



Parent Support Group
for children with hearing loss

VConnect Foundation Annual Report 2019-20

Introduction

VConnect Foundation, is a parent support group for children with hearing loss. It was founded in 2007, by Vahishtai J Daboo and Fatema Jagmaag, both parents of children with hearing loss, who are also experts and practicing professionals in the field enabling children to 'listen and speak'. It is a supportive network for families of children committed to listening and spoken language and all these children use hearing devices to listen. It is a Not-for-profit organisation which caters to families from diverse backgrounds and income levels. It has over 1300 parents across its national and international circles.

VConnect's **Vision** and **Mission** are to mainstream children with hearing differences by:

- providing hope and empowerment to their parents and primary caregivers
- co-creating an ecosystem that fosters a culture of inclusiveness

Strength of VConnect Foundation

VConnect now has over 1300 parents spread across various circles located across India and Internationally. To support these parents, we have created various circles consisting over 50 parents. Each of these circles are managed by Circle Coordinators and VConnectors (who are parents). They are guided by the core team to manage their circles effectively. VConnect has a network of WhatsApp groups for each of the circles where regular query solving about various aspects of the child's hearing loss are discussed and solved.

Two new circles, Rajasthan and Dhule were added during the year. There are now a total of 13 circles: VConnect Foundation Circle(which includes middle east and other states where circles are yet not formed), Rajasthan, Dhule, Mumbai (has 5 circles), Pune, Vidarbha, Gujarat, Delhi, Bangalore and Kenya.

Focus areas in 2019-2020

During the year we focused our efforts on 4 areas of significant importance namely:

1. Workshops on Concessions and Benefits
2. Workshops on Mental Health
3. Mainstream Guide
4. Awareness Building for VConnect

Each of these activities are detailed out below. In addition we continued with our regular activities such as new born hearing screening and networking platforms.

Our Activities in 2019-2020

Completion of 10 Successful Workshops on Benefits and Concessions for Children with Hearing Loss across the country.

Based on feedback received from parents we conducted workshops in Mumbai, Pune, Ahmedabad, Nagpur, Jaipur, Bangalore. Over a 1000 parents attended the workshops. Parents were empowered with the knowledge of concessions and benefits given by the government in respect to train travel, bus travel, income tax benefit and education for various school boards. They were also explained the importance and procedure of procuring the disability certificate for their children. This was followed by a Panel discussion and a group activity. The 'Benefits and Concessions' workshops conceptualised and executed by Vibha Shah and her team Prafulla Bargaje, Jigna Sanchania, Ramu Vadapalli, Dildar Dalvi and Julie Thakkar.

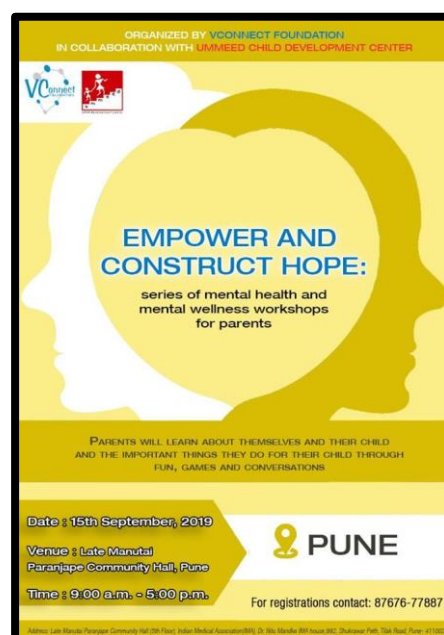


Team VConnect Foundation was invited to **present at the CIGICON 2019, the Annual Cochlear Implant Conference**, a conference for Professionals working with cochlear implants, held in Mumbai in October 2019.



