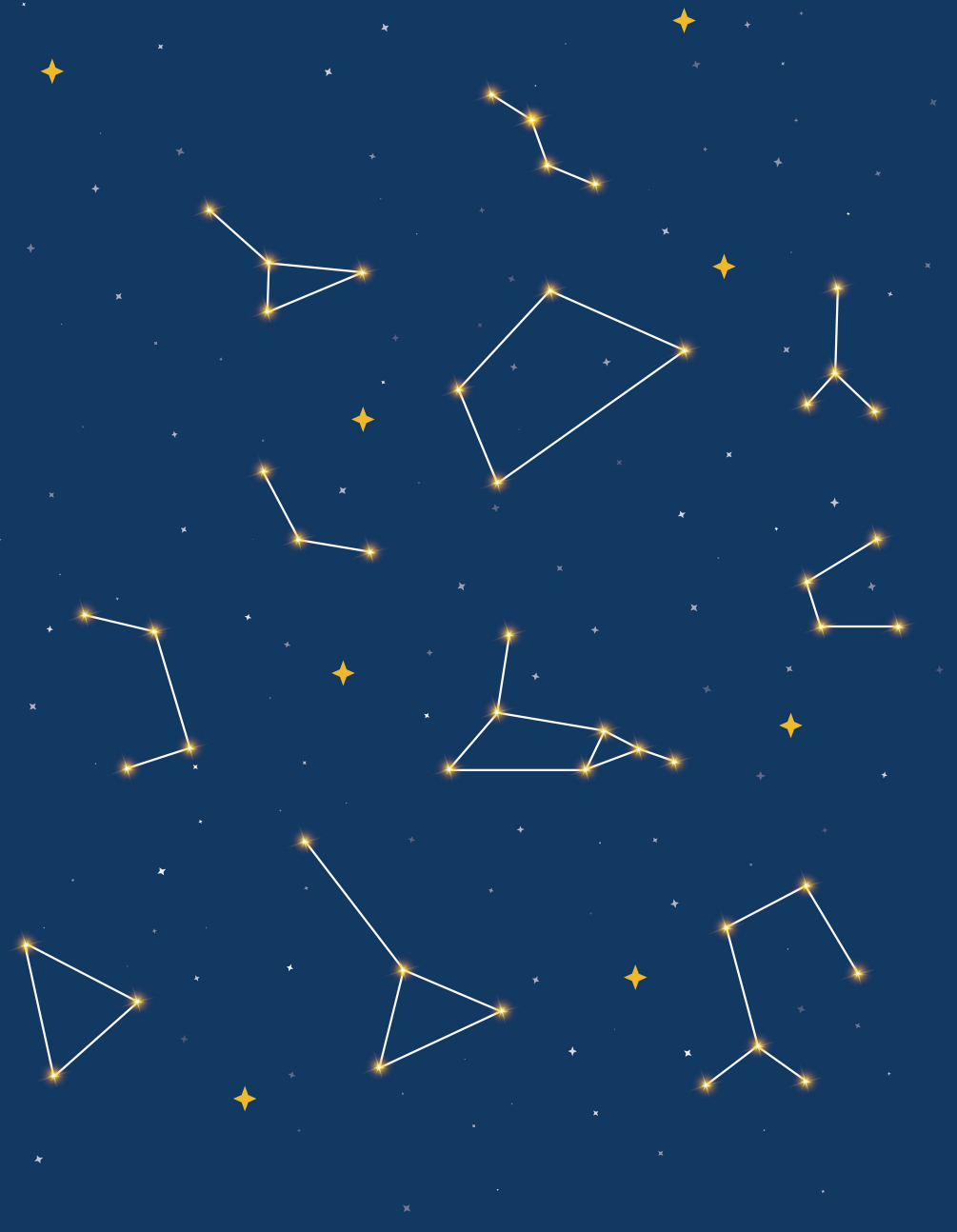
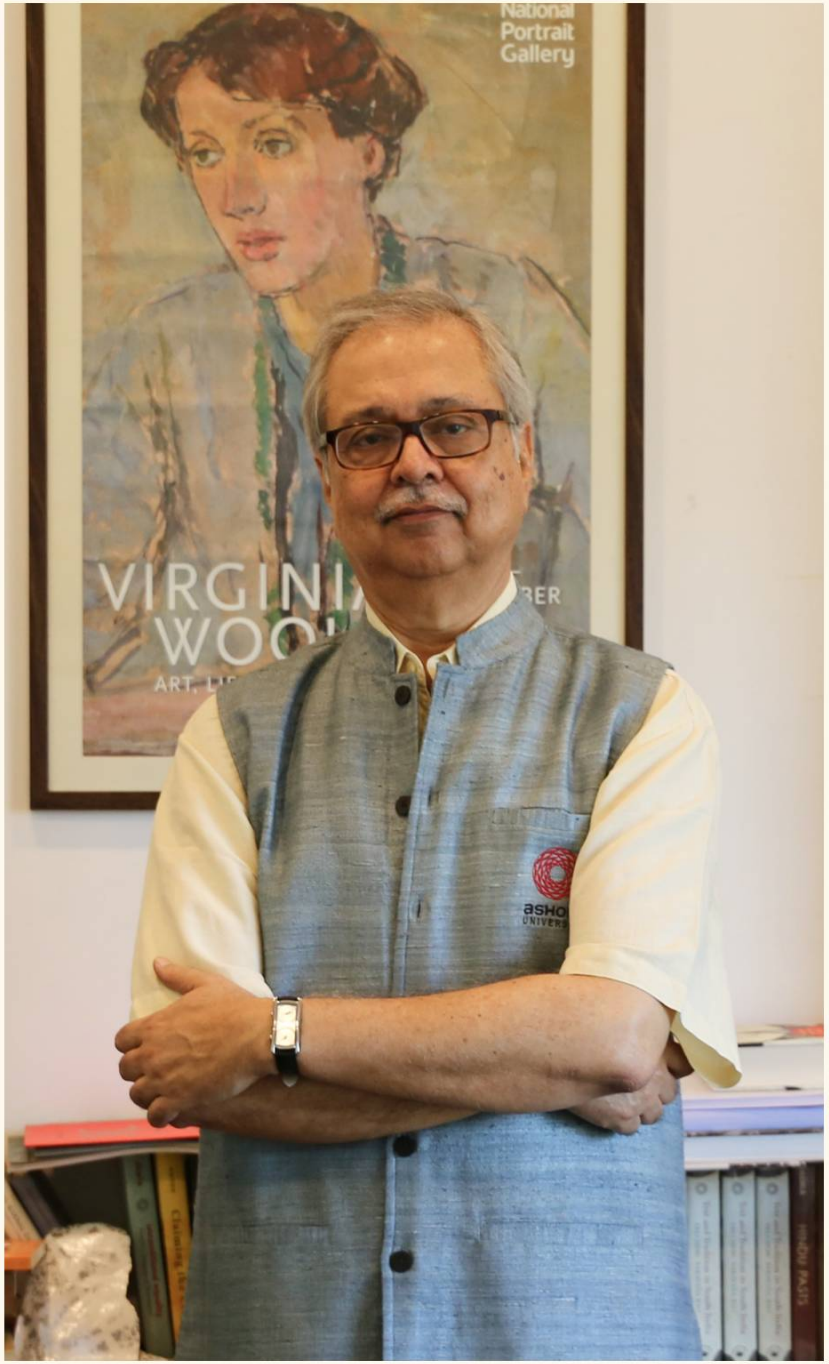
ashoka UNIVERSITY | OFFICE OF Learning Support

Because Of You

THE CONSTELLATION
BUILT IN TEN YEARS

2016–2026





Rudrangshu Mukherjee

Chancellor, Ashoka University

Ashoka University since its inception has pursued excellence in the field of higher education. But Ashoka also works -- and works with great commitment and sincerity -- to be inclusive. Ashoka aspires to make all its offerings available to everyone who is pursuing excellence. To make this possible Ashoka established the Office of Learning Support. This Office reaches out to everyone to nurture, to help, to grow, to accomplish and fulfil their dreams. The work of this Office is very special to Ashoka and one of the distinctive features of the University.

The Office is staffed by a group of dedicated and trained professionals who work beyond the call of duty. Everyone at Ashoka is proud of them and profoundly grateful to them. Their work has earned for them the trust and respect of the students and parents.

I believe that the work of the Office of Learning Support contributes in a very significant way towards making Ashoka the outstanding institution it is.

I salute my colleagues in the OLS.



Rishikesha T. Krishnan

Vice-Chancellor, Ashoka University

My compliments to Team OLS!

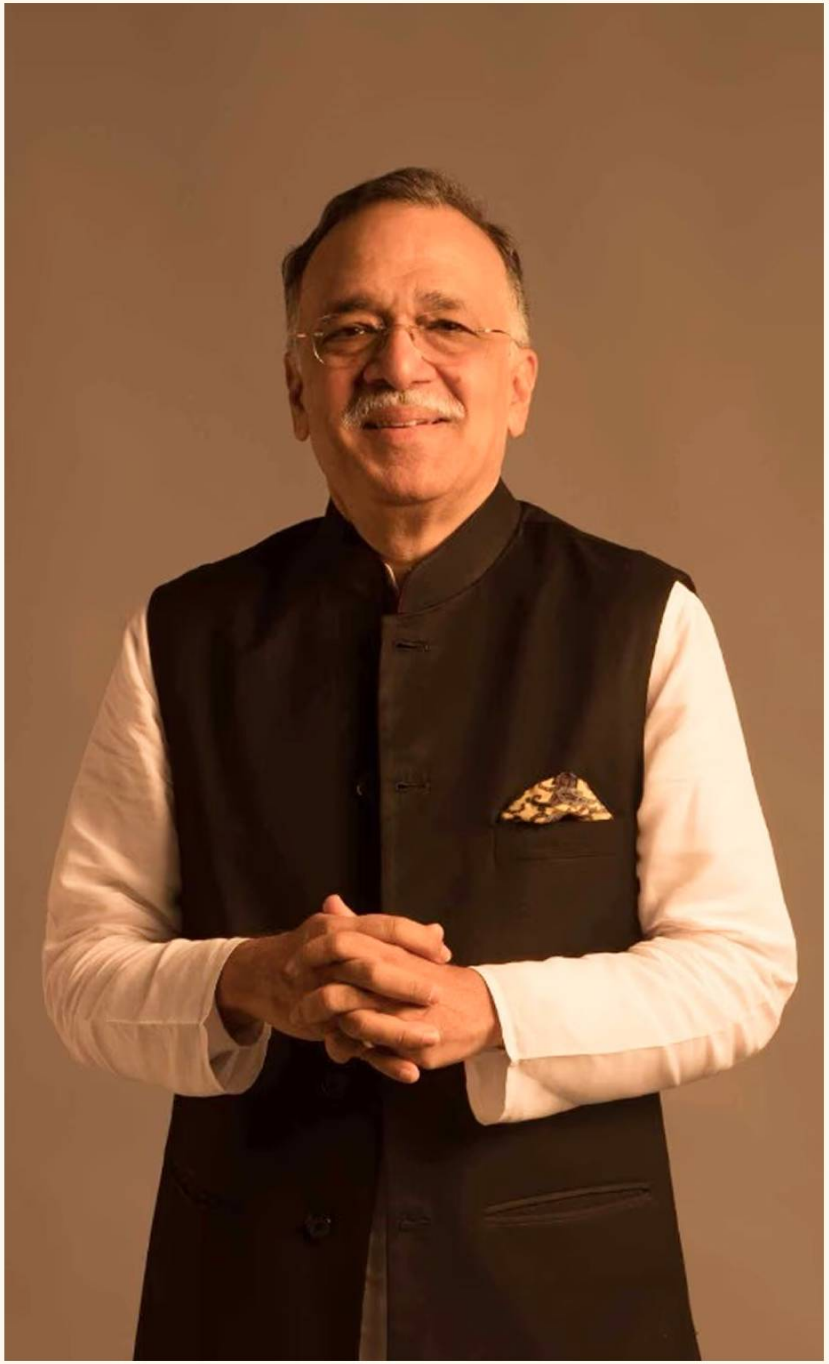
Your decade of work has subtly shaped the contours of Ashoka University as you have relentlessly created a pathway for learning for students with diverse needs. Indian higher education still needs to walk a few miles before we can truly claim to offer a fully inclusive framework. Many institutions have built inclusivity into their pedagogy, however it remains a tenet in theory but not in practice. Ashoka made a different choice a decade ago. It opted to bypass the traditional siloed educational framework and shifted the educational paradigm from merely integrating learners to fundamentally redesigning the environment.

Today, Ashoka stands as a unique example where it has assimilated physical, digital, and pedagogical resources to ensure every student navigates their education autonomously with the help of assistive technologies alongside flexible assessment methods tailored to diverse cognitive and physical needs. It has moved away from the 'one-size-fits-all' model, treating accessibility not as a secondary compliance measure but as a core institutional belief. This is not a departure from academic rigour in the least. It is what rigour looks like when it takes seriously the full range of people and students it is meant to serve.

The next decade will demand more of this work and with much more resolve. New technology, new research on learning, and a deeper understanding of our diversity will keep changing what support can mean, and what it can make possible. The environment will demand a collaborative ecosystem where peer empathy, combined with specialised faculty, will champion every student's success.

I am confident that Ashoka will continue to pioneer this movement, setting a benchmark for other Indian institutions. Access is not a privilege to be selectively granted; it is the fundamental foundation upon which all education must be built.

To the Office of Learning Support, and everyone who has helped build this over ten years: thank you for showing the rest of us what this work can look like.



