

# EMPOWERING WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES



## MOVING FROM CHARITY TO RIGHT BASED MODEL

Handicap International / Humanity & Inclusion in Partnership with UN Women

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UN Women Pakistan

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# Preface

Even though under-reported, over 1 million persons with disabilities exist among us in Pakistan; most considered undesirable, locked behind closed doors and left neglected. The mentally ill are locked in a small room for hours on end and women with disabilities are married off only to serve as a servant in their husbands' house. Despite having equal qualifications, companies are more inclined to hire people without disabilities while on the other hand, factories exploit children and women with disabilities by making them work in tough conditions for hours on end with minimal pay. Our values teach us to be fair towards each other and to promote fairness and inclusion in our communities then why is it that we treat persons with disabilities so unfairly? Why is it that we consider them invisible?

Considering that over 90% of women with disabilities are confined to household chores, Handicap International with financial support from UN Women decided to arrange skill training to help women with disabilities take a step outside of their homes and earn a living. They were able to arrange skill training for 167 women with disabilities from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) Sindh and Islamabad with the main focus of the training was the economic empowerment and social well-being of women with disabilities.

Keeping in mind the scope for handicrafts in Pakistan, women in Bari Imam Islamabad were provided skill training to make masterpieces from marble mosaics with the help of a professional trainer. The women were given orientation on the basics of marble arrangement after which they let their creativity unleash. These women were able to make splendid artworks with colorful marble pieces and intricate patterns, some of which were also sold in different crafts exhibition arranged in the Islamabad Capital Territory.

In Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, women with disabilities were taught a wide variety of skills such as embroidery, stitching, making house décor and baking skills in a disable friendly kitchen. These women were not only ecstatic about having to learn unique skills but were also happy interacting with other women with disabilities. The skill training was able to give these women hope; hope for a dignified life and hope for a tomorrow where they are not considered undesirable. Interacting with each other, women with disabilities were able to comfort each other and move on from grievances from their past.

This compilation goes out to all the women who spend their life behind closed doors, neglected and belittled. To all the women who stay strong regardless of how the world bashes them. All the women who despite facing difficulties in today's society head out of their homes to provide for their families. To all the women who do not let their disabilities define them.

Stay strong and redefine yourself.

## MOVING FROM CHARITY TO RIGHT BASED APPROACH



## OUTCOMES OF THE PROJECT

Enhanced capacity of relevant government entities to monitor and report on the rights of persons with disabilities

Enhanced awareness and capacities of stakeholders to increase employment for women with disabilities

Enhanced capacity of persons with disabilities in particular women, to advocate for their rights

Enhanced capacity of institutions to respond to GBV of women with disabilities



**REDEFINED**





## Bilquees

In the further left corner of the room, you'd usually be able to spot Bilquees diligently working on her pieces while rocking her daughter who slept soundly in her lap. Once in a while, she'd take a break, tired by the hard labor, and gently stroke her daughter's hair, even placing gentle kisses on her bubbly cheeks. The sight of it alone was enough to make you miss your own mother, wishing you would once again become a child and rest in your mother's embrace. Looking at Bilquees, she radiated love not only for her daughters but also for the women around her. However, even though she cared for everyone around her, she had very little love reserved for herself.



30-year-old Bilquees had gotten into the habit of hiding her hand under her shawl. A few years ago, she lost the function of one of her arms due to nerve damage and has been feeling incomplete ever since. She'd find herself constantly comparing herself to her friends and relatives: thinking she was unattractive, undesirable and rather plain. It was her daughters that helped her regain confidence in herself.

Bilquees had been discouraged and abandoned by her family as she was now considered undesirable but she certainly did not want to give in to the people who had left her three daughters and her stranded. Gaining strength for the sake of her daughters, she headed out of home to learn new skills and make a living on her own. She had tried stitching clothes for women in her community; however, people took advantage of her disability and paid her less than what tailors usually get paid. Attentively learning at the training, she wishes to gain expertise in stitching and designing clothes to make elegant dresses and innovative house décor to eventually start a business of her own. Bilquees looks up to her trainers and hopes that her daughters will be well educated so that they can someday be self-sufficient like other office women.



## Dr. Zeb Taj

In the blink of an eye, something happens that takes our future to a direction least expected. Dr. Zeb was living a fulfilled life; her family did not face any financial difficulties, she was a diligent medical student and was about to get married to the man of her dreams. She had all the conveniences and blessings that many longed to have. Dr. Zeb was grateful for the bounty, it's just that she didn't know they would be snatched from her in the blink of an eye.