A Series of 8 full day Workshops on 'Mental Health and Mental Well-Being for Parents of Children with hearing loss on 'Empowering and Constructing Hope' were conducted as follows:

VConnect Foundation has collaborated with Ummeed Child development Centre, a renowned NGO, to conduct a series of 'Mental Health' workshops for parents of children experiencing hearing loss. As part of this series, a series of sessions were conducted in 4 cities on 'Empower and Construct Hope: A workshop for parents'. These sessions were beautifully structured with fun, games and conversations and made parents feel hopeful, positive and recognize their own skills which in turn made them feel empowered! This workshop was conducted by Ummeed Child Development Centre and facilitated by the VConnectors - Mrs. Vahishtai Daboo, Mrs. Vibha Shah and Mrs. Julie Thakkar all of whom are certified Mental Health practitioners.



Based on the success of the first series, a second series of full-day workshops was rolled out. These workshops were on “What parents Do or Can Do for their Children’s Mental Health”. Parents learnt about their child’s strengths, how to discover positivity in their child and how good mental health can impact the development, mental wellbeing and progress of their child. This was done through games, group activities, conversations, art and fun.

Over 750 parents attended these workshops and we have plans to conduct many more such programs around mental health in the near future.





WORKSHOP ON
WHAT PARENTS DO OR CAN DO FOR THEIR CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH

WHEN:
1st December, 2019

TIME:
9:00 am - 5:00 pm

WHERE:
Orange City Hospital and Research Institute
19, Pandey Layout, Veer Savarkar Square,
Nagpur - 440015

WHY ATTEND THIS WORKSHOP:

- Learn About Your Children's Strength
- Learn Ideas on How to Discover Positivity In Your Children
- Impact the Development & Progress of Your Child

For Registrations Contact:
VConnect Coordinators: Mrs. Julie Thakkar - 87676 77887 / Mrs. Behroze Billimoria - 99308 37793
Orange City Hospital Coordinators: Mrs. Manjari Damle - 9763412153 / Mr. Ganesh Iyer - 9373111318







Mainstream Guide

In keeping with our vision of mainstreaming children we have put together a comprehensive Mainstream Guide, which has been written keeping in mind the Indian context. The guide is aimed at bridging the gap between parents getting children ready for mainstreaming and schools, teachers, educators and professionals learning the skills to integrate children with hearing loss successfully.

The guide will be launched at our 13th Founder's day on the 9th of February, 2020 by Dr. Milind V Kirtane, (Padma Shree), ENT Surgeon and Dr. Suni Mathew, Director of Ali Yavar Jung National Institute for Speech and Hearing Disabilities(Divyangana). Over 500 educators, Principals, teachers, professionals and parents are expected for this event.

Post the launch we are planning a significant all India rollout of the guide.



Awareness Building for VConnect

It was indeed a great opportunity for Vahishtai J Daboo, Co-founder and Managing Trustee and Fatema Jagmaag, Co-founder and Trustee presenting on 'Parent Support Groups in Developing Countries', at the AG Bell Global Listening and Spoken Language Symposium 2019 at Madrid, Spain.



Vahishtai J Daboo, Co-founder and Managing Trustee and Fatema Jagmaag, Co-founder and Trustee we given an opportunity to present on 'Empowering Parents through Parent Support Groups' at the prestigious 14th Cochlear Implant Update Conference organised annually for over 100 professionals by ENT surgeon Dr. Milind V Kirtane's 'I Hear Foundation' in association with Hinduja Hospital at Lonavala.



The VConnect Co-Founders Fatema Jagmaag and Vahishtai J Daboo to present about VConnect Foundation and the work done by us at the 'International Conference on Parenting Children to Listen from Infancy & Talk for a Lifetime' organised by Balavidyalaya on the occasion of their Golden Jubilee in Chennai on the 7th of February 2020.