Pramath Raj Sinha

Founder & Chairperson, Board of Trustees, Ashoka University

When we founded Ashoka, we wanted to build the kind of institution we wished existed in India. That meant thinking carefully not only about what students would learn, but also about who would have the opportunity to be here at all. Inclusive education was never simply an addition to our vision; it was core to it.

Over the past decade, starting from scratch, we have built systems, capabilities and infrastructure that enable us to recognise and support a wide range of learners. Today, the Office of Learning Support provides resources and accommodations across twenty of the twenty-one disabilities recognised under Indian law. More importantly, it has helped cultivate an inclusive ethos grounded in access, belonging and the conviction that no two learners are alike. Behind each accommodation is a particular student: one who needs a text in another format, or a little more time, or a campus they can actually move through. Building and innovating around that reality, rather than asking students to fit a single mould, has shaped the journey of the Office of Learning Support from the beginning.

This has required a much wider ecosystem across the University. Faculty, student peers, staff, specialists and institutional leaders have worked together to identify barriers, respond to preferences, and create conditions – physical, academic, attitudinal – in which students with different abilities and needs can thrive. Inclusion is not the responsibility of a singular office. It is a university-wide commitment that must find expression in culture and everyday habits of campus living.

The impact of our work in enabling contextual, comfortable and considerate learning environments now extends well beyond Ashoka. Through national initiatives such as the Inclusive University Alliance, our own primary research, direct collaboration with schools to prepare high-schoolers for college and long-term engagement with employers, we are helping widen the conversation on what higher education for all means for India. In doing so, we are also contributing to a holistically informed understanding of education as a critical force for human development.

We would like to see many more Offices of Learning Support across India's institutions, like a much-needed national mandate: to create and nurture places where every learner can access, participate in and benefit from an excellent university education. We are committed to sharing what we have learnt so far and to building the partnerships that can make this possible.



THE FOUNDING VISION

Chandana Singh

Founder, Office of Learning Support, Ashoka University

Looking back on ten years of the Office of Learning Support, I believe two pillars made this journey possible.

The first is the vision of Ashoka's leadership. In the early days, when a new university has countless priorities competing for attention, they chose to make inclusion one of them. OLS was the first institution of its kind at the higher education level in India. In a country where awareness of disability and inclusion was still so limited, that early commitment was remarkable. It did not just support students at Ashoka - it created a template for what is possible, and a model for other universities to adopt and build on.

The second is transforming vision into reality. Building something like this takes a real understanding of inclusion, genuine empathy, and the drive to keep pushing forward with new ideas and hard work. Reena has given OLS exactly that.

In ten years, OLS has changed how disability and inclusion are understood in this country. It has shifted mindsets, set a standard for others to aspire to, and transformed lives.



THE FOUNDING CONVICTION

Vineet Gupta

Founder, Ashoka University

Inclusion at Ashoka happened very organically, due to an unsaid but deep commitment from all our stakeholders to support students who had been admitted to the university. The Office of Learning Support was not an original part of the academic construct. When the university started in 2016, we discovered very early that some students needed learning support. Our early efforts started with trying to support the few students in our founding class. We were lucky to meet Reena, who started to take care of these students.

The next year, we admitted a student with visual impairment. There was significant debate on whether we were ready to admit such a student.

But then we realised: we will never be ready until we admit a student with a disability. And we went ahead. I feel that was a turning point in our approach to inclusion.

In subsequent years, we admitted a student with full hearing impairment, and the Office of Learning Support grew from strength to strength. Excellence in higher education cannot just be limited to excellence in the classroom. Our Office of Learning Support has surpassed all our expectations and has become a role model for many other institutions.



THE STEWARDSHIP

Somak Raychaudhury

Former Vice-Chancellor, Ashoka University

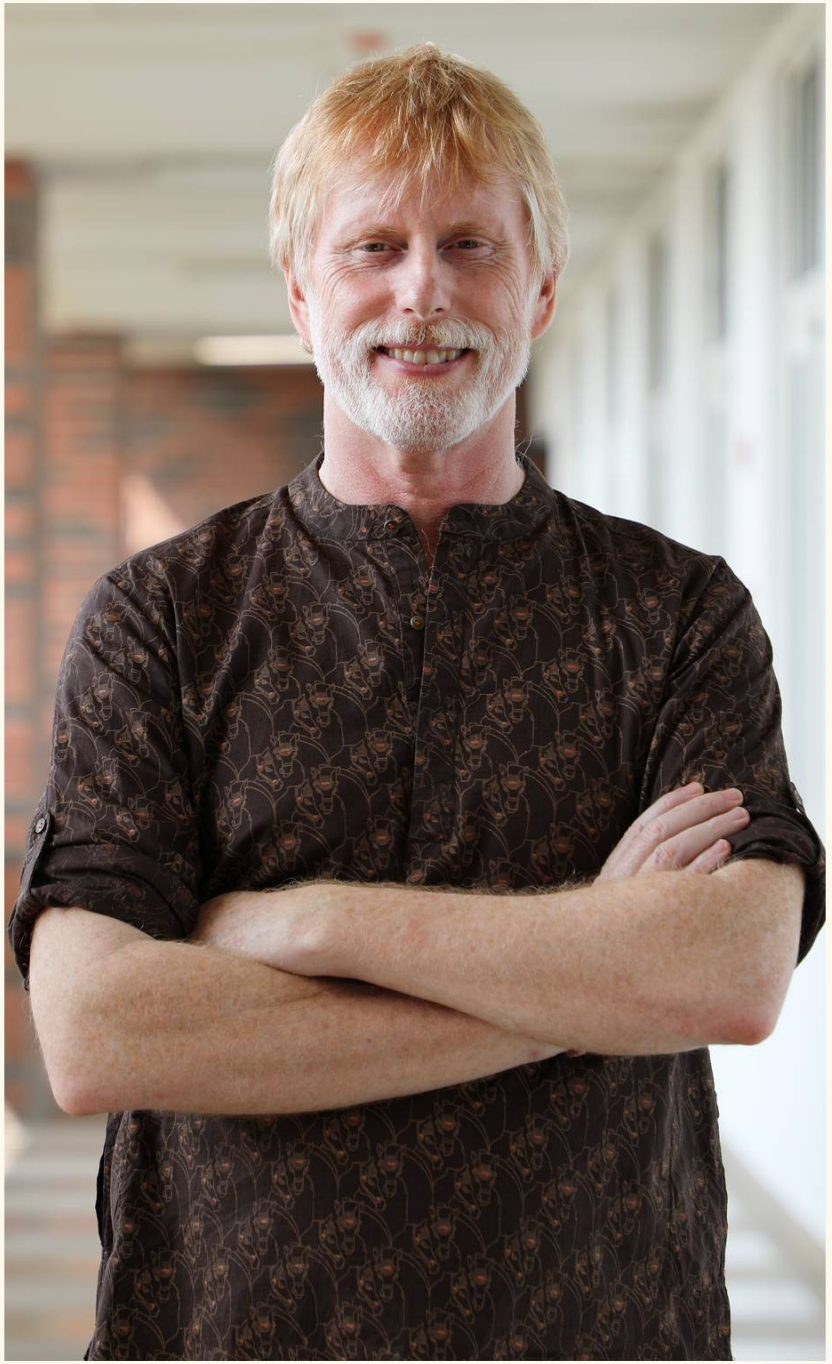
It is important to carefully curate an environment on campus where every student feels genuinely valued and respected as an individual, and empowered to succeed, regardless of their background, identity, ability, or socioeconomic status. A University aspiring to develop thoughtful leaders for the 21st century cannot fulfil its mission unless every student experiences a true sense of belonging, and feels relevant, and finds their place in the local and larger community.

Building meaningful inclusion in higher education demands far more than simply increasing diversity on campus. Ashoka University has long embraced this principle, believing that in addition to admissions and scholarships, it is essential to build robust support services, and accessible infrastructure, in order to foster an equitable learning environment. The Office of Learning Support (OLS) has been central to this mission. Reaching the ten-year mark for the OLS is a powerful statement, clearly indicating that inclusion is not merely a policy at Ashoka. For us, it is a deliberately cultivated culture that continues to blossom with time.

When OLS began, the goal was simply to make a meaningful difference for students who needed it the most. What followed surpassed every expectation. Families who once struggled to find a place for their children in higher education have discovered a genuine home at Ashoka. Today, institutions across India regard Ashoka as a benchmark, demonstrating that institutional leadership in inclusion is not only possible but achievable.

The impact of all this effort has extended beyond students to the caregivers, and to the educators themselves. Faculty and other teaching staff now view classrooms through the lens of diverse learning needs, rethinking assessment methods, pedagogy, and the fundamental question of who is in the room and what they truly require. This understated but profound shift, from mere accommodation to intentional design marks a significant milestone for the University.

Meaningful inclusion demands sustained commitment and accountability. By prioritising equity, belonging, representation, and continuous reflection, higher education institutions can create spaces where all students thrive and contribute meaningfully to society. With a strong foundation already in place, Ashoka University is well-positioned to further strengthen and expand its commitment to inclusion in all forms in the decade ahead.



THE ACADEMIC CONSCIENCE

Jonathan Gil Harris

Professor of English, Ashoka University

It's hard to believe the Office of Learning Support is celebrating its tenth birthday. On one hand it feels like yesterday it opened its doors; on the other, it feels like it has always been here. And that is because OLS has always been an absolutely crucial part of how Ashoka University has imagined itself.

When we began the University, we were committed to offering a liberal arts education in the most literal sense - an education that would cross boundaries, get people out of their comfort zones, expose them to ways of being and thinking that didn't tread the straight and narrow path of conventionality. OLS was absolutely vital to that mission. A university like ours couldn't claim to fulfil it without making sure it was offering as broad a vision as possible to as many people as possible.

This was never just about taking care of people in need. It was about ensuring that every member of Ashoka took a share of responsibility - for being aware of ability and disability, for being part of a classroom that was genuinely diverse and open to many different ways of learning.

Happy birthday, OLS. It feels like you are part of the beating heart of what makes Ashoka, Ashoka.



THE EVIDENCE

Anuradha Saha

Assistant Dean, Academic Affairs · Associate Professor of Economics, Ashoka University

The Office of Learning Support (OLS) has consistently been one of the strongest advocates for students with physical and learning disabilities, helping ensure that every student can participate fully in University life. From securing additional classroom support to making campus infrastructure more accessible, OLS has quietly but profoundly shaped Ashoka into a more inclusive institution.

One experience has stayed with me. Last summer, I mentioned to Reena that a YSP student with visual impairment was unable to join the evening festivities because all the music and dance events were held on the sunken field, which was inaccessible. Within a few months, I noticed that a ramp had been built, allowing students to access the field with ease. It was a simple yet powerful reminder of how responsive and thoughtful OLS is.

Their work extends far beyond infrastructure. The Accessible Ashoka app enables students with disabilities to navigate campus independently, and their learning support sessions have made a real difference to students I have taught. I am personally grateful for the many conversations I have had with members of the OLS team. Their patient guidance has helped me rethink my own teaching practices and make my courses more inclusive in ways I would never have discovered on my own.



THE ONE WHO LAID THE GROUND

Reena Gupta

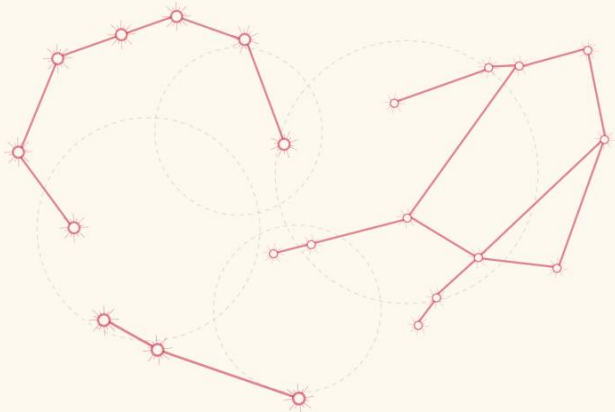
Founding Director, Office of Learning Support

Ten years of OLS at Ashoka has been an amalgam of everything I studied years ago; learned from my students; and understood from parents and educators. Every interaction with each one of them has reinforced the belief that an open mind from management, flexible thinking from educators, and a dedicated resource on the ground are the three key elements of inclusion in education.

Through this book, I invite you all to learn a little more about our journey–one dominated by anxious moments, yet consistently ending in extremely rewarding breakthroughs. After all, there must have been something we did right to turn a 2016 hope into a 2026 reality.

This book is an honest effort to give you a glimpse into our work that hopefully speaks for itself, without worrying about what looks good on the surface. This is not a record of everything we did, but a reflection of what it felt like to do it.

I dedicate this book to:
· Every Ashoka student who trusted us: you are the reason any of this exists.
· Every parent who shared your hopes and fears: you are the foundation of our strength.
· Every faculty member who went the extra mile: you are the heart of this inclusive environment.
· Every administration member who championed our vision: you are the architects of this movement.
· The entire Ashoka community: you proved that change is possible when we work together.



WHAT YOU ARE HOLDING

This book was made by asking people to remember.

We wrote to students, alumni, faculty, partners, and the people who built this office, and we asked them one question: what stayed with you? Not what OLS did. Not what programmes were offered, but what stayed with you.

What came back was more than we expected. People wrote with candour and with care. They described moments of doubt and moments of arrival. They named the people who made the difference. They wrote about what changed in them, not as outcomes, but as something quieter and more lasting.

This book is their answer, arranged into five chapters that follow the shape of a human journey. From what it takes to ask for help, to the moment of being seen, to what that moment unlocks, to giving back, to what travels beyond one campus entirely. Between the chapters, visual spreads show the scale of what the voices describe. In the middle, the OLS team steps forward to reflect honestly on what this work has taught them.

