



Going Beyond Numbers

Stories of the Real Impact of XRCVC

St. Xavier's College, Mumbai



Going Beyond Numbers: Stories of the Real Impact of XRCVC



A Letter from Team XRCV

Dear Well-wisher,

Despite the turn of tide of the society towards diversity, equity and inclusion, the lives of persons with disabilities are marked by all kinds of significant barriers to leading independent and productive lives – physical, social, legal, attitudinal etc.

Set up in 2003, as an assistive technology resource centre for students with visual impairment studying at St. Xavier's College, Mumbai, the Xavier's Resource Centre for the Visually Challenged (XRCVC) has organically grown over the last two decades into a national-level support, training, awareness and advocacy centre for persons with all disabilities with a vision "A diverse and inclusive world where all, irrespective of disability, can thrive."

A snapshot of the impact of our work in numbers over the years is as below:

- 7,000+ PwDs reached
- 5,600+ stakeholders reached through 160+ stakeholder trainings
- 2,100+ teaching-learning aids (TLAs) in a TLA library
- 700+ books created in accessible format
- 250+ Assistive Technology available in-house
- 54,000+ persons reached through 640+ Antarchakshu® awareness events and workshops and Assistive Technology Awareness Exhibitions

In this booklet, we present a series of over 20 success stories from our 20th year. The XRCVC first released a booklet on our success stories in the year 2022-2023. This was well received and garnered positive feedback and recognition from various stakeholders. Encouraged by this response, we have produced this publication for our 20th year.

These stories highlight the impact of our programs and the positive impact they have on the lives of our beneficiaries. While it is important to know the numbers we have reached, it is also crucial to understand the real-life impact on individual lives through these stories. To us the person behind the numbers matters the most, and our real focus is on the quality of the impact rather than just the numbers reached. These real-life examples showcase the diverse ways in which we address the unique needs of PWDs, both at the micro and macro-level including educational support, vocational training, advocacy for policy change, and community integration initiatives.

They also show that disability inclusion is not just a matter of social justice but also a catalyst for broader societal growth and enrichment. By fostering environments that support and empower PWDs, we create stronger, more cohesive communities.

Each narrative is a testament to the potential that can be unlocked when barriers are removed and inclusive practices are embraced. We hope these stories will bring you as much joy as it has been for us to be a part of them.

The stories from this year would not have become reality without the support we have received from diverse stakeholders, whose role we gratefully acknowledge. We extend our deepest gratitude to the funders, partners, and sponsors who have played a pivotal role in shaping the XRCVC into what it is



today. We would like to offer special thanks to the Dhun Pestonji Parakh Discretionary Trust (DPP), Mr. Vikram Utamsingh, Mr. Sudhir Shenoy, Tata Investment Corporation Ltd, PSA BDP UGL Global Logistics India Pvt Ltd. We also express our profound appreciation to the N M Wadia Charities, Lila K Jagtiani Foundation, Paragon Property Enterprises Pvt Ltd, Lions Club of Byculla, Mr. Farokh N Subedar, Mr. Himmatraj G Jain, Mr. Ankush Jain, Ms. Rashna T Doongaji, Sir JJ Foundation, Mendonsa Foundation, Mr. Mohit Sodani, Mr. Vibhas Sen, Ms. Clara Lobo, Lions Club of East Bombay, Ms. Vahbiz Pestonjamasp, Ms. Persis Pestonjamasp for their invaluable support. Thanks also go out to our sponsors of Antarchakshu 2.0, Season 6 — Godrej Industries Ltd, SBI Mutual Fund, Tata Sons Ltd and Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL).

We extend our special thanks to the Jesuit Management of St. Xavier's College, Mumbai, our rector Dr. (Fr.) Keith D'Souza, S.J., the Principal, Dr. Rajendra Shinde, Dr. (Fr.) Conrad Pesso S.J. and his team at the Treasurer's Office for their constant support and guidance, thanks also to the teams at the General Office, SIP department and the Student Inclusion Cell (SIC). A thank you also to the team of Salsette Developers Private Limited (Viviana Mall) for all their support for the XRCVC- Viviana Extension centre where many of our success stories are anchored.

Thank you one and all for being there for us and being instrumental in upholding the XRCVC's reputation as a centre of excellence throughout the nation.

Team XRCVC

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Empowering Lives: Individual Stories of Success

Beyond Barriers and Borders: Narratives of XRCVC's Impact from Around the World

1. Yagnit Vadhel – Wings to Fly High



"If I wouldn't have done this (XRCVC training programmes), I wouldn't have been able to travel a mile, not even a mile, a step alone!" - Yagnit Vadhel

Yagnit Vadhel is one of XRCVC's shining success stories. Yagnit was the first student with visual impairment who completed his BSc (Chemistry) from the St. Xavier's College, Mumbai and XRCVC was instrumental in ensuring access was created at every possible juncture of this journey to be able to realise his dream of pursuing graduation in science.

He continues to be a trailblazer and is currently the first student with visual impairment pursuing his Master's degree in Plant Biology (Botany) from the prestigious University of Vienna in Austria. Here, he has successfully been able to transplant all the learnings from the centre's work in ensuring barrier-free access to STEM education for him in his Master's program by advocating successfully for his reasonable accommodation needs. He also says his peers and professors commend his ability to independently manage his studies and laboratory work and are happy to see him as an equal collaborator rather than a barrier or burden. The word of his success has spread around Europe and he has been approached by students with visual impairment in various universities across Europe for inputs on relevant support systems for them.

Yagnit not only shines in academia, but also is living a highly independent life in Vienna wherein he lives alone and travels around Europe. He attributes his independence to the training programmes of Activities of Daily Living and Orientation and Mobility offered at the XRCVC which he attended as a preparation for going abroad. He excitedly reports that he is not only is able to manage all his daily tasks himself but also is excelling at them – be it cooking, cleaning, organising his room and documents etc – and he credits this to the skills he learnt in the XRCVC programs.



He also commends XRCVC's Orientation and Mobility program that taught him how to navigate his way around new places and ask for directions in crystal clear manner. These skills have helped him travel around Europe and he has travelled to Munich, Germany, Innsbruck in Austria, The Czech Republic, Poland, Budapest, Slovakia and Milan since his move to Vienna and he looks forward to visiting the Scandinavian countries and the Finnish Lapland later this year. He proudly states that his friends are very happy to travel with him as he is seen as peer rather than a barrier because of his independent travel abilities.

Yagnit is actively exploring doctoral options and plans to become a researcher in his field.