A week or two after her wedding, Dr. Zeb was traveling towards her relatives for dinner with her husband, brother-in-law and her mother-in-law. Taking advantage of a relatively open road, her brother-in-law sped through the highway and was stopped by the traffic police for speeding. The brother-in-law being arrogant in nature, got into a fight with the officer. He argued that since he came to Pakistan after a long time, he had forgotten the traffic rules of Pakistan. The situation escalated when he threatened to report the officers to the superior authorities if they didn't let him go. This instigated the police officers and they called for backup. Dr. Zeb's husband and mother-in-law left the car to try to convince the group who had now gotten into a physical fight. Dr. Zeb helplessly watched the scene unfold from the window of the car when she suddenly felt a jolt of pain in her body.

Seeing the situation unfold, an officer from the backup police van open-fired; however, it ended up passing through the car's exterior and embedded itself in Dr. Zeb's spine.

Dr. Zeb was rushed to the hospital where the doctors announced that she wouldn't be able to walk for the rest of her life. Due to the sheer impact of the bullet, her spinal cord had been damaged and she lost her mobility. The doctors still showed some signs of hope which is why Dr. Zeb's father let her stay in the hospital for recovery and physiotherapy. In the meanwhile, a report was filed against the police officers but the news was brushed under the carpet by senior police officers in an attempt to save their jobs and reputation.

Dr. Zeb spent the next few months in denial, she refused to accept that she had lost her mobility and would wish it was all a nightmare that would soon end. Frustrated at home, she decided to head outside and find other people like her.

When she first arrived at the training center, she was anxious and almost reluctant to be friends with the other women around her. However, eventually, she warmed up and found comfort in the company of these women. Even though she was not used to doing household chores, at the training center she was taught to manage her tasks and to be independent. This would also serve as a way of exercising for her.

Dr. Zeb did lose hope but is slowly gaining back her confidence. By teaching other women in the training center and by interacting with her trainers, she is learning to accept how she is. She is coming to agree with the fact that disability or not, she is still the same talented woman she was before her accident. With persuasion and encouragement by the people around her, she wishes to step out into the world again and prove to the Pakistani society that she indeed does not need any man's assistance and can lead an independent life.

## Amina

A resident of Peshawar, Amina is a determined 18-year-old who wishes to change her life for the best. When Amina was only a few years old, she caught a fever which left her with polio.

Despite her disability and her family's financial difficulties, Amina is determined to work hard and live a normal life like others around her. Recently, she passed her matriculation examinations and will be enrolling for college courses as well. Despite the fact that the school was one and a half a kilometer away, Amina buckled up and attended school every day.

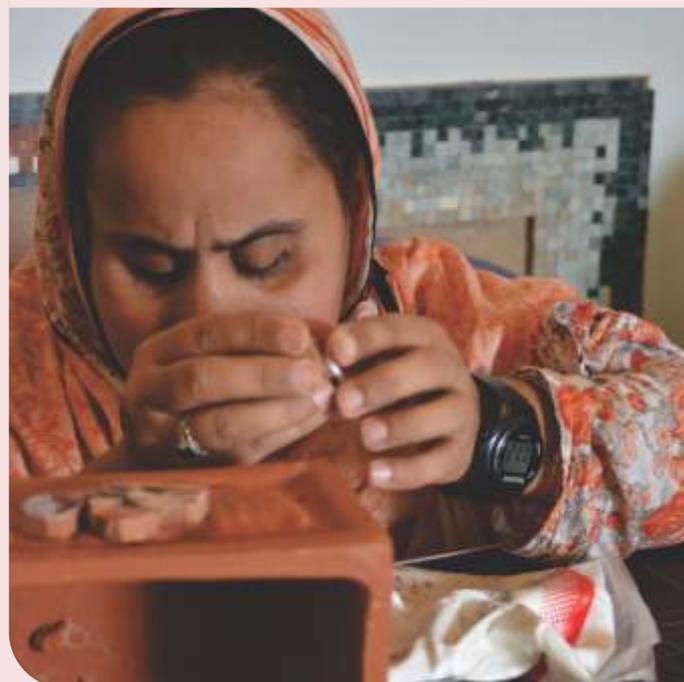


“I used to walk for about one and a half kilometers from my home to reach my school. It was hard but my ambitions were far stronger than my disability”

After many trials and errors, Amina has found a way to hold the pen with her affected hand and can write her assignments with relative ease now. She learned to stitch clothes from the women around her and after much practice, she is now able to stitch intricate designs onto clothes. In the future, Amina not only wants to complete her education but also wants to learn further skills in stitching and embroidery. She believes that it is not only an essential skill to have but will also help her earn an income to support her family.