You do not have to read it in order. If a voice stops you, stay with it. But if you read from beginning to end, you will find that each chapter answers something the one before it raised, and that the story, taken whole, is bigger than any one part of it.

What you are holding is the story of these people, shaped but not smoothed. The voices are real. The experiences are real. The unfinished work is real too.

This is not a report. It is a record of what it feels like when a University decides that every student it admits is worth the full effort of inclusion.

It is for the Ashoka community, the people who were here, the people who are here now, and the people who will arrive next, still wondering if this is the right door to knock on.

It is.

– The OLS Team

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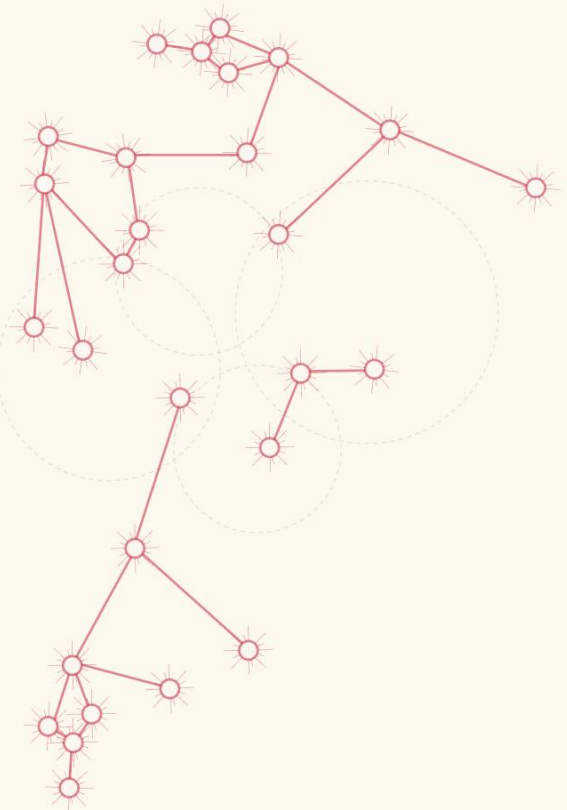
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TEN YEARS TIMELINE

Building the Ecosystem

2015

Before the office had a name, the need was already there

- The idea gets the nod
- The first invisible struggles are named – and met, one student at a time

2016

Office of Learning Support (OLS) is officially launched

- Reena Gupta is appointed Director
- Individualised support systems for students with disabilities begin taking shape

2017

Inclusion moves from intent to action

- Campus begins active preparation for supporting students with disabilities
- 26 new students onboarded, including Ashoka's first student with deafness

2018

Accessibility moves beyond individual support and into University systems

- Specialised training expands to faculty and wider campus stakeholders
- Plans for a 24x7 Assistive Technology Room take shape
- The Inclusive Education Framework Manual is codified

2019

Inclusion becomes a shared project

- Ashoka becomes a founding member of the **Inclusive University Alliance (IUA)**
- On-campus ATMs are upgraded to be fully accessible for visually impaired users

2020

When learning moves online, support moves with it

- Academic accommodations and assistive technology support transition online
- Faculty resource guide on accessible online teaching, grounded in Universal Design for Learning (UDL), is developed
- Pilot Peer Mentorship Programme is launched
- Reena Gupta is appointed to the AICTE national committee on the inclusion of Dyslexic students in higher education

2021

Inclusion becomes part of the institution's architecture

- National policy recommendations on support systems for students with Specific Learning Disabilities are formally accepted
- Ashoka's Policy on Inclusion of Students with Disabilities is approved
- University website, UG, and YIF admissions systems are made fully accessible
- College Readiness Program (CRP) is launched
- India's first conference on Higher Education and Dyslexia is hosted
- Assistive Technology Room opens

2022

A new frontier opens for accessible learning

- India's first leadership summit on Inclusion in Higher Education is hosted online
- OLS crosses support for 500+ students, including those without disabilities
- Ashoka becomes the first University in India to pilot and successfully launch the Accessible Ashoka navigation app

2023

The work begins shaping the system beyond Ashoka

- Enrolment of students with disabilities doubles from 1% to 2%
- First Conclave convenes higher education institutions around a shared vision for disability inclusion

2024

The conversation shifts from campus practice to national change

- CRP expands across India and launches its first course, Becoming an Independent Learner
- Baseline mapping report, Access to Higher Education: An Unresolved Challenge for Students with Disabilities, is released
- Conclave 2.0: Building Foundations for Inclusive Higher Education is hosted
- Major investments strengthen campus accessibility and STEM learning infrastructure

2025

The model moves beyond the campus that built it

- OLS chairs the restructured Inclusive University Alliance
- IdeaPal, an open-source platform for inclusive higher education, is launched at Conclave 3.0
- Corporate Diversity Hiring Toolkit is launched
- Campus accessibility expands through tactile wayfinding, digital accessibility initiatives, cultural inclusion efforts, and enhanced library access
- Assistive Technology Support Course is launched under CRP

2026

Ten years on, the Office has become a campus ecosystem – and a national movement

- 4% of Ashoka's student body identifies as disabled or neurodiverse
- A dedicated sensory room is developed
- AI-powered navigation chatbot is launched on CRP website
- State-of-the-art assistive technology resources continue to expand access to learning
- Conclave is renamed as ASCENT: Inclusive Higher Education National Conference
- OLS leads the discussion with the regulatory bodies in the Central Government

CHAPTER I

The Weight of Wondering

On the question every student carried before they walked through the door



Before the assessment. Before the accommodation. Before the conversation that changed things – there was a question. Quiet, persistent, almost never spoken aloud. Do I deserve to be here? The students who found their way to OLS almost always arrived late – not because the door was hard to find, but because they had spent months, sometimes years, talking themselves out of knocking on it.



UG '25 · Co-founder,
Unmask · A student with ADHD

THE BUILDER

Uditi Mahindra

the one who was always capable, and just needed the space to know it

CASSIOPEIA

When I first got into Ashoka University, I made a video diary for my future self. I remember repeating the same things over and over again: I hope you've learned how to not let people down. I hope you've figured out how to stop wasting your potential.

ADHD is not explicitly recognised under India's Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act. Unlike many other disabilities, it lacks consistent statutory protections and standardised accommodations across higher education institutions. In our experience, many students arrive at University without a formal diagnosis – and without the language to make sense of their experiences or ask for what they need.

A year into University, I was exactly there again, except worse. I was failing courses despite deeply loving what I studied. I could spend hours thinking, reading, discussing, caring intensely about ideas – but somehow still could not sustain work over long periods of time, reply to people consistently, be punctual, or begin assignments before panic set in. The collapse did not feel like laziness from the inside. It felt like wanting to do a hundred things and not being able to get out of bed, followed by avoidance and shame.

I genuinely believed something was morally wrong with me. Even though support systems existed, I hesitated to approach OLS because I felt I was not 'struggling enough' to deserve help.

I thought support was for people who had already figured out and medically articulated their struggles.

It was only when things completely fell apart – when I seriously considered dropping out – that I finally reached out.

OLS did not begin from suspicion. They treated my struggles as something worth understanding before judging. Through their referral and guidance, I underwent an on-campus assessment and received my ADHD diagnosis. Suddenly, years of confusion began to make sense.

OLS has facilitated close to **40 fully funded psycho-educational assessments since 2023** – giving students a language for experiences they had carried, unnamed, for years

The accommodations mattered immensely. But more than that, OLS helped create an environment where support extends beyond checkboxes. I do not have to repeatedly justify my struggles in order to be believed. Because I know there is institutional support behind me, I now have the confidence to vocalise when I am struggling instead of hiding it until crisis.

With that support, I was also able to help start Unmask – a neurodivergence-centred student collective at Ashoka. A space where students remind each other about deadlines, study together when working alone feels impossible, and help make overwhelming systems feel survivable.

Unmask, founded in 2025, is among the first student-led neurodivergence collectives at an Indian University.

I am taking longer than I once thought I would. But for the first time in years, my future feels possible, manageable, and open.

More than anything, I think I have learned how to be gentler with the versions of myself that once believed they were failing alone.



Uditi's story is unusual only in how precisely she names something many students feel but rarely say: that the threshold of 'struggling enough' is one they set for themselves – and set impossibly high. Across ten years, OLS encountered this same hesitation in student after student. Each one convinced that someone else needed the support more.

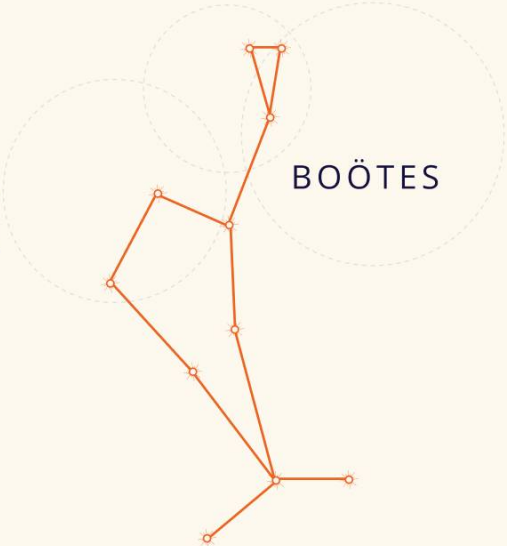


UG 2023 · A student with partial hearing impairment

THE ADVOCATE

Tejasdeep Sehgal

the one who understood, before most, that belonging is something you build



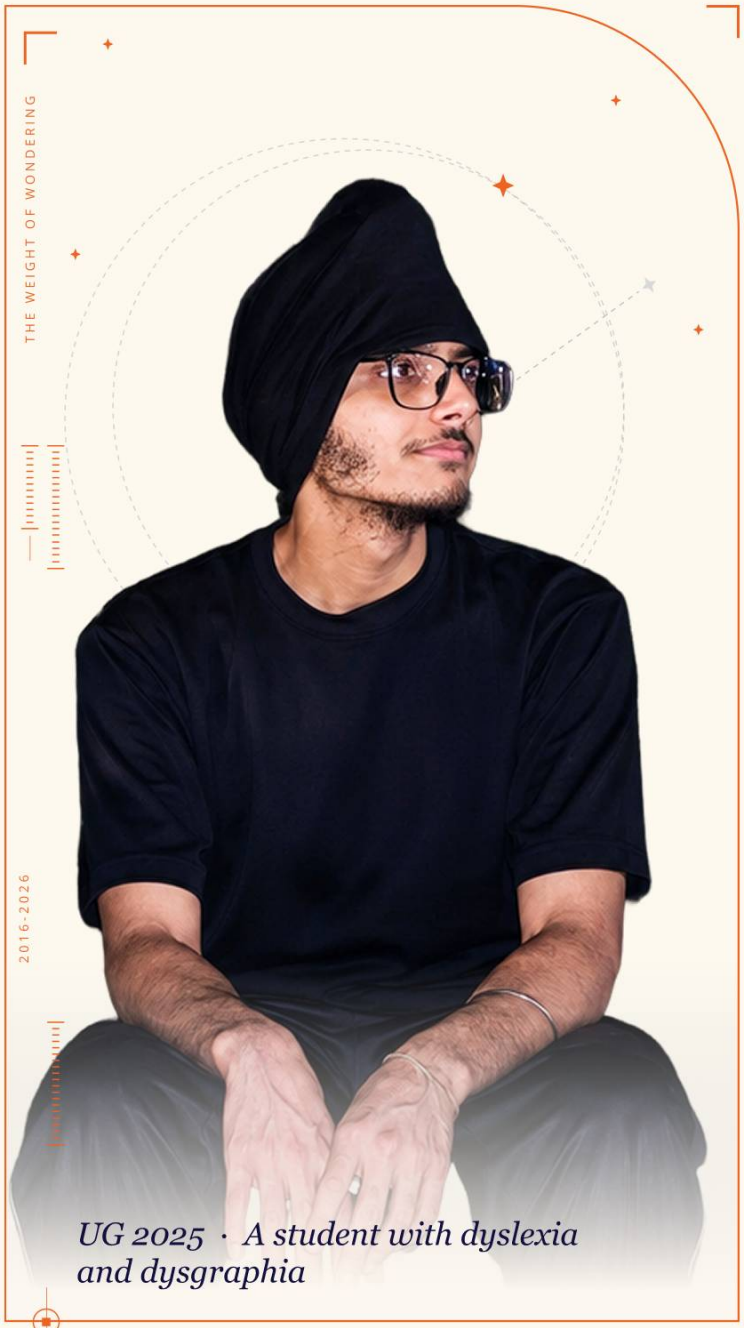
I remember very early in my Ashoka journey, in my first year, struggling with reaching out for help. I knew I had a disability and that I was struggling – but since I had grown up in an environment that looked down upon asking for help, I didn't know how to ask for accommodations.

Reena Gupta said to me: 'It is your job to ask me for accommodations – not to self-censor whether you deserve them.' Everything shifted in that moment.

We all know the famous story of asking a fish to climb a tree. That is what society's view of assimilation looks like: erasing people's individual strengths and identities. It was a proactive approach by OLS, and by Reena Ma'am, that I grew into my shoes to navigate my social and academic life at Ashoka.

While Indian laws and guidelines mandate inclusive education and reasonable accommodations across universities, systemic implementation remains lacking. Every support structure at OLS was built by something greater than compliance – choice.

What Tejasdeep describes – receiving permission, then becoming someone who extends it to others – is one of the quieter patterns of OLS's first decade. The students who were told they deserved support became the students who made sure others knew the same. The office built a support system. The students built a culture.



UG 2025 · A student with dyslexia and dysgraphia

THE WILDCARD

Adheep Raj Singh

the one who never fit the mould, and never needed to



I honestly never felt like one of those chocolates in a box that fit perfectly into the system. I have always been a misfit and a wildcard throughout my academic life. It is one thing to feel anxious – another to feel that way far from home.
It was a heavy, new sensation for me.