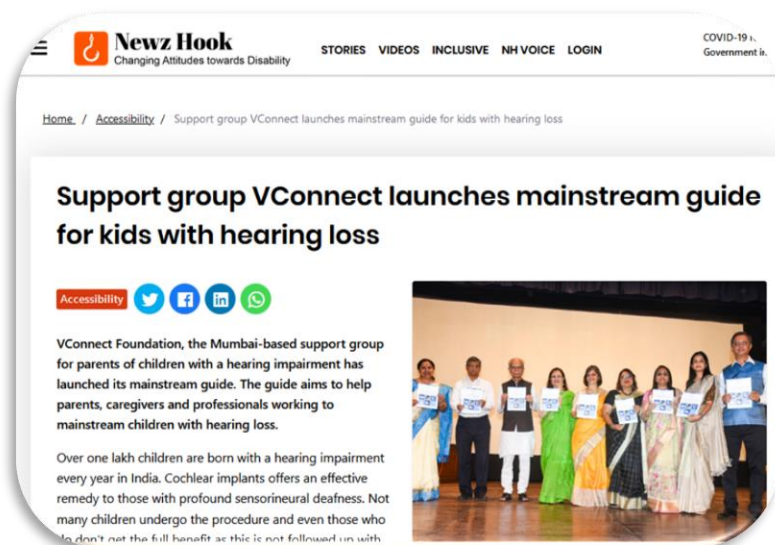
2nd International Conference on Mental Health Conference - Weaving Our Voices:

On 2nd of February 2020, Vahishtai J Daboo, (LSLS Cert. AVT & Mental Health Practitioner) VConnect Co-Founder and Managing Trustee presented her work with children and families at the 2nd International Conference on Mental Health – Weaving Our Voices, conducted by Ummeed Child Development Center.



IN THE NEWS:

Mention in Newz Hook:



On 12th February, The VConnect Foundation was mentioned in NewzHook. "VConnect Foundation, the Mumbai-based support group for parents of children with a hearing impairment has launched its mainstream guide. The guide aims to help parents, caregivers and professionals working to mainstream children with hearing loss." – NewzHook.

Mention in Newz Hook:

On 23rd February, The VConnect Foundation was mentioned in NewzHook. "VConnect Foundation, the Mumbai-based support group for parents of children with a hearing impairment has launched its mainstream guide. The guide aims to help parents, caregivers and professionals working to mainstream children with hearing loss." – NewzHook.

<https://newzhook.com/story/vconnect-foundation-mainstream-guide-deaf-hearing-loss-disabled/>

Mention in Newz Hook:

On 4th March, The VConnect Foundation was mentioned in NewzHook. "Universal New Born Hearing Screening has resulted in significantly lowering the average age of identification in the developed countries", points out Vahishtai J Daboo. Daboo is a Listening and Spoken Language Specialist and certified Auditory Verbal

Therapist. She is also the co-founder and trustee of VConnect Foundation, a Mumbai-based support group for parents of children with a hearing impairment.

[\(https://newzhook.com/story/universal-screening-hearing-disabilities-disabled-deaf-hard-of-hearing/\)](https://newzhook.com/story/universal-screening-hearing-disabilities-disabled-deaf-hard-of-hearing/)

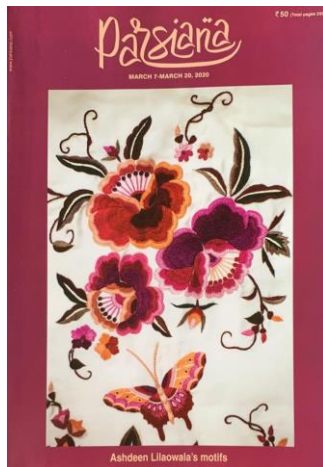
Early screening mandated in many parts of the West

"Universal New Born Hearing Screening has resulted in significantly lowering the average age of identification in the developed countries", points out Vahishtai J Daboo. Daboo is a Listening and Spoken Language Specialist and certified Auditory Verbal Therapist. She is also the co-founder and trustee of VConnect Foundation, a Mumbai-based support group for parents of children with a hearing impairment.

“ Screening is a necessary first step, which then needs to be followed up with early intervention which is fitting of the most appropriate amplification device (hearing aid, cochlear implant – depending on each child's degree and type of hearing loss) and extensive 'Auditory Verbal Therapy' by qualified Auditory Verbal Therapists who work with families to enable their child to learn to listen, speak and become independent contributing members of mainstream society. – Vahishtai J Daboo, Listening & Spoken Language Specialist/Certified Auditory Verbal Therapist

Mention in the Parsianna:

On 12th March, The VConnect Foundation was mentioned in the Parsianna- a renowned Zoroastrian magazine.



