



# Adenwalla ensures voice of the deaf gets heard

R.I. educator believes key lies in education

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PROVIDENCE, R.I.— Dinaz Adenwalla's mother did not realize her daughter was deaf till the earth shook - literally. Adenwalla was around five months old when her hometown Kolkata was bombed by Bangladesh (East Pakistan at the time), and Adenwalla did not even twitch. "My mother realized I was deaf then," says Adenwalla.

Adenwalla, now 48, gives back to the deaf community as the coordinator for secondary school programs at the Rhode Island School for the Deaf in Providence, R.I. She was also the chairperson of the Rhode Island Commission on the Deaf and the Hard of Hearing from 1993 to 1999.

Her duties at the Rhode Island School for the Deaf, which she describes as very similar to that of a principal in a school, include supervising the curriculum and making modifications to meet the needs of the students. She also checks if the teachers in the school's classrooms comply with the suggested individual education plans. Individual education plans are mandatory special education curriculum goals and objectives set for children with learning disabilities.

John Plante, the director of the school says Adenwalla is one of the most precious employees of the school. "She has endless

amounts of energy. On a daily basis, she is one of the first persons to arrive, and one of the last to leave," he says. He says she remembers an event that the school had organized when Adenwalla had just started working, more than 15 years ago.

Adenwalla organized a deaf lawyer from Washington, D.C. to come to the school and talk about the rights of the deaf. "Her commitment is not only to



Adenwalla

\$200,000 for the commission. The voluntary post, however, required so much time and effort, says Adenwalla, that she often worked after office hours for matters regarding the commission.

Adenwalla, one of the first two deaf students to pass the Indian Certificate of Secondary Education examination, came to the United States to complete her undergraduate degree in chemistry and biology from Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C. After her bachelor's degree, she worked for General Telephone and Electronics in Waltham, Mass., but was not comfortable with the work environment, she says.

"So it forced me to look into myself and

education, but also the lives of deaf individuals," says Plante.

While on the statewide commission, Adenwalla was instrumental in creating the position of a n executive director at the commission. After a lot of bureaucratic struggle, she was able to secure a funding of

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**Dinaz Adenwalla,  
Coordinator, Secondary  
School programs  
R.I. School for the Deaf**

see what I was good at and what I loved," says Adenwalla. "It turned out I was good at teaching so I went back to college to get my master's degree in education for the deaf."

Adenwalla says she always had a talent for teaching, and was rebelling against her family by studying biology.

She finds her work at the school very fulfilling, and pushes the students to reach higher. "I think she clearly identifies with the students, and they with her. She is aware, on a first-hand basis, of the obstacles and challenges that these children face. And I think they look at her as a role model for them," Plante says.

Some of the problems that she faces, she says, are not in the school, but from outside, Adenwalla says. She says the general population is plagued by ignorance about the deaf community. She says people

equate deafness to mental retardation, and have a hard time believing the capabilities of the deaf.

"They cannot believe that deaf people can read and write well," Adenwalla says. "Many people still cannot believe that I am profound deaf because of my ability to read and write well."

Even after all these years, says Dinaz, people think that her position at the school does not entail making any decisions. "My position here involves a lot of decision making and they (people) are having a hard time believing me," she says.

One the main problems that deaf people face is communication, says Adenwalla. "Over the years, I have come to meet many people who are learning to make accommodations to ensure that I understand them and they understand me," she says, "but there are a lot of people out there who are flatly refusing to make kind of accommodation."

Adenwalla is thankful for modern technology like closed captioning and TTY (also called TDD or Telecommunications Device for the Deaf), and that was one of the main reasons that made Adenwalla decide to stay back in the United States.

Adenwalla credits her success to her father Dorab Adenwalla, her mother Dhun Adenwalla, who is India's leading educator of the deaf, and her friends at the Rhode Island School for the Deaf.

Adenwalla is an avid hiker, reader and traveler, and used to ride horses frequently until she had a riding accident around three years ago. She travels to India almost every summer to be with family.

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