My mentor acted as a grounding anchor. Through our bi-weekly meetings, we discussed the topics of the day and the pain points in my coursework. He specifically helped me with prioritising my workload – a skill I had never quite mastered on my own.

Executive functioning coaching at OLS helps students build the skills that underpin everything else – goal-setting, focus, emotional regulation. Since 2024, OLS has delivered **more than 400 coaching sessions.**

His guidance proved that while I might not fit the standard mould, I could still find my rhythm and thrive.

None of them were found – they found their way. What changed, in each case, was not the difficulty of what they were carrying. It was the discovery that someone else was willing to carry it with them.

The wondering is what came before. What came next – the moment of being truly seen – is where it begins to unfold.

CHAPTER II

The Moment

On being seen – and what that changes.



Some moments don't announce themselves. They arrive quietly – in the middle of an ordinary conversation, a door held open, a person who believed you before you believed yourself. The students in this chapter came from different places, carried different histories, and needed different things. What they found was the same: a moment where something shifted. Not a policy. Not a form. A person.






The Ashokan Tapestry
Let's weave stories, bridge differences and celebrate the neurodiversity around us!
ASHOKA
Who am I?

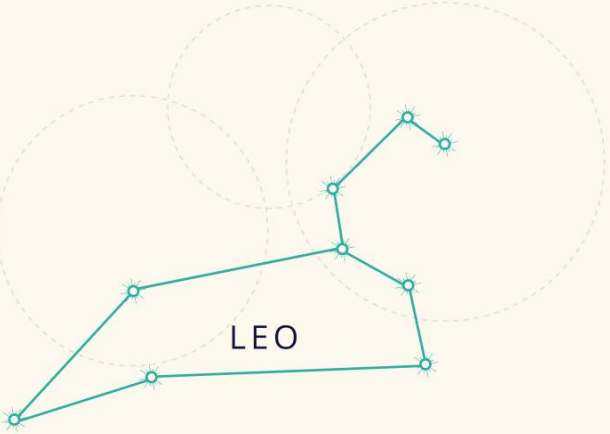


UG '22 · ASP '23 · Manager, HR Strategy at Genpact · Assistant Coach, Indian National Frisbee Team · Alum with dysgraphia

FROM THE SHADOWS

Rohan Manoj

the one who found their footing here and ran with it



Walking into Ashoka in 2019, I had a quiet skepticism sitting with me. How would I fit in? What would the academic pressure feel like? I had grown up with dysgraphia – and in a system where scores determined your worth, that had never been easy to carry.

But those concerns were met before I even arrived. My mother reached out to Reena Ma'am before I joined. In my first week on campus, I met the OLS team – explained my strengths, my development areas, what I would need. I was shy. I didn't know how to ask for what I wanted. The team went over and above anyway.

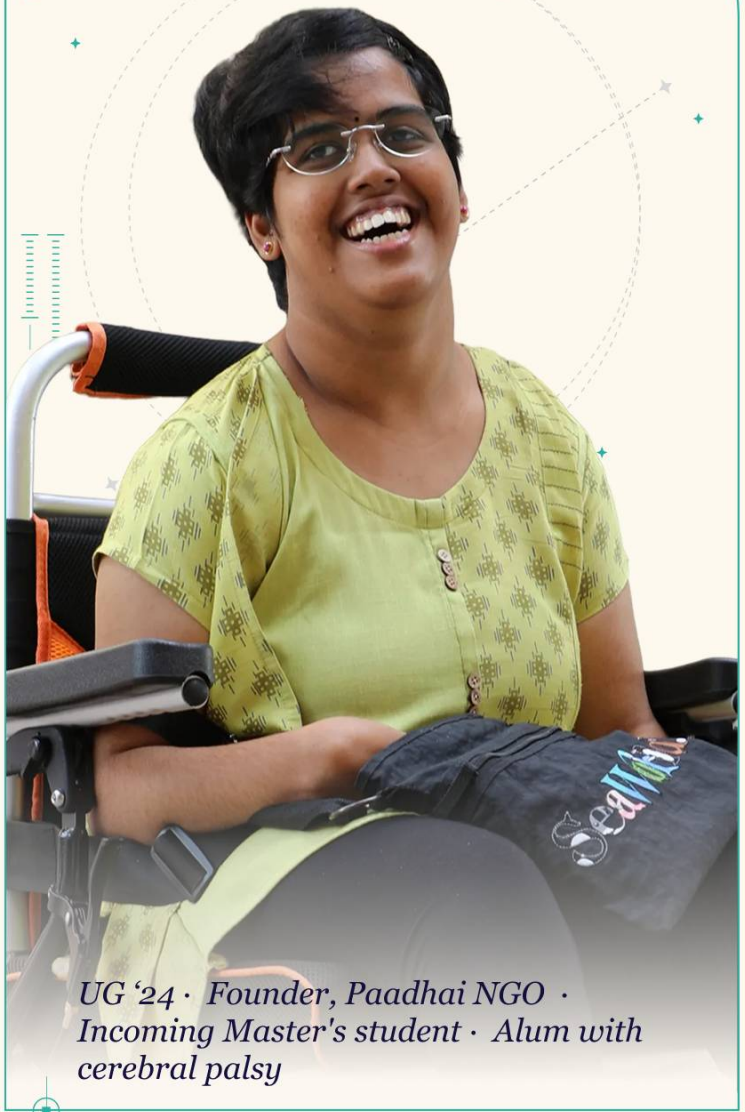
What followed surprised me. I went on to hold almost every position of responsibility a student could – leading teams, navigating people, building trust. Not because the path was easy, but because for the first time, I wasn't spending my energy managing around a system that didn't account for me. I could just grow.

I entered Ashoka hiding behind my mother. I left independent, self-advocating, and certain of what I was capable of.

This is what allowed me to step into a management role at Genpact immediately after graduating. And to become Assistant Coach of the Indian National Frisbee Team.

Reena Ma'am once described it back to me: the boy who arrived hiding behind his mother. I can barely recognise him now.

Rohan's story moves fast – which is exactly how it felt from the inside. Early intervention, immediate integration, a trajectory that compounded. But not every student's story moves at that speed. For some, the moment of being seen arrives more quietly – not as a single conversation but as something that accumulates, slowly, until one day you realise you are being held.

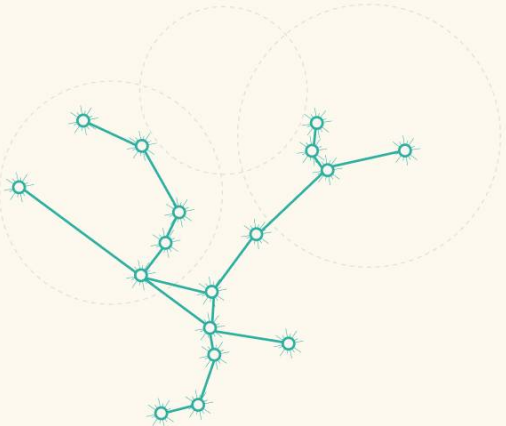


UG '24 · Founder, Paadhai NGO · Incoming Master's student · Alum with cerebral palsy

FINALLY, A NET

Upasana Ravikannan

the one who was held at exactly the right moment, and never forgot the difference it made



ANDROMEDA

I joined Ashoka in August 2021 as a BSc. Psychology student. Keen to understand how people relate with the world around them, I was excited to see what my journey would bring. In the years that followed, there were many moments which I have grown to cherish. Most of all, I am proud of how my friends formed a powerful support circle around me, and showed me the strength of community in disability advocacy.

As part of a mandatory developmental psychology course, I was faced with difficult topics in the classroom. As a wheelchair user with cerebral palsy, discussions surrounding developmental delays and bodily conditions felt deeply personal and sometimes more intense than I could handle. I did eventually speak to Reena Ma'am about what I had been feeling – how such experiences could be made easier for others in the future. Our conversation stayed with me. What helped wasn't one big intervention. It was many small, consistent forms of support.

My friends would step in without making a big deal of it – opening a door before I had to ask, at a time when I had become very aware of needing help.

OLS's Peer Learning Support Programme formalised what Upasana's friends were already doing instinctively, making belonging a by-product of accessibility.

My notetakers became some of my closest friends. What began as a formal arrangement grew into something more meaningful – we learned from each other and stayed connected long after graduation. Gradually, they went from a group of acquaintances to a genuine community.

Support at Ashoka didn't come from just one place. It was there in the system, in the people, and often in the spaces in between.

That changed me. Before Ashoka, I was used to advocating for myself alone. At Ashoka, I was exposed to a community that showed me challenges are often dealt with better together. What has stayed with me most is the sense of being held. It's given me the confidence to try things, to take risks, knowing there is something beneath me if I fall.

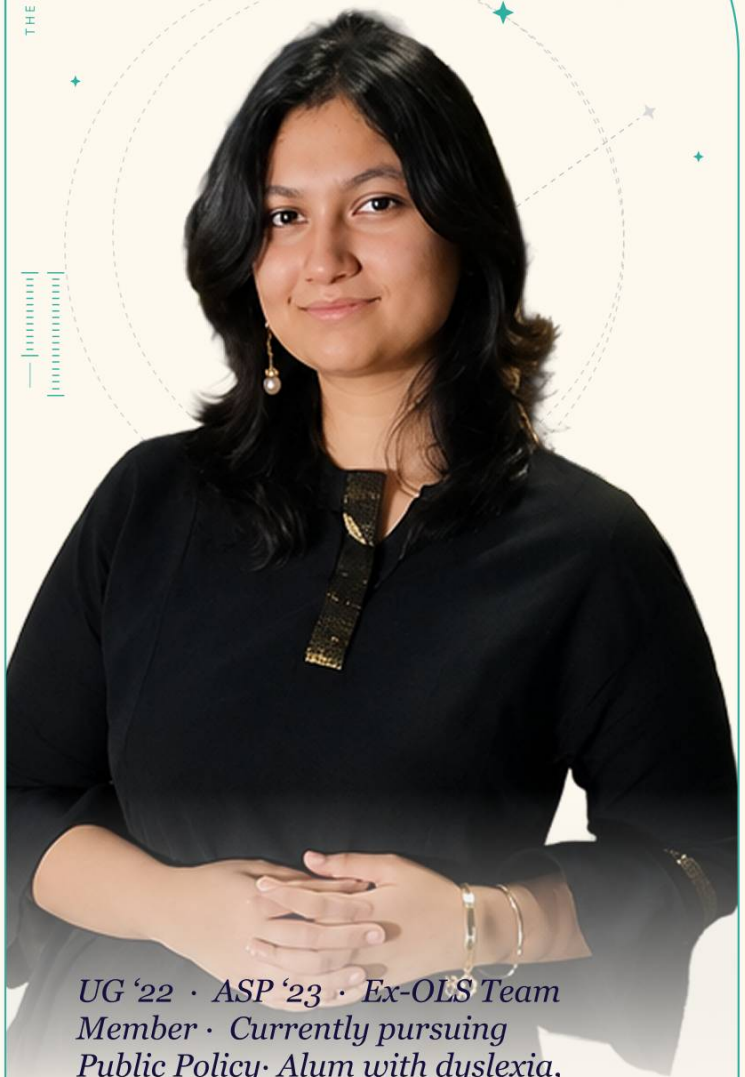
I'm currently running my NGO full-time, and starting my Master's in Inclusion and Child Psychological Development this July. In many ways, what I'm doing now feels like a continuation of what I began learning at Ashoka.

I joined Ashoka as a curious student. Now, I dare to dream bigger than ever before.

Residential life is one of the least visible dimensions of inclusion – and one of the most consequential. OLS's 360-degree support covers room assignments, accessible dorm rooms, and the peer culture on residential floors – ensuring that inclusion doesn't stop at the classroom door.



What Upasana describes – support existing in the spaces between formal systems – is something OLS understood early and tried to design for deliberately. The Peer Learning Support Programme attempts to make organic what might otherwise remain accidental. To ensure that the next student wouldn't have to be lucky enough to find the right friends.

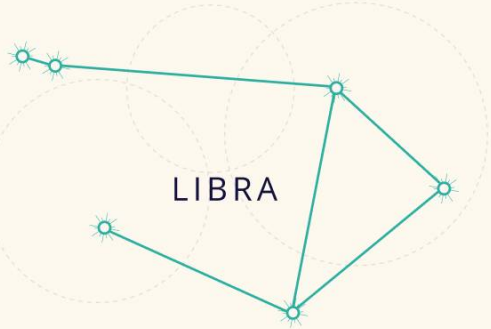


UG '22 · ASP '23 · Ex-OLS Team Member · Currently pursuing Public Policy· Alum with dyslexia, dysgraphia & dyscalculia

DIFFERENT, NOT LESSER

Kriti Khanduri

the one who had always known what an uneven scale felt like



Joining college is an exciting yet overwhelming experience. Now imagine stepping into this academically demanding space after years of feeling misunderstood – your learning needs vastly different from those of your peers, while even those willing to help often lack the awareness or vocabulary to truly understand your disability.

These were the thoughts consuming me before joining Ashoka, even though I had heard reassuring things about OLS. It was only after meeting Monika and Reena Ma'am that a part of that uneasiness began to fade. Over the years, I witnessed the immense effort the office put into sensitising the campus about different learners.

> Sensitisation and awareness across campus – faculty and staff training, peer workshops, student orientation – are central to how OLS builds a culture of inclusion, not just a system of support. What changes is not just access. It is how a student understands themselves.

What began as support from a small office on the first floor of the admin block gradually extended into classrooms, dorm rooms, study groups, and everyday interactions – so much so that my disability eventually felt less like a limitation and more like a different perspective.

