

Annual Report 2009-2010



**Xavier's Resource Centre for the Visually Challenged (XRCVC),
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In 2009 – 2010 the XRCVC continued to build on its existing areas of work and to venture into new territories. The expansion was driven by the circumstances we encountered and by the need to evolve in a constantly changing world. Our endeavour as always has been to create a more inclusive society. This report highlights our initiatives to transform both the world of the visually challenged and the perceptions of the sighted world.

XRCVC's work over the last year can be shared through our key areas of work. The narrative below charts out our experiences of the varied programs and activities.

I. Advocacy Initiatives at the XRCVC

A key area of our work is to convince people who hold decision-making powers in the fields of print, banking and education to adapt their fields to allow access to the visually challenged in different ways.

Print Access

Our long-standing focus has been to overcome the information barriers that prevent the visually challenged from exploring the world of books. We followed a multi-pronged approach to ensure accessibility to the visually challenged.

Our Efforts at Ensuring an Equitable Copyright Law

This year has been filled with hectic lobbying by the XRCVC to ensure that the Copyright Act, 1957 up for amendment meets the needs of the print impaired. In this regards the XRCVC team met Mr Kapil Sibal, Minister of HRD. The meeting succeeded in getting the government to recognise the concerns of the print disabled.

Further prior to the tabling of the in the April 2010 session, the XRCVC engaged in a series of activities in order to ensure its effective referral to a Standing Committee. A national level alliance to lobby on the issue was formed - National Access Alliance (NAA). The NAA drafted a collective representation to the government as well as chalked out a strategy leading up to the parliament session.

NAA representatives including the XRCVC members met key parliamentarians of the ruling and the opposition parties. These negotiations resulted in the bill being referred to a parliamentary standing committee on HRD. Subsequently, the Alliance lobbied with the standing committee members and made a presentation to them. The report of the standing committee is now awaited for the monsoon session of parliament.

Building Bridges with the Publishing World

Our discussions with publishers resulted in significant developments - the signing of a MoU with Cambridge University Press for permission to their titles worldwide. We also met representatives of Tata McGraw Hill Ltd. to further the DFI-Publisher MoU process.

The XRCVC continued to discuss ways of making e-copies of text books, fiction and non-fiction books available to the visually challenged with several other publishing houses across the country.

A joint collaborative seminar in Delhi with the Director General of WIPO, the publishers' community and the visually impaired community explored practical models of working on print access in the country. It was the first time that the publishing community in India shared a platform with the visually impaired community along with government representatives to commit to the need for print access in the country.

In December the XRCVC took a step forward in its print access work; we launched the western India region chapter of the **Right to Read Campaign**. As part of the initiative the XRCVC contacted a large number of authors and publishers to seek their support for the print impaired person's right to read. The campaign was extremely well-received, with endorsements from over 600 authors and publishers.

Noted names in the literary community came out in full support of the right to read for the print disabled. Mr. Arun Shourie, Mr. Tarun Tejpal, Lord Meghnad Desai, Mr. Alok Bhalla, Mr. Girish Karnad, Mr. Chetan Bhagat, Mr. Dilip D'souza, Mr. Harsha Bhogle, Mr. Udayen Vajpeyi, Ms. Anju Makhija, Ms. Sai Paranjpye and Ms. Anupama Chopra, Mr. Norman Page, Mr. Jean Dreze, Mr. Anurag Mathur and Mr. Vikram Chandra are amongst the few names who lent their support to the campaign.

Amongst the publishing houses some of the names included Harper Collins India Ltd, Marg Publications, Balaji Publications, Popular Prakashan, Neelkanth Publishing House, Seth Prakashan Kendra, Vanathi Pathippakam, Marine Sports Publications and Manjul Publishing House Pvt Ltd.

The XRCVC carried this campaign to the National Book Fair in New Delhi. The DAISY Forum of India had a stall at the Book fair which the XRCVC managed; through this process we networked with many publishers and were able to get new leads with over 8-10 publishers.

