

Negative attitudes and stereotypes hinder the participation of people with disabilities in society

Today's interview presents the work of Pravneil Chand (Neil for short), from Fiji. He has a background in Psychology and Law and works as the Team Leader - Programme Coordination for the Frank Hilton Organization.



Source: Pravneil Chand

Neil, through your work you address the needs of children with disabilities and their families in Fiji. Could you tell us more about your organization - how do you help these groups?

The Frank Hilton Organization (FHO) is a charitable organization that initiated its operations in the 1960s with the aim of helping children living with disabilities. Since its establishment, we have consistently developed our services to meet the needs of all children and families that seek our services.

We provide early detection and intervention support for children with disabilities in Fiji, and our service portfolio comprises a multi-disciplinary range of health, education, and community support services, many of which are only available in our country through FHO.

Our range of multi-disciplinary services includes Audiology, Physiotherapy, Speech Pathology, Positive Behaviour Therapy, and Mobility Device Services. Furthermore, understanding that socio-economic factors largely influence a child's resilience and rehabilitation, we also support parents and caregivers through a range of Community Support

programs such as nutrition, medication, water, hygiene sanitation (WASH), parent counseling, transport, and access to service support programs.

Services are also provided to the Public Hospitals through clinics and through the Special Education network, spanning 17 special education schools around Fiji. Further, the FHO team conducts frequent outreaches and community-based therapy across Fiji.

The Frank Hilton Organization also operates a residential care facility for children at risk of abuse and neglect. Our services are absolutely free for all children aged between 0 to 18 years of age.

Can you share what are the biggest challenges that children and people with disabilities face in Fiji?

I can list at least a few problems. The first is the limited access to education. Children with disabilities often encounter barriers to accessing quality education. Limited resources, inadequate infrastructure, and a lack of trained teachers and inclusive educational practices contribute to this challenge. Secondly, I would point to discrimination. People with disabilities in Fiji often face social stigma, leading to exclusion, isolation, and a lack of opportunities. Negative

attitudes and stereotypes can hinder their participation in society and limit their access to employment, healthcare, and social activities.

Equally important in this regard is the lack of appropriate health services for children and people with disabilities. This is a serious challenge in Fiji. Although the country has made progress in implementing policies and legislation related to improving the lives of people with disabilities, there are still gaps in the effective implementation and enforcement of these laws. Limited legal protections can hinder the rights and inclusion of children and people with disabilities.

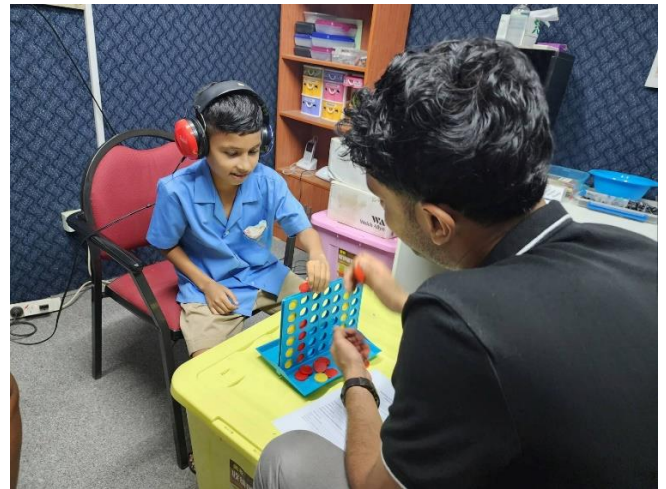
What are the policies (economic, social, etc) that your country could develop that will make the situation of people with disabilities better in your opinion?

Generally speaking, policies should address the problems I have listed above. There is a need to develop and implement a comprehensive policy that promotes inclusive education practices. It should include provisions to ensure accessible infrastructure and training for teachers who are familiar with inclusive teaching methods. It is important that curricula are adapted to ensure equal educational opportunities for children with disabilities.

We also need inclusive employment policies. They should guarantee vocational training and employment opportunities for people with disabilities. These could include incentives for employers to hire and retain persons with disabilities and to build accessible workplaces. Skill development programs for disabled people are also needed.