Minimizing hearing loss
The VConnect Foundation (VF) is a parent support group for children with hearing loss started by two parents of such children, the undersigned and Fatema Jagmaag. Both of us are professionals in the field. VF is a charitable organization founded in 2007 with the aim of enabling children to “listen and speak” so that they can become participating members of mainstream society.

society.
The Foundation constantly endeavors to enable families to support children with hearing loss through a holistic approach. Its purpose is to support, educate, empower, provide hope and guidance to parents by creating platforms and networks, both real and virtual. These networks would connect parents to experts, device companies, agencies, centers, clinics and educational institutions, as well as provide forums for parents and children to interact with and draw support from. VF helps over 1,300 parents across 12 circles in seven cities in India and also has an international center in Kenya. The trust has a dedicated team of parents and professionals working for a common cause.

Feature in the Hearing Journal:

On 13th March, The VConnect Foundation was featured in the Hearing Journal, the most respected publication in the hearing health care.

THE
Hearing Journal
THE MOST RESPECTED PUBLICATION IN HEARING HEALTH CARE

Friday, March 13, 2020

AUDIOLOGY WITHOUT BORDERS: Benefits of Parent Support Groups in Improved Hearing Care

By Vahishtai J Daboo, LSLS Cert AVT, and Fatema Jagmaag

Parent support groups are important to parents of children with hearing differences. The scope and nature of the support provided varies, depending on the ecosystem and society within which the parents operate. The less developed the ecosystem and the less mature the society, the greater the challenge that parents face.

In India, as well as in other developing countries, parents face challenges that include poor public awareness about hearing loss and virtually no new born screening programs in the country. The sense of denial is high especially among those who belong in the lower socio-economic sections of society. Parents, especially mothers, feel a sense of isolation. Awareness levels of possible solutions and medical pathways to progress are extremely poor. The reach and effectiveness of government programs are limited due to several factors. Notably, VConnect Foundation, a parent support group in based in India, has adopted a holistic approach that goes beyond emotional and social support and presents a strong case study for organizing parent support groups in developing countries.

World Hearing Day:

On 3rd March, The VConnect Foundation had a social media campaign to celebrate World Hearing Day. The World Health Organisation (WHO) highlights that timely and effective interventions can ensure that people with hearing loss are able to achieve their full potential. VConnect Foundation extends its support to WHO's message!

What if my child has hearing loss? How will she/he communicate, study or make friends?

There are solutions so that hearing loss does not limit your child's life. These include:

- Medicines or surgery, where hearing loss is caused by an ear infection or glue ear.
- Hearing aids and cochlear implants may help the child hear, develop speech and language and progress in education.
- Auditory Verbal Therapy is a must to ensure the child learns to use listening and spoken language to communicate.

REMEMBER
With proper and timely intervention, there is no limit to what your child can achieve.

क्या होगा अगर मेरे बच्चे को सुनवाई हानि है? क्या वह संवाद करने, अध्ययन करने, दोस्त बनाने में सक्षम होगा?

समाधान हैं ताकि सुनवाई हानि बच्चे के जीवन को प्रभाव न हो :

- मेडिसिन या सर्जरी, जहाँ सुनवाई हानि कान के संक्रमण या ग्लू कान के कारण होती है।
- श्रवण यंत्र या कोक्लियर इम्प्लांट बच्चे को सुनने, भाषण और भाषा विकसित करने और शिक्षा में प्रगति करने में मदद कर सकता है।
- श्रवण मौखिक चिकित्सा यह सुनिश्चित करने के लिए होनी चाहिए कि बच्चा संवाद करने के लिए सुनने और बोलने की भाषा का उपयोग करना सीखता है।

याद रखें
उचित और समय पर हस्तक्षेप के साथ एक बच्चा क्या हासिल कर सकता है इसकी कोई सीमा नहीं है।

Could my child have hearing loss?

Your child could have a hearing loss if s/he

- Does not respond to sounds and speech.
- Has delayed or improper speech and language development for his/her age.
- Cannot understand what you say or often asks people to repeat themselves.
- Incorrectly responds to questions or instructions.
- Turns up the volume of the radio/television or has trouble hearing what is being said over the phone.
- Is performing poorly at school or has behavioral issues.
- Often has discharge from the ear or impacted wax.
- Has repeated episodes of pain or blockage in the ear.
- Has recently suffered from a serious illness like meningitis.

