



Xavier's Resource Centre for the Visually Challenged (XRCVC)

Breaking Barriers, Achieving Access

St. Xavier's College 5, Mahapalika Marg, Mumbai – 400001

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Antarchakshu – The Eye Within™ 2014

The Theme: Inclusive Education (from KG to PG)

Antarchakshu—The Eye Within™ was powered by Johnson & Johnson Ltd., CMC Ltd, Godrej Industries Ltd., Sightsavers, Tata Sons Ltd and the Tech Mahindra Foundation (TMF).

1932 participants, including 993 educationists drawn from all over Mumbai, went through an eye-opening experience with their eyes shut at “Antarchakshu – The Eye Within” on September 12th and 13th, 2014. The workshop – a training and sensitisation process for educationists – was organised by the Xavier's Resource Centre for the Visually Challenged (XRCVC) at St. Xavier's College, Mumbai.

XRCVC is a support and advocacy centre aiming to work towards the holistic development of visually challenged people.

The theme for Antarchakshu 2014 was “Inclusive Education (from KG to PG)” and the process was actively backed by the Education Department of the Maharashtra government and the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation.

“The central idea of this process was creating awareness about the lives of the visually challenged. Antarchakshu 2014 primarily focussed on Educational Inclusion, which aims at training and sensitising educationists towards the totally blind and low-vision people as students--and even as teachers,” according to Dr Sam Taraporevala, director, XRCVC.

The participants were blindfolded and engaged in basic activities like playing with numbers, reading maps with their fingers, conducting experiments in a laboratory, and much more, the way the blind do. They even played a round of football and basketball with their blindfolds on!

Participants also had the opportunity to go through a detailed exhibition area, and were exposed to the various emerging technologies used to facilitate effective education access, including some exhibits showcased by a team from Assistech, IIT Delhi. The experience continued with a short experiential trip to an inclusive classroom, which was designed to reinforce the message that visually challenged students can sit and participate shoulder-to-shoulder in the teaching-learning process with their sighted counterparts in classrooms, and go on to lead independent, successful and fulfilling lives.





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All participants were given a handbook on mainstreaming education for students with blindness and low vision, titled 'I For Inclusion', to help the educator better understand the various nuances of building an inclusive set-up within the educational framework.

In the past, the XRCVC has done extensive work in the field of making education inclusive for persons with disability, helping many educational institutions and universities to set up uniform guidelines for scribes/writers for students, working with NCERT to make tactile maps, and has published a report titled 'Numbers and Reactions' on how Science and Maths can be made accessible to visually impaired students who wish to pursue higher studies in these subjects.

The objective of Antarchakshu 2014 was to take these initiatives a step further by reaching out to the key operatives on the ground – the teachers who have to implement these initiatives in the classroom. Many of these participants expressed their willingness to help XRCVC pursue the inclusion agenda in their institutions.

The success of the event hinged on the intricate networking and coordination of over 200 staff and volunteers.

Here is what some of the participants had to say:

Mr Biju Nair, Teacher trainee: The activities at Antarchakshu have contributed to my senses in a way that years of learning wouldn't have. From making a paper rocket, to finding Bangalore and Hyderabad on the map, to drawing a perfect right angled triangle, I was doing things in a different yet correct way. What an eye-opener to the fact that a blind person can be so capable of doing things when I, who was blinded for just a few minutes could manage so well! The classroom session was inspiring – with a blind boy sitting right next to us, doing geometry on his customised plastic sheets. There were no concessions given. The tools he used were just to measure his performance. He just needed a different medium of expression... What more should be done for us to accept that the time has come, for us to overcome our limitations of thinking and attitude – to open the doors of opportunities of learning and growth to the visually challenged – for they too can learn and live – and isn't that the whole purpose of life itself? The eyes are useless when the mind is blind. With Antarchakshu, I can finally see.

Dr Uttam Dave, Educationist: Antarchakshu was one of the most sensitising experiences of my life. I always thought that young men and women were busy either with their "friends" or hooked onto their smartphones. The students from St Xavier's have proved me wrong. Thanks for creating such a wonderful exhibition for the visually impaired. It sure touched many chords in my heart.

Mr Calvin D'Sylva, Entrepreneur: 'No, this has nothing to do with donations and selling you a bowl of pity. It's more of a 'dare to live' challenge. To help you understand that 10-15 minutes of total darkness is not a roadblock... that even the blind are not DIS-abled but differently-abled, and that "What the body can't do the





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spirit makes up for.” It's about including the blind into everyday society and also to understand that they can do what sighted people can. “Everyone is great at something. You've just got to look hard enough.”

Ms Gilda Mathew, Educationist: The workshop was so enriching that all of us who attended and participated in it are still talking about it and reliving the experience. The whole idea of the workshop was designed brilliantly and there was no way anyone of us could have not participated or avoided the activities and the exhibition. This kind of an interactive workshop echoes our ideology at Shikshaa, of 'I do and I understand'. The interaction made all the world of difference to our student teachers and to us staff. All of us will strive to be inclusive in our attitude and approach to the visually challenged.

Ms Mila Desai, Teacher Trainee: The workshop just made me realise that we actually hinder the growth of visually impaired people with our so called kindness and compassion. The workshop just exhibited the fact that they are at par with us and maybe even more focused and better than us, as they do not take things for granted as sometimes we do.

Ms Dilbur Langrana, Teacher Educator: The workshop was brilliant, well managed and conducted. I thought, I thanked, praised and prayed. I thought of how strong they were, I thanked for what I had, I praised them for their "if you can I can attitude" and prayed for their "vision" to come true. I had nothing to teach but so much to learn.

Ms Nisha Dalmia, Teacher Trainee: This was one of the best experiences in my life. I have worked with visually challenged people before, helped them read and write but learnt in the workshop that with little changes how we can make them feel independent. The time when they blindfolded me, it was a true realization as to how difficult things are for them. Thank you for the opportunity to have this enlightening experience.

For further information, please feel free to contact:

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