2. Voices from Africa – Technology Training for Professional Growth

Lilian Onyine Evughire



"I am now very comfortable with my knowledge about computer... everything now became clearer to me" asserts Lillian Onyine Evughire, an advocate based in Nigeria. She found out about the XRCVC computer training programmes through the social media groups in Nigeria where XRCVC has had a presence since 2023.

Lilian had earlier pursued some computer training programmes for the visually impaired but found them to be not very effective. Determined to enhance her skills and achieve professional independence by gaining mastery of computers, she joined XRCVC's Basic Computer Training and Intermediate Computer Training certification programs. Additionally, she attended the Tech Roshni workshops regularly, which provided further insights and practical knowledge.

Lilian's experience with XRCVC exceeded her expectations. The courses were comprehensive and covering everything from basic computer operations to more advanced skills. Moreover, she specially mentioned finding the instructor - Mr Vikas Dabholkar's patience with questions and pacing very helpful to the learning process.

She became more confident and at ease with the computer-related activities essential to her profession. She can efficiently draft documents, conduct research, and manage her tasks with ease. The training has helped her gain professional independence and proficiency.

Lilian is pursuing her Master's degrees and strongly feels that the computer training from the XRCVC will help her do her studies and complete her projects well.



Taiwo Olusegun Oluwagbemi – A Teacher's Learnings



Taiwo lost his vision at the early age of six. He has completed his Masters degrees and post-graduate diploma in education and is now working as a teacher in Nigeria.

Although Taiwo had been exposed to computers and technology since his undergraduate days, he found his initial training inadequate and struggled to use them competently. Discovering XRCVC through social media, he enrolled in our online computer training programs and successfully completed both the BCT and ICT programs.

Since starting his training with us, Taiwo feels he has made significant progress. He regularly attends our Tech Roshni workshops, learning additional computer-related topics to enhance his competence. Taiwo states that the "knowledge he derives from the training is actually helpful." Previously, he relied heavily on his wife for assistance with computer-related tasks. Now, he is not only able to use the computer independently and efficiently for his job but also helps his non-disabled colleagues with MS Excel and other programs to effectively compile scores and reports for his students.

Looking ahead, Taiwo is excited to apply Excel and other skills that he has learnt with us to further his knowledge of computers and become a programmer.



Outstanding Board Exam Results: Success Stories of Inclusive Education from Mainstream Schools

1. Kaushiki Patel – Academic Excellence in the ICSE Board Exams



"XRCVC has been really helpful to me throughout my academic journey," says Kaushiki Patel who has been associated with the XRCVC since the age of 6 years old.

While she did her schooling at the Prime Academy ICSE School - mainstream school, she attended all of our school-level skill development programmes for students with visual impairment in mainstream schools. In these programs she learnt skills such as reading and writing in Braille, activities of daily living, using computers and assistive technology for educational purposes etc enabling her to independently and successfully complete her studies in a mainstream school. XRCVC also helped her out with books in accessible formats and other teaching-learning aids such as tactile diagrams etc.

Kaushiki scored a phenomenal 97.4% in her ICSE 10th standard board exams and wants to do her further studies in the arts field.

She continues to attend XRCVC's training programmes and has attended the Orientation and Mobility programme under the guidance of Ms. Shizanne D'mello to learn how to travel to college independently.

Kaushiki Patel's phenomenal results have found a mention in the Hindustan Times and can be read at: Hindustan Times article on Kaushiki Patel



2. Siddhi Dalvi: Top All-rounder Performer from the SSC Board



"The computer training given to me as part of the level 4 course encouraged me to take my laptop to school and study using the same. Eventually, I thought of giving my 10th exams using a laptop. This helped me immensely and I scored 94.2%. I would attribute at least 20% of my success to the fact that I appeared my exams using a laptop," says Siddhi Dalvi a totally blind student from Kalyan.

Siddhi was the first Marathi-medium SSC student with visual impairment of Maharashtra who took her board exams on the laptop.

Siddhi has been a student of the centre since 2017. She was a part of the Level 4 programme – a specialised training programme designed to support students with visual impairment attending mainstream schools. It teaches them specific skills that are not a part of mainstream school curricula such as Braille, language, math, etc. In fact, it was XRCVC where she learnt how to study math using her computers.

"In Std V, Siddhi joined St Xavier's College's XRCVC [Xavier's Resource Centre for the Visually Challenged] for training. This was apart from her school. We travelled to CST from Kalyan for this. It was very fruitful as her learning capacity and understanding improved significantly. She received essential coaching and guidance, which played a crucial role in enhancing her skills," says Pratiksha Dalvi, mother of Siddhi Dalvi.

She scored a commendable 94.2% in her SSC board exams and stood second in her school. Siddhi is also a national-level swimmer representing Maharashtra and has won three gold medals last October and this year at the 23rd National Para Swimming Championship 2024.

She is currently learning more life-skills through XRCVC training programs and is enrolled in our training programme on Orientation and Mobility to gain greater independence as she moves to higher education.

Siddhi Dalvi's outstanding performance has been extensively covered by the Mid Day: Mid Day's article about Siddhi Dalvi



Enabling Inclusive Higher Education: From Our Students of St. Xavier's College, Mumbai

1. Ajay Kharb – Imbibing Learnings to Create Impact in Society



"This was a very good and fruitful journey together," says Ajay Kharb, a student with visual impairment, as he speaks of his experience of studying at St. Xavier's College, Mumbai with XRCVC as a support system.

Ajay Kharb completed his high school education in Delhi and chose to pursue his undergraduate education at St. Xavier's College, Mumbai because of the holistic inclusive education setup which is managed end-to-end by the XRCVC with the support of the college. He also wanted to become independent as he had lived only with his family with a limited exposure to the real world.

Ajay asserts that the comprehensive reasonable accommodations form for students with disabilities to be filled every year to receive the particular support they require to be one of the best practices he has experienced. He particularly mentions the independence and empowerment being able to use the laptop to take one's exams as offered by the college brings for students with visual impairment because there is no dependence on scribes and their note-taking capabilities for marks and one has more control over the process for oneself. Ajay also speaks of the positive impact of the extra-curricular activities such as organising cricket matches for the students with visual impairment on campus and being able to create awareness about the lives of persons with disabilities by being a resource person at our Antarchakshu® workshops has had on him in this inclusive education setup. He speaks gratefully of the end-to-end support of all kinds provided by the XRCVC team who always were approachable.

Ajay completed his B.A. in Political Science this year and is planning to study Masters in Public Policy. He is excited to take the learnings from his St. Xavier's College, Mumbai inclusive education setup to be an advocate of inclusion for persons with disabilities in the educational setup and the country through his work.



