

DHAN'S LIFE: A DIGNIFIED LIFE CAN BE MADE

Dhan Bahadur Khadka, resident of Dudwa Rural Municipality, Baijjanath-5, Banke is a confident, curious, friendly, and fun-loving teenager who has a profound and multiple learning disability (disability that affect his mobility and ability to communicate, learn and be independent). He is a single child of Khakda (mother) but the eldest son from Bahadur Khadka (father). The couple children before Dhan due to stillbirth and miscarriage. The couple were medically to conceive another child as it might risk the mother. His father then married his little sister Himsara, so that they could another baby. Later, Bir and Himsara children.



Dhan was born with a low birth weight. and half years he did not crawl, speak, other babies. At the age of four, he started to sit up and sleep on his own have any balance in his body. His father remembers being hopeful every day for years thinking that Dhan might walk and eventually grow up to be a healthy child. Sadly, that never came true. Dhan could not do any of the daily living activities by himself like eating, wearing clothes, brushing his hair and teeth, washing his face, using the toilet, maintaining personal hygiene and so on. He also could not speak or express himself properly to others around him.

When he was seven, his mother took him to Kohalpur Medical College, Banke to discuss for his treatment. The doctor told her they could operate on him, but the chances of him walking were extremely low and if the operation failed, they might lose him completely. His parents were in a dilemma, so instead of operating, they chose to receive physiotherapy for him. Once every month for eleven months, Lalsari took him to hospital for his physiotherapy session. She says that she remembers buying balls for his exercise routines. But unfortunately, the treatment did not bring any change in Dhan's health. His family then felt hopeless and prayed to God for his recovery.



VSO (Voluntary Service Overseas) in consortium partnership with Handicap International and implementing partner Disable Empowerment and Communication Center (DEC) Nepal provided significant support to Dhan through Empowering a New Generation of Adolescent Girls with Education (ENGAGE) project funded by Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) flagship Girls' Education Challenge Programme's Leave No Girls Behind (LNGB). The general objective of the ENGAGE project is to empower 10 to 19 years

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old Out of School (OOS) marginalized girls and OOS children with disabilities to transit to the formal school/resource class, or to engage them in any small business or improve their daily life by developing their basic literacy, numeracy, business, and daily living skills.

Initially, the ENGAGE project used Washington Group Questions as a tool to verify children with functional limitation through door-to-door survey using external evaluators at the project area to select the Primary Actors (PAs). 15 years old Dhan who has a profound and multiple learning disability and who had never been to school was selected as one of the PAs. He was then taken to medical verification camp, organized by the ENGAGE project in collaboration with local government, where the medical team verified his disability.



Through the personal social support, ENGAGE project identified areas to improve his condition, hygiene, and daily living activities. Physiotherapy service support was designated for him. The therapist visited his house, two to three times for physiotherapy sessions and to teach his parents, big sister, and community mobilizer about his exercises. All the resources needed for his treatment like physiotherapy mattress, stability ball, and parallel bar was provided to him along with a wheelchair as a part of the project intervention. The ENGAGE project also supported him constructing a new disability friendly toilet with railings and a new ramp at the entrance of his house for his convenience.

The ENGAGE project with an effective peer mentoring model, where a big sister from the same community mentors and assists the primary actors, brought a huge change in Dhan's life. Ram Kumari Chaudhary, Dhan's big sister, for the past three years, visits his house twice or thrice every week for his physiotherapy sessions, learning sessions and parental counselling. She says, 'When I came to Dhan's house for the first time, he was drooling excessively, had wounds all over his knees and legs as he could only crawl to move about. His hygiene was very poor, he used to bathe and change his clothes only once in one and half weeks. Now he bathes daily with the help of his mother, changes his clothes himself, wipes away his saliva immediately and stays neat and clean.'

Ram Kumari teaches Dhan about different things through the communication book. He now recognizes bananas, toothbrushes, t-shirts, pants, and other regular things used in his daily life. She sometimes also teaches him to draw a line and other simple shapes. In her absence his siblings also help to teach him. They love him unconditionally.

Dhan has shown impressive transformation after the intervention of the ENGAGE project. He can now change his own clothes, brush his teeth, wash his face, hands, and eat Roti all by himself. He has a wheelchair which he uses to roam around his neighborhood independently. Moreover, he once was a person who did not stand on his feet for about 16 years but now is able to stand still for about 30 seconds to 1 minute without any support and

can walk with the help of a railing. This shows just how much progress he has made in the past few years.



Dhan has also started speaking simple words like Baba (father), Aama (mother), Baje (grandfather), Nai (no), Ah (yes). He can also peel the corn from corncob which shows that his balance has improved tremendously. His situational awareness has also increased. His mother says, "If he sees goats or bulls getting out of their shed, he immediately calls out to his grandparents saying Baje, Bajai." His parents are incredibly happy seeing his improvements.

Environmental factors such as his neighbor's love and friend's support have a significant impact on Dhan's improvement. His grandmother says, "Dhan is liked by everyone in society. He goes and hugs the people from our neighborhood, they also reciprocate back his love in the same way. He has four best friends; he plays with

them and gets happy" Dhan is not scared of anyone in society. He understands everything and never forgets a person who he has met.

Dhan has a "A" category, complete disability card. Every month the Government of Nepal provides Rs. 4000 as social security allowance. His father says, "We spend half of his allowance for his own needs like nutritional foods, clothes etc. We sometimes give a small portion of the amount to people in the village as loan so that we can earn some interest." The ENGAGE project is also going to support the provision of 4 goats for Dhan's family so that they can generate more income that will enable to meet his needs. His father has already taken three days training on goat rearing. Now the only wish of the family is to see Dhan being able to eat all kinds of foods alone and doing all his toilet tasks alone.

Dhan sets out a perfect example to people that life can get better if the right kind of support, guidance and care is given to a child with a disability. The achievements he has made with his daily living activities and personal hygiene shows he has a better future ahead. It also shows the meaningful development and dignified life that the ENGAGE project has envisioned as fundamental to all the children with disabilities.