There was also something quieter at work. A friend group that helped me through difficult times – explaining concepts, studying together, peer reviewing my papers. A roommate who stood by me through both the tough moments and the good ones. OLS remained in the background as a constant safety net, always ready when I needed it.

But OLS became more than just my support system in college. It also guided me as I entered the workforce. My first job was with the Office of Learning Support itself, where I hoped to help others labelled 'disabled' feel simply different, not lesser. Throughout that time, OLS supported me through mistakes, helped me understand them, and celebrated every accomplishment.

I am deeply grateful to Reena Ma'am, Monika, Pritika, Shalini, Kamal, and Medhavi for being such an integral part of my journey – they were there for all of it, from an impulsive adolescent to a young professional now asking how systems can be built to include everyone.



Rohan found his footing immediately. Upasana found it gradually, in the accumulated weight of small acts. Kriti found it and then turned around and became the person who held the door open for someone else. That last move – from recipient to provider – is where the next part of this story begins.

Being seen changes a person. What happens next – when the people who were seen start seeing others – is a different kind of story entirely.

If You're Reading This

Students look back at who they were when they first arrived — and leave something behind for whoever comes next.

Don't be scared to express yourself and do what you see fit. You don't need to be liked by everyone.

Everything will be okay.

There is time. It is okay to work at your own pace.

You'll change your mind about what you want to do at least three times, and that's fine.

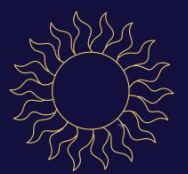
Relax. You do not have to win every battle, prove yourself every day, or figure out life immediately. Learn to ask for help, learn to laugh at awkward situations, and trust that the right people will meet you halfway. And, most importantly, learn to value add.

Find one person you can be completely honest with. Everything else gets easier after that.

Cherish the confusion.



Put in the effort to build the community around you — and that community will find you. The people who refuse to accommodate and respect your needs are simply not for you.



Some of your best time and learning will happen outside the classroom, over chai, at 1 am, so leave the room.

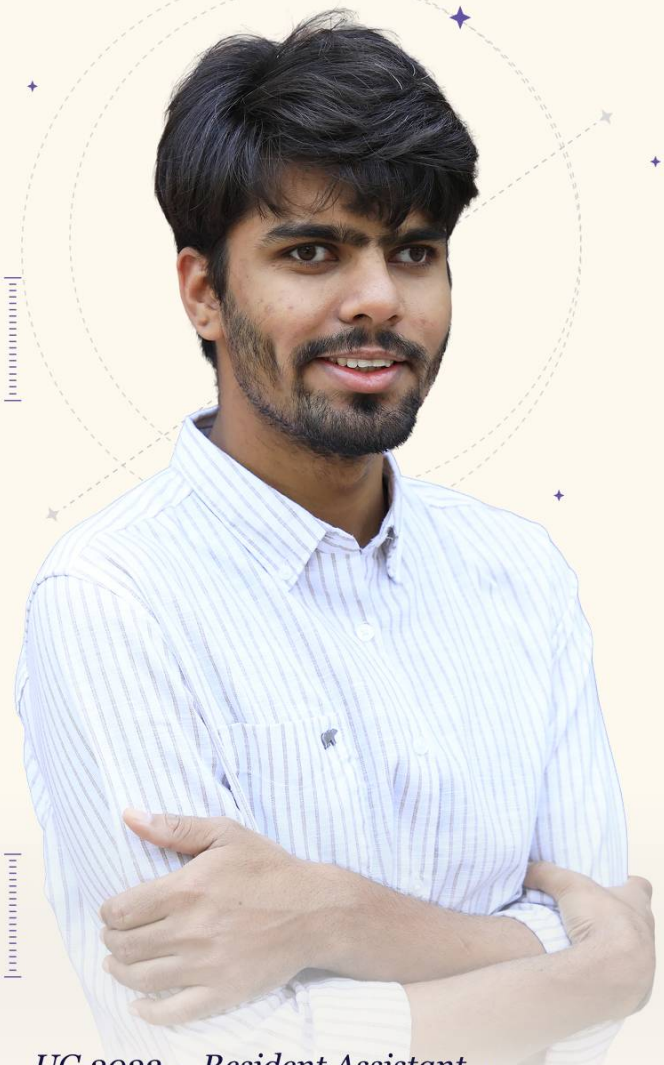
CHAPTER III

The Transformation

On what happens after the support arrives – and the person it makes possible.



Support is not the end of the story. For most of the students who walked through OLS's door, it was the beginning of a different one. Once the scaffolding was in place – once the energy spent on fighting for access could be redirected toward everything else – something opened up. Not all at once. Not without difficulty. But unmistakably, irreversibly.

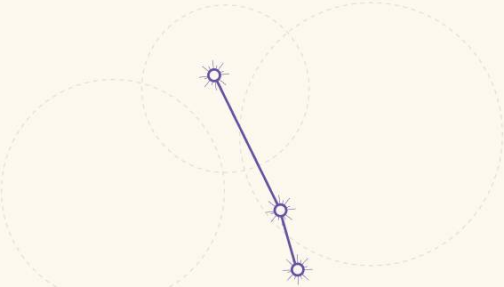


UG 2023 · Resident Assistant · Student with visual impairment

FINDING MY SPACE

Ravi Shankar

the one who found their compass here and became one for others



PYXIS

When I first came to Ashoka, I was carrying experiences from educational spaces where navigating academics and everyday life as a visually impaired student often felt exhausting and isolating. A large part of my school life had involved figuring things out independently. Belonging was not something I expected immediately.

Something shifted after I arrived at Ashoka. For the first time, I did not feel like I was here just to receive accommodations and complete my degree. I could participate as a complete person.

When students no longer spend their energy navigating inaccessible systems, that energy goes elsewhere – into learning, leadership, community. This is the compounding effect of early, comprehensive support.

I realised I did not have to spend so much of my energy demanding accessible materials, or seeking support for meals and laundry. I could focus on how to grow.

I became more involved in campus life, took on responsibilities, and slowly began occupying spaces I would once have considered intimidating. One such space was the Resident Assistant role. Before I applied, I used to see it as something slightly beyond my abilities. A part of me also wanted it – but another part kept questioning whether I would fit.

My interactions with OLS gave me the courage to go for it. After doing it, I felt far more confident – in leadership, in people, in myself. Because of that, I am now interning with Ashoka's High School Programmes, supporting students from grades nine to twelve in their residential experience.

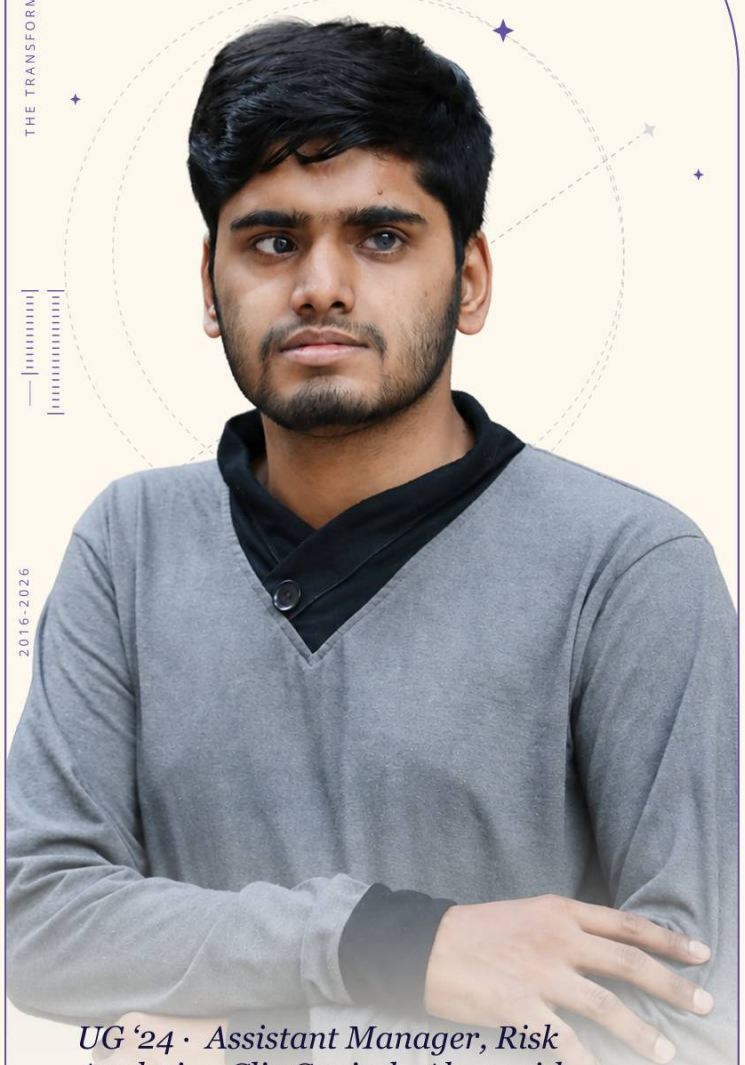
Ravi's arc – from supported student to student supporter – is one OLS has watched repeat across ten years. Students who arrived needing support have gone on to take up leadership roles across the University, turning what they were given into something they now offer others.

These roles helped me grow. But they also created greater awareness about inclusion among other people – staff, students, the wider campus. They helped people realise that individuals can contribute meaningfully regardless of physical limitations. That transformation was not just mine. It belonged to everyone who watched it happen.

Over time, spaces that once felt intimidating slowly started feeling natural. That shift has been one of the most meaningful parts of my journey here.



Ravi's story makes visible something OLS understood early: that the most transformative thing support can do is free up a person's energy. When the fight for access is removed, what fills the space is remarkable. Across the student body, the pattern repeated – students who had spent years managing around barriers suddenly had the bandwidth to lead, to build, to surprise themselves.

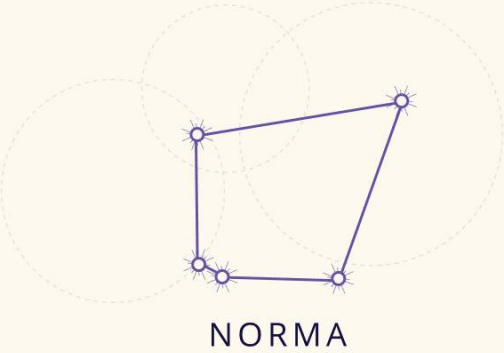


UG '24 · Assistant Manager, Risk Analytics, Clix Capital · Alum with visual impairment

A NEW DEFINITION

Ayush Prakash

the one who redefined the measure and found the world more navigable than expected



When I think about inclusion and accessibility, I feel they are things that simply cannot be ignored. Over time, I've realised that the most important factor is my own willingness to learn, adapt, and take initiative. After that come the external aspects – people, systems, spaces, whether they are accessible or not.

One of the biggest things I've learned is self-advocacy, along with accepting my practical limitations without letting them hurt my ego. Something as basic as entering the office and not greeting someone I already know – because I genuinely don't know whether they're standing there or whether I'm confidently greeting an empty chair and a laptop screen. That possibility exists every single day. And honestly, it's a little funny when you think about it.

I don't believe inclusion means expecting the world to automatically understand every silence, every limitation. Everyone is already carrying their own struggles. If I want to speak to someone, I should also take the initiative.

At work, my managers understand the kind of work where I contribute best. Analytical work, automation, coding, problem-solving – they trust me with it. If something heavily visual comes up, it goes to someone else. That feels fair, collaborative, and inclusive to me. Inclusion is not about pretending everyone can do everything in the same way. It is about creating environments where people contribute meaningfully through their strengths.

OLS's work doesn't stop at the degree. It also helps students with disabilities find their way into suitable careers – and works on the other side of the equation too, sensitising employers through Corporate Toolkits and corporate sensitisation workshops, so that a workplace is ready for them rather than the other way round.

I've also realised that relationships work both ways. If I seek understanding and support from others, I should also add value wherever I can. The world works through cooperation – all of us depend on each other in different ways.

What truly stayed with me from Ashoka: accessibility is not only ramps, software, or accommodations. It is people making space for you naturally, conversations feeling easy, friendships feeling genuine. Not constantly having to prove your worth before belonging somewhere

And I think that is what inclusion ultimately becomes: not perfection, but people making life easier for each other in ways both big and small.



Ayush's definition of inclusion – not structural compliance but emotional ease – is what OLS has been working toward for ten years. It is also what makes the work impossible to finish, and necessary to continue.



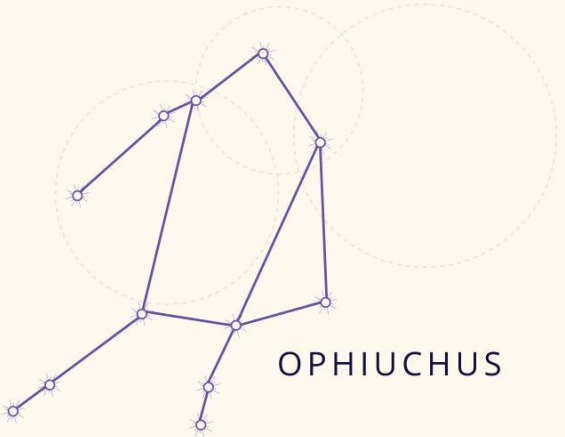
UG '22 · ASP '23 · Erasmus Mundus Master's, Evolutionary Biology · Project Assistant, Khan Lab, Ashoka University · Alum with locomotor disability

2016-2026

BEYOND THE CONDITION

Tanmay Singh

the one who was met with curiosity, not assumption



I joined as an undergraduate in 2019 and have been in touch with OLS ever since. Members at the office were extensively involved in ensuring I was initially settled – working out modalities of movement, aspects of everyday living, open to every request, always finding workable solutions where direct modifications weren't possible.