2. Siona Tribhuvan – End-to End Support for Reasonable Accommodations



Siona Tribhuvan was a TYBA student with a specific learning disability. She has had all the facilities and accommodation that were required by her for completing her academic requirements. In her own words, "I had a really good time at Xavier's as a TYBA student who has a learning disability. I was provided with all the requirements I needed, such as extra time during the examination".

In fact, she unfortunately met with a railway accident and was unable to write her own exams. She approached the management who referred her to XRCVC. She has been extremely grateful for the assistance provided to her by the student co-ordinator. To quote her again, "A special thank you to Poonam ma'am, as she always helped me whenever it was needed; she supported me, answered my silly queries, and helped me a lot, especially when I met with an accident and was in need of a writer for my examination."

The centre has always tried to meet the requirements of students with various disabilities. In fact, it would be Centre's endeavour to provide as many accommodations as possible so that the students can complete their academic pursuits with optimum success.

3. Anshul Shashidhar – Support Services for Student with Autism



The XRCVC provides inclusive education support services for all disabilities at the St. Xavier's College, Mumbai. It ensures that an adequate support system is created through a 360-degree approach for a



student with disability. The XRCVC works closely with the students, especially through the admissions process and intake form to ensure the support is tailored to the student's specific needs.

Anshul Shashidhar is a student with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Though some of his accommodation needs have been very specific requiring additional efforts from the college, the XRCVC has successfully worked with the college management to ensure Anshul is not denied the opportunity to pursue the education he is eligible for.

According to Ms Ajita Shashidhar, "The XRCVC team was like a whiff of fresh air." Several colleges expressed their inability to provide accommodations for Anshul but St. Xavier's College and XRCVC were ready to help Anshul with the necessary accommodations and adjustments. "Anshul qualified (the entrance test). It was a dream come true! ... Be it sensitizing Anshul's classmates about his challenges, protecting him from bullying incidents or giving time to Anshul to speak his mind out, the staff at XRCVC has always been there for him."

Anshul is about to start his third year of B.Sc. (IT) studies and he will continue his studies and succeed to the best of his capabilities.

4. Phiroze Matthai – 360- degree Approach to Inclusion



Phiroze Matthai, a student with autism spectrum disorder, has made remarkable strides in his transition from school to college. Initially facing communication challenges, his experience transformed significantly after he approached the centre. His mother, Ms. Cooma, expressed her gratitude, saying, "Everyone was so helpful and caring, and that made a big difference. They looked after him, ensuring his transition from school to college was smooth."

Phiroze began to engage with other students and showed marked improvement in his academic performance. Reflecting on his journey, he shared, "The support from the SWD coordinator and the extra notes helped me understand concepts and topics much better. The centre made sure I felt comfortable."



Now, Phiroze is successfully continuing his college studies and is set to enter his second year of BA this academic year. The centre's support played a crucial role in making his educational journey manageable and successful.

5. Reece Rodrigues – Ensuring Appropriate Accommodations



Reece Rodrigues is a student with Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) who has just passed his first year of junior college. He came to the college on a visit organised by Gateway School of Mumbai of inclusive colleges. His mother was highly impressed by the services offered and decided to enrol Reece at St. Xavier's College.

Reece has been in need of a writer however his certificate did not recommend using a writer. This resulted in difficulties. The centre worked with the mother and recommended the hospital to rectify the certificate so he could use a writer.

In the words of his mother, "During his LD certification at KEM, the counsellor had certified that writer was not required but during his interaction in the college, the team realised that he required a writer. The support and guidance well in advance of the 12th Board ensured that we get the certificate rectified by KEM. The process begins well in advance to ensure that the children get all the facilities granted by the government."

The Centre has always striven to provide optimum facilities so that students with disabilities can attain their academic success to the best of their capabilities. This is an example on those lines.

Reece is presently studying at SYJC - Commerce and it is hoped that he will achieve his potential in the future.



Realising Dreams – Pathways to Premier Institutes in India

1. Roshni Patra – Journey to the Prestigious Ashoka University



Roshni Patra's journey of academic success is another story of how with a lot of determination inclusive education can succeed. Roshni was referred to XRCVC through another NGO. Initially, she attended computer training programs at XRCVC's Viviana training centre, which marked the beginning of a transformation in her educational experience.

Roshni's mother, Meenakshi Patra, proudly recalls the impact XRCVC has had on her daughter. "XRCVC has helped Roshni in all aspects of her education. The way she speaks and performs her educational tasks is due to their intervention," she says.

Since joining the centre in 2017, Roshni has participated in various training programs at XRCVC's centre at St. Xavier's College, Mumbai. The centre's staff played a crucial role in advocating for Roshni's needs, ensuring that her school allowed her to use a laptop for classwork. This adaptation was instrumental in her ability to succeed academically, culminating in her completing her Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) exams with commendable marks of 88%.

Roshni's achievements are a reflection of the collaborative efforts of her hardwork, XRCVC's dedicated staff and interventions and her school's willingness to make inclusive education possible for her. The centre even trained her school teachers in inclusive education practices, significantly enhancing her learning environment. Additionally, XRCVC provided Roshni with tactile diagrams and trained her family members to create them, enabling her to fully utilize technology in her studies.

"It was only due to XRCVC that I am able to use computers. They provided me with all the relevant tactile diagrams and trained my family members to create them. Today I am successful only due to the centre," Roshni asserts.

Her hard work and the unwavering support from XRCVC has resulted in her earning a full scholarship to the prestigious Ashoka University in Sonipat, Haryana. As she prepares to embark on her academic career, Roshni aims to become a psychologist. Her story is a shining example of how inclusive education can empower individuals to achieve their dreams.



2. Aditya Mittal - Making Way to the Elite IIM - Bangalore



Adity Mittal lost his sight in 2016 at the age of 22 due to a degenerative disease and tried desperately to find a medical cure for it. He is a qualified Mechanical Engineer working in the finance sector at that time with a promising career ahead. However, loss of vision created barriers for him in his professional life, due to which he guit his job and went back to his hometown in Shimla.

He got the reference of XRCVC in 2022 from an ex-student of the centre who is the colleague of his sister. Aditya joined the XRCVC when he'd lost hope about being able to be independent and pursue a career that he had dreamt of. He enrolled for our certification computer training courses and re-learnt how to use computers with screen-readers proficiently. He found the training to be most useful in gaining mastery in using computers through a different skill set such as his sense of hearing and using the keyboard and not the mouse.

Aditya Mittal has secured admission in one of the country's top 3 management institutes – Indian Institute of Management – Bangalore (IIM-B) for the next academic year. He has expressed confidence in pursuing further education and dealing with the challenges that may come along the way.



