Winds of Change
Celebrating the Stars of Jehlum

Case Studies of Persons with Disabilities from Tehsil Sohawa, District Jehlum, Punjab, Pakistan
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**Acronyms**

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<td>CCB</td>
<td>Citizen Community Boards</td>
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<td>SHG</td>
<td>Self Help Group</td>
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An Overview of Our Work on Inclusive Development in District Jehlum

We aim to set up a model of inclusive community development in Pakistan. Under this programme we establish inclusive community organizations in District Jehlum, Punjab Province of Pakistan which are being facilitated to enable people with disabilities to participate in communal decision making processes which affect their lives. Some of the major thematic focuses of our work includes inclusion of children with disabilities in education, inclusion of young people in livelihoods, inclusion of middle aged and elderly people in community organizations and social and recreational inclusion of all age groups regardless of gender and disability type. It is our approach to reach out to as many people with disabilities as possible.

So far we have been able to include:

1. 67 children with disabilities in mainstream education
2. 145 young and elderly people in community organizations
3. 300 people with disabilities received disability certificates
4. 57 young people with disabilities have established their small scale enterprises

In this regard we also hold consultative workshops in all provinces to mobilize Disabled Persons Organizations to suggest measure for making national action plan for PWDs more inclusive. It is our aim to raise awareness of families and neighborhoods of PWDs regarding inclusion and rights of PWDs in social, economic educational, communal and recreational activities. The financial support for programme comes from DFID while CHIP, STEP and Sightsavers jointly implement the programme in Pakistan through designated roles and responsibilities.
Preface

Winds of Change – Celebrating the Stars of Sohawa maps the victories and dreams of ten PWDs, five males and five females, ranging in age from five to thirty-five that were successfully mainstreamed in the themes of education, health, livelihoods, social inclusion and empowerment under the pioneering project on Inclusive Development through Mainstreaming People with Disabilities. Under funding from DFID, the project was implemented across 30 villages in District Jehlum between 2008 and 2012 by CHIP in collaboration with Sightsavers and STEP.

Through this collection of case studies, we learn how PWDs, who had been previously resigned to a lifetime of dependency by their families and peers found the inner strength to identify and apply individual talents to a variety of opportunities provided under the project. Through this, they were able to achieve extraordinary milestones to become productive, active citizens who overturned centuries old discriminatory practices and attitudes against disabled persons in their communities.

The inspiring lives of the Stars of Sohawa, provide us insights into the spectrum of and obstacles PWDs have overcome during their quest to develop individual identities – ones that are no longer derogatively tied to their disabilities. They illustrate that at least in rural Sohawa, the future for PWDs is no longer marred by socioeconomic exclusion and ostracization, but promises equal access to educational, economic and social opportunities and support for the achievement of their dreams and hopes.

However, their struggles and victories are only the beginning of a long journey. As their experiences demonstrate, in a climate of rising poverty and unemployment, even the Stars of Sohawa, may, at times, find themselves struggling with a faction of families, teachers, employers and communities that are still not entirely convinced of the benefits of investing time and scarce resources in their development – despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary.

Theme and Beneficiary Details of Case Studies

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A. The Star of Shehreyar Public Elementary School

Lying at a distance of 20 minutes from the nearest urban town of Sohawa in district Jehlum, the village of Arnial Phulan possesses a culture of education, even for girls from impoverished families; this is in stark contrast to villages in surrounding areas where poverty and daily struggles for survival discourage access. However, it was only in 2010, that disabled children could attend schools for the very first time. At the Shehreyar Public Elementary School amongst other support, teachers received training in sign language and teaching aids to facilitate inclusive learning.

Thirteen year old Hina Kanwal, was the first disabled student to be enrolled at Shehreyar Public Elementary School. Currently studying in the 5th grade, she received a waiver for the PKR 150 per month attendance fee to facilitate her enrollment. The second youngest in a family of six, like her elder sister, Ambreen Kausar who is 23 and her brother Akif Shahzad, 22, Hina is also hearing and vocally impaired. Hina’s mother, Jameela Perveen, 40, explains the onset of her preventable disability. “Her right ear-drum burst soon after birth and the left ear drum was ‘drying up’ but she could hear a little. We took her to a general doctor in Sohawa who told us to get her a hearing aid. My husband, a blacksmith, could neither afford the device nor any further checkups. Eventually, she completely lost hearing in both ears and her condition can not be relieved by any assistive devices.”