But inclusion at Ashoka was much more for me. I was seen, loved, encouraged, and sustained for my individuality and interests throughout.

This meant, on several occasions, looking beyond my condition and providing me with an environment to hone my talents. I already had that never-say-die attitude and positive outlook – but Ashoka breathed new life into what it could mean in a university environment. For this, I remain ever grateful.

Tanmay now works in Ashoka's Khan Lab, having completed an Erasmus Mundus Master's in Evolutionary Biology – hands-on lab fields. OLS has worked with Ashoka's science departments to ensure a student's disability is never a barrier to scientific inquiry; Tanmay's path is direct evidence it works.

Tanmay draws a precise line: between an institution that accommodates a condition and one that sees a person. The first is necessary. The second is transformative – and it's the one OLS always set out to be.

What Ravi, Ayush, and Tanmay describe is not gratitude. It is arrival. And arrival, it turns out, makes people want to hold the door open for whoever comes next.

Ten Years in Numbers

2500+

STUDENTS SUPPORTED

since 2016

5000+

PEOPLE REACHED ON CAMPUS

through awareness and advocacy events

300+

PEER SUPPORT DELIVERED

through directly trained peer guides

3500+

PEOPLE REACHED BEYOND ASHOKA

across universities, organisations, corporates and high schools

CHAPTER IV

The Turn

On the moment giving back becomes instinct.



At some point, without anyone announcing it, the direction reversed. The students who had been supported started supporting. The people who had needed the door held open started holding it for others. This is what happens when a culture of inclusion takes root deeply enough that it stops being the responsibility of an office and starts being the instinct of a community.

OLS began as support for students with disabilities. A decade later, its reach extends to nearly every student on campus.

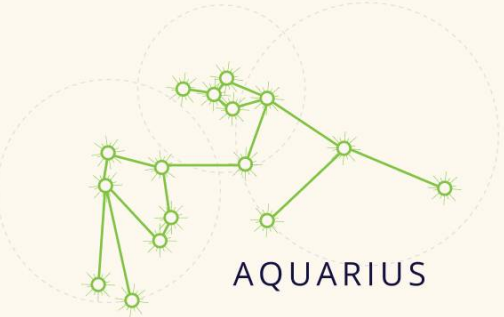


UG '25 · Alum and Student Leader · Campus Buddy · Scribe · Conclave Volunteer · Resident Assistant & RA Mentor

THE ONE WHO SHOWED UP

Shikha Yadav

the one who kept pouring –
and never ran dry



For me, inclusion was never something I first encountered in a formal setting. Long before I took on any official role, I found it in the small, everyday things – sitting down for a meal with a friend, saying hello to someone in the corridor, or simply being approachable enough that my roommate felt comfortable asking for help. A sense of community is built just as much through these quiet gestures as through any structured programme.

The Peer Learning Support Programme (PLSP), started in 2020, has trained close to 200 students as peer guides in various roles, such as peer mentors, campus buddies, notetakers, scribes, campus navigators and academic buddies. These peer guides have gone on to support more than 400 students across the Ashoka community – with or without disabilities.

My journey began with being a Campus Buddy with OLS, twice – for a fully visually impaired student and a partially visually impaired student. For three months, my role involved guiding my student through the campus using verbal instructions, helping her navigate to classes, meals, and daily activities, and supporting her in getting comfortable in the social environment around her.

What I had not expected was how much the role would demand from me – not just practically, but in a deeper and more human way. Students with visual impairments often hold back from asking for help, even when they need it most. So it became my responsibility to read the situation, to be attentive, to offer before being asked.

Being someone's eyes was unlike anything I had done before. It taught me to pay full attention to the world around me – and to notice things I had always taken for granted.

What made it even more meaningful is that it gave me a true friendship. The student I walked alongside is no longer someone I am officially responsible for. She is a close friend, and that bond has only grown stronger. That kind of connection – built on trust and genuine care – would not have been possible without OLS and the institution creating the conditions for it.

The Campus Buddy role in PLSP pairs a senior-year student with a student with disabilities, such as visual impairment or autism spectrum disorder, for accompaniment, navigation, and social integration. What began as logistical support has consistently produced something more: friendship.

I also worked as a Scribe on two occasions, and volunteered at OLS Conclave 2.0 and 3.0, eventually moving into a leadership role. The Conclave showed me that at Ashoka, inclusion is not written into a policy document and left there. It is practised – in how events are planned, in who is given space to participate, in the deliberate effort that makes it real.

Working as a Resident Assistant, and later as an RA Mentor, brought me the most personal understanding of belonging. I expected the role to be heavy. But once I started, I found I genuinely looked forward to it. Being present for others, listening, engaging in real conversations – it gave me a kind of clarity I had not found elsewhere. In trying to help others, I often found answers for myself.

One experience has stayed with me. A mentee of mine had been going through something very difficult for a long time – something she had not shared with anyone, not even her family.

It was only after I became her mentor that she felt safe enough to open up. She broke down. We talked. We hugged. No training can prepare you for that moment. It comes entirely from the quality of the relationship.



What I carry with me beyond Ashoka is simple. Inclusion is a habit of paying attention. It means noticing who is missing, who is quiet when they should not have to be, who is struggling with something no one else can see. Wherever I go next, I want to bring that same awareness – so that the people around me do not just occupy a space, but genuinely feel that they belong in it.

What Shikha describes – showing up before being asked, reading the room, noticing who is missing – is not a skill that can be taught in a workshop. It is built through practice, proximity, and being given a role that demands it.

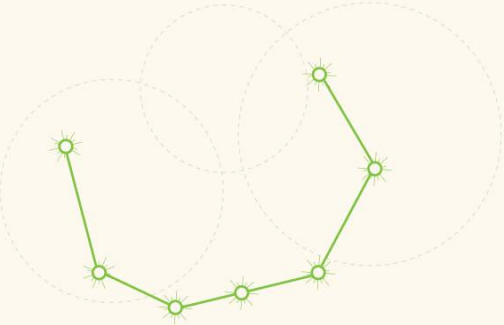


UG 2023 · Performing Artist · Ex-OLS Intern · Student with visual impairment

FROM THE OTHER SIDE OF THE ROOM

Roshni Patra

the one who laid down the thread, so the next person wouldn't have to find their way alone



CORONA BOREALIS

I often felt that cultural spaces were not built with people like me in mind. I wanted to attend events, perform, and participate – but the constant need to depend on someone else quietly held me back.

Accessibility is not about special treatment. It is about thoughtful planning.

Through working with OLS, I realised that simple steps – asking people what they need, sharing accommodation forms early, thinking about navigation – can completely change who feels welcome. What stood out to me was how open student groups were once these conversations began. Many were already trying, but lacked guidance.

In the past year alone, OLS worked on training and sensitising 50+ clubs and societies at Ashoka – turning what once required case-by-case advocacy into a campus-wide expectation.

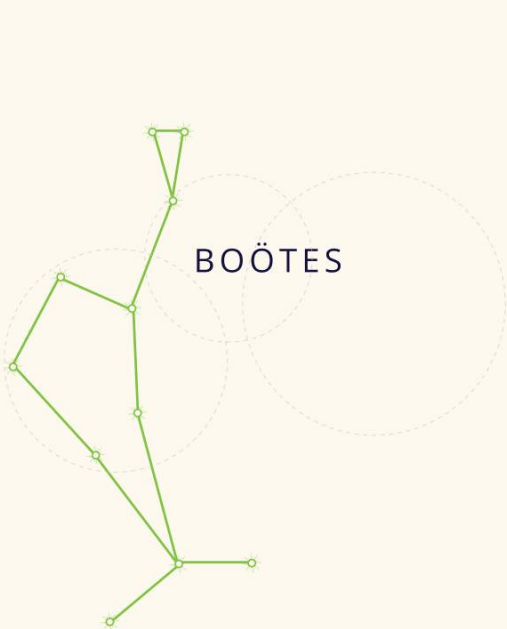
Being able to contribute to that shift – both as a student and as a performer – has stayed with me in ways I didn't expect. Inclusion is not achieved through one event or one semester. It is a continuous, collective effort. And it belongs to everyone in the room, not just the people who run the office.

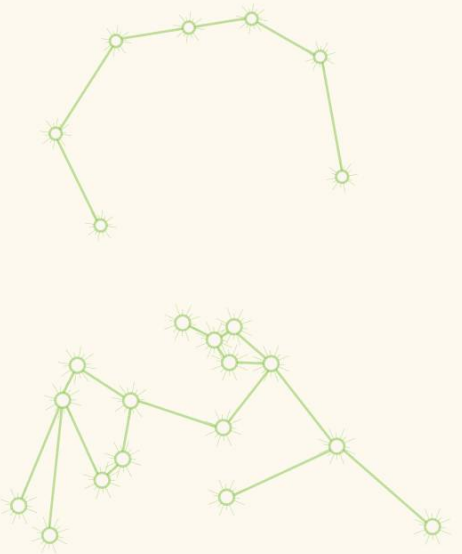
Roshni's experience points to something the data cannot easily capture: who gets to participate in the full life of a university. Not just the academic parts – the performances, the festivals, the spontaneous evenings that become the memories people carry longest. Expanding access to those spaces is quieter work than policy change. But it is no less significant.

THE ADVOCATE

Tejasdeep Sehgal

the one who understood, before most, that belonging is something you build





You met Tejasdeep in Chapter I – still learning to ask for what he needed. This is where he is right now.

Throughout my time at Ashoka, I tried to carry forward what OLS gave me – to make others feel like there is a community they can lean on, to reach out proactively, to check in on people. I made a particular effort to ensure accessibility was not a second thought when events were planned and communities were built.

At the Ashoka Literature Festival, we worked closely with OLS to make all our communications accessible and to remain accessible on the ground across both days. That was not a formal requirement. It was a choice that felt obvious once someone had shown me what it meant to be included. I envision a day where accessibility is not a luxury. Across digital and physical spaces. For everyone.

Accessibility is not a second thought. It is the bare minimum – and once you understand why, you cannot unknow it.

Shikha learned it by walking alongside someone. Roshni learned it by standing on the other side of a door that wouldn't open. Tejasdeep learned it by realising that he deserved to walk through. What they all arrived at is the same understanding – that inclusion is not a destination an institution reaches. It is a practice that people carry with them into every room they enter next. ***What began inside one campus is now moving beyond it. The next question is not what OLS built – but how far it can travel.***

PAUSE

Honest Reckoning

The OLS team looks inward – on growth, struggle, and what these years have actually taught them.



A book like this can become a mirror that only shows what is beautiful. This one refuses that. The people who built OLS from the inside have earned the right to be honest about what worked, about what surprised them, and what the work has asked of them.

What follows is not a celebration. It is something rarer: a team thinking out loud about what ten years has actually taught them.



BUILDING WITHOUT A MAP

Apratim De

First Employee (2016), Office of Learning Support

Apratim was the first brick, before anyone knew what the building would be like.

None of us knew, in 2016, what we were building – we just carried a vision.

Right after my fellowship at Ashoka University, I joined Reena Gupta and Jonathan Gil Harris as the first employee of the Office of Learning Support. Indian higher education had no dedicated support departments or playbooks for us to follow or learn from.

We were focused on the 'what' and the 'why' – what were the systemic gaps, why did certain needs go unmet, and how could we build something that would last?

Every framework carried the quiet excitement of shaping something from scratch.

We were constantly balancing ambitious ideas with the practical reality of building them step by step. When students first walked through our doors with diverse, complex needs, we faced questions no manual could answer. We didn't pretend to have polished solutions; our work became a rhythm of trial, error, and shared determination, guided by a simple compass:

"Let's try and see how it works."

We engaged in global collaboration, studying institutions like the University of Pennsylvania to understand how world-class support systems were constructed, then translating those lessons for our own campus. It was a delicate craft – stitching global insight into our daily reality, backed always by the university's steadfast confidence in its students and in us.

Working closely with our students, I learned lessons no textbook could capture. In that space of listening and adapting, I developed a deep sense of empathy – a grounding truth that defines how I approach everything I do today.

We began with a guiding spark and a willingness to learn. A decade later, what started as trial and error has grown into a living, lasting community. I still don't think any of us saw this coming. We just kept showing up and tried to get it right.

In 2016, OLS began with a handful of students and a founding team of two. Today, ~4% of Ashoka's student body identifies as persons with disabilities and neurodiverse – against a national average of 0.20%. That gap is not accidental. It is the result of ten years of deliberate, sustained investment in inclusion.



BUILDING THE FOUNDATIONS

Monika Bhalvani

Alum · Former Employee (2019-2023), Office of Learning Support

Before OLS had systems, it had Monika. Doing by hand what systems would later do.

I first walked into OLS as a student looking for support myself, carrying questions and anxieties I did not always know how to express. I could never have imagined that years later, I would return to work alongside the same team - to help create support systems for other students navigating similar challenges. It was never just an Office. It was a space where students felt seen, understood, and supported in ways that stayed with them long after.

What I remember most are the early days - the work that came purely from care and commitment. Endless hours manually making content accessible, supporting students one-on-one, physically walking with students with blindness across campus so they could navigate with confidence. At the time, these felt like small everyday efforts. They were the foundations of everything that followed.

I still remember the excitement around setting up the Assistive Technology Room - and the hope that technology could someday make learning more empowering and independent for students with disabilities.

The Assistive Technology Room, established in 2021, was the first of its kind in Indian higher education. This dedicated room houses state-of-the-art assistive technology solutions to facilitate academic independence. What once took 48 hours of manual content conversion can now be completed in minutes.

One of the most meaningful parts of my journey was getting the opportunity to conceptualise initiatives such as the Peer Learning Support Programme and the College Readiness Program. What began as conversations and early pilots slowly grew into initiatives that now reach students with disabilities and their families across India.