Making a Lasting Difference: Community Impact

Government Collaborations – Towards Inclusive Public Systems and Processes

1. Election Commission of India Training Program – Towards Accessibility of the **Democratic Process**

In November 2023, the Election Commission of India (ECI) reached out to XRCVC, St. Xavier's College, Mumbai, with a vital request: to conduct training sessions on the accessibility of social media and documents. This initiative was in preparation for the upcoming elections in 2024. The ECI aimed to ensure that all election-related content was accessible to everyone, including persons with disabilities. The sessions were conducted by Mr. Sushil Pandit and Mr. Ketan Kothari from the XRCVC team. Representatives from all states attended this critical training session, which was designed to equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge to create and share accessible content.



Participants during the training session in November 2023

Training Session Overview

The training session held in November 2023 covered the following key areas:

- 1. Understanding Accessibility:
 - The importance of accessibility in digital content.
 - Legal and ethical considerations.
- 2. Accessible Social Media Practices:
 - How to write descriptive alternative text for images.
 - Using captions and transcripts for videos.
 - Structuring posts to be screen reader-friendly.
- 3. Creating Accessible Documents:
 - Formatting documents for accessibility.
 - Using heading structures, lists, and tables appropriately.
 - Ensuring PDFs are accessible.



4. Practical Exercises:

- Hands-on activities to practice creating accessible posts and documents.
- Real-time feedback on participants' work.



Group photo of state representatives attending the training session

Follow-Up and Implementation

The ECI encouraged state representatives to organize similar training sessions for their respective staff. Among the states, Jharkhand's ECI team showed remarkable enthusiasm and commitment. They invited us to conduct a follow-up session in December 2023, demonstrating their dedication to making their electoral content accessible.

Follow-up training session with Jharkhand ECI team in December 2023

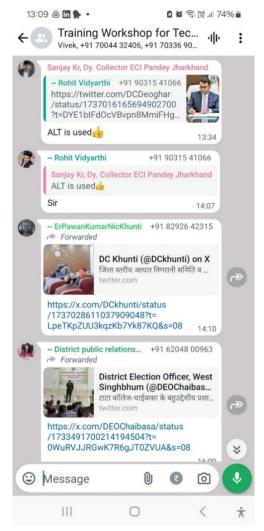


Follow-up training session with Jharkhand ECI team in December 2023



Continuous Support and Improvement

After the December session, the Jharkhand ECI team remained in constant communication with us. They formed a WhatsApp group where they would share links to their social media posts for review. This continuous feedback loop allowed us to provide timely suggestions and improvements. As a result, Jharkhand ECI's social media presence became consistently accessible, ensuring that all citizens, including those with disabilities, could engage with their content effectively.



Screenshot of WhatsApp feedback group with Jharkhand ECI team

Feedback from Participants

The feedback from the participants and state representatives was overwhelmingly positive:

State Representative from Punjab: This was very informative and enlightening session. Moving forward, such training sessions should be held more often at different levels.

State Representative from Telangana: I have lot of Knowledge gain from this section and we can learn more how to design and how to prepare the documents as accessibility. Thank you very much.

Jharkhand ECI Team: This is one-of-a-kind session will change the way we normally communicate in social media and in our day-to-day life.



Impact

The impact of our training and ongoing support was significant:

- **Enhanced Awareness:** State representatives became more aware of the importance of digital accessibility.
- Improved Skills: Participants acquired practical skills in creating accessible content.
- Increased Accessibility: There was a noticeable improvement in the accessibility of social media posts and documents shared by the ECI, particularly in Jharkhand.
- Sustainable Practices: The Jharkhand ECI team adopted a sustainable approach to accessibility, integrating it into their standard content creation processes.

Conclusion

The collaboration with the Election Commission of India exemplifies the positive change that can result from focused training and continuous support. By making their content accessible, the ECI has taken a significant step towards inclusivity, ensuring that electoral information is available to all citizens, regardless of their disabilities. This case study highlights the importance of accessibility in digital communication and the impact of dedicated training and support in achieving it.

The training conducted at Jharkhand was covered in the news by the local media and can be read at: News Wing article on Jharkhand State Election Commission training programme

2. Rehabilitation Council of India – Collaborations with Policy Makers

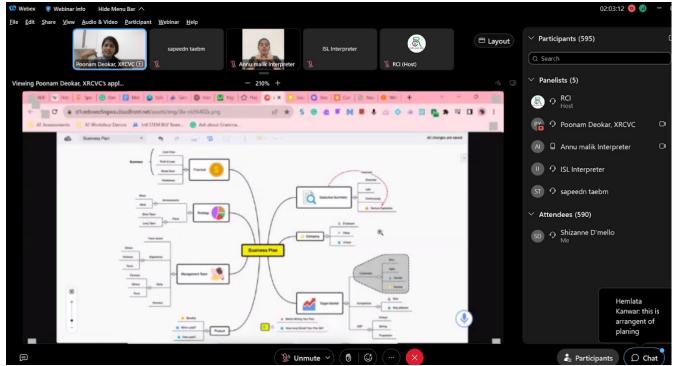
The Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) is the principal statutory body to regulate and monitor services given to persons with disabilities, to standardise syllabi and to maintain a Central Rehabilitation Register of all qualified professionals and personnel working in the field of Rehabilitation and Special Education. The XRCVC collaborated with the RCI in two major areas:

Mr. Ketan Kothari, our Managing Consultant – Programs was nominated as an expert member on two committees that reviewed the syllabi for D.Ed., B.Ed., and M.Ed in Special Education. The recommendations from these committees have laid the bases for the newly revised syllabi which are now being operationalised throughout the country.

The Centre has also worked with RCI in conducting Continuous Rehabilitation Education (CRE) programmes. Ms. Poonam Deokar our Lead Consultant – Inclusive Education conducted two sessions on Assistive Technology for Students with Specific Learning Disabilities in August 2023 to help them update their knowledge and skills and continue to provide the best possible services and support for PWDs. More than 1000 rehab professionals from all across India participated in this virtual programme.

Besides this the XRCVC has always been part of various initiatives of the RCI and hopes to continue the association in the future.





Continuous Rehabilitation Education Training Session for the RCI

3. Central Railways - Disability Sensitisation Programme for the Frontline Staff

"How we communicate with disable people Yaha ki activity se feel hua ki unki life aam aadmi se mushkil hai isliye unhe railway me aane jaane ke liye aasan tarike provide karaye jaane chahiye" -Khushboo Kushwaha

The XRCVC was invited by the Central Railways Mumbai Division to conduct disability sensitisation programmes for the Travelling Ticket Examiners (TTE) and Railway Protection Force (RPF) staff to enhance their ability to cater to the needs of all passengers with disabilities.