Luckily, Hina was the recipient of free education at a the Special Education Center Sohawa-a government school for disabled children until the 3rd grade, located 25 minutes away from her village, which created her ability to communicate her needs and thoughts through sign language effectively. According to her mother, the school shut down.

“In the two years that she then spent at home after that, she become non-communicative and stopped going out. She used to seem out of touch with her environment at times” Jameela Bibi’s darkens as she recalls her daughter’s condition.

Naureen Kausar, Hina’s energetic 15 year old sister continues to describe Hina’s transformation once her attendance at the local school was facilitated and she could start attending regular classes. “She became outgoing within a matter of weeks! The children at the school do not tease her as they have participated in awareness raising activities related to the needs and rights of PWDs held at the school.” She proudly adds “her performance at school is at par with her classmates, even though she was out of touch with school work for 2 years. She even won first prize in a modified basketball competition where students had to aim and throw a ball through a hoop during one of the sports days!”

Naureen turns to Hina to ask her what her goals are for the future. Hina stops doing her homework for a moment to giggle. Then, through sign language she communicates “to complete at least 12 years of education and make sure I keep up with you!” Jameela Bibi smiles as she explains Hina’s response “She loves studying and is very competitive with Naureen! Ever since Naureen started attending 9th grade at the Al Saif Public High School in the nearby village of Khalsa, she insists she will go too there too. Unfortunately, there is no teacher trained in sign language available at any of the girl’s high schools here. Also, since her father’s death, our financial condition has deteriorated so we cannot afford special private education.”

She turns to watch Hina complete her schoolwork. “I will try my best and hope that she is able to study further. After all, she is my daughter, and I know that it is crucial for her to become economically independent to lead a fulfilling life.
B. Breaking Barriers in Access to Education for PWDs

“Tahir attends regular nursery classes at Amral Elementary school. He is extremely naughty and is often reprimanded for teasing other children!” giggles Ishrat Bibi, while hurriedly preparing her five year old son, Tahir Habib, for school in their austere three-bed-room house in the impoverished village of Amral. Like other villages in Jehlum, residents largely derive their livelihoods through farming. Electricity is rarely available, there is no direct access to water at homes and gas (for cooking and heaters) were never introduced.

“Attending school is by far his favorite activity of the day,” she adds while taking a seat on a wooden chair. Tahir smiles at his younger brother while she proceeds to narrate how she first learned Tahir was hearing and vocally impaired.

“It was when he turned two that we began to worry that he was not speaking at all. “We live in a joint family comprised of seven. We barely meet our household expenses with my husband’s salary as a security guard at a college in Jehlum. Even then, we took him to a general doctor for a medical review. Unfortunately, he sent us home saying that he could not treat him. We had no choice but to accept the disability as Tahir’s fate.”

Asma Bibi, the energetic, 21 year old community mobilizer of the village explains what ensued in the aftermath of his diagnosis. “When I first started visiting Tahir’s house to mobilize his family for participation in communal activities in 2010, I would find him lying listlessly in corners of the courtyard. No one in the family would communicate or engage with him. He was rarely bathed and I am not certain whether the amount of food he received was the same as his two siblings.”

Although the physical reminders of Tahir’s unfortunate neglect in infancy remain - even today, he is visibly leaner than his two brothers - due to the positive impacts of our interventions in Amral, his personality and hopes for the future have not been detrimentally affected adversely. In 2010, a renowned audiologist evaluated him. Shortly afterwards, he was provided hearing aids which allowed him to hear sounds for the very first time, enabling him to pronounce monosyllabic words. Further, a teacher from the Government Elementary School Amral was provided sign language training and teaching aids to cater to the learning needs of PWDs.