REMEMBER
In the case of babies, you should suspect hearing loss if the baby does not respond to sounds, especially the mother's voice or is startled by loud sounds e.g. a loud bang.

क्या मेरे बच्चे को हियरिंग लॉस हो सकता है?

आपके बच्चे को हियरिंग लॉस हो सकता है यदि:

- वह ध्वनि और भाषा की तरफ ध्यान नहीं देता है।
- अपनी उम्र के अनुसार भाषा का विकास देरी से हुआ हो और सही ढंग से भाषा का प्रयोग ना करता हो।
- क्या आपका बच्चा नहीं कह सकता कि क्या कहना है या अक्सर लोगों को वाक्य दोहराने के लिए कहता है।
- गलत तरीके से सवाल या निर्देशों का जवाब देता है।
- रेडियो की वॉल्यूम को बढ़ा देता है या फोन पर सुनने में परेशानी होती है।
- स्कूल में बराबर पढ़ नहीं रहा है या व्यवहार के मुद्दे हैं।
- अक्सर कान से डिस्चार्ज या वैक्स निकलता हो।
- कान में दर्द या कान का बन्द सा होना बार बार होता हो।
- हाल ही में मेनिंजाइटिस जैसी गंभीर बीमारी का सामना करना पड़ा हो।

याद रखें
शिशुओं के मामले में आपको सुनवाई हानि पर संदेह करना चाहिए यदि बच्चा ध्वनि पर प्रतिक्रिया नहीं करता है, विशेष रूप से माताओं की आवाज या जोर से आवाज से चौंका जाता है।

How can POLICY MAKERS HELP?

Start a universal new born hearing screening in India

- Develop and implement policies** that ensure easy access to high-quality, affordable and safe technologies and services.
- Adopt affordable, high-quality products** which comply with WHO's recommendations.
- Provide hearing aids and cochlear implants** as part of government-led health services. Include these in the list of assistive products made available within the country.
- Test and implement effective service delivery models** that do not rely exclusively on highly trained professionals e.g. use of trainable hearing aids; direct-to-customer services; use of e- and m-health platforms; training of locally available manpower. Such service delivery models should be adapted to the needs and health system of the country.
- Launch a communication campaign** to de-stigmatise hearing loss through accurate and accessible information. Empower persons with hearing loss and strengthen their associations and activities.
- Reduce costs** by measures like waving import duties or taxes; pooled procurement; use of solar-powered batteries and locally-sourced materials.
- Encourage research and innovation** in design and delivery of hearing aids and cochlear implants within the country.

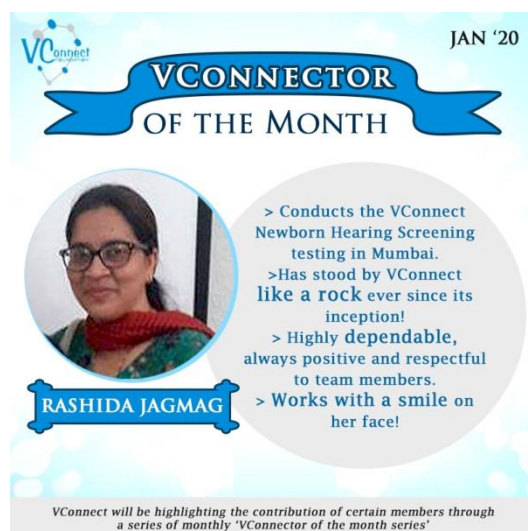
DON'T LET HEARING LOSS LIMIT YOU

Hearing for life
World Hearing Day, 3 March 2020

Reward & Recognition:

Recognizing the work of our team members is extremely important to VConnect. In our endeavour to recognise, encourage and empower them we have started recognising the work of our team members by honouring them and recognising them as 'VConnector of the Month' and 'VConnector/s of the Year'.