Mr Krishna Warrier and Mr Ketan Kothari of XRCVC conducted this session. Through immersive simulation exercises, the attendees were given a preview of the lives of persons with disabilities. This was followed by an interactive knowledge-sharing session in which they were made aware of the specific needs of persons with disabilities and how to best interact with them. This helped them understand better the needs of PWDs and through the new skills learnt they felt more confident in being able to cater to the needs of PWDs and enhance their travel experience.





Training programme for the TTE and RPF staff of Central Railways Mumbai Division

This programme was covered by the Free Press Journal and can be read at: Free Press Journal Article on the Central Railways Disability Sensitisation Training Programme

Success of Advocacy Initiatives – Creating Rightful Access

1. Zill Jain – Supporting a Legal Challenge for Access to Mainstream Physiotherapy Education



Zill Suresh Jain approached the XRCVC in October 2022, as she was being disqualified on grounds of her low vision from appearing for the Counselling round for admission to the Bachelor of Physiotherapy (BPTh) course despite it being an established profession for persons with blindness and low vision in India and internationally. XRCVC advised her to petition to the Bombay High Court with them acting as a support service due to their earlier work in the case of Kritika Purohit. Owing to the petition, the Bombay High Court issued an interim order for allowing her to appear for the counselling round and she was given provisional admission into the first year BPTh course based on her marks and entrance exam performance at KEM hospital in Mumbai while the case was being heard in the court.



XRCVC was closely involved in the petition. It drafted the extensively researched mammoth affidavits and rejoinders that were commended by the High Court bench in the order, sending out appeal letters to relevant authorities for advocating right of persons with blindness and low vision to pursue physiotherapy in the mainstream and publishing two policy papers titled, "Regulatory gaps in physiotherapy education and practice in India: A ground-level challenge A policy paper for upholding the rights of education and equality for persons with blindness and low vision" and "Building Blocks of Inclusion: Policy Paper for Physiotherapy Education and Practice for Persons with Blindness and Low Vision in India". These papers were designed to provide various policy makers inputs on how to create accessibility and inclusivity for persons with blindness and low vision in mainstream physiotherapy education and practice. For these, XRCVC not only referred to legal precedents in India and a plethora of international research such as books and articles, but also reached out to universities, physiotherapy practitioners and researchers across the world who are closely involved with creation of access for persons with disabilities in the health sciences to have supportive evidence for the court submissions and to make the policy papers more robust. XRCVC and Advocate Kanchan Pamnani also worked with Advocate Rahul Bajaj and Tanishk Goyal of Mission Accessibility to draft the final submission to the Court.

The outcome of the efforts put in by the XRCVC team for over 7 months was that Zill succeeded in her petition and the Honourable Bench gave a detailed and sensitive order in Zill's favour. They spoke of barriers, especially attitudinal, and also of inclusion of persons with disabilities in mainstream education, employment and society. Additionally, they were hard towards the discriminatory stance taken by the OTPT Council in their submissions and strictly reminded them of their Constitutional and Legal obligations. They directed the OTPT council to make both the study and practice of physiotherapy inclusive for persons with blindness and low vision as mandated by the law.

"When my daughter Zill got disqualified, I was clueless. As my elder daughter (who also has 70% loss of sight) is a physiotherapist, Zill had seen her grow and succeed and had only dreamt to become a physiotherapist. We approached XRCVC as they were the only ray of hope in the dark. XRCVC, Sam sir and his team constantly supported and guided us unconditionally. They did not just open doors for my daughter but for all the visually impaired students all over India. We are really thankful for the constant support and guidance that we have got from the entire team of XRCVC.", says Alka Jain, Zill's mother.

Zill, too was elated by the decision, and expressed herself in the following manner:

"When my admission got denied, I lost hopes by all means. I felt distorted as I never had a plan B. It was then when we approached XRCVC for their help. Their constant support, guidance and selfless determination is the reason because of which I and many more people like me are able to achieve our goals. I am short of words to express my gratitude. They have been a beacon of light."

Currently Zill has completed her first year of the BPTh course at the KEM hospital and continues to work hard towards her goal of becoming a physiotherapist.



Teacher Trainings - Capacity-Building across the Country to Reach Generations of **Students**

1. Faculty Development Programme at KBPM, Pandharpur – Educator Training on **Inclusive Education**

A five-day Faculty Development Programme (FDP) on Disabilities and Inclusion was organised by Karmveer Bhaurao Patil Mahavidyalaya (Autonomous), Pandharpur of Rayat Shikshan Sanstha, from April 10th to 14th 2024 by the XRCVC. Our special educators, Ms. Poonam Deokar and Ms. Shizanne D'mello, skilfully conducted this programme designed to train mainstream educators on various methods and techniques for implementing an inclusive environment in higher education.

The organisers shared excitedly that this was a unique experience for the participating faculty where they learnt many new things. To quote Dr Umesh Salunkhe, one of the organizers, there are different resources available at the college but to use them properly appropriate training is essential. "This training was useful as it equipped us with the principles of inclusion and informed us that teachers should not treat students with disabilities in a special manner but rather try to include them in the mainstream of the education system."

Prof. Jaymala Patil one of the participants expressed her satisfaction with the training and stated that students with disabilities needed empathy and accommodations to fulfil their academic achievements.

Another participant Prof. Mujavar R. K. stated that "We were explained about our role as teachers in an inclusive teaching-learning environment was explained in an interesting and engaging manner. How to make (students with disabilities) confident and self-reliant was also explained. Overall, this was a very useful training programme."

The centre has actively partnered with similar institutions to promote inclusion for students with disabilities in higher education and create replicable models. To this end, several similar events are organised at different places to enable inclusion in education even in semi-urban and rural areas.



Participants of the KBPM Pandharpur FDP with the XRCVC Team



2. Victoria Memorial School for the Blind – Teacher Training on Inclusive STEM Education

Recognising the crucial importance of Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) education, Victoria Memorial School for the Blind (VMSB) collaborated with the XRCVC a pioneer and established expert in the field to provide specialised training for VMSB teachers on inclusive STEM teaching-learning skills during the academic year 2023-24.

Our STEM expert Ms Poonam Deokar conducted comprehensive training sessions focused on teaching STEM subjects to students with blindness. These sessions were meticulously designed to arm teachers with innovative skills and tools, fostering an environment where inclusive STEM learning could thrive. The training has empowered teachers with new tools and methods, which they implemented in their pedagogical process. As a result, a few students have started exploring digital methods of learning mathematics. Following are the insights and feedback from a teacher and a student from VMSB:

Teacher's Insights: Janvi Thakkar

"As a special educator teaching mathematics to secondary students, I was amazed to learn that mathematics could be taught and practiced digitally. Poonam guided us through the entire process, providing valuable insights and practical knowledge. This training has been a game-changer, allowing many of my students to take their exams on the computer. While I was familiar with traditional tools like the Taylor frame, Nemeth code, and abacus during my D.Ed, the advancement in technology and the introduction to computerized mathematics have been incredibly helpful. The notes provided by Poonam were clear and concise, enabling visually challenged students to learn independently."