“As a result of extended social interaction at school and special attention from his teacher, he can speak a few words like mama, papa, food and water.” Explains Asma Bibi. “Although his hearing impairment has been dealt with, to further overcome his speech disability, he must be taken to a speech therapist in Rawalpindi as recommended by the audiologist in 2010.” Ishrat Bibi quickly re-enters the conversation. “We will see when and if we can do that. As I mentioned, our income is limited.”

Asma changes the topic by asking Tahir what he would like to be when he grows up. “A teacher” he communicates confidently through sign language.

If his parents do not invest in his treatment, it is uncertain whether Tahir will be able to complete his education and achieve his dreams– at the middle and high school level, teachers have not been trained to teach PWDs. Although milestones have been achieved in changing negative attitudes towards PWDs in rural communities, lingering doubts regarding the abilities of children with disabilities to learn and become economically independent adults continue to deter the prioritization of healthcare expenditure in households.
C. Dhok Kashmirian’s Miracle

Residing in the quaint village of Dhok Kashmirian, barely a 30 minute drive from the nearest urban town of Sohawa in district Jehlum, is Bashir Munir. His ability to stand up and walk - through the use of assistive devices and medical support since 2009 - is considered a miracle in the village.

Bashir was born with a number of physical degenerative disorders including muscular dystrophy and equines feet which left him unable to stand, walk, bathe, dress or use the bathroom independently. “While I was pregnant with Bashir, a bull kicked me in the stomach while I was running errands on our farm. I was taken to the hospital immediately where the doctor injected me with a medicine he said would force an early delivery. But that was a terrible day. Even the injection did not work and Bashir was only born after the full term. I believe it is that injection that worsened his health conditions.” narrates Ismat Shah, Bashir’s mother. She takes a moment to collect herself and wipes her forehead with her scarf before continuing to describe Bashir’s personality.

“He would not speak and would have to sit all day. It was so challenging to even fulfill his basic care requirements with other household responsibilities, which we barely had the time to engage in regular conversation with him. Now, he speaks but with a slight stutter which is decreasing as he interacts with other children at school. Also, he was very sensitive and would start crying even if someone shut the door loudly. This limited his social interaction and his only friend was his first cousin. Again, through exposure at school, he is becoming more confident.”

In 2010, the local community mobilizer Tanvir Hussain trained Bashir’s family in administering physiotherapy and taught them how Bashir should use the assistive devices such as the parallel bar, wheel chair and Knee, Ankle Foot Orthosis for exercise and mobility. “After our training, we (Bashir’s family) worked together to make sure he exercised and utilized the assistive devices regularly. Now, once we transfer him onto the devices, he is capable of using them without supervision” adds Ismat. “Even if we ever seem to forget to do the exercises (physiotherapy), Bashir reminds us immediately!”

Back at the Primary School Dhok Kashimirian, Bashir smiles brightly as he shows his teacher and class-mates how he can stand up by himself only by using his table for support. Standing tall he asserts “and I am going to be a doctor when I grow up.” His classmates break into a round of applause.

In April 2011, at the age of nine, Bashir was enrolled in the first grade at the local school a result of his rapid improvement in mobility -in February 2012, he stood up by himself (with the support of a table) for the very first time. Other factors that facilitated his enrollment were the development of a paved street to the school that he could travel on with his wheel chair by CHIP and support from his teacher and class-mates. His two friends, Zain and Zaibee who study in the third grade, help him walk around school during the break, climb up and down stairs leading to the school, and sit on his wheelchair.

Jameela Bibi looks down while describing what she expects the future holds for Bashir. “Bashir is a very intelligent and ambitious boy. We have been told --but not promised- by the doctor who evaluated him that there is a strong likelihood that he will be able to walk without support as he grows older if we follow the exercises and care plan thoroughly. We are doing everything in our power to make sure that this becomes a reality.”
D. Proving the General Doctors Wrong

Bricked streets and neat mud brick houses overlooking sparsely vegetated hills in the distance welcome visitors to the village of Sugyal. Whereas early marriages, large family sizes and low literacy rates for females can be found across villages in district Jehlum, here girls are allowed to pursue higher education degrees by moving to cities as far as Lahore. Those who are constrained by limited financial resources opt for distance learning programmes offered by a leading university.

