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Reaching the Unreached

The Journey of Arunodaya Charitable Trust (ACT)

Arun Sethi [1] Reena Sethi [1], Will Spackman [2] , Vaibhav Sethi[1], Aditya Sethi[1], Sahebaan Sethi[1]

1. Arunodaya Deseret Eye Hospital (ADEH), Gurugram, Haryana, India

2. Torbay Hospital, Peninsula Deanery, United Kingdom

Background

- Arunodaya Charitable Trust (ACT) was founded in 1990 by Drs. Reena and Arun Sethi, a couple of ophthalmologists, who embarked on a remarkable journey aimed at providing quality eye care to underserved communities in India.
- The Trust's genesis was rooted in the idea of creating a community-based eye care project where private practitioners could offer their expertise, limited time, and resources in an organized, effective manner, to help those who would otherwise be deprived of proper medical attention.
- The couple, passionate about their cause, began by offering eye care services under a banyan tree in a village on the outskirts of New Delhi.
- The initial efforts, though simple, were born out of a deep desire to help those in dire need. The sight of patients receiving free consultations and basic eye care services, regardless of their social or economic background, became a beacon of hope.
- This first initiative was modest, but the couple's vision was grand. They believed that providing quality eye care was not just a matter of medical intervention, but a way of improving the lives of entire communities by offering them access to services they could not afford.



The Mission

- ACT's mission was aimed specifically at the economically weaker sections of society, who often do not have access to the resources required to get proper medical care.
- In the early stages of the project, the Trust's services were offered on an entirely voluntary basis. Private practitioners, including local ophthalmologists, joined hands to devote their time and skills to this cause.
- As the need for quality eye care was so vast and urgent, the couple quickly realized that this was not a problem that could be solved by just one team or a few individuals. A scalable, sustainable model was needed, one that could involve multiple stakeholders and support long-term growth.
- ACT's core objective was not merely the provision of treatment but to create a system of outreach, awareness, and education.
- The Trust wanted to make eye care accessible and affordable to the masses, particularly for those in rural areas or urban slums who were otherwise isolated from the medical community.
- The Trust also recognized that in order to build trust within the communities they served, it was essential to educate people about eye health, preventative measures, and the importance of early intervention.

Outreach Model

- ACT's model of outreach included conducting free eye check-up camps in various villages and remote areas.
- These camps would not only provide basic diagnostic services but would also distribute spectacles and medications to those who required them.
- Over time, ACT expanded the scope of its services to include more complex procedures, including cataract surgeries and treatments for conditions such as glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy, and other eye-related disorders.
- These services were provided either free of cost or at a nominal charge, depending on the patient's financial capacity.

Impact

- To date, over 1.6 million patients from underprivileged backgrounds have benefited from the Trust's services. These patients have received consultations, treatment, surgeries, and follow-up care.
- With such a large patient base, the scale of ACT's outreach has grown significantly, spreading across rural areas, urban slums, and low-income neighbourhoods of New Delhi, and beyond.
- The Trust's work has not only contributed to the improvement of individual health but has also enhanced the quality of life for entire communities by providing essential health care services to a population that would otherwise be left behind.
- In addition to its medical efforts, ACT has prioritized the training of local community workers and volunteers. By involving the community in its activities, the Trust has ensured the sustainability of its programs and a more widespread impact.
- Volunteers have been trained to assist in eye care camps, spread awareness about eye health, and support the logistical operations of ACT's initiatives.
- This approach has been crucial in creating long-lasting change, as local communities themselves become agents of change, capable of carrying the message of eye health forward.
- ACT has also collaborated with other organizations, government agencies, and corporate entities to strengthen its efforts and expand its impact. These partnerships have enabled the Trust to access additional resources, improve the quality of care provided, and increase its geographical reach.
- The support from these partners has made it possible for ACT to offer a wider range of services, from vision screenings and preventive treatments to major surgeries and post-operative care.

Conclusions

- The Trust's innovative approach to providing eye care has garnered widespread recognition, and its work has been featured in several national and international forums.
- ACT's success lies in its ability to bridge the gap between the underprivileged and the healthcare system, making a tangible difference in the lives of those it serves.
- ACT's journey from treating patients under a banyan tree to becoming a leading provider of eye care services for the economically disadvantaged is a testament to the power of vision, compassion, and commitment.
- The Sethi couple's initial vision has blossomed into a significant movement, one that continues to touch the lives of millions and has set a benchmark for community-based health initiatives in India.
- The Trust's work exemplifies how grassroots efforts, when combined with professional expertise and a clear vision, can create lasting, positive change for those who need it most.
- Arunodaya Charitable Trust's journey is an inspiring story of reaching the unreached, breaking barriers in healthcare, and empowering communities.
- With a focus on equitable access to eye care, ACT has proven that the difference between blindness and sight, health and suffering, lies not in wealth or location, but in opportunity.
- Through its sustained efforts, ACT is ensuring that quality eye care becomes a right, not a privilege, for the most vulnerable populations in India.