Her father works as a laborer in a local vegetable market and despite his hard work, he earns very little. Amina's family lives from mouth to mouth and have survived with limited financial resources for years. Amina wishes to empower herself so that she can help provide for her family's everyday needs. Having the drive to learn, Amina remained a very active participant in the skill trainings and constant practice enabled her to improve rapidly.

“I have strong ambitions and I have decided to beat my disability and move forward. I see this skill training as a great opportunity for me to grow. My education is going to help me in my work and distinguish me from the people around me”



## Naseem

Looking and examining the murals made at the training center, there are certain pieces that stand out. Murals that have a good selection and mixture of color, precision, and creativity in their design. Most of these pieces are made by Naseem, a student who the trainer claims is a prodigy among her fellows. Despite the fact that Naseem is visually impaired and does not have any sight since childhood, she uses marble pieces as a guideline and manages to make pristine designs.

Like Naseem, life hasn't been easy for her family members either. Naseem has two other sisters who are also visually impaired; her only brother has a mental disability due to which he has never had the opportunity to attend school or receive any skills training. Naseem's father is a wheelchair user and he assists Naseem in running a small shop on the street selling snacks to children. Naseem handles dealings at the shop while her father buys the supplies to sell at the wholesale market. Realizing that the neighborhood children could take advantage of her impairment, her father taught her not only to distinguish between different snacks by touching them but also taught her to differentiate between different notes of money. Within only a few seconds, Naseem can distinguish between coins and notes by touching and identifying significant spots.

Naseem realized that the shop barely made them profit to sustain the entire family; therefore, she headed out of home to put her skills to good use and support her family. Naseem is skilled in the art of jewelry making, decorative crafts and perfume making. Her hard work isn't always fruitful, though she makes pieces diligently, they rarely sell due to which she makes little earning. Naseem's wish is to use the skills she learned at her shop to be able to run a bigger business someday and showcase her handmade crafts. She wants to be an example to her sisters and the women around her to signify that even persons with disabilities are capable of running businesses if given the support and opportunity. Even with all the challenges Naseem encounters, she wishes to stay positive and create a colorful world for her family and her.





## Komal Arif

26-year-old Komal Arif has a burning desire to make improvements in her life. Slowly gaining confidence and becoming brave, Komal learned to face challenges head-on and to never give up on her beliefs. As a woman with a disability affected by polio, she has to commute using a bike customized for her. On the first day of training, Komal fell off her bike while commuting to the training center and hurt her knee. Thankfully, the people passing by helped her off of the road and back onto the bike; however, sensing jolting pain in her knee and being surrounded by unfamiliar faces, Komal was set into a state of panic. She wanted to go back to the comfort of her own home but she knew that she couldn't back off from the opportunities the training center would provide. Fighting back her fears, Komal got back on track and managed to make it to the training center on time.



Komal attended a local school in her area; however, due to her disability she was discouraged by her teachers and lost interest in wanting to study. Nevertheless, one year out of curiosity she picked up her sibling's notebooks and was intrigued by the curves of the letters and how entire words flowed on paper. She didn't know what they meant or how they were pronounced but she started tracing on top of those letters out of curiosity. Redeveloping an interest in learning due to her sibling's efforts and storybooks, Komal started attending school again and graduated as well! Komal wishes to learn new skills that she could not only implement in her life but also teach other women and girls with disabilities who may not be blessed with opportunities as her.

Inspired by the TED Talks and works of Muneba Mazari, Komal dreams to become a motivational speaker. She wants to stand on stage to face a crowd of hundreds of listeners, overcome her fears and spread awareness regarding the rights of persons with disabilities and the problems that women with disabilities encounter due to societal pressures and the lack of accessibility. She expressed a wish to attain further higher education and then eventually start an organization of her own that would provide opportunities to underprivileged women like this training did.



## Aksa Naz

A sweet voice fills the air as you walk closer to the training room. The voice starts off in a low and mellow tone accompanied by the occasional snapping of fingers to the melody. Gradually, the honey-like voice picks momentum to transform into a spirited tune. From the snapping of fingers, you can now even hear the clapping of hands and the drumming of tables. Peeping through the window, you'd spot Aksa singing her favorite song while everyone else hummed to the cheerful melody. The end of the beautiful performance is treated with cheers from all the women while Parveen even flails her arms in joy.



Earphones plugged into her phone, you'd often find Aksa humming to her favorite songs as she arranges an assortment of marble pieces on the board. When you first meet her, you don't notice her twisted legs but rather her colorful personality.