Saba Rashid was born hearing impaired. “My mother married her first cousin. However, they had problems and got divorced while I was still four years old.” Ordinarily, children from broken homes and orphans in rural areas find themselves with a lack of access to education or health facilities whereas girls are the last to receive health-care even in the case of disabilities. But Saba was an exception and blessed with concerned maternal relatives.

“My mother moved back to her house after the divorce with my brother and I. There our maternal uncle takes care of us. I have another uncle who works in Islamabad and sends us money for educational and health expenses. It was due to their support that at the age of 12, I went to Islamabad for treatment for my hearing problem but it was too late. I had only been evaluated by general doctors at the Sohawa Tehsil Headquarters until then who had clearly told me they could not do anything to stop mucous coming out of my ears and declining hearing. At Islamabad, the doctor told us I had arrived too late for surgery. I was very disappointed that day.”

But Saba’s fate soon changed. In 2011, she was evaluated by an audiologist. “It was a very positive experience for me as I felt that my condition could be controlled. I was given hearing aids which let me hear clearly for the very first time in my life. It was strange at first – as I was used to seeing peoples lips moving but not always making sense of what they were saying. At school, I would have to keep asking my friends to repeat what the teacher was saying.” Saba smiles as she remembers her life before her treatment.

“The audiologist also told me that I should not let water get into my hearing aid, not to get stressed and taught me how to use and maintain the hearing aids – I don’t need anyone’s help to use them. Except when the batteries run out, then I must tell my uncle to bring them from Sohawa! I also have started going for regular checkups to a specialist every six months. Also, I know that if I notice any change in my hearing or mucous discharge from the ear, I should tell my community mobilizer, and she will make the necessary arrangements for medical treatment.”

Due to Saba’s hearing improvement, her family is allowing her to pursue high school education at the Government High School Phulray Saida – lying 30 minutes away from her village of residence. “I am really looking forward to studying at the school as I have always been interested in learning to use a computer and there is a computer lab there. When I grow up, I am going to be a computer teacher!”

Today, Saba’s response during conversation and speech is so fluent that an onlooker would not be able to discern her disability. “For me, the most important result of my improved hearing is that I am no longer paranoid – before I was always thinking that girls at school and neighborhood were talking behind my back and making fun of me. I now know that it is not true. Except for this one girl. But since I can hear what she says now, I can answer back. She will have to stop soon as it’s not fun for her anymore!”
E. Stitching the Way to Economic Independence

Sidra Azam, 19, resides in Dhok Bagh – a scenic village nestled within a cluster of hills dotted with lush green bushes, 30 minutes away from the town of Sohawa. Located next to a graveyard, Sidra’s house can only reached through a walk through the village wheat fields. Here she lives in a joint family setup comprised of 14 family members including four siblings who are also hearing and speech impaired, like herself.

“As a child, she could hear a little. However, our parents were unable to provide her specialized treatment, as they were paying for the treatment of our eldest brother Humayun Saeed, for the same disability. She went to the regular primary school for girls here in our village until the 3rd grade which is around the time she lost her hearing completely. The girls at school would also tease her so much about her disability that our parents felt it was best to pull her out. She became very aggressive following this, and would always fight with us (family). She would not go out, did not have any friends and would only occasionally help in household chores if she was in a good mood,” explains Rukhsana Bibi, 28, Sidra’s married sister who is visiting her maternal home for the day.

In 2009, Sidra was medically evaluated and provided hearing aids by CHIP in Dhok Bagh. This resulted in improved hearing and a larger vocabulary. At “Sidra’s Tailoring Shop”, she communicates verbally with her customers.

Sidra smiles shyly while sitting next to her sister on a chair. She is wearing a bright yellow and green shirt she has embroidered and stitched herself. In 2010 after being capacitated by CHIP in the village regarding the needs and rights of PWDs, Sidra’s family sent her to live with her cousin at a nearby village to learn garments stitching for 6 months. After mastering advanced techniques, she returned home and in 2011 was provided a table, chair, banner and sewing machine for her tailoring business.