Financial Access

The discrimination that the visually challenged face in accessing banking services has concerned the XRCVC for a long time. A notable achievement is that others are beginning to share our concerns and are making concerted efforts to address them.

ATMs becoming disabled friendly

Any time Money is a concept that ensures people access to some banking services 24x7. Unfortunately the design of the existing machines restricts access to those with vision impairment. The XRCVC collaborated with leading banks including the SBI and ATM manufacturers such as Diebold, NCR Corporation and AGS InfoTech to develop models of accessible ATMs for the Indian market.

In August the NCR Corporation and Deibold launched two model ATMs at the XRCVC. We collected feedback from a range of visually impaired users and conveyed the same to the developers for further testing and development. We also helped the NCR Corporation to finalise Braille labels for accessible ATMs.

The XRCVC has also begun dialogue with Corporation Bank to convert its existing ATM on campus into an accessible one given that it is used by many visually impaired persons because it is located near the XRCVC.

Inclusive banking

The XRCVC has always recognized the need for a coordinated strategy for the banking industry to take up the needs of the visually impaired. We partnered with CII in conducting a seminar on Banking Access for the Visually Impaired for leading banks in the country. The participants expressed their commitment to addressing this issue, and a select committee of the CII, the Banking Industry and organizations such as the XRCVC which work for the visually impaired has been set up to take this initiative forward.

Following the seminar a working group was formed: the CII-Accessibility forum which includes the XRCVC. The group will spearhead inclusive banking activities in the coming year with specific focus on Accessible ATMs, Accessible Net Banking and Accessible and smooth account operation methods. We are in the process of drafting a Banking access booklet with a list FAQs to facilitate discussions with banks. Work in the coming months will involve meetings with key banks to promote accessible banking.

Through the year the XRCVC has begun dialogue with SBI, Standard Chartered Bank and Saraswat Bank to take many of these ideas forward.

The XRCVC was also invited to a RBI core group meeting on making currency accessible. We offered our suggestions to the RBI on making the notes and coins more accessible for the visually impaired.

Expanding Educational Access

Visually Challenged students often encounter roadblocks in their paths to pursuing certain subjects for study. The sighted world determines which disciplines are open to them and which should be out of bounds. It is often thought that the field of education would be enlightened and inclusive. However, we have encountered a few obstacles in expanding access to education. These barriers have strengthened our resolve and we have succeeded with the help of others to make a few significant strides.

Can a visually challenged student major in psychology in the third year BA? Until last year the answer to that question was in the negative. In addressing this issue, the XRCVC worked with the University of Mumbai to develop guidelines for the psychology practical examinations conducted in the third year of the Bachelor of Arts course. The work with the Board of Studies (BOS) resulted in the board approving the plan which subsequently was passed by the Academic Council. Thus the university is now in the process of issuing the circular which will permit a VI student to study Psychology at the T.Y.B.A level.

Another noteworthy development is the circular issued by the Maharashtra State Board of Secondary and Higher Secondary Education to colleges in Maharashtra to allow visually challenged students to pursue science in the eleventh standard. Ms. Vijaysheela Sardesai, Chairperson of the board was approached again so that an extension circular could be issued to allow these students to continue their studies in the 12th standard too.

Success in one area was followed by a setback in another. A VI student pursuing 12th standard science is still not eligible to appear for the Maharashtra Common Entrance Test 2010 (MH-CET Medical) examination - a qualifying examination for the range of medical and paramedical courses. In order to make sure that Ms Kiritka Purohit who wished to pursue her degree course in physiotherapy is allowed to do so, the year has been full of work with a range of bodies involved in the process – The Directorate of Medical Education and Research (DNER), the Maharashtra State Department of Medical Education, The Indian Association of Physiotherapy and the Medical Council of India

Following several follow ups the case had to be finally taken to the Hon'ble Bombay High Court. The Court ruled in favour of the student allowing her to sit for the entrance examination. A subsequent hearing is due for consideration related to admissions

Simultaneously, the XRCVC in partnership with the Physiotherapy College for the Blind, Ahmedabad begun the process of putting together a working paper on adapting the Degree course in Physiotherapy for the visually impaired students. For the purpose the XRCVC has networked with the National Association for the Blind –Department of Rehabilitation (NAB-DOR) as well as the Royal National Institute for the Blind- Physiotherapy Support Service (RNIB PSS), UK to gather data.