Aksa Naz is a 15-year-old who knows how to enjoy life to the fullest. Despite only being in 7th grade, she already has an artistic soul. Aksa enjoys illustrating, crafting, reading horror stories and most important of all, listening to music. Occasionally when the women at the training center are overwhelmed with work and weak of spirit, Aksa sings a song for them to cheer them up. Sometimes she sings a national song to invoke a sense of passion while other times a song from a movie she recently watched. She tries her best at school so that she can fulfill her dream of becoming a doctor, her dream of helping other people with disabilities. She clearly remembers the times she had to get painful surgeries, 35 to be precise. Having gone through the pain, she wishes that no other person with a disability will have to go through the same physical pain that she had to endure.



## Parveen

There is only one way to describe Parveen: the sunshine of the training center. Being kind natured and jolly, she embraces and interacts with everyone she meets. With her presence and the wide smile on her face, you can spot no one in the training center with a frown. It's almost as if there is a childish side to Parveen, the childish side that wants to make sure everyone stays happy. Despite having Cerebral Palsy, she gained a lot of control over skills and makes one of the best pieces among the other women. Of course, Parveen doesn't hesitate to show off her pieces to visitors.



Besides her excellent crafts, there is something else Parveen likes to show off about: her parents. Parveen immensely loves her parents and would never let go of an opportunity to talk about them. She's very thankful to her ammi for making her biryani and to her abboo for laughing at her jokes.

Parveen always expresses that she wants to live a simple life without any worries, she wants to eat good food, make the people around her happy and see her parents happy for as long as she can.



## Urooj Siddique

Our elders always remind us that even during the most challenging times, one must stay strong, stay persistent and never lose hope. By taking this advice from her family, Urooj Siddique was able to survive so far.

Residing in Karachi Urooj lives with her parents, 3 sisters, a brother, and his family as well. Their family originated from Kashmir but settled in Karachi for a better lifestyle. Due to the love Urooj receives from her family members, she is a very kind-hearted and optimistic character.

When Urooj was only three years old, she caught a fever which wouldn't cool down. Concerned, her parents rushed her to the hospital and upon examining her condition, the doctors were alarmed as well. The doctors had said that saving Urooj's life would be difficult, that her parents should pray to Allah for her life but should also prepare themselves for the worst-case scenario. Thankfully though, Urooj's fever was able to cool down and she was able to recover. However, due to a sudden change in body chemicals, she would become short heighted and lost strength in her limbs.

Of course, it saddens Urooj that she cannot live a life like other children can; however, she is thankful that she is alive and is living among her loving family members. Since Urooj was often bullied and discouraged at school by her teachers and classmates, she left school and was never able to complete her education. In addition to that, since Urooj did not have much strength in her arms, she was not able to write fast during examinations.

Now, Urooj wishes to gain strength and find different skills that she will be able to learn despite her condition. Instead of focusing on her disability, she wants to remain positive and explore the abilities that her brilliant body and brain possess. For the first time in years, Urooj took a step out of her apartment complex and stepped on Earth's soil. She breathed the fine air and smiled at the sunshine beaming on her face. Due to her disability, she wasn't able to go out as her apartment complex didn't have an elevator and she'd need someone's assistance to get down the long flight of stairs. With help



from caretakers at the training center, Urooj was able to get out of her little abode and to the wide world.

At the training center, Urooj is very friendly with her fellow learners and often jokes around to liven up everyone's mood. She now wishes not only to improve her life but to also make others happy around her. She tries her best to engage herself with the people around her and even runs social media accounts to follow celebrities she looks up to. She believes that making other people happy will someday bring joy into her own life as well. In addition to that, Urooj prays five times a day, reads the Quran and prays for a better tomorrow.

## Nusrat Bibi

Nusrat Bibi is a 25-year-old residing in Peshawar. Nusrat was a perfectly healthy baby; however, at the age of two, she unexpectedly got severely sick and caught a fever. Worried about the health of their child, her parents took her to a dispensary where the doctor diagnosed her by giving her an injection. After a couple of days though her parents noticed that Nusrat was not able to walk normally and that her foot seemed to be twisted. She would lose her balance easily and had trouble walking. They had an uneasy feeling that something about their daughter was nothing like it was before.



Nusrat without a doubt is a very talented girl. Instead of giving in to her disability, she turned it into her greatest abilities. Despite the difficulties as a disabled woman in Pakistan, she continued her education and has a Bachelor's degree. Due to her education, she has been employed as a teacher at a nearby private school. Besides work, she prefers spending her leisure time tailoring clothes for women and children which enables her to make an extra income. Nusrat has 7 siblings (3 sisters and 4 brothers). All her siblings are married except for her younger brother and herself.