Due to her isolated upbringing, initially women would not give orders to Sidra. “This is where the Community Mobilizer, Muhammad Akmal intervened and went door to door to inform women about Sidra’s shop. From here, orders increased and today she earns PKR 2000 per month,” while speaking Rukhsana goes through the sales register to confirm the earnings. “I charge PKR 100 per suit!” adds Sidra confidently.

Putting the register back, Rukhsana continues to explain how Sidra spends her earnings. “As soon as the month ends, she first sets aside money to buy thread and other consumables required for running the business. Then she starts forcing our mother to take her to the town of Gujar Khan to buy her shoes with dresses she has stitched for herself during the month!” shares Rukhsana.

Sidra’s face lights up as she enthusiastically explains her future goals. “I want to teach other girls in the village stitching.” Rukhsana adds “she also wants to buy an embroidery machine for garments to expand her business. Actually, she is already saving up for it.” Sidra nods in agreement.

Through her tailoring shop, Sidra became economically independent and through her participation local organizations, such as the Women’s Organization and Self Help Group for disabled persons, she has become actively involved in community activities and even made friends with girls her age for the very first time in her life.
F. The Active Citizen of Amral

Thirty five year old Ishtiaq Naeem concentrates on stitching a *shalwar kameez* he has already spent the previous night on at his Men’s Tailoring Shop. It is for a new customer, and he wants to set a good impression by delivering the order on time. Located on the main street leading into the rustic village of Amral, he was able to establish the shop in April 2010. He has been successfully running the business since. Today he earns approximately PKR 3000 a month which he uses to support his family and buy consumables for the business. He also manages his brother’s tyre puncture shop and edible goods store which have been established adjacent to his business. Ishtiaq is the only one of his seven siblings who was born hearing and speech impaired. Before the community of Amral received awareness on the causes of disabilities, needs and rights of persons with disabilities (PWDs) through disability equality trainings, puppet shows, skits and awareness raising messages in 2009, Ishtiaq would not even be taken to social events such as weddings by his father.

“I did not understand how a person who could not hear would benefit from attending such gatherings,” Ali Qadar, Ishtiaq’s aged father explains while sitting on a stool at Ishtiaq’s shop. Looking over Ishtiaq meticulously stitching on a sleeve, he recounts his son’s childhood. “As an infant, he contracted a fever, which according to an army doctor in Jehlum I consulted weakened his nerves and further affected his hearing detrimentally. He gave me dietary instructions and told me to make sure he interacted with children of his age. I was serving in the army at the time and was rarely at home. My wife cared for him to the best of her abilities but the village children would tease him so much if he went out, he preferred hiding away inside the house. As he grew up, he continued to keep to himself, sometimes taking care of our farm animals.” He stops momentarily to observe a van full of school-children passing by the shop.

“As a father, I hoped he would get through with life in a respectable manner – and not have to depend on other’s charity for his survival. To be honest, I was not very positive about his future – but I was lucky, and proven wrong by CHIP.”

Under interventions to mainstream PWDs in Amral, in 2009, Ishtiaq was assessed by an audiologist shortly after which he was provided hearing aids that allowed him to hear sounds for the very first time in his life. Within two years and extended encouragement from his father and wife – one of Amral’s two community mobilizers Saima Ishtiaq -whom he married during 2009, he developed the ability to speak full sentences. At his shop, he has begun communicating verbally with customers – his speech is not clear but it is only with practice that it will improve.

Eager to put his improved hearing and communication abilities to use, Ishtiaq began focusing on playing his part in mainstreaming the role of PWDs in Amral. He became the President of the self-help group for PWDs in the village and strives to reduce their economic and physical dependencies on families from this platform. As a member of the village CCB, he led an initiative to expand the village graveyard and a funds mobilization effort to successfully raise PKR 8,000 to restore a pond and facilitate regular access of water for the community during summer months.

From the unknown son of Ali Qadar, Ishtiaq has emerged as an economically independent, active citizen of Amral within a span of four years – developing an identity that is not tied to his disability. At least in the village of Amral, he is proof that disabilities no longer have to be the cause of restricted social participation and access to livelihoods.