VCONNECTOR OF THE MONTH



We are indeed honoured to recognise and honour Rashida Jagmag, for her work and contribution to VConnect. She has been associated with VConnect almost since its inception as a volunteer, and subsequently was trained to test and manage our New Born hearing Screening programme. We are indeed proud to have her on our team.

VCONNECTOR FOR THE MONTH OF MARCH:

The VConnector for the month of February was Jigna Sanchania. She is a parent and a VConnector who manages the Central Circle in Mumbai. She was an integral team mate who took on a lead role in conducting the 10 Benefits and Concessions workshops in India in the year 2018-2019. Jigna is extremely conscientious and hardworking and ensures any task given to her is well researched and completed on time. Jigna's quiet commitment and dedication to VConnect is highly appreciated by the entire team. We are proud to award Ms. Jigna Sanchania, VConnector of the month.



VCONNECTOR OF THE YEAR AWARDS:

At our 13th Founder's Day we have recognised the contribution and the work of 2 of our core team members Behroze Billimoria and Julie Thakkar by honouring them with a VConnector of the year Trophy to each of them.

For us indeed it would not have been possible to grow and function without these 2 amazing ladies!!! Heartfelt congratulations to you both dearest Julie and Behroze.



Behroze Billimoria is a parent and she has been the back bone of VConnect Foundation for well over the last 6 years. She has stood by us through thick or thin and supported the organisation with her quiet dilligence. Behroze handles all our VConnect circles and coordinates with parents on a daily

basis via our virtual chats and through phone. She is not one to show how much she does but just gets the work done by taking ownership. It is indeed an honour to have her as our other VConnect Programme Coordinator.

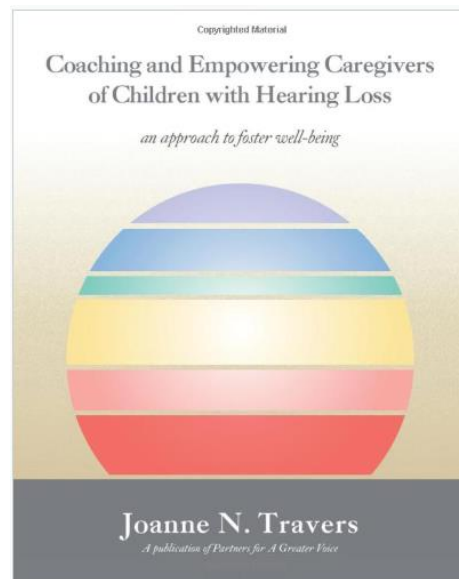
Julie Thakkar, is a parent and key member of our organization. She was part of VConnect Foundation from its inception in 2007. As the organization grew she too grew with the organization and today I am truly delighted to say she is VConnect's Programme Coordinator. Her enthusiasm and zest to go beyond her call of duty is something we admire and learn



from her. Julie has completed her one year training in Mental Health and is part of VConnect's mental health team too. She coordinates on our behalf of the organization with our team of VConnectors and Circle cordinators and truly does an amazing job.

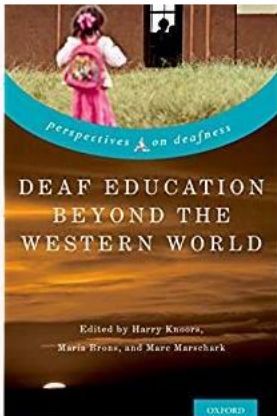
Written About:

VConnect Foundation has been quoted as a case study in the book "Coaching and Empowering Caregivers of Children with Hearing Loss: an approach to foster well-being" by Joanne N Travers, MIM, ERYT, Partners of A Greater Voice, USA.




We are happy to share that our work was recognised by Oxford University Press USA in the book titled “Deaf Education Beyond the Western World” published in Feb 2019, mentioning VConnect Foundation.

Professionals from 19 countries have contributed in this book.