According to Nusrat, people from her community gave her clothes to be stitched but gave her little pay for her hard work. To make things worse, sometimes they did not hand in the money upon receiving the suit, instead, they delayed giving her the money for months! Despite her hard-work, people take advantage of her disability which causes her immense sorrow. Nevertheless, Nusrat shared her positive hopes and wished that the training would empower her to learn skills such as modern stitching techniques which would help her to earn more money. Nusrat hopes that she can be connected through the project to boutiques or any garment business for making a livelihood with dignity. This project would not only enable her to be independent but would give hope to other women with disabilities to come out of their shell.



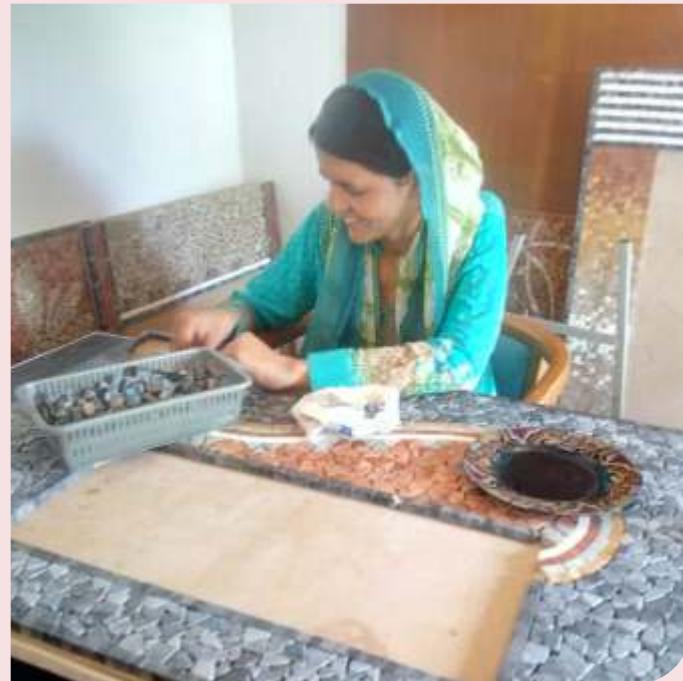
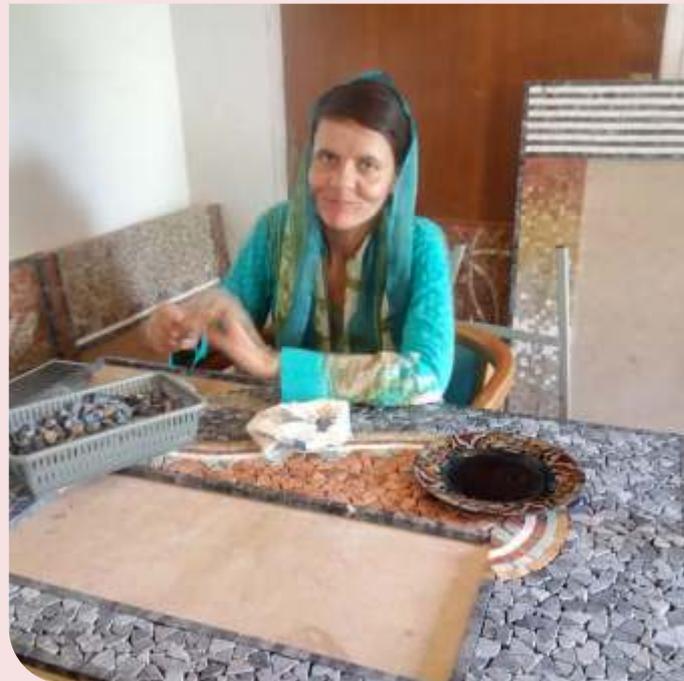
## Sofia

In 2005, an earthquake hit Pakistan and severely affected many of its regions. Thousands of people were left homeless without any resources while many had to mourn the loss of their family members. Even though Pakistan received international aid from its neighboring countries and other organizations, it wasn't enough to facilitate all those affected by the earthquake. Many left without any basic necessities, without shelter, and without any adequate medical facilities.

20-year-old Sofia is also one of those affected by the 2005 earthquake. Due to the sheer intensity of the earthquake, her family's residence collapsed while she was still inside. During her rescue, with a mountain of debris piled on her, her body was mishandled which left her right hand paralyzed. Still, Sofia was thankful that she ended up alive alongside her family members.

Despite such difficulties, Sofia lives with an optimistic mindset. Resisting her father's dislike towards her going to school, she decided to continue her education and is currently studying in 8th grade. Overcoming the obstacles set for persons with disabilities, she wishes to study and become a lawyer to advocate for the rights of persons with disabilities. Understanding the difficulties faced by women with disabilities around her, she wants to be a source of guidance so that no woman would have to feel alienated in the future.