Together with the Indian Association of Visually Impaired Physiotherapists (IAVIP) we began a dialogue with the Indian Association of Physiotherapists (IAP), the main physiotherapy body in the country, to register and recognise the existing practising visually impaired physiotherapists within the mainstream system.

This has been a significant first step in a struggle which has been going for many years for students with vision impairment. Ms Purohit will be the first visually challenged candidate who appeared for the MH-CET (Medical) entrance exam.

In continuation of its efforts to open up mainstream education for visually impaired students the XRCVC worked on getting appropriate writer guidelines implemented for the NMAT exam conducted by NMIMS, Mumbai.

Further as a follow up to its work with NABARD it got the organisation to commit to following appropriate writer guidelines for all their subsequent examinations.

In addition to this the XRCVC also provided back-up support to candidates preparing for their CAT exams, both in terms of material as well as to network with their respective institutes on matters related to taking the examination and the use of scribes.

II. Awareness Initiatives at the XRCVC

Our aim as always has been to spread the message of inclusiveness. We did this by conducting sensitization programmes for students, teachers and corporates. They were made aware of the different technologies and methods of interacting with the visually impaired. Our objective was to convince them to open the doors of their schools or their workplaces to the visually challenged. Our awareness programmes with students were directed to present them with the idea of volunteering as readers or writers for the visually impaired.

The educational institutions which participated in our sensitization programmes were: Nirmala Niketan College of Social Work, SNTD University Para-professional course, K.J. Somaiya Medical College, TCS Maitree's Advanced Computing course, NSS Hill Spring International School, Tardeo, Beacon High School.

Other sensitization programmes were conducted for the itinerant teachers of Sightsavers, the staff members of MNB Industrial home for the Blind, and the interns of Johnson & Johnson. We also initiated dialogue at Nirmala and TISS to discuss holding workshops to sensitize various NGOs about employing disabled persons.

Dr. Sam Taraporevala was invited to speak at a Seminar on "Inclusive Education" at the SNTD College, Ghatkopar, Mumbai. Mumbai He was also asked to participate in a panel

discussion following his presentation. The seminar was held to sensitise students on the benefits of inclusive education.

Antarchakshu

The XRCVC organized its mega awareness event Antarchakshu on 17 and 18 September 2009. The event this year was organized to reach out to a range of stakeholders from corporates, educational institutions, the banking community and students. Together with the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) we brought in corporate participation this year. Further one of the key themes at Antarchakshu was accessible banking, involving the exhibition of the newly-launched Accessible ATMs.

The event was a huge success with over 1200 people attending. Of these, about 100 were corporate participants from some of the leading corporates groups including - Taj Hotels, ITC Hotels and Johnson & Johnson, and 150 were trainee-teachers from three teacher training institutes - K.J Somaiya College, Bombay Teacher Training College and SNDT University. Antarchakshu was also visited by over 150 school students from Cathedral and John Cannon School and B. D. Somani International School. In addition to these the event was attended by college students and a range of visitors.

Feedback secured indicated heightened sensitivity and awareness on the issues sought to be communicated.

Spreading the message of Equal Employment Opportunity and equal rights for persons with disabilities

The XRCVC made a presentation at the CII HR Summit, 'Envisage Organizations of 2015 - Shaping Tomorrow Today', to present the concept of equal opportunity employment. The summit was attended by over 100 senior managers across the CM member organizations.

We also ran a training session on Disability and Counseling to equip potential helping professionals across various sectors to meet the needs of visually impaired and other disabled persons. The session was conducted for the Nirmala Niketan Certificate course in counselling.