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1 Traditional Pakistani attire comprised of a loose shirt and baggy pants.
Becoming a Role Model for the Women of Amral

A steep cemented path leads to nineteen year old Fazilat Qayyum's modest brick home located in the center of the agricultural village of Amral. Like many houses, it was not given any finishing touches once the structure became habitable. Poverty is rampant in the village where each family has an average of six children. Fazilat’s father is lucky to have found work at the post office in the nearby town of Sohawa, but barely earns enough to sustain his family.

Fazilat is the third eldest child in her family. Unfortunately, she was the first one to be born with a severe hearing impairment. Her mother, under cultural pressure to bear more children, gave birth to two more children, Nadeem who is now fifteen and Iqra who is ten years old. Both were born with the same disability.

Fazilat sits behind the display shelf of her cosmetics and jewelry shop which is located in the guest room of the house, facing the courtyard. She wears a neatly ironed black shalwar kameez with silver sequins and smiles as she re-arranges a set of silver bangles she bought from Sohawa over the weekend for sale. According to her mother Shakeela Qayyum, Fazilat operates her enterprise with personal dedication. On the first day of sales alone in March 2012, she earned PKR 1200.

"I still cannot believe this is the same Fazilat who would not even tell me if she needed something before she was medically assessed by CHIP in 2008. I am certain she was depressed as she would not interact with us (family) unless it was absolutely necessary. She could not attend school as there were no facilities catering to children with such disabilities. Because of this, she never had many friends. "Shakeela continues to explain how Fazilat’s personality changed as she was began to participate in the local village Women’s Organization (WO).

"At the WO, she began to socialize and make friends with other girls who were attending the monthly meetings. She also participated at events organized form the platform such as sports days which increased her confidence and interest in participating in community social activities – such as weddings. Last year, during one of the WO meetings she mustered the courage to request support to establish a jewelry and cosmetics shop which was taken up by the President. CHIP evaluated her capabilities to manage such an enterprise after which she received a showcase, chair, shop banner and start-up items for sale."

Her mother proudly continues "Her confidence has developed extensively as she began interacting with women from around the village. Girls of her age come to look at and discuss products at her shop and to learn makeup tips from her even if they cannot purchase any items. As Fazilat cannot speak, these girls have made the effort to learn sign language to become her friend."

Although Fazilat’s hearing disability is too severe to be treated, and she lacks basic literacy and numeracy skills, through her immaculate grooming, increasing economic independence, positive attitude and active participation in social activities, she has turned her life around and emerged as a role model for women across Amral.

Shakeela Bibi concludes by discussing her interest in marrying Fazilat off. “I never thought I could marry her off as I was afraid that if she would be mistreated, she wouldn’t tell me as she was not communicative at all and have to suffer in silence. Recently, another girl in our village who is hearing impaired like her got married and is very happy. I want Fazilat to be happy like her too so I am looking for a suitable spouse. Although we don’t marry outside the family, for her I will make an exception if a proposal is suitable otherwise.”
H. My Disability is Not a Liability

“I was in the eight grade when my eyesight started receding. Blood or mucous would start spurting out from my eyes sporadically. My father, who was on pension after retiring from the army at the time, was extremely worried and immediately took me for my treatment at the renowned Shifa Hospital in Islamabad. My eyes were operated upon and I was given medicine to keep the condition at bay.” Naeem Younis is a twenty four year old resident of the village of Dhok Kashimirian, neighboring Sugyal, who suffers from low vision. He was forced to drop out of school as a few months after his surgery, the condition returned. “The doctors said they could not operate my eyes again, but promised that my condition would improve with time if I kept taking a medicine they gave me.”

Although Naeem’s vision has not improved, neither has it worsened. But what is worrying is that he is unable to identify the cause of his disability. The tradition of cousin marriages - rampant in cities and villages across Pakistan - in his family may offer a clue. “We do not marry outside the family as it is not acceptable. Even I am happily engaged to my cousin.”