## Sadia Akthar

It is true that if your family stands for you and supports you through the toughest of times, you will be able to overcome the obstacles you come by. Sadia realizes this. Which is why she is worried.

25-year-old Sadia has had to face motor system damage due to which her lower body was left paralyzed. She needs someone else's assistance doing certain tasks such as being able to move from one place to another. Luckily, she has her brother by her side who is willing to help her through the thick and thin.

Sadia's brother assists her in getting ready in the morning, makes her breakfast and takes her to the training center himself. Despite his work, he takes some time off in the afternoon to take his sister back home from the training center. But with such a caring brother by her side, why would she be worried?

Sadia's family consists of her 4 brothers; all of them loved her immensely and wanted to empower her to stand tall in the Pakistani society. However, as 3 of her brothers got married, their priorities seemed to shift and they moved out of their family house. One by one, her loving brothers seemed to forget about their sister who they once wanted to empower. Sadia fears that her only bachelor brother might abandon her once he marries as well. She is worried about her future, worried about having no help at hand and being left alone.

Her fear is what drives her to do well in the training center, she wishes to gain skills in crafting and use her knowledge to make crafts of her own someday. That way, she would at least be able to financially assist herself and would not have to rely upon other's help. Instead of holding onto her brother, she wants to become self-sufficient and let him start a new phase of his life himself. Sadia believes that if she starts earning money, her brothers would look at her as a useful member of the family rather than a burden. Maybe that could bring their family closer together how they once used to be





## Naheed Ijaz

While walking in the busy streets of Karachi, Naheed felt a sudden jolt of pain in her legs and dropped on her knees. A few days later, she realized that she wasn't able to move at all which set her into a state of panic. Upon reaching the hospital and getting diagnosed, the doctors concluded that she had muscular dystrophy. She had lost strength in her body and even needed an attendant to take her to the bathroom. At the age of 27, Naheed had completely lost the ability to walk and she still progressively loses the use of her legs and her independence in daily activities. Since Naheed's family is a lower-middle-class family, they couldn't pay for the treatment expenses either.



One way or the other as they managed to save some money, Naheed's family paid for her treatment and she finally had some hope towards getting better. Like many other women who face a certain disability or imparity after their marriage, Naheed's husband also left her stranded without any financial or emotional support all at a time when she needed his reassurance the most. With time, even her family members began complaining about having to take care of her.

As a graduate Bachelor's degree holder, Naheed was totally disappointed after her disability and started alienating herself without keeping in contact with any of her family members and relatives. She spiraled down a dark path that she couldn't pull herself out of, she had lost all will to live a happier life. Taking a leap of faith, Naheed joined the training center as an excuse to get out of her house and gain motivation from the people around her. Mobility was an issue for her, however, attendants at the training center were always available to help her. The greatest skill she learned was how to handle herself and be independent in everyday tasks.

Naheed thoroughly enjoyed block printing, screen work, and fabric paintings. She found joy in painting artworks and made pieces that represented both her resentment towards people who discouraged her but also hope towards a better future. Naheed finally had something to look up to, a form of art that would temporarily make her put aside the growing pile of problems in her life.

"Living happily and spreading smiles is my motive now, I want to work hard and save money for my better future and start a new business forgetting all about my past."



## Nageena Irfan

Every now and then, we get to hear stories of mothers who give sacrifices for the wellbeing of their children. However, the stories of these courageous mothers usually get underplayed. These brave mothers are not encouraged or supported for their hard-work but rather persecuted for their efforts.

Nageena Irfan is a 27-year-old mother of two beautiful daughters. She considers them the light of her eyes; even if they are a nuisance sometimes. When Nageena was affected by arthritis, she lost mobility and had to deal with a physical disability. Ideally, in such a difficult phase of her life, Nageena should have had her husband by her side consoling her and encouraging her not lose hope. However, luck was not on Nageena's side as instead of consolation and support, she received divorce papers. Nageena did not just lose her family, she lost what she considered her life.

Nageena had no choice but to move back to her father's house. Since her father had an age disability, he himself was not making a living and the household ran on charity from the neighborhood. Frustrated that people pitied her family and how her life had taken a toll overnight, Nageena headed out of her house to try and make a respectful living.

Nageena joined the training center with a growth mindset, wanting to learn skills and wanting to learn to love her life despite her disability. Gaining confidence from the women around her, she works on improving her skills so that one day she too is able to make a living and take care of her daughters and elderly father. She wants to prove to her husband that having a disability does not make her weak but makes her strong enough to want to strive for a better life. Like Bilquees, Nageena wants to become a role model for her daughters and give them a comfortable life along her side. She too wants to educate her daughters to see them as respected members of society.