The XRCVC joined hands with Sightsavers International to launch the Mumbai Eye Care (MEC) campaign a five-year comprehensive eye care programme for Mumbai. As part of the launch we did a modified version of the Antarchakshu programme at Dharavi, Mumbai. The programme aimed at sensitizing the 200 participants to the life of visually impaired persons. Subsequently, we conducted two more awareness workshops: for a woman's group and students from Akanksha and for the employees of Johnson & Johnson ltd.

Throughout the year through its various awareness programmes the XRCVC has been able to reach out to 1673 persons.

III. Direct Support Services at the XRCVC – For families and Individuals

Over the years we have included new areas of concern within our purview but we have not lost sight of our core constituency: the visually challenged students. An important area of our work is to equip the visually impaired students with the skills and resources to function independently.

We provided educational support to two of our students who were preparing for post-graduate management entrance tests. They were successful in securing admission to Jammalal Bajaj Institute of Management Studies and to Symbiosis College of Management and Human Resource Development, Pune.

In continuing its work on increasing educational access the XRCVC provided back-up support to students appearing for various entrance examinations, some of these were the CAT, the IRMA test and the XAT.

All through the year we conducted advanced and basic computer training, and English language courses for visually challenged students from across the city.

In order to support deserving visually impaired students pursuing higher education the XRCVC had set up the XRCVC-Tech Mahindra Scholarship. This year we received a total of 55 applications from across the country. After a scrutiny of the applications and telephone interviews we awarded scholarships to 10 students pursuing a range of courses such as MBA, MSW, B.Ed, M.Phil and P.hd.

The Lions club of east Mumbai scholarship was awarded to Mr. Salim Sheikh who graduated in Political Science. An individual donor, Mr. D. K. Patel approached us to set up another scholarship for our students.

The XRCVC Parent Support group meeting had a session with Ms. Nandini Menon who gave her inputs on working with children and their education. We also had an open house session for students who appeared for the 10th standard exams to guide them decide about college admission. We also provided counselling support to new members as well as addressed individual inquiries related to rehabilitation and career choices.

Training in mathematics for the visually impaired has been a key area of concern for the visually impaired. In order to address this issue as part of the parent support group meeting the XRCVC conducted a training session for the parents on teaching mathematics to visually impaired students.

We assisted Saksham, Delhi, in implementing a unique net book scheme for visually impaired students in Mumbai.

The XRCVC membership for the year reached 130 members thus once again expanding its direct services to greater number of beneficiaries.

IV. The Technology Frontier

We are determined to keep in step with the latest technology so we constantly upgrade and acquire the latest appropriate devices such as low vision aids and special machines for creating tactile graphics.

Our DAISY production work is progressing and we have produced a full text full audio DAISY format of the children's book – "The Magic Store of Nu Cham Vu". Further, 10 more titles of SAGE publications have been converted into DAISY format. In addition, we have set up a catalogue system for the DAISY database. This will now make all the DAISY books created accessible to users.

This year we inaugurated a new room granted to us by St. Xavier's College. The new room which began functioning in October is a training centre for assistive technology. We conducted several workshops on new advances in Accessible Technology and career guidance for: paraprofessionals and the NAB staff; students from the NAB Rehabilitation department; itinerant teachers from the NAB Education Department; the NAB batch of 'Independence program' students; students, and their parents from Voice Vision with Ms. Sushmeetha Bubna; students of the B.Ed. in Special Education Course at SNTD University; students of the D. Ed in Special Education of the NAB Education Department.

Our training is not restricted to the confines of the XRCVC; we share our expertise with other organisations. Mr. Prashant Naik conducted JAWS and DAISY training sessions at the TCS Maitree's Advance Computer Training Centre for the Blind, Jogeshwari, Mumbai. He also conducted a workshop on "Modern Technologies for the visually challenged and IT career opportunities for the blind" at the NAB Employment Department, Worli, Mumbai.

