the disability space, I was provided with consistent mentorship, guidance, and support by my supervisor, Ms. Chitra Shah, as well as the staff workers at the school. I worked with them to conduct primary field-based qualitative and quantitative research in order to analyze the current status of PwDs, in order to improve current disability

practices among PwD communities. The Fellowship provided a unique exposure that is not available within the traditional classroom or workplace, as I had the opportunity to work on a diverse range of projects which required distinctly different skill sets. I was able to develop my professional skills in several areas including but not limited to data analysis, survey design, curriculum design, partnership building and grant proposal development.

Reflecting on my journey, I cannot help but feel immensely grateful for the opportunity to engage and work with Satya Special School, and learn from the experiences and stories of the people that I encountered. I believe that I have gained a comprehensive grassroots understanding of the Indian disability space, as well as the primary gaps within rural India's developmental infrastructure.

My greatest learnings came from the community and the beneficiaries themselves. I found myself inspired and in awe of their resilience, strength, and determination in the face of adversities. I saw semblances of this strength in the mothers who brought their children to Satya, day after day, with the determination to ensure the well-being of their child. I saw it in the staff workers who talked to frightened children with gentleness and unrelenting patience, and in the faces of the children who allowed me into their lives with warmth and unconditional trust. Out of all my learnings with Satya Special School, this has been the most powerful: practicing patience and commitment to one's cause is foundational to executing any form of change.



Children's Day celebrations at Satya