## Javeria Hanif

Education is the key to success in life, and teachers make a lasting impact on the lives of their students. Among her fellow classmates, Javeria was a particularly intelligent and creative individual. Even as a child, she had the drive and curiosity to learn new skills; however, her community was not able to provide her the opportunities that would enable her to shine brighter. Due to financial restrictions and discouragement from the community, Javeria was only able to study until 7th grade. Neither the members from the local community nor her relatives were willing to sponsor her education. In addition to this, her teachers discouraged her from studying further as they were not able to facilitate her. The little girl who once smiled from ear to ear now had a frown plastered on her face. A sullen face replaced the child's precious smile as she lost all hope and trust in herself. She received all this harsh treatment just because she had Cerebral Palsy.



Now 23, Javeria has been able to gain confidence by interacting with other women with disabilities at the training center. In addition to that, her parent's support and kind words have played a huge role in her recovery from misery. Javeria says that because of her parents, she has become a hero; if it weren't for their encouragement and trust in her abilities, she would've forever remained in her shell. Javeria recently gave her matric examinations and wishes to study higher education as well.

With experimentation at the training center, Javeria has recently developed a love for making baked goods. She wants to be surrounded by the scent of cinnamon and freshly baked bread. She imagines herself spending most of her time at a bakery, experimenting with batters and dough to make something delicious for her customers. Javeria wishes that an accessible bakery would someday open in Karachi so she too can start a business of her own someday. She'd like to employ other women with disabilities to give them a source of income and help become a ray of guidance to others that she once herself needed.



## Rukhsana

20-year-old Rukhsana is from Peshawar and is affected by polio as well. After losing function of her leg, she uses clamps attached to her foot which she has to regularly adjust for ease in mobility. Since her house consists of two stories, she usually stays in the lower story as climbing up and down is extremely tedious for her. In addition to that, not a single bathroom in her house is disabled friendly which is why she has to use her family member's help for washing up.

She belongs to a very poor family as her father is just a laborer and supports a big family of eight. She needs a wheelchair and a friendly washroom facility to ease her in her daily life, however, her father's income is not enough to facilitate her. Rukhsana is a hard-working girl and she took keen interest in the skill trainings. She is now confident in using the sewing machine and sews clothes. She wishes to learn new skills and use those skills to earn a living. She wants to pursue tailoring in the future and help her father in providing for their family.



"I have a disability but that doesn't mean that I am useless. I want to become a useful member of the family and not a burden"

Rukhsana is very good at crochet knitting and can make beautiful handbags out of it. If provided the opportunity and encouragement, she can establish a small business of her own and have a regular income out of it.



## Amama Nusrat

30-year-old Amama is a part of a family of 12 members. Amama, her two sisters and a brother are hard of hearing. Amama herself is trained in sign language and teaches it to children school. Despite the fact that it is difficult for her to attend the training after school ends, she never misses a session and learns readily.

Amama's family is very supportive of her; however, they are very strict. She is not permitted to leave outside in the evening and has to ask for permission from her elders before leaving the house or making commitments with friends. Having a passion for acquiring as many skills as possible, Amama has attended several trainings and has mastered the art of crafting handicrafts, tailoring and stitching clothes, drawing and writing. Yet despite having all these skills, she finds that people are still unwilling to hire or trust her with projects. Due to her disability and strict parents, she hasn't been able to work before and due to that she lacks professional experience.

Amama wishes to become a government official and prove to people that even persons with disabilities are able to handle competitive positions and complicated tasks. She hopes that all corporations will hire persons with disabilities in their establishments.





## Shahina Ali Madad

Usually, when women with disabilities first come to the training center, they bring along with themselves hopelessness and hatred against the Pakistani society and its prejudices.

Which is understandable.

However, 24-year-old Shahina entered the training with a smile, putting her optimistic nature on a clear display. Among a family of 6, she is the only one affected by Polio since childhood. She continued her studies in the training center and is currently studying for the matriculation exams. Shahina is really thankful that not only her family but also the people around her community are very supportive of her. In addition to that, she is thankful that the training is teaching her ways to become independent and fend for herself. When Shahina lived in Kashmir, she did not have access to a wheelchair and had to crawl to school on rough paths. Her fellows at school would make fun of her at every opportunity they got. It was when she came to the training center that she received a wheelchair and love from the people around her. She has come to the conclusion that after all, kind-hearted people do exist in this world.

Inspired by her trainers and the progress she has made so far, Shahina wishes to pursue motivational speaking. Through her words, she wants to show to the world that women with disabilities are not just defined by their disabilities but by their personalities and their improvement as a human being. Being the optimistic individual she is, she wants to try her best to make other women with disabilities happy and give them hope as well.