A total of 66 persons were trained in assistive technology through the year and 213 participants from the various profiles were sensitized and oriented to use of assistive technologies.

The centre in order to keep up with the latest technologies made the following additions to its facilities.

- Ruby - A portable video magnifier for low vision person with excellent features.
- Angel - A multipurpose portable digital device having facilities of daisy player, voice recorder, music and FM player and e-book reader, etc.
- Daisy players 'Buddy' – A low cost daisy player and multifunctional device.
- PIAF tactile Graphic Image Maker
- MacBook Pro – An excellent and advanced notebook from Apple which has in-built screen reader called Voice Over.
- HP Scanjet G3110 Photo scanner

V. Networking Initiatives: Garnering the value of collective work

We strongly believe that a synergy of more than one mind will propel our work ahead. Through the year the XRCVC has continued to work with its existing partners and built new ones to strengthen its works.

Our active association with a range of organisations in the field continued to carry forward work of mutual interests. This also led to the new national alliance – National Access Alliance to further the cause of work in the area of print access

The XRCVC also explored work with Grameen Shramik Pratishthan to discuss ways in which his organization along with the XRCVC could embark upon a joint strategy to expand employment and livelihood programme for the rural visually challenged in rural Maharashtra.

We also participated in a disability group specific consultation on harmonization of Disability laws organized by the Human Rights Law Network in coalition with the National Association of the Deaf and the Deaf Way Foundation in New Delhi.

The XRCVC team has networked and partnered with Human Rights Law Network, Mumbai, to seek their assistance in the legal battles that the XRCVC has been engaged with. The XRCVC team this year also visited Worth Trust and Shankara Netralaya, both from Chennai, to share our work and identify common areas of work.

Our work with one of our existing partners NAB- India continued this year as well. The XRCVC provided them with technical consultancy for website development and server configuration. The XRCVC provides regular assistive technology training and support to various NAB programmes, students and staff.

The XRCVC also worked with the Computer Society of India (CSI) to incorporate systems for the visually impaired to take the CSI examination. A total of 13 students took the CSI certification examination.

In addition to the above the XRCVC continued its computer training for a range of visitors as well as met with Ruparel College representatives to help them explore the possibility of setting up a support centre at the college.

Papers presented / Awards received this year include

1. Dr Sam Taraporevala made a presentation at the Sightsavers International regional meet on "New initiatives in Inclusion" under the theme "social inclusion"
2. Dr Sam Taraporevala presented a paper on "Setting up resource centers and Capacity Building" at the National Conference on ICTs for the differently-abled under privileged communities in Education, Employment and Entrepreneurship 2009 - (NCIDEEE 2009)' at Chennai.
3. Dr Sam Taraporevala presented a paper on Social Advocacy at the Sightsaver's workshop on Social Inclusion
4. Dr Sam Taraporevala, Director, XRCVC was awarded the 11th Shell Helen Keller Award by the NCPEDP.
5. The XRCVC team went to New Delhi to receive The Manthan Award 2009 for Digital Inclusion for Development.

Our loss

We fondly remember Ms. Fareeda Banja who joined us as a volunteer in June 2008. We instantly recognised her commitment, her hard work and her quick grasp of our work; and we persuaded her to join us as a regular staff. On 26/11 she suffered a personal loss: her husband was killed in the Mumbai terror attacks. Although she was grief stricken, she resumed work after a brief period of mourning with undiminished enthusiasm. She engaged in a variety of tasks ranging from teaching English to the visually challenged students to handling the XRCVC's correspondence to other administrative work. Her sense of humour, her cheerful smile and her willingness to help endeared her to the staff, the students and their families, and the volunteers of the XRCVC. Sadly, we lost her suddenly on 12 September 2009. Our thoughts are with her son and the rest of her family.

Acknowledgements

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Our thanks also go out to Fr. Frazer Mascarenhas, principal, St. Xavier's College and the administrative and accounts staff and our army of volunteers who are the backbone to all our efforts.

Dr. Sam Taraporevala
Director
XRCVC