Student's Experience and Feedback: Shlok

"I found learning maths on the computer to be a fascinating experience. Although it was new to me, I was determined to succeed and put in a lot of effort to master the exam topics. I practiced tirelessly and showed my work to my maths teacher. Unlike using the Taylor frame, I could write out each step of the problem just like a regular student, which made me feel confident and in control of my work. I really enjoyed the process and was thrilled to receive good marks on my first attempt (appearing exams on computer). Now, I am eager to learn more topics and even consider taking my board exam on the computer."

The collaboration between VMSB and XRCVC has had a significant impact on both teachers and students, fostering a more inclusive and effective STEM education environment. This initiative not only enhances the educational experience for visually impaired students but also paves the way for their future academic and professional success.



Breaking Attitudinal Barriers – Success Stories from Our Awareness Initiatives

1. Purple Fest – Creating Awareness about Inclusive Education

"I really enjoyed the activities conducted, I also liked the interaction as it was filled with life."

"Thank you for the knowledge. It has definitely elevated my awareness."

"Teaching learning materials for persons with visual impairment. Good team with an excellent speaker."

These were the reactions of participants at the International Purple Fest, Goa 2024 who attended the events organized by the Xavier's Resource Centre for the Visually Challenged (XRCVC), St. Xavier's College, Mumbai. Keeping last year's experience in mind, the Government of Goa invited the XRCVC, St. Xavier's College, Mumbai to conduct Antarchakshu® – its flagship program aimed to create awareness on the lives of persons with disabilities. In fact, Inclusive Education being one of the themes of the festival, the centre was also asked to conduct two more events – namely, an Experience Zone of Inclusive Classroom and an Awareness Workshop on STEM for persons with disabilities. Our team comprising of Mr. Ketan Kothari, Ms Poonam Deokar and Mr. Krishna Warrier travelled to Goa to lead these awareness and sensitisation experiences for the participants.

This year, almost 300 persons participated in these three events. It seems to have had the desired impact of dispelling the myths surrounding disabilities, since many people mentioned that they would be keen to practice inclusion in their respective institutions, and as a result of the event, they got acquainted with disability needs. In fact, STEM education for the visually impaired was a totally unique idea for some of the participants.

Significantly, the idea of an inclusive classroom resulted in bursting many of the misconceptions held by educators or educational administrators. The apprehensions expressed by them in catering to students with disabilities in a regular class were alleviated to quite a large extent.

The centre also organised a small exhibition of Assistive Technology as a part of an experience zone of SBI Foundation. Mr. Sushil Pandit was actively involved in acquainting participants with assistive technology and resolving their doubts. This work of the centre was highly appreciated by the Foundation.

Besides this, as reported by the Commissioner's Office, more people wanted to attend the event, but couldn't because of the paucity of time. This goes to prove the effectiveness of all our events and we are hopeful that the state of Goa will show a beacon and lead the rest of the country on the path of inclusive education.

XRCVC's presence at the Purple Fest was covered by the Prudent Media Goa and can be found at: Prudent Media's coverage on the Antarchakshu workshops at Purple Fest Goa 2024





Antarchakshu® workshop at the Purple Fest Goa



Inclusive Education session at the Purple Fest Goa



2. Chakshumathi Eyes Free Science Camp – Inclusive STEM Education Beyond Urban Areas

"After attending two-day sessions at (by) XRCVC at the 10th Anniversary Chakshumathi Inclusive Eyes Free Science Camp, I felt that if I would have had this kind of opportunity while I was in School, I would definitely opt science in my higher education.

When we were studying, we were taught science and mathematics concepts theoretically with almost no practical experience.

The two-day sessions gave me full confidence at least to guide, encourage and motivate my juniors to explore the possibilities in science and mathematics.

Finally, I thank XRCVC,... " said Naresh Kumar of Chakshumathi from Andhra Pradesh. Naresh is a blind commerce graduate and is pursuing an MBA. He has a research-oriented mind.

Chakshumathi, a non-governmental organisation based in Kerala, has been working to promote science education amongst students with visual impairment. For this, they organise an annual event called Eyes Free Science camp at different places. This year, this was organised from the 21st August to 26th August 2023.

XRCVC was invited by them to train students with disabilities, including students with visual impairment on accessible science education, including laboratory skills. Our expert, Ms. Poonam Deokar, led an inclusive STEM experience zone from the 22nd to the 25th of August, 2023. This experience zone was designed to equip various stakeholders with tools and methods for inclusive STEM learning through interactive discussions, demonstrations, sensitisation activities and practical exercises. 120 students, 21 volunteers from the Rural Development Trust (RDT), Anantpur and 208 educators including teachers and principals underwent an immersive experience that fostered awareness and an inclusive environment for STEM learning for students with disabilities, especially for those with visual impairment. It not only sparked an awareness and discussion on integrating inclusive STEM practices into mainstream education, but also provided relevant stakeholders with key skills that will help them translate this into real-life situations.

XRCVC's awareness and specialised training during this camp was highly appreciated by the Chakshumathi, Rural Development Trust, Anantapur, and Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, Andhra Pradesh.



Inclusive STEM Education for Students with VI at Chakshumathi Eyes Free Science Camp



3. Wilson College Assistive Technology Exhibition – Creating Awareness for Inclusive **Education**

The XRCVC was invited by the Andrews Vision Centre of the Wilson College to conduct an Assistive Technology awareness exhibition as a part of their event "The Third Eye" aimed at creating awareness on the campus among teaching staff, non-teaching staff and peers about the lives of persons with disabilities.

Our team comprising of Mr. Keshavan Nadar, Mr. Sushil Pandit and Ms. Shizanne D'mello conducted a specially-curated exhibition for the participants which demonstrated a range of technology and gave them a practical idea of how these can create a level-playing field for persons with disabilities.