“One other innovative way of developing parent networks in early intervention is observed in a group called “V-connect” in Mumbai. The V-connect Foundation is a virtual support group for parents of DHH children. Information is shared through social media. The foundation was founded in 2007 by two parents of deaf children who are also practicing professionals in the field of deaf education. Its purpose is to empower and to provide support and guidance to parents of DHH children. (www.vconnectfoundation.org)



PUBLISHED IN “DEAF EDUCATION BEYOND THE WESTERN WORLD”
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REGULAR ACTIVITIES 2019-2020

New Born Hearing Screening Programme

VConnect continues screening new-born babies in 3 hospitals in Mumbai to detect for hearing loss. We started the new born hearing screening programme in 2012 and have **screened over 8000 babies to date.**

Talent Show at the Vidarbha Circle, Nagpur

VConnect believes in the importance of Social Interaction and empowerment of children and their families. The Vidarbha circle headed by circle coordinator Ayesha Khan, conducted a talent show on June 16, 2019 at Nagpur where 64 parents and children from all over Vidarbha participated and showed off their talent. The entire program was solely managed by parents and it was wonderful to see their interactions and creativity in putting up this event.



Hope Lies Ahead - Video Series

A series of real video stories by the VConnect parents were shared to create hope, empower and guide parents in their journey to mainstream their children. Parents found this series encouraging, motivating and helpful.

Programs for Self-Development and Recognition for VConnect team members

Train the Trainer Workshop to sensitise the VConnect Team on Mental Health

A 2 day interactive workshop was conducted by the Ummeed Child Development Center, Mumbai for the core team of VConnect Foundation that emphasized on importance of Mental Wellness using Narrative therapy. This crash course on counselling using the Narrative approach is a respectful, non-blaming approach to counselling with children, young people and families- encouraging children and families to rely on their own skills to

minimize problems that exist in their lives. The focus is on assisting people to create stories about themselves and about their identities that are helpful to them.

The team derived immense value from this workshop and expressed their interest on taking this approach in their respective circles as well, that in turn will bring about more support and empowerment for the families associated with VConnect.



Julie Thakkar, VConnect Programme Coordinator completes her extensive one year training in Mental Health, narrative practices and ideas from Ummeed Child Development Center, Mumbai. She is now one of the three trained Mental Health practitioners to be certified at VConnect Foundation.



OUR TEAM

The Executive Committee

Vahishtai Daboo

Fatema Jagmag

Vibha Shah

Purveen Parekh

Bapsy Patel

Jamshed Daboo

Core Team

Behroze Billimoria – Coordinator

Julie Thakkar - Programme Coordinator

Kashmira Surti – Administrator

The Board of Trustees

Vahishtai Daboo - Co-Founder & Managing Trustee

Fatema Jagmag - Co-Founder & Trustee

Jeroo Buhariwala – Trustee

YOUR SUPPORT!

At VConnect we really want to make a difference to the lives of thousands of children with hearing impairment in and around India in our endeavour to successfully mainstream them at all levels.

All donations to VConnect Foundation are 50% exempt from tax under section 80G of the Income Tax Act.

Cheques & Demand Drafts to be made in the name of 'VConnect Foundation' Direct online fund transfers details are as under:

A/c: VConnect Foundation
Savings Account
Account Number: 3014605126
Bank details: Central Bank of India, Colaba Causeway Branch, Mumbai
IFSC CODE: CBIN0281407

For foreign donations:

A/c: VConnect Foundation
Savings Account
Account Number: 3284711054
Bank details: Central Bank of India, Colaba Causeway Branch, Mumbai
IFSC CODE: CBIN0281407

Trust & Contact Details

Name of the Trust: VConnect Foundation

Legal Status: Charitable Trust

VConnect Foundation is a registered not-for-profit company under section 25 of the Indian Companies Act (1956) and has tax exempt status in India under section 80(G) of the Income Tax Act (1961).

Registered Office: C-216, Bunyaan, Seth Moti Shah X Lane, Byculla (E), Mumbai 400 027, India

Correspondence: R-7, Cusrow Baug, Shahid Bhagat Singh Road, Mumbai 400001

Contact No: +91 9820409019

Email Id: vconnect.foundation@gmail.com

Website: www.vconnectfoundation.org

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/VConnectfoundation/>

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/vconnectfoundation/>

Instagram: <http://www.instagram.com/vconnectfoundation/>

YouTube: <https://youtube.com/vconnectfoundation>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/VConnect>