Watching systems evolve from manual effort to more sustainable, technology-enabled support - whether through accessible processes, independent navigation tools, or larger ecosystems of peer support - has been incredibly emotional to witness.

Somewhere along the way, OLS stopped being just a support system and became part of a much larger movement towards making higher education more inclusive, accessible, and humane.

Reena Ma'am's passion and unwavering belief gave OLS its heart, and working alongside Pritika through those years remains one of the warmest and most meaningful parts of my journey. And honestly, when I think about how far it has already come in ten years - I feel the most beautiful part of its story is still ahead.



ON STAYING

Pritika Gupta

Manager, Office of Learning Support

Pritika has watched OLS become something it didn't necessarily set out to be.

One of the first students I worked with taught me something I have carried ever since: support does not begin when you have the answer. It begins when you are willing to stay with a problem long enough to find one.

In 2022, a colleague and I were trying to make an Economics curriculum accessible with limited resources and a rapidly approaching semester. We spent weeks creating tactile graphs by hand and teaching ourselves new technologies. There were no ready-made solutions. We learned as we went, sharing what we knew and figuring out the rest together.

I used to think that the hardest part of this work would be responding to crises. Instead, some of the hardest lessons arrived when things were going well. The office was growing. I found myself spending as much time helping others navigate the work as doing it myself. What had once lived in conversations, instincts, and hard-earned experience suddenly needed to be taught, shared, and carried forward. For the first time, I understood that building something is one challenge; helping it grow without losing its soul is another. It also gave me something I did not have in my early years: perspective.

Time has a way of separating what feels urgent from what endures. The student who once carried immense shame around their disability, now confidently advocates for themselves. The student who no longer has to fight every battle alone because they know someone is standing beside them. The moment accessibility stops being a request and starts becoming part of how a university thinks.

Change accumulates quietly. Then one day, if you pay attention long enough, it becomes impossible to miss. Sometimes, you even get to watch it walk across the graduation stage.

Growth is easy to measure. What Pritika tracks is harder – whether the thing that made OLS worth building is still intact as it gets bigger.



THE RAMP MUST ALWAYS BE THERE

Amrit Balakrishnan

Deputy Manager, Office of Learning Support

Amrit has spent a lot of time trying to make buildings remember people.

Every time a visually impaired student navigates to class independently using our Braille signages and tactile QR codes, I feel immense pride. Yet campus infrastructure remains a harsh teacher; while these physical modifications may succeed, our campus navigation app proves that good intentions don't guarantee seamless impact, as digital accessibility demands an iterative, ongoing battle for perfection.

I felt this deeply when advocating for a single room for a student with dwarfism and visual impairment; securing that private space completely alleviated his anxiety and allowed him to truly integrate into his cohort. This underscores the need for institutions to be proactive rather than reactive. The ramp must always be there, regardless.

True inclusion must move far beyond a single office.

The campus navigation app, now used by 850+ Ashokans, required multiple iterations before reaching a usable and accessible version. The gap between good intentions and seamless impact is where most accessibility work actually happens – in the iterations, not the launches.

We saw this when our IT team sat down with disabled students to fix the University app; that face-to-face empathy broke the bureaucratic gridlock, transforming accessibility from an exhausting extra into a shared institutional culture.

This ethos must extend into the classroom. When a visually impaired student faced a philosophy course with heavily visual pedagogy, we had to innovate with tactile geometry kits so he could literally think through concepts with his fingers. That interaction shattered my old definitions of reasonable accommodations. Ultimately, removing these barriers is what drives my daily work – and tearing one down so a student can just focus on learning brings me immense joy.



NO SINGLE PATHWAY

Medhavi Bose

Deputy Manager, Office of Learning Support

Medhavi speaks two languages: school and university.

Working on the College Readiness Program has shown me that the transition to higher education is shaped by much more than academics alone. Through conversations with students, parents, educators, and disability experts, I've seen how important access to information, support systems, exposure, and confidence-building can be in helping students make informed decisions about their futures. These conversations have also influenced how we think about inclusion within OLS – encouraging us to reflect on skill-building, vocational pathways, mental health, and how we can continue creating environments that better support students as they navigate their journeys.

One area we are still working towards is sustaining engagement beyond a student's initial involvement with the programme. While we have built resources, webinars, courses, and networks, there is still an opportunity to strengthen long-term mentorship and more localised support systems.

Through this work, I have realised that meaningful change often happens when you stay in touch with the student or the parents to just check in on them. Some of the most rewarding moments have been seeing students return months later with greater confidence or simply the willingness to ask for help when they need it.

I've come to appreciate that there is no single pathway that fits everyone. Success may mean higher education for some, vocational training for others, or simply being able to speak up for their needs. Success for us is when we can one day say that a student has made the most of what we offered – and is navigating their journey independently.

The College Readiness Program has reached 1000+ beneficiaries across India. Medhavi's work on the school-university bridge is what makes the programme something more than college counselling – it changes how families think about possibility itself.



CLOSING THE DISTANCE

Gugloth Srikanth

Senior Associate, Office of Learning Support

Srikanth builds bridges between institutions – knowing the crossing takes longer than the building.

Working with the Inclusive University Alliance, what stood out to me most was that our conversations did not remain confined to individual campuses. The Alliance carried these learnings into engagement with the government – asking: what challenges have we seen? How have we addressed them? What barriers persist? These questions may not offer complete answers. But they reflect a collective commitment, and immense hope, for building a more inclusive higher education.

The network began in 2019 with a simple idea: no institution has all the answers. What matters is a platform where institutions can share and learn from one another's experiences, challenges, and practices. Over the years, this idea brought together eight premier higher education institutions, twelve organisations, and thirteen committed members. Every week, members grapple with questions of disability inclusion – identifying policy gaps, discussing academic challenges, sharing solutions drawn from their own practice.

What these conversations have taught me is that good policy and genuine practice are rarely the same thing – and that the distance between them is where students either find support or fall through. The Alliance exists to close that distance, together.

The Inclusive University Alliance brings together 31 members – but the number only tells part of the story. Behind it is years of relationship-building, shared learning, and the slow, patient work of creating a space where institutions don't just share best practices, but hold each other to them.



ON HOPE AND OUTCOME

Neha Wadhwa

Deputy Manager, Office of Learning Support
Neha knows what families don't say out loud.

'Not everything that counts can be counted, not everything that can be counted counts'.
– Albert Einstein

My work at OLS spans research, donor management, accessibility, and outreach – and across all of it, the same tension keeps surfacing. Numbers matter. They provide concrete evidence of impact. But numbers alone cannot capture what it actually feels like to be a student navigating a system not designed for them, or what it costs an administrator to care as deeply as this work demands. Through outreach, I often interact with prospective students and families who have previously navigated an educational system that never quite made room for them. Through our conversations, they begin to see higher education not just as an aspiration but as a real possibility. Watching that shift happen is deeply fulfilling.

But when students are not selected, the disappointment extends beyond an admissions decision. I have come to know their hopes, their anxieties, their dreams. It is difficult to detach yourself from that.

True belonging, I have come to understand, emerges when students no longer have to justify their needs – when accessibility is part of how a university thinks, not something it offers on request. That shift is already underway. And being part of it, however imperfectly, is what keeps me here.

Outreach means that Neha is often the point of first contact for families who have never encountered a support office before. What they bring to that first conversation – hope, fear, confusion, relief – is a measure of how far inclusion still needs to travel in Indian higher education.



THE HUMAN ENGINE

Nikita Kaushik

Deputy Manager, Office of Learning Support

Nikita arrived when the foundations were already laid – and immediately started building.

For years as a psychologist, my work centred on people – their experiences, their struggles, and the environments that shape them. When I joined OLS, what immediately caught my attention was a shared instinct and a profound sense of alignment. Sitting in that cubicle on the first floor of the admin block, I found myself among people who consistently asked, 'What else can be done here?' and 'What can be done differently?'

Watching solutions emerge so naturally from everyday conversations – in meetings, over tea-breaks, or around the lunch table – was both reassuring and inspiring. It felt like OLS's way of seeing the world closely mirrored my own: that lasting change emerges organically when people commit themselves to the same pursuit of possibility.

While we look back on a decade of metrics or the quiet triumph of the graduation stage, I learnt that the true soul of OLS lies in the human engine that builds those milestones. It is *he tāngata* - the people. It is the heart of everyone doing their bit to drive. The programmes, partnerships, and initiatives are the tangible, actionable expressions through which the world experiences that vision. Building on this shared drive, I am hopeful about the upcoming years, where our collective efforts and energy will continue to keep people exactly where they belong: right at the centre.

What we know now that we didn't know then: that infrastructure is only as inclusive as the culture around it. That the gap between policy and practice is bridged by people, not documents. That the families who come to us quietly are often carrying the most. That building something replicable means first accepting that your original model was incomplete. We are still in it - and that is not a failure. It is the work.



Reena Gupta

Founding Director, Office of Learning Support

Ten years ago, I told my team: “We will go slow and strong.”

We got restless. We wanted speed.

Instead, we had to stop and repeatedly explain why accessibility for one student mattered just as much as a functional classroom for a hundred. We had to repeatedly argue why an academic accommodation was not an “unfair advantage,” but basic justice. We had to prove, day after day, that equity cannot be measured in headcount.

We do that even today. We still justify. We still explain. But there’s a difference. The room has grown. Today, those conversations are happening with institutions across the entire Indian higher education landscape.

A decade ago, we were laying groundwork. We had to show why inclusion was central to Ashoka’s mission. Today, we work side by side with everyone at Ashoka, living up to high standards of equity and belonging set in our policies and daily practice.

That shift was not seamless. We stumbled, misjudged expectations, and wrestled with tough ethical choices.

As we grew, our impact spilled beyond campus. We helped spark a broader shift across Indian higher education, serving as a blueprint for accessibility across the country. That path carried its own friction. Many assumed that our progress was purely a result of elite funding. We had to prove that true inclusion is built on empathy, culture, and intent–not just budgets. Inclusion takes institutional will, not just financial wealth.

Building OLS was never about quick wins. We were never fast. We were never perfect.

But ten years later, we remain standing strong, grounded in human dignity, many students at a time.

The People Behind It



The beginning



Along the way



Ten years on

THE WIDENING CIRCLE

Student

Understanding the Need

First conversations and initial screening · psycho-educational assessments · referrals to external specialists when needed · onboarding and ongoing communication with families · accommodations during the admission cycle · regular check-ins

One-to-One Support & Accommodations

Extra time in exams · scribes and readers · note-takers · accessible reading material and course content · one-to-one sessions with OLS and regular check-ins · executive-function coaching · assistive technology resources and training

The Campus Around Them

Teaching & the Classroom: faculty–OLS liaison; inclusive teaching and assessment; tactile STEM adaptations for lab work

Residences & Daily Life: accessible rooms in Residence Halls; inclusive common spaces; carer support coordination; accessible dining, events, and travel; barrier-free navigation; supporting students into RA and mentor roles

Specialised Spaces & Tools: the Assistive Technology Room; the Sensory Room; Braille signage, tactile QR codes, navigation apps and booklets

Peer & Social: Campus Buddy Programme; Peer Learning Support Programme; awareness and sensitisation with student clubs

Beyond the Campus

Transition & Readiness: College Readiness Program · IdeaPal

Building Inclusive Ecosystems: Inclusive University Alliance · annual national Conclave and Idea Labs · partnerships with other HEIs and corporate partners · programmes with Government of India regulatory bodies

Research, Advocacy & Publications: hiring toolkits, baseline reports, and research papers · talks and presentations at conferences · focus group discussions · survey reports

Careers & Workplace: career guidance and placement support

CHAPTER V

The Ripple Effect

On what happens when a model leaves the place that made it.



Every institution that has ever built something meaningful faces the same moment: when what it made starts to travel. Not in reports or presentations, but in people - in the questions other institutions begin to ask, in the families who find their way to a programme they never knew existed, in the slow shift of a sector that begins to imagine something different. This is where OLS is now.



THE WIDER RESPONSIBILITY

Venkat Eshwara

Pro Vice-Chancellor (Development, Placements, Alumni Relations and Strategic Communications), Ashoka University

The Office of Learning Support and the work done by Reena Gupta sit at the core of what Ashoka stands for: the idea that every student is unique, and that differences in learning should never become barriers to opportunity. By supporting students with their unique challenges, OLS moves beyond accommodation toward genuine inclusion. To me, this work is not just about providing services; it is about rethinking accessibility.

As a young, rapidly scaling University, our founders have always maintained that institutional growth must never outpace our commitment to equity. Inclusion cannot be an afterthought; it must remain central to our expansion, embedding long-term systems of access and belonging into the very architecture of the University.

But our responsibility does not end at our campus gates. There is a critical, collective need to champion this ethos across the wider higher education landscape in India. By evolving our practices from individual student support to a systemic model, Ashoka is proof that this process works.

The pioneering framework established by OLS serves as a definitive blueprint for this transformation, positioning Ashoka as a true thought leader in the national discourse on inclusive education.



At some point, the question stopped being how to support students at Ashoka - and became how to ensure that students everywhere could find what these students found. That shift, from institution to movement, did not happen in a single decision. It happened the way all meaningful things do: gradually, then all at once - through programmes, partnerships, and platforms, through whatever form the next problem demanded. What follows is the story of three of them, as told by the people who lived it.

THE COLLEGE READINESS PROGRAM

For many students with disabilities, the barrier to higher education isn't ability - it's information. Which universities offer support? What does the application process look like? What accommodations can a student ask for, and how? The College Readiness Program was built to answer those questions - for free, for any family that needs it, across India.