Despite evidence and awareness that cousin marriages can be a precursor to degenerative disorders, traditions take precedence over the health of future generations. “All my 8 siblings are healthy – would they not have the same problem if it was due to cousin marriages?”

In 2009, Naeem established a shop for fixing tire punctures on Hinga stop on the Main Chakwal road through support received from CHIP. He travels across a neatly constructed road from the village to the shop – a distance of 20 minutes – everyday on a van that travels through Dhok and neighboring villages at regular intervals.

The shop was the stepping stone to his social inclusion within the community. “Despite my disability, I was determined to return to regular life – to earn a living, have friends, and to get married – I worked as an apprentice first at another puncture shop to acquire the skills required for running my business. Today, Alhamduillah, I earn PKR 300 to 400 a day.” Along-with Ali Asghar, Naeem was one of the first PWDs to be provided with a shop for livelihood support by CHIP in 2009. “Before beginning my business, even though I wasn’t bullied by anyone, I felt useless. The most I could contribute to my household was farm animal grazing. I felt that my disability would never let me do anything productive with my life.”

The twenty eight year old local community mobilizer, Miss Uzma, explains, “When CHIP started working here, he was so shy that he wouldn’t even talk to us or reply if we were to ask him anything. His shop made social interaction with customers, and neighboring business owners and shop keepers compulsory. This resulted in his increased confidence as well as new friends who looked beyond his disability.” Naeem is an active member of the local CCB and the Secretary Finance for the SHG (for disabled persons). Fixing his glasses, Naeem explains “I participate in discussions and interventions for fulfilling needs of the PWDs to improve their quality of life in the village”

He played a key role in mobilizing funds for the development of the street through the village to make the local school accessible for disabled children. Bashir was able to attend school for the very first time due to this street. “I have also talked about perhaps creating a ramp as the steep flight of stairs that lead into the school is still risky for PWDs.”

Adjusting his glasses he adds, “I also am thinking of proposing that teachers be trained to teach children with low vision or blindness. I still regret not being able to complete my education because no facility was available for children with problems like mine.”
I. The Celebration of Life – Triumphant over Disabilities in Bit Sher Ali

A paved, dusty, street leads to 24 year old Shumaila Shahid’s semi bricked home in the village of Bhit Sher Ali. Lying at a 20 minutes drive away from the town of Sohawa in district Jhelum, the residents of the village have regular and direct access, in the form of reliable, public transport, to the town and available health and higher educational facilities. Like other villages surrounding Sohawa, the landscape is dotted by a striking contrast of flourishing crop fields and barren lands. Basic amenities available in homes across Jhelum, such as electricity, direct access to water, sewerage systems and gas are lacking – and if available, only sporadically.

A flowering tree beautifies the courtyard that leads into the sitting area where Shumaila is working on a sewing machine her father gave her – it was custom made for her stature. As an infant, Shumaila was diagnosed with osteogenesis imperfecta – a condition that stunted her growth and left her vulnerable to constant bone fractures. Standing at a foot and a half tall, she remains incapable of walking but is able to control movements in her upper body.

“When she was baby, if I were to even touch her arm, her joints would be dislocated,” explains her mother, Shafeela Begum as she watches adoringly over Shumaila. “Due to her frailty and limited mobility, I could not send her to the local schools - the streets in the village had not been paved at the time and we had no idea that a wheelchair could have been used to facilitate her mobility. Nonetheless, I made sure I taught her and sisters how to count till 100.” her mother explains.

“That was really useful! As the WO’s Finance Secretary, I wouldn't have been able to keep track of the funds otherwise.” Quips Sumaila who has been an active member of the organization for the past three years. “She also manages the saving and safekeeping of the money we keep in the house! If I hide money, I always forget, but she doesn’t!” adds Shafeela begum. Shumaila gleams knowingly.

As Shumaila returns her attention to the shirt she is stitching, her mother explains that Shumaila’s life turned around only three years ago. “Before CHIP interventions on inclusive development in our village, she would sit on the bed all day and refuse to go out. She was so sensitive about her condition and people’s impression of her, that even if anyone were to speak harshly to her on an unrelated matter, she would crawl under a bed and cry all day.” In 2009, CHIP implemented a series of inclusive development activities which included a disability equality training, a sports event and the chalking of awareness raising messages in prominent locations of the village. Alongwith PWDs and their families, these activities were attended by the village community thereby increasing their understanding of the needs and rights of disabled persons.

