

# METAS Group Teach Independence | CPD

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The CPD's Sachin Pavithran plays ball with a young student.

The idea for METAS started in 2015 with some conversations—the kind that could only happen between blind self-advocates from diverse backgrounds. “We’d been talking about services in the U.S. and how people here have opportunities to be more independent. We started getting into conversations about how those services are not available to kids who are undocumented, or in other countries,” said Sachin Pavithran. Pavithran directs the Utah Assistive Technology Program at the Center for Persons with Disabilities. He is blind, he was born in India and grew up in Dubai before coming to the US to pursue a higher education. And, after taking part in those conversations with like-minded people, he added another title to his resume in 2016: Treasurer for METAS (Mentoring, Engaging and Teaching All Students). The group’s other three members all have strong backgrounds in advocacy and education. Together they developed a curriculum, and then they started taking it abroad. Their focus was on fellow educators and professionals, giving them a chance to see their students do more things independently. “Their philosophy is more about taking care of the kids... Everything is done for them,” he said.

“Ours is getting them to do it on their own.” Last May, they visited a group in Guatemala. None of the children they encountered there had a cane, so METAS introduced canes and worked with students on mobility. They also focus on independent living, sports like goal ball and beep baseball, and self-advocacy. “There’s not a lot you can do in a week, but we planted a seed of what is possible,” Pavithran said. “A lot of it is confidence building and helping them think there is a future for them.” METAS also makes an effort to meet with policymakers wherever they go. It’s important to see what is working in each local area, Pavithran said. “They have things figured out that work for them in their environment.” The group has received requests to visit groups in Bolivia and some African countries. They have also made connections with companies and individuals who can help with funding. Materials have been donated from different sources. For more information, visit the METAS homepage.

METAS works introduces skills for independence, including orientation and mobility.