## Alishba Islam

Residing in a joint family structure in Karachi, 20-year-old Alishba is the only daughter of her parents. Among her family members, her brother and her aunt also have hereditary hearing loss and deafness. Alishba's brother works at a factory near the industrial area of Korangi as a laborer while her aunt and Alishba come to the training center to learn some helpful skills.

Even though Alishba's parents were discouraged by the local community, they worked hard to send both Alishba and her brother to a special school where they completed their education until grade 10th. Their parents realized that in order for their children to survive in the society, their children needed to be well educated and needed to learn to be independent.

Due to financial difficulties, Alishba was not able to study further to attend college or university. Even though her father is a government employee, he earns very little her family has no other choice but to live from mouth to mouth. In addition to that, Alishba's mother is diabetic therefore, Alishba decided to stay at home and take good care of her mother instead. She surely misses going to school and interacting with her friends, however, she also understands that due to her circumstances, she'll have to make use of other skills instead.

"I was always excited to go to school where I learned different skills. My school was my whole life, my fellow classmates and teachers were a source of joy in my life. They taught me different skills like painting and artwork, embroidery work, sign language and even participated in different competitions."

Adding to her troubles, recently her wedding was called off after being engaged for over a year. Due to that, she was put under a lot of stress and had uncertainties regarding her future. As if making fun of her disability was not enough, people now went as far as making comments that she'll never be able to lead a normal life. Due to this everyday stress, her family guided her to the training center so she could



get her mind off of the matter. In the meanwhile though, her family searched for another match for her, someone who would be able to accept and appreciate Alishba for how she is. Like Fozia, she expressed that she'd like to marry someone who also has a hearing imparity as that would balance their life and communication would be a lot easier as well. She doesn't demand a lot from a partner, just kindness, love, respect and acceptance towards her as she is.

Alishba is exceptionally good at lip reading and communicates with other members at the training center very easily. She wasn't always this good though as she would often have trouble communicating with public transport drivers to guide them towards her destination. Their annoyance and anger at her lack of communication would often make her anxious and uncomfortable to go outside. Despite the barriers, Alishba tried her best pushing aside the discomfort. Now while shopping with her cousins, she even bargains with the shopkeeper to reduce the prices of clothing until she is able to get a good deal!

Alishba is working towards her dream to continue her studies and even get an opportunity to study abroad. She'd love to explore cultures outside of Pakistan and awe at the architectural marvels as well. In the future, she'd also like to open a school for deaf children that will enable them to learn basic skills free of cost; a school that will encourage people with disabilities to dream higher rather than giving up due to the lack of opportunities.

## Fozia Ilyas

A cheerful woman and a social activist in her community, Fozia is identified as a person who is hard of hearing since birth. She lives in Korangi with her husband, one son and two sweet little daughters who are all hard of hearing. During Fozia's youth, her parents had decided for her to marry her cousin; however, after long and hard thinking she decided he was not someone she could live a happy life with. She made the brave decision to confront her parents and with the passage of time, convince them to search a different partner for her.



"I broke my engagement with my cousin because he could hear normally and I was not comfortable with that. I couldn't help but feel that my hearing imparity would disturb his perfectly normal life so I decided to let him go. Instead, I let my cousin marry a woman of his match and chose a hearing-impaired husband for myself, I finally felt satisfied with my decision and surely do not regret it."

Currently, Fozia works as a sign language teacher at a nearby Government special education school to contribute to the household finances. Her husband works in a glass factory near the industrial area of Korangi on very nominal wages; therefore, he appreciates all the help he can receive.

Fozia already has some skills in embroidery and stitching that she learned from her mother before marriage; however, if she wants to start a business of her own, she'll have to practice and polish her skills to put out well-designed products. At the training center, she practices hard to improve her skills and learn further tricks and trends in embroidery. Being kind-natured, she even accompanies her trainer to the residences of other hearing-impaired women to not only help the trainer communicate but also convince the women into grabbing the opportunity brought to their doorstep.

Fozia was only able to study until 12th grade at a special school in her area since her parents were not able to further financially support her education. They thought that what she had learned so far was sufficient for her to survive in the future. Despite the harsh words and discouragement of her relatives,

Fozia was lucky to have very loving parents. They gave her all the extra love and special attention that she deserved while growing up. Before her marriage, she even had the privilege to perform the holy pilgrimage of Hajj and Umrah with her family members where she prayed wishing that Allah made her life easier. In addition to that, they'd even go to the northern areas for holidays every year. Due to the love and support she received from her loving family, she was able to gain confidence and vowed that she'd love and support her family the same way.