When designing public spaces, transport systems, and buildings, solutions that prioritize accessibility should be chosen. This means establishing guidelines for designing and upgrading infrastructure to make it accessible to people with disabilities.

It is crucial to have policies that prioritize quality health services for people with disabilities. This should include specialized healthcare providers, affordable assistive devices, therapies, and rehabilitation services that meet the specific needs of this population.



Source: Pravneil Chand

Can you tell us a positive story related to your work - please share an achievement.

Over the past three years, there has been a significant increase in the number of children we provide support to on an annual basis, with the figure tripling during this period. This growth reflects a growing awareness within the community regarding the significance of early detection and intervention services for children.

Furthermore, we have established formal referral pathways with all 17 special schools nationwide. This collaboration allows for streamlined and efficient referrals, ensuring that children in need of our services can access them more easily. In addition, we have also formalized our collaboration with the Ministry of Health, enabling a closer partnership and enhancing our ability to reach and support a wider range of children.

Formalizing these relations is crucial in ensuring that children receive timely and appropriate support. We are committed to continuing our efforts in expanding these partnerships and networks to extend our reach and impact within the community.

You have already mentioned that you have successfully cooperated with the state. What other activities are you undertaking to combat the problems of children with disabilities?

Despite the successes I have shared, only 60% of our services are funded by the state. So as an organization, we are challenged to raise funds for the remaining 40%. This is the only way we can ensure that every child seeking services receives timely support. One of the ways we do this is through our annual 'Amazing Wheelbarrow Race'. It is open to teams of 5 to 8 people who pay an entry fee. This way we are able to promote our work but also provide a source of funds. We also have a mobile app that allows people around the world to contribute to our cause virtually as well - you can learn more from the flyer and see more information [here](#).

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Frank Hilton **EDUCATE EMPOWER UPLIFT UPHOLD**
FRANKILTON

BARA BATTLE

29TH JULY 2023

AMAZING WHEELBARROW RACE

PHYSICAL RACE
 Sign up with 4-8 members and join the race around Albert Park. Entry fees is \$5000 per team.

Will you make it to the finish line and can you raise the highest funds to become the Bara Battle Champion?

VIRTUAL RACE
 Recruit friends and family from all around the world to be in your team.

Download the 'Amazing Wheelbarrow Race' app and register.

There are no entry fees for the Virtual Race but if you raise \$5000, you can also participate in the physical race as well.

REGISTER YOUR TEAM NOW

Contact Divisha Deepthi | 3384923 | 3313909 | divisha.d@hilton.org.fj

PHYSICAL RACE

- This is a three-round circuit relay race around Albert Park
- Four to eight participants can make one team
- Teams will need to fundraise \$5000 as their entry fee for the race
- Multiple awards available under categories
- Fastest team to finish the race wins!

VIRTUAL RACE

- Race your wheelbarrow around Viti Levu from anywhere in the world
- Download the Amazing Wheelbarrow Race App and register your team
- Send invites to all your friends and family across any social media platform to support your team
- Everyday you are required to move 60km for 8 days.
- Every \$10 donated allows your wheelbarrow to move 1km ahead
- You will raise \$4800 to complete the race.
- Accumulated donations after you have surpassed your target of \$600 daily will be your Bara Bucks.
- The team or individual with the most Bara Bucks wins the virtual race!

AMAZING WHEELBARROW RACE
 TO MOVE YOUR BARA, DONATE \$10 FOR 1KM

HIGHEST AMOUNT OF BARA BUCKS WILL WIN

ABOUT FRANK HILTON HOME

The Frank Hilton Home is a full time residential care facility looking after individuals who have severe disabilities and require assistance with all activities of daily living. The Hilton Home also receives additional support such as Speech Therapy, Physiotherapy as well as Assistive devices where necessary by way of the Hilton Organization auxiliary services. Some residents have no family to take care of them and in rare instances, their disabilities are so severe that families simply cannot cope. This sometimes leaves the child at risk of neglect and sometimes abuse. Therefore, they are placed in our care by the Department of Social Welfare.

There are 12 caregivers working around the clock to ensure these residents are provided with the best care possible. We kindly ask for donations to support our mission in looking after our residents.

Source: Pravneil Chand