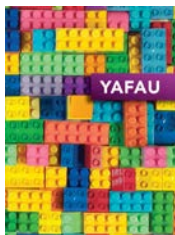
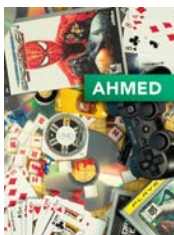
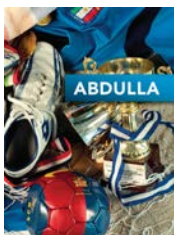




AHMED

Books in this series.....



**AHMED**

Written by Ifham Niyaz for Handicap International  
Concept, Design, Photography & Layout  
by mooinc. [[www.mooinc.com](http://www.mooinc.com)]

THIS BOOK IS NOT FOR SALE

# Introduction

Welcome to this series of inspiring stories of Maldivian children and adults. With each story you can see part of a new world, and meet a person with a different experience of life. Through the stories you are privileged to gain an insight into what each person values, and what they aspire to. You will realise that each character has another aspect to his or her life as well - either a hearing, visual, intellectual, mental or physical impairment. But as you read, you will understand that all people, whether with or without an impairment, have skills, talents and dreams, as well as challenges in life.

These are true stories, using real names, and were written during 2008 / 2009. Each person is trying to help you understand more about his or her life, so that you can realise that we are all equal, and deserve equality. Through your understanding you can help to make a more welcoming environment for all on your island.

Handicap International would like to say a big 'Thank you' to the stars of the stories, for taking the time to share them with us.

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*"Why do people stare at me like that? Are they looking at my legs? Are they looking at me because I am in a wheelchair? ... Do they think I am different? Are they going to call me a disabled person? ... Am I that different?"*

Whenever Ahmed saw a person looking at him he felt a burning need to hide away – from the eyes of all onlookers who may think that he is disabled. That is why Ahmed stopped going to school while he was just starting secondary education. That is why Ahmed started hiding away in the privacy of his home and friends. Because his friends never made him feel he was different to them. Because he felt comfortable when no one stared at him.

Ahmed was two years old when he caught a high fever, as did a lot of other children that age in Male'. He could not feel his legs after that. His father took him to India for medical treatment, but it only got worse. He later found out that this happened to him and other kids who suffered from the same fever because they were not immunised with polio vaccine, which was not common then.

Ahmed had started using his wheelchair when he was around 10 years old. He had lived with his grandmother for most of his childhood, as his parents went separate ways when he was very small. Ahmed loved life just as any young boy growing up in the neighbourhood. He used to go swimming or fishing with his friends at the unoccupied Male'

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harbour area. It was a time when he did not question if he was different from others. He never wondered then if he was less capable than others. Because, there, in the harbour area, surrounded by his close group of neighbourhood friends, he was capable of anything he wished to do.

But that began to change as he developed into a young adolescent. As any other boy his age, he began to become more aware who he is as an individual, his appearance, and mostly of how others looked at him. Just around the same time, his grandmother fell ill and Ahmed had to move in to an unfamiliar environment with his father and his half siblings. Life took a dark turn, Ahmed became more self conscious and started retreating away from the outside world, into the privacy of his home. He left school at grade 8 and the small group of close friends who visited him at home became his only connection to the outside world. Television, telephone and video games provided him solace when he felt fed up with the routines at home. When he rarely got out of his house, it would be with a friend who pushes his wheelchair for him, not as the carefree boy he used to be.

Life continued like that for a long time, until he met the girl of his life many years later. It started as a friendship first; they just had a lot to talk about. And it felt good for Ahmed to talk to a girl about everything in his life. As their relationship gained more depth, Ahmed gained more confidence as an individual. They got married young and everything turned around for the better. Ahmed's wife became his soul mate and his strongest pillar of support. She encouraged him to go out, get a job, and do whatever he wanted to fulfil his life. Soon Ahmed took up a volunteer job at Youth Centre, where he met a wonderful group of people who provided both inspiration and support in every

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manner possible. He started counselling sessions at the Centre, started getting involved with various works of the Centre, and everything just got much better from then on.