Participants were quite engaged by the experience and gave us a lot of positive feedback:

"It was really good to learn about so much of the tools that are available for people with different disabilities." - Disha Devanpelli

"This kind of awareness session are necessary to sensitise is and give us the exposure needed to understand what are the platform which can be used for smooth Interactions" - Poornima Kadam



Assistive Technology exhibition at Wilson College



Corporate Collaborations – Creating Further Avenues for Inclusion

1. Dow India – Working with Corporates to Create Further Avenues for Inclusion

"Amazing stuff learnt at just one table today- thank you for literally opening my eyes and mind!" -Rahul Murdeshwar

"Thank you for joining us at Dow and helping us understand the various solutions. We can surely try to make our applications as inclusive and accessible as possible." - Vinay Davis, Sr. IT Analyst

The XRCVC was invited by Dow India to conduct a two-day Assistive Technology (AT) awareness exhibition as a part of a roadshow being organised by them. This carefully curated experience served as a platform for 150+ participants to explore and engage with state-of-the-art ATs. Through experiential learning, awareness was raised about the challenges faced by persons with disabilities and the immense potential of ATs in creating a level-playing field for them was highlighted.

Mr. Keshavan Nadar, Mr. Sushil Pandit and Ms. Shizanne D'mello from our team demonstrated a range of ATs for different disabilities at the awareness exhibition – from screen-readers and screen magnifiers for persons with visual impairment, to closed captioning and speech to text software for persons with hearing impairment, to eye movement-controlled computers for persons with disabilities of the upper limbs.

Participants were quite engaged by the myth-breaking innovative solutions thus sensitising them to the fact that with technological support, persons with disabilities can be an asset to the workplace.



Mr. Chandrakant Nayak - President and CEO Dow India at the AT exhibition at Dow India

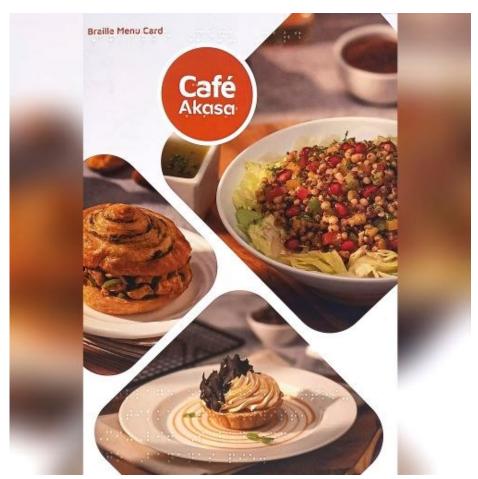


2. Akasa Air's In-Flight Menu – Making Travel Inclusive for All

The XRCVC has long -running association with Akasa Air in ensuring their services are inclusive for PWDs. As a part of this, the XRCVC designed inclusive braille menu cards for inflight dining to provide a seamless experience for travellers with visual impairment.

This menu has been designed with large fonts, high contrast and synchronised Braille and caters to the need of all persons with visual impairment enabling them to independently select their meals and enhances their travel experience.

This innovative menu has been featured in the Times of India - Times of India article on Akasa Air's **Braille Inflight Menu**



Akasa Air's Braille Inflight Menu card



Accessible Environment

3. Inclusive Calendar 2024 – A Daily Reminder of Inclusion

The Xavier's Resource Centre for the Visually Challenged (XRCVC), St. Xavier's College, Mumbai, completed its 20th year in 2023. As a part of our commitment to promoting inclusivity and creating awareness about accessibility, the XRCVC designed and an inclusive calendar for 2024 to spread the message that with a little out-of-the-box thinking and a lot of determination, accessibility can be easily made a part of everyday life.

This Inclusive Calendar is designed such that it can be used by all - non-disabled and persons with disabilities alike. This calendar is designed with a large font, high contrast and Braille dots which together seamlessly allow for everyone to be able to use it.

The calendar has been designed both for persons with disabilities and the wider community and the response from both has been positive. For persons with disabilities, it is a useful resource that enables independent living. And for the wider community it serves as a daily reminder that accessibility is important and not very hard to achieve if the mindset is right.

This initiative found a special mention in the Mid Day: Mid Day's article on XRCVC's Inclusive Calendar



An image of the inclusive calendar 2024



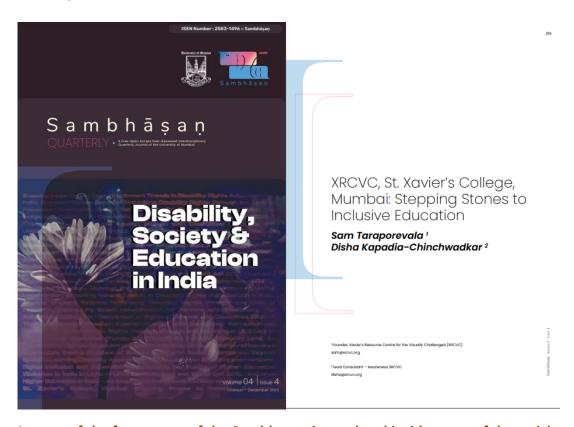
Publications

The XRCVC has a rich tradition of creating and publishing comprehensive information resources such as policy papers, research articles etc to support its awareness and advocacy work.

This year as we mark the 20th year of its foundation, the XRCVC had the honour of being invited to write an article for the 'Disability, Society and Education' in India special issue of University of Mumbai's Quarterly inter-disciplinary journal Sambhasan.

Moreover, XRCVC published two well-researched and insightful policy papers – one on mainstreaming of physiotherapy education for persons with blindness and low vision and one for financial access for persons with VI – particularly on accessibility of ATMs.

1. XRCVC, St. Xaviers College Mumbai: Stepping Stones to Inclusive Education in the **University of Mumbai Journal Sambhasan**



Images of the front cover of the Sambhasan journal and inside cover of the article

This article reflects on the journey of the XRCVC in creating access for persons with disabilities in various spheres of life through its advocacy program which has led to changes such as the Copyright (Amendment) Act (2012), standardisation of scribe rules for examinations across boards and universities, creation of access for students with visual impairment in STEM education from high school level to university level, mainstream physiotherapy courses, undergraduate psychology courses etc. It draws on some of the key learnings that have made it possible for the XRCVC to have a real impact on the lives of persons with disabilities. These include keeping an ear to the ground for understanding areas of intervention, harnessing the power of the multiplier effect through strategic collaborations, designing of interventions that ensure the impact of change reaches the relevant stakeholders –



persons with disabilities and adopting a 360-degree approach to intervention to ensure a holistic solution. These insights serve as guidance for stakeholders committed to championing inclusive education and fostering an equitable society for persons with disabilities.

