

RISING STAR OF THE YEAR - 2020 CREST AWARD

The nomination of the Lakshminarayanan Family

Bharat and Ramya Lakshminarayanan in Memory of Achyuth Bharathwaj (2009-2018)

1. How many years has this person volunteered in Cupertino and for which organizations/efforts?

In 2018, Achyuth Lakshminarayanan passed away from a rare genetic skin disorder. At the time, he was in 3rd grade at Sedgwick Elementary School. He dreamt of building an inclusive playground that others like him could enjoy. Like the Sun that shines upon all living beings without bias, this playground is for everyone to share and play! His parents, Bharat and Ramya have worked since his death to raise funding and support for Achyuth's dream.

2. What contributions has this individual made to the community that are beyond the scope of normal civic responsibilities?

Achyuth (2009-2018) was a 'Butterfly Child', a term used to refer to children born with a rare genetic skin disorder. Despite all the pain that he endured, Achyuth showed great empathy for those around him. He looked forward to every day and lit everyone around him up with his smile and positivity.

In honor of their son, Bharat and Ramya Lakshminarayanan, have worked with outside businesses to secure funds to build an inclusive playground on the preschool and Kindergarten playground at Sedgwick Elementary School in the City of Cupertino. The playground will be dedicated in memory of Achyuth on Friday, March 6, 2020.

3. How has this person's activities made an impact or difference on the community?

Inclusive playgrounds are about more than providing an accessible piece of equipment. Instead, they create and design a playset that allows all children to play. Inclusive playgrounds provide multiple uses of equipment for people of different abilities, skills, and conditions. Inclusive playgrounds are about ALL children having equal access to play.

The family raised \$60,000 to begin the project at Sedgwick and the playground design company donated an additional \$50,000 to complete the project. The family hopes to

continue to expand such playgrounds across the City of Cupertino in memory of their son, Achyuth.

School Playgrounds

Sometimes I feel sad because I can't climb monkey bars. That's why I think all schools should have a disabled area for disabled kids.

One reason why schools should have a disabled area is because some people can't even do simple things! For example, people who have a broken leg can not stand up without help and can't even kick a ball. I know you might be thinking that they can throw and catch the ball instead, but the ball might hit the broken leg and hurt it even more.

Another reason why is because if someone is blind, they might get hurt when walking if nobody is protecting them. For example, someone who is blind might hurt themselves by tripping over something sharp. If there was an area that has nothing sharp, nothing to trip over, and with easy things to do. Then that would be the place for those kids.

Teachers, parents, and guardians please try to pay for all fundraisers and do whatever help you can do to get each school a disabled area.

*"It's recess time at school,
I'm done with my medications and g-tube feeding at the nurse's office,
now all I have do is sit on my wheelchair and wait....,
maybe I can strike a conversation with my aide,
my eyes longingly looking at all my friends at the playground"*



Dear CUSD Board members,

We are the blessed parents of Achyuth, an 8-year-old boy who passed away on July 10th, 2018. Achyuth was born with a rare genetic skin condition that caused his skin to blister or tear with even the smallest friction. EB (Epidermolysis Bullosa) as it is called, is one of the worst disease you can ever imagine.

Despite his skin condition, Achyuth always had a smile on his face and respect for everyone around him. He made friends with everyone he met and positively impacted their lives in his short 8 years of life. For a child who was suffering for every simple thing in life (walking, eating, writing, etc.), he always had the heart to understand and feel for others.

During his 3rd grade at Sedgwick Elementary School at Cupertino, He wrote an opinion piece about inclusive playgrounds and requested everyone to contribute so special needs kids like him may have an opportunity to experience a playground at Sedgwick.

At Sedgwick, there are many such kids with special needs and an all-inclusive playground will bring a light in the eyes of many such kids. Beyond directly impacting kids with special needs, this will provide life education for all children at Sedgwick on empathy and inclusiveness at a very young age. We have no doubt that in 5 years all school playgrounds will change to an all-inclusive playground and we see Sedgwick/CUSD leading the way to become an all-inclusive school playground district.

With a generous contribution from our prior employer, we were able to collect \$60,000 USD which is readily available for starting on a playground project. Sedgwick has 2 playgrounds and we want to initiate the construction of the smaller playground in 2019. This will provide us the momentum to plan for the bigger playground in 2020 and seek funding help from the community around Sedgwick.

We kindly request CUSD to help us with the reminder of the money for the smaller playground at Sedgwick so we can begin construction. Achyuth's wish was to see that no child is left behind at the Playground and we sincerely appreciate all the support that we have received from Sedgwick and Cupertino Union School District in making his wish come true.

Thank you,

Bharat and Ramya

(Achyuth's mom and dad)