Today Ahmed has regained the confidence of his childhood. The confidence he felt to do anything he wanted, when he used to dive into the Male' harbour lagoon with his friends. Ahmed and his wife now have two beautiful children, Sarah and Looth, who make life complete. Now he has the confidence to get around anywhere in Male' in his wheelchair.

Ahmed did not get to where he is today all by himself. Everyone needs a little bit of care, support, will, and sometimes a little push in the back from someone caring to move forward, to live life every day. For Ahmed, it was his wife, his counsellor, his work mates, and his close friends who gave him the nudge, the advice, and the inspiration. And it is his cute children who give him the hope and joy to live to the full with each passing moment.





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## Glossary of terms used in this series;

**Brain Injury** – this could be due to a mechanical or infectious cause, and could result in one or more of the following; Attention impairment, cognition (understanding) impairment, language impairment, memory impairment, conduct disorder (different behaviour), motor (physical movement) disorder, any other neurological dysfunction.

**Cerebral Palsy (CP)** – Caused in the womb or at birth by lack of oxygen, meningitis encephalitis, German measles (rubella) or other unknown causes. The child's muscles may be weak, with tremors and uncoordinated speech, hearing and sight. The child's body may not grow the same as other children. Some children with CP have an intellectual impairment, while others may be extremely intelligent. Spasms may cause particular problems, and speech and facial expression are often affected.

**Early intervention** – applies to children of school age or younger who are discovered to have or be at risk of developing a disabling condition or other special need that may affect their development. Early intervention consists of the provision of services such children and their families need, for the purpose of lessening the effects of the condition.

**Impairments** – all the impairments defined can range from mild to severe;

*Hearing impairment* – Four categories are generally used to

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describe hearing loss: mild, moderate, severe and profound. Some people with a significant loss, communicate through sign instead of, or as well as, speech. People with a hearing impairment may require hearing aids, adaptations to their environment and/or particular strategies in order to access concepts and language. Hearing loss may be because of conductive or sensori-neural problems and can be measured on a decibel scale.

*Visual impairment* – this refers to a range of difficulties from partial sight through to blindness. People with a visual impairment may be able to use spectacles or low vision aids (such as magnifiers) as well as training in mobility skills to be able to move independently. Adaptations to the environment may be necessary depending on the individual. Some people who cannot see to read large print may learn Braille, a tactile language read with the fingers.

*Intellectual impairment* – this means an impairment in paying attention, in thinking, understanding, or in memory. People may require support, both for their learning needs and also for personal care. They could need tasks broken down into very small steps. Some people with an intellectual impairment which makes speech difficult may communicate by gesture, eye pointing or symbols.

*Mental impairment* – this can include people with depression, schizophrenia, paranoia and can result in behavioural, emotional or social difficulties, from mild to severe. A person may be withdrawn or isolated, disruptive and disturbing, hyperactive and lack concentration, lack social skills or present challenging behaviours.

*Physical impairment* – This could mean a different shaped arm or leg, hand or foot. It could impact on mobility. Or, people with a

physical impairment may be mobile but may have significant fine motor difficulties, like holding a pen and writing, which require support.

**People with a disability** – includes those who have long-term impairments as described, and who experience discrimination or barriers in society, such as steps, language and laws, which prevent people with disabilities from being included equally.

**Polio (poliomyelitis)** – causes muscle paralysis. The virus may affect the nerves governing the muscles in the limbs and the muscles necessary for breathing, causing respiratory difficulty and paralysis of the arms and legs.

**Sign Language** – a language of communication through hand and arm movements and facial expressions which is completely visual. Sign languages commonly develop in deaf communities, which can include interpreters and friends and families of deaf people as well as people who are deaf or hard of hearing themselves.

**Special classes** – classes in schools for children with needs which are not met in the mainstream classes.

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