Dressed in a bright pink outfit, gold bangles, earrings and nose ring, Shumaila is an inspiration to PWDs across Pakistan. Despite the dangers her disability pose to her life and her isolated upbringing, she has come to celebrate every day of her life – she makes sure the hennae on her hands does not come off and that she is dressed to look her best. “I begin my day with conversations with women who gather outside our house to collect water from the well – This is how I keep track of disputes between mother and daughters in law in every house in Bhit Sher Ali” she giggles mischievously. Shumaila has also made friends with little girls in the village who visit her everyday after their school finishes “We talk about our day, play board games and cook rice! I really enjoy my time with them.”

By overcoming the taboo of disabilities pose in rural areas and learning to socialize and participate in community activities within the restraints of her condition, Shumaila is one of the few PWDs who have triumphed over the restrictions imposed by their disabilities.
J. Disabled by Fate – Refusing to be Restricted by Choice

Thirty one year old Ali Asghar sits confidently on a chair at Ali’s Puncture Shop in Sugyal village. He was one of the first PWDs to acquire start-up goods required for establishing a business in 2009 by CHIP. It is past two pm and he has closed his business for the day. Located centrally, the shop is situated at an intersection leading, on the one side into a paved street cluttered by brick houses and on the other, onto a descending path that overlooks scenic hills in the distance.

A customer waits outside, and Ali gets up to inform him to return the next day. He stands up without difficulty but limps slightly as he paces towards him. In 2004, Ali’s legs were paralyzed. As he limps back to his seat he explains, “I had gone to Karachi for work where I contracted typhoid. I recovered that time, but then, I had another attack while I was working in Rawalpindi a few months later which left me bed-ridden despite treatment. During a time in life when I should have cared for my parents, they were caring for me.”

Through the provision of assistive devices and regular physiotherapy therapy, against all odds, Ali was able to take his first independent step in July 2010 – six months after gaining the will to overcome his disability while participating in the World Disabled Day Wheel-Chair race held in Islamabad during December 2009. “I kept falling but I did not give up. Finally, I returned to a position where I could care for my parents again – I began by supporting household expenditures through my earnings at the shop. Once my health improved further, I even began driving my parents to run errands on my motorcycle.”

Most importantly, Ali began his mission to empower PWDs in Sugyal. “As the CCB Secretary and President of the Self Help Group (SHG) for disabled persons, I helped Muhammad Razzaq, who is physically disabled like I was to run a small edible goods store he established. I also mentor him as he adjusts to the changes in his life that result from economic independence. I also helped Shagufta Bibi, who is vocally and hearing impaired, start a poultry farm. She is now earning regular income by selling the eggs the chicken lay.” In addition to PWDs, Ali has been involved in the redressal of issues affecting the community as a whole– he has established a relationship with the local nazim in the process and is willing to consult him whenever the needs arise for assistance.

Ali also organizes sports activities regularly in the village to strengthen the inclusive social integration of PWDs across all age groups. “Every evening I organize an hour of cricket and make a special effort to include my peers.” Looking at pictures of himself riding a motor-bike and participating in the wheelchair race on the World Disabled Day held in December 2011 he has on a pin board in his shop, he continues. “Today, men from around the village respect me, sit at my shop for hours to chat and even depend on me for loans! I am proud that through my economic independence, I have earned a status of respect in my community again- when I was bed-ridden, no one in the village, except for a few old school friends, cared about me or my welfare.”

“As a result of my recovery, my most important role has become as that of the President of the SHG.” Here, I empower members with the belief that we, PWDs, are only dependent on our families for as long as we resign ourselves to the restrictions imposed by our disabilities. If I could start earning a living and even support my family while still being unable to walk, why can’t every PWD do one thing – no matter how small - to decrease their dependence on families and show everyone that they are not helpless?”