

Xavier's Resource Centre for the Visually Challenged (XRCVC) Report May 2006-April 2007

The state of the art facilities set up through May 2005 - April 2006 continued to be used in full swing throughout this academic year.

The year began with the enrollment of four new students in the F.Y.J.C. It also saw the addition of two professional full time staff, Ms Neha Trivedi as Project Officer and Mr. Prashant Naik as our Training and Development Officer. The XRCVC through the last year has grown from its limited scope of providing services to college students to becoming a nodal agency of services and work for the visually challenged.

The NAAC Peer Team during its visit in December 2006, also recognized the work of the XRCVC, to quote from its report,

“In realizing its objectives of providing equal opportunities to the disadvantaged group, the Xavier's Centre for the Visually Challenged is an ambitious project by way of extending its services and offering the facilities to those disadvantaged. The performance of the centre is exemplary and probably one of its kind in the country and worth being emulated. The College's initiative in launching a national social advocacy programme is a step towards the betterment of the lives of the visually challenged.” (pg. 6, NAAC report)

The list of activities for the year is highlighted below:

Major strides of Project Access

The advocacy project related to accessibility issues of the visually challenged launched in March 2006 took major strides. In the area of Copyright, the XRCVC, along with other organizations working in the field, under the banner of Publication Access Coordination Committee (PACC), has drafted and submitted a representation with the Copyright Board, HRD ministry, Govt. of India for suitable amendment of the Copyright law of the country. The XRCVC has also made a short documentary film on this issue which will be used to create awareness on the same.

Within the area of accessible banking, the XRCVC has established a partnership with CMC Ltd (a TATA Enterprise) to develop a finger print recognition software which can be used for recognizing thumb prints on cheques. The software is currently at the testing and development stage.

Awareness Programmes

Malhar 2006 (the inter-college student festival) saw the XRCVC participate in a unique and innovative manner. The XRCVC members designed an awareness

workshop called 'Antarchakshu - the Eye Within' which ran as a full day event on both the days at Malhar. This programme was conceptualized to help its participants get an insight into the lives of the visually challenged person through a series of simulation activities. Since then XRCVC has taken the same idea to other venues and the programme has been found to be an extremely effective way of sensitizing people to the lives of the visually challenged.

Student Activities

This year's calendar also saw a large number of student activities. A number of these were started this year

- A debating circle was started at the centre to help language development and articulation amongst students.
- Our Students participated in the nation wide Right to Information Campaign conducted in Aug 2006 and got wide acclaim. The Centre also helped to convert the RTI Act into Braille.
- The centre in partnership with IBM, conducted a two day IT Excitement camp to introduce students to various avenues open to them in the IT industry.
- The Diwali vacation saw the continuation of the intensive English Language training started in the summer vacation. This programme aimed at further refining and improving written communication skills of the students
- The centre also for the first time started Mobility training for students. With the help of a trained mobility instructor from National Association for the Blind, the centre conducted a week long mobility training course for four of the students who needed this training.
- The XRCVC-Gili Cricket Championship was held in December 2006. Unlike previous years where the cricket tournament was restricted to two colleges, this year a triangular series between St. Xavier's College, Ruia College and SIES College was conducted. St. Xavier's won the Cup and Ruia was the runner up.
- The centre also conducted an Eye camp for its students at the Bombay City Eye Institute to assess any possibility of a positive intervention to restore some degree of vision. In addition to this, in April '07 the XRCVC also conducted a specialized low vision screening for its students in partnership with Lotus College of Optometry to identify specific low vision aids which students can benefit from.
- The centre this year started a unique computer allotment scheme for its members. The centre has loaned out computer units on a need basis which would help the students to continue work from home as effectively as they currently do from college.
- With the recruitment of the Training and Development Officer, we have now started a regular computer training programme for students. This is conducted at varying levels ranging from basic computer training for beginners to more advanced courses for senior students.

Other Highlights

The XRCVC was also involved in a range of other activities.

- Website Launched. The XRCVC set up and launched its official website on 7th Sep 2006
- The XRCVC also started to liaison with employers for internships and placements for its students. Mr. Jatin Shah, our student who graduated last year, was placed with Johnson & Johnson Medical India on a three month Internship with the HR department.
- Ms Neha Trivedi along with the Training Manager of Johnson & Johnson conducted a 3 day personality development workshop with visually challenged students of Ruia college based on the module of '7 Habits of Highly Effective people'.
- Mr. Prashant Naik conducted a training programme on assistive technologies for Optometrists of the Low Vision Centre at the Bombay City Eye Institute.
- The centre has entered into the new area - assistive technologies. This year the centre has started a partnership with IBM to test a Linux Compatible screen reader and has also begun a partnership with Rediff to work towards greater web accessibility of Rediff portals.
- Workshop at J.J College of Architecture on Accessible Design: The XRCVC along with Mr. Ketan Kothari of NAB conducted a sensitization workshop for third year architecture students on the basic principles of accessible design.
- Presentations on Inclusive Education: Presentations were made at HR College as well as at the Xavier's Institute of Education on inclusive education using the XRCVC as a case study.
- Presentation and Training for Special educators and trainees: Mr. Prashant Naik, has made a presentation on Technology advancement and its application in the field of education for the visually challenged to teacher trainees at NAB as well as conducted a training programme in accessible technologies for itinerant trainers.
- Going Beyond: The XRCVC has also started an intensive computer training programme that is open to any visually challenged person. The first batch was conducted in April 2007.
- The XRCVC Library: As an immediate step whilst the efforts to amending the copyright law are on from our side, we have begun building up an e library and database which we envisage would become a library for the visually challenged with material and information available to them in accessible formats . "The XRCVC Library" would therefore be an electronic database of resources, both academic and non-academic for the use and access of visually challenged and print disabled persons. Currently our collection consists of five thousand titles ranging from classic literature to law and beyond. The database is open to outsiders as well.

The XRCVC has also since April 2007 become a primary member of the DAISY Forum of India (DFI). This forum will spearhead the creation of an electronic library in specially accessible format (DIASY) on a national level and share the resources amongst its members. The XRCVC as a primary member of the forum will be engaged in both Production and sharing of DAISY books.

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