This article can be read from pages 218 onwards at: XRCVC, St. Xavier's College, Mumbai: Stepping Stones to Inclusive Education

2. Building Blocks of Inclusion: Policy Paper for Physiotherapy Education and Practice for Persons with Blindness and Low Vision



Cover page of the policy paper "Building Blocks of Inclusion - Policy Paper for Physiotherapy Education and Practice for Persons with Blindness and Low Vision in India"

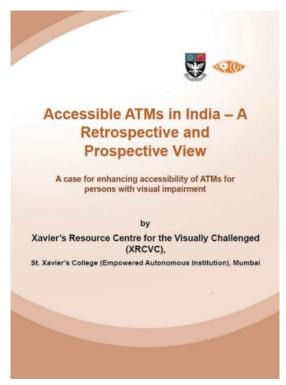
XRCVC published this paper primarily as an input for Zill Jain's case in the High Court of Bombay to address the unjust denial of access to her to the mainstream physiotherapy course due to changes regulatory framework that did not provide adequate accommodation for persons with VI in the Bachelors of Physiotherapy course, despite it being an established profession for persons with VI in India and internationally.

This paper highlights core principles for the inclusion of persons with blindness and low vision in physiotherapy education and practice in India based on the laws of the land and international best practices. It has been designed for regulators, education institutes, employers, professional associations, policy makers and other relevant state and national authorities in the field of physiotherapy education and practice who can apply it to their specific context.

The paper can be read at: Building Blocks of Inclusion: Policy Paper for Physiotherapy Education and Practice for Persons with Blindness and Low Vision



3. Accessible ATMs in India – A Retrospective and Prospective View: A case for enhancing accessibility of ATMs for persons with visual impairment



Cover page of the policy paper "Accessible ATMs in India -- A Retrospective and Prospective View"

This paper was published by the XRCVC to commemorate a decade of the website Talking ATM India. This website, a volunteering initiative started by Prashant Naik and Saidarshan Bhagat and currently under the purview of the XRCVC, is a useful resource for persons with visual impairment to help locate nearest accessible talking ATM and other informational resources on accessible banking.

In this paper, the XRCVC builds a case to advocate the necessity of ensuring updated data regarding locations of accessible ATMs is made available by banks and the need and feasibility of making Unified Payments Interface (UPI) - enabled cardless cash withdrawal accessible for persons with print disabilities, in particular for those with visual impairment.

This paper has been drafted for policy makers, banks and bankers and ATM manufacturers, vendors and deployers with recommendations for a roadmap for making UPI-based ATM transactions accessible for persons with visual impairment. It not only provides basic policy formulation recommendations, but also addresses the technical aspects of making the step-by-step process of UPI-based ATM transactions accessible.

This paper can be read at: Accessible ATMs in India – A Retrospective and Prospective View: A case for enhancing accessibility of ATMs for persons with visual impairment



Awards and Recognitions 2023-2024

Sarojini Trilok Nath National Award, 2023 – Best Institution, National Association for the Blind, Delhi

XRCVC was awarded by the NAB, Delhi the Sarojini Trilok Nath National Award 2023 under the Best Institution category. This award has over the years emerged as one of the prominent awards given to individuals and institutions that have done remarkable work for persons with disabilities, particularly the visually impaired. These awards are conferred upon individuals, institutions and CSR Initiatives to recognize outstanding work in education, empowerment or rehabilitation of visually impaired. The award which consists of a trophy, certificate and citation is a great honour to receive as XRCVC celebrate the milestone of 20 years of work.



XRCVC receives the Sarojini Trilok Nath National Award.



Media Coverage 2023-2024

Details	Link	
Mumbai: How fully visually impaired swimmer bagged 3 gold medals	Mid Day 1 st June 2024	
and scored 94 per cent in SSC – Mid Day, 1 st June 2024	Siddhi Dalvi	
Siddhi Dalvi's many achievements including her score of 94% are	Shorter URL -	
extensively covered in this article. XRCVC finds a mention not only as a	https://bit.ly/3VSgX2q	
support service for Siddhi but also as an advocacy centre for inclusion in		
mainstream education.		
A proper all-rounder – The Hindustan Times, 7 th May 2024	Hindustan Times 7 th May	
This article commends Kaushiki Patel's phenomenal success in the ICSE	2024 Kaushiki Patel	
Board Examinations of 97.40% and she mentions the help she received	Shorter URL -	
from the XRCVC.	https://bit.ly/3XytJ7y	
See and smile, Mumbai Dossier – Mid Day, 15 th January 2024		
See and sinile, Multibal Dossier – Mid Day, 15 January 2024	Mid Day 15th January 2024 XRCVC's Inclusive Calendar	
This article covers the creative inclusive calendar 2024 designed by the	ARCVC'S ITICIUSIVE Caleridar	
XRCVC and says that "this one is sure to put a smile on our faces, at the	Shorter URL -	
beginning of the year."	https://bit.ly/3XuTUw1	
'Antarchakshu' Workshop Held at Purple Fest – Prudent Media Goa,	Prudent Media Goa 11 th	
11 th January 2024	January 2024 on	
This is a video coverage of VDCVC's presence at the Division Fact Coally	Antarchakshu Workshops at	
This is a video coverage of XRCVC's presence at the Purple Fest Goa. It	<u>Purple Fest</u>	
has short videos of various activities being done as a part of the	Charter LIDI	
workshops along with some bytes from the XRCVC team members.	Shorter URL -	
Nimeshan as indicable and take a sid made his about	https://bit.ly/4bjSgjY	
Nirvachan se judi website, app tatha social media ki pahunch	The News Wing 5 th	
drushitbadhit matdaataaon tak pahunchane ke liye DIO tatha DPRO ko	December 2023 Training for	
diya gaya prashikshan – News Wing, 5 th December, 2023	State Election Commission	
In this article a detailed overview is given of the Web and social media	Jharkhand Officers	
accessibility training conducted by the XRCVC for the DIOs and DPROs of	Shorter URL -	
the State Election Commission of Jharkhand.	https://bit.ly/4eCqHpc	
Akasa Air introduces braille menu cards for inflight dining – The Times	The Times of India 12th	
of India, 12 th October 2023	October 2023 Akasa Air	
The first of a fall that distance are also the bight as a part of a second state.	Braille Menu Card for	
The inclusive inflight dining menu card with high contrast, large font and	Inflight Dining	
braille printing for passengers with visual impairment developed by	61	
Akasa Air in partnership with the XRCVC is covered in this article.	Shorter URL -	
	https://bit.ly/45yQj23	
Central Railway's Mumbai Division Collaborates With Xavier's	Free Press Journal 27th	
Resource Center For Visually Challenged To Improve Assistance – Free	August 2023 Training	
Press Journal, 27 th August 2023	Programme for Central	
This article provides an overview of the interactive training sessions	<u>Railways</u>	
conducted by the XRCVC team for the TTEs and RPF officers of the	Shorter URL -	
Central Railways – Mumbai Division	https://bit.ly/3VzYo1N	





XRCVC

Xavier's Resource Centre for the Visually Challenged

Inclusivity at 20 - Breaking Barriers.... Achieving Access

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