Arveen Singh

Parent of Adheep · College Readiness Program Participant

The College Readiness Program was very helpful for Adheep. He was in the eleventh grade when I first attended the webinar. It gave me the confidence that, although Adheep has learning difficulties, he will be able to prepare well for his college application, and that the college will be able to support his individual needs.

I was very impressed by the assistive technology initiatives aimed at supporting children. Another thing I valued most was the clear focus of the programme on fostering independence in our kids, helping them become self-directed learners. I am very grateful to the OLS department - they were always approachable and ready to provide him with support and guidance, not only in terms of academics but also on the personal front.

I truly value and recommend the College Readiness Program for any child needing extra support. It gives students the confidence and insight they need for the college experience ahead. Adheep has now successfully completed his first year, and I have seen him grow through the year and blossom into a confident young man.

Sonam Moondhra

Career Counsellor · College Readiness Program

My association with the Office of Learning Support has been both a privilege and a deeply meaningful extension of my own twenty-year journey in college counselling. Over the years, I have watched OLS grow from an important support initiative into a pioneering space that has changed the way we speak about learning diversity, higher education, and possibility in India.

For many students with diverse learning needs, and for their parents, the idea of college can feel overwhelming – even frightening. When regular academic work itself requires immense effort, the transition to higher education can become a traumatic and uncertain process. Quality college counselling in this space remains extremely limited in India.

Through the College Readiness Program, OLS has helped bridge this gap – making thoughtful, learning-informed guidance accessible at no cost to families who may otherwise have limited access to such support.

Launched in 2021, the College Readiness Program is offered at no cost – extending college counselling and transition support beyond the metropolitan centres and private schools where such guidance has long been confined.

What makes OLS remarkable is that its work aligns with global standards of inclusive higher education while remaining deeply sensitive to the Indian context. Every child is unique, worthy, and capable of pathways beyond conventional definitions of success. When such children are understood, supported, and guided with dignity – they do not merely survive. They arrive.

The College Readiness Program proved that what OLS had built could travel – that it didn't belong to Ashoka alone. But a programme reaching families is one kind of impact. A national alliance reshaping how institutions think and build – that is another.

THE INCLUSIVE UNIVERSITY ALLIANCE



In 2019, a group of institutions came together over a single question: what if universities stopped solving the problem of inclusion alone? The answer was the Inclusive University Alliance (IUA) – a network built on a simple idea: share frameworks, advocate together, move faster than any single institution could alone.

Restructured in 2025 and anchored by Ashoka University through its Office of Learning Support, IUA today brings together 8 higher education institutions, 10 organisations, and 13 individuals – all united by one conviction: accessible higher education in India cannot wait.

Bhuvaneswari B

Faculty, Azim Premji University · Member, Inclusive University Alliance

Higher education institutions have started recognising disability inclusion as a path to institutional excellence rather than a matter of compliance. As higher education evolves, institutional success will increasingly be measured not only by rankings but also by the capacity to create compassionate learning environments. This requires kindness in leadership and a culture that prioritises human dignity.

In spaces that value disability and neurodiversity as a natural human variation, accessibility is no longer viewed as an add-on service. Accessibility and accommodations are embedded within the design of teaching, in assessment, infrastructure, technology, and student support systems. Institutionalising accessibility demands systemic change – creating policies, building faculty capacity, developing a growth mindset, and strengthening support systems. Such efforts benefit not only students with disabilities and neurodiversity, but also contribute to more flexible, responsive, and inclusive learning environments for all learners.

The Office of Learning Support at Ashoka University has set a benchmark for disability inclusion in higher education and has shaped national conversations around accessibility, disability, neurodiversity, and belonging on university campuses.

This year IUA's member institutions are stepping in as knowledge partners at the Conclave – the annual gathering, now in its fourth edition, that brings together institutions, practitioners, and policymakers working on disability inclusion in higher education. It's a shift that turns what was once a conversation led by one Office into one the whole sector is having together.

Taking cues from OLS, higher education institutions should not merely provide access, but create environments where every student, irrespective of their (dis)ability and background, can participate fully, contribute meaningfully, and thrive. In doing so, such institutions strengthen not only their inclusivity but also their quality and institutional character.

PVM Rao

Faculty, IIT Delhi · Member, Inclusive University Alliance

Over the last ten years, the landscape of accessibility across institutions of higher learning is slowly shifting. Some premier Indian institutions are moving on from mere architectural compliance – a single ramp – to building cohesive, systemic support for accessibility. We are witnessing assistive technologies, individualised learning support plans, and structured academic accommodations transition from revolutionary ideas to real practice. However, this is happening in only a small number of institutions.

Institutionalising accessibility calls for a very different mindset. It requires universities to acknowledge that equity cannot be an afterthought or a series of exceptional workarounds. Universal design must be integrated into pedagogical and physical infrastructure, and disability embraced as a natural dimension of human diversity. OLS at Ashoka University is a true example of this.

Creating diverse and accessible campuses actively strengthens a university's academic rigour and institutional

character. When we welcome diverse mindsets – including neurodivergent individuals and those with physical or sensory disabilities – we disrupt rigid cognitive biases, enrich classroom discourse, and cultivate a campus empathy that defines true leadership.

In this national journey, OLS has been a genuine flag-bearer. By championing neurodiversity and creating a blueprint for comprehensive accommodations, OLS has set a benchmark for campuses across India. Its decade-long work has shifted the national conversation from charity to fundamental rights, proving that an inclusive campus is a thriving campus.

Today the Alliance carries its members' voices directly to the policy table – engaging both the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. Policy on disability inclusion in higher education is still finding its shape, and the experience of institutions on the ground ensures it is grounded in practice.

The Alliance brought institutions together. But OLS understood that a meeting, however meaningful, is not a blueprint. The knowledge accumulated over ten years – the frameworks, the assessments, the accommodation processes, the hard lessons – needed to be available to any institution, at any time, without a conference fee or a membership requirement.

IdeaPal



A free, open resource for any institution that wants to build what Ashoka built.

IdeaPal is OLS's open-access knowledge platform – a step-by-step guide to making a campus genuinely inclusive, hosted on the OLS webpage and available to any university, anywhere, at no cost. It is ten years of hard-won knowledge, developed collaboratively, distilled into something any institution can act on. The frameworks developed in real time, tested on real students, revised after real failures - packaged not as a report but as a tool.

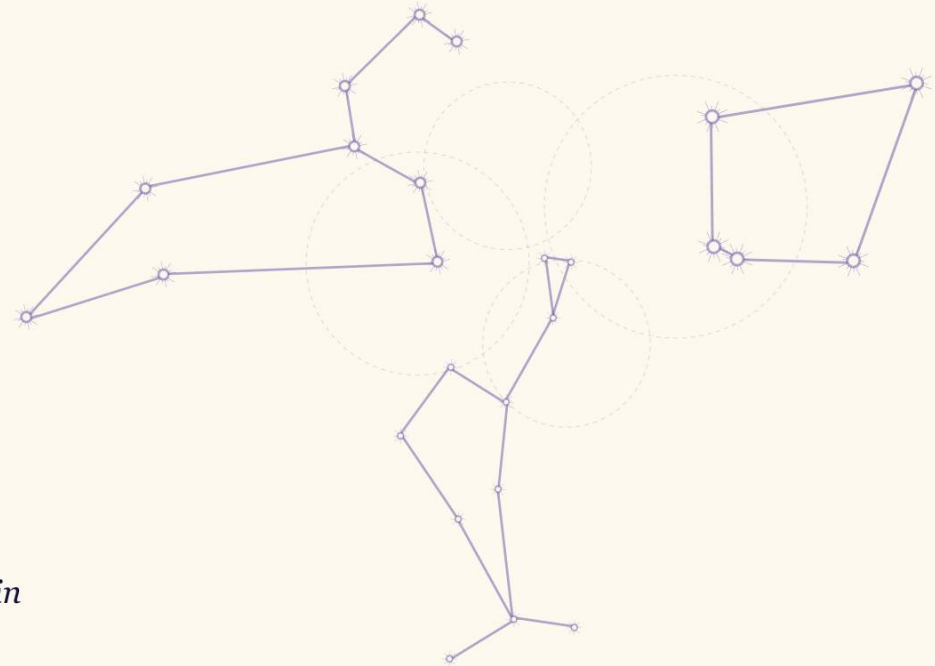
OLS built IdeaPal so ten years of learning can become something any institution can act on tomorrow

Beyond the programmes and the platform, OLS has also been present at the tables where policy is made, helping shape accessibility guidelines that extend beyond any single institution. The work of inclusion requires both the intimate and the institutional. Both the student in the room and the policy that makes room for them.

Ten years ago, OLS was a response to an immediate need on one campus. Today it is something closer to a question - one that more and more institutions are beginning to ask themselves. Not 'do we have an accessibility office?' but 'have we built a university that includes everyone?' OLS did not just answer that question for Ashoka. It showed others how to begin asking it.

ONWARDS

The Next Ten Years



We came here with different needs, different fears, different definitions of what belonging might mean. What we found – in this Office, in this community, in each other – was something none of us could have built alone.

What the next decade demands is both deeper and broader than what the first required. Deeper: Universal Design for Learning embedded as the default pedagogy across every classroom, every course, every assessment. Broader: the IUA model reaching institutions in cities and towns where disability support has never existed, through IdeaPal, through the Conclave, through the patient work of changing what institutions believe is possible.

The policy table matters now more than ever. Engagement with regulatory authorities and the ministries that shape national education means that what OLS built at Ashoka has the potential to become the expectation across Indian higher education. That work is underway.

But above all, one conviction will shape everything that follows:
there is no voice stronger than the students themselves.

The next decade will be defined by what students build for the generations after them. Equipped with agency, tools, and platforms to advocate for their own rights, they will carry inclusion far beyond any office.

Genuine inclusion produces people who understand, from the inside, what it means to build something that outlasts you.

The students who found the door open will hold it open for others.

The next chapter belongs to them.

That is what ten years of intent builds. And it is only the beginning.

Acknowledgements

This book exists because people were willing to remember – and willing to share what they remembered. Every voice in these pages trusted us with something real. That trust is the foundation of everything here.

To the students and alumni who wrote, spoke, and reflected with such candour: this book is yours. You did not have to tell these stories. The fact that you chose to is the most important thing about this project.

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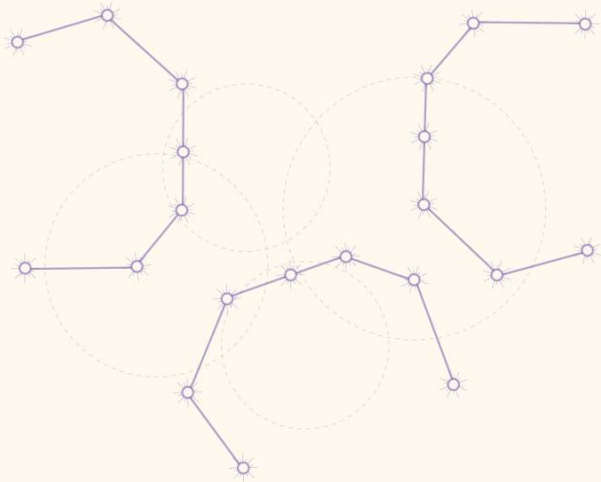
Hemant Andania

Content and Editorial

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To Ashoka University – for making the space, and for understanding that what fills that space matters.

To every institution that has since asked how: this book is part of the answer.



Abbreviations

ADHD – Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
AICTE – All India Council for Technical Education
ASP – Ashoka Scholars Programme
ATR – Assistive Technology Room
CRP – College Readiness Program
IUA – Inclusive University Alliance
NAAC – National Assessment and Accreditation Council
NGO – Non-Governmental Organisation
NIRF – National Institutional Ranking Framework
OLS – Office of Learning Support
PLSP – Peer Learning Support Programme
RA – Resident Assistant
STEM – Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
UDL – Universal Design for Learning
YSP – Young Scholars Programme

Connect

The work documented in this book continues. These are the places to find it, follow it, and join it.

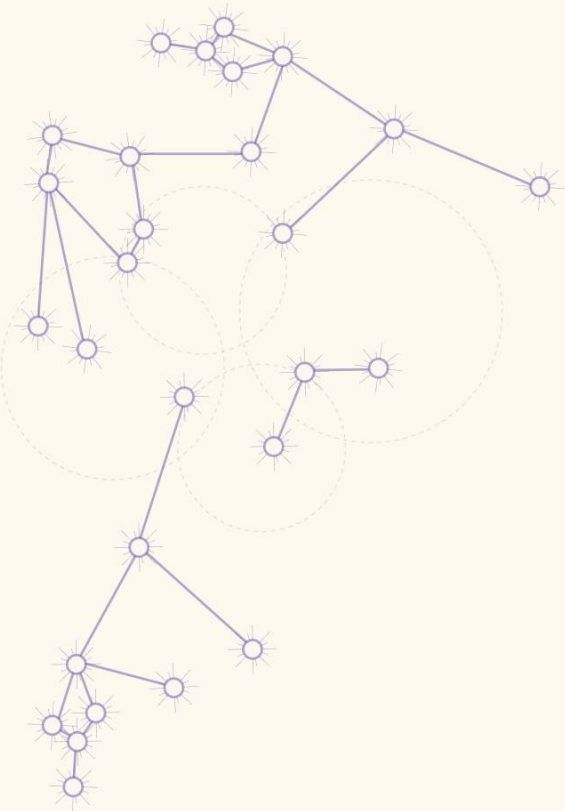
OLS Webpage
ashoka.edu.in/page/office-of-learning-support

IdeaPal – Inclusive Campus Resource
ashoka.edu.in/academic-programme/welcome-to-ideapal

College Readiness Program
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years of

YOU

10 years of

