

# Professor raising money to beat spinal muscular atrophy



**Abhinand Ponneri Adithavarman**

■ MERIN JAMES

**A** professor of Bioinformatics at the Sri Ramachandra Institute of Higher Education and Research, Dr Abhinand Ponneri Adithavarman has overcome many hurdles in life. The 33-year-old Triplicane resident is suffering from a crippling condition called Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA). He says that the condition didn't stop him from achieving his dreams. "I could walk and play cricket until the age of 8. But when I turned 13, SMA had prevented me from walking or even standing on my own and confined me to a wheelchair. My high school and higher secondary days were tough. My mother was my primary caregiver back then. Sometimes, my neighbour uncle would take me to school on his bike. My friends also helped me a lot. I did my UG at Kumararani Meena Muthiah College of Arts and

Science in Gandhi Nagar, Adyar. The college had an elevator and that was the only college that gave me admission back then. I was passionate about life sciences and did my undergrad degree in Biotechnology," Abhinand starts the conversation.

He is facing terrible muscle pain in his back and limbs every day and is also suffering from Scoliosis on his back. Despite being in unbearable pain, Abhinand has never given up on his dreams and has never let SMA be an obstacle. "I did my PG and Ph.D. in Bioinformatics at Sri Ramachandra Institute of Higher Education and Research. The management and students have been very supportive from the beginning. The college is wheel-chair friendly campus. I could even go to the playground and watch students playing. That was a big liberation for me. That college gave me the freedom to explore. There is an incident I would like to share. The college library is in the basement. When the management found that I was finding it difficult to go to the basement, they put on an elevator just for my sake. They have been accommodative and encouraging from the beginning. Even my students are

very supportive - I have never faced any bullying or other problems from them," he shares with a smile.

Abhinand believes in living his life to the fullest despite his disability and limitations. "Whenever my friends go for a trip, they take me along with them. I have travelled across the country. My friends and family have been a huge blessing. I know there are many differently-abled individuals around us. If you trust in yourself, nothing can beat you. Only if you believe in yourselves, the world will believe in you. The most important thing is that you have to find happiness in smaller things in life," the professor remarks.

SMA is weakening him further every day and making him more vulnerable by affecting his breathing, sleeping, and even the way he eats. "I require Roche's Risdiplam (Evrysdi) which costs Rs 4 crores and I need funds to continue the treatment as I am unable to pay the required amount. So, I am raising funds through the crowdfunding platform ImpactGuru. I wanted to teach throughout my life but if I don't get the medicine on time, I will not be able to teach," he concludes.

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