

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

The expanded facilities of the Xavier's Resource Centre for the Visually Challenged (XRCVC) were officially inaugurated on 23 November 2005. This replaced a much smaller resource unit which had been operational for the past two years.

St. Xavier's College, Mumbai has pursued a policy of helping the less privileged. As part of this philosophy it encourages the visually challenged to take an active part in its academic life. Over the past many decades scores of visually challenged students have enriched their lives through studying in St. Xavier's College.

Currently not only does it have some visually challenged students at different levels of the college, but what is more, it is one of the few colleges of the university that has employed a visually challenged person as a professor who has been on the staff for the last 18 years.

The need to keep step with technology

Times are changing fast and the computer revolution has made it possible to enter, process, retrieve and access information merely by the click of a button. In this digital revolution there is a distinct possibility that the visually challenged if not given the right encouragement would face distinct deprivation. This would be on account of the fact that the digital divide would create an additional barrier between them and the sighted.

In order to avoid this pitfall, St. Xavier's College, Mumbai, embarked upon a project to provide these facilities to the visually challenged. Over the past two years the XRCVC has become a focal point of learning and enrichment for the visually challenged. Thanks to these facilities the college has witnessed a four-fold increase in the number of visually challenged students on its rolls to 16. This resulted in the facilities being over-stretched.

Features of the expanded facilities

The XRCVC is now located in a 425 sq ft room on the ground floor of the college. This place has been divided into three units. The first which houses six computers, a reading machine, and low vision equipment. The middle section serves as a reading cum writing room where students can read their own study material, type Braille notes and listen to audio material. The third section serves as an office room and houses the 4x4 PRO Braille embosser. A lot of this equipment has been funded through a CSR **initiative and donations from individuals and trusts**.

These facilities along with the other back-up support aim to help the visually challenged students at St. Xavier's College, Mumbai, and other visually challenged persons to be educationally, psychologically and socially enriched so that they are better equipped to face the challenges of life.

The current objectives of the XRCVC include the following:

1. Every visually challenged person at St. Xavier's College, Mumbai should have access to state of the art facilities that would provide them full functionality.
2. Providing a healthy individual-facility ratio. This would reduce waiting time and help in guaranteeing optimum efficiency.
3. Conducting specialized (formal) training in computer skills for those in the target group who are not computer literate.
4. Imparting computer presentation skills so that those concerned could develop and make their own presentations, for example through PowerPoint.
5. Building up an e-books database and library. Apart from storing books in the normal electronic format, it is planned to gradually build up a collection in Daisy format so that their audio clarity would make listening a pleasure.
6. Providing an in-house Braille embossing facility so that the resource room can serve as a single stop destination for meeting the special needs of those concerned.
7. Imparting special English language skills to those in need so that the barriers of communication do not place an additional burden on the concerned students.
8. Identifying special potential and ensuring that it is harnessed.
9. Special counselling to help students face challenges and adjust effectively in an integrated set-up.
10. Providing vocational guidance so as to enable the students to identify the appropriate courses and careers.
11. Training students for special post-graduate competitive exams.
12. Evaluating the exact visual acuity of the low vision students so that they can be prescribed and provided appropriate low vision assistance devices.
13. Providing special computer training to non-Xavier's visually challenged persons as and when there are vacancies for the programme.
14. Providing Braille embossing facility to all visually challenged persons who may need Braille material embossed.
15. Providing books and other reference material in e-format to those visually challenged in Mumbai who may need it.
16. Making the beneficiaries aware of diverse facilities and legal provisions that are available for them.
17. Developing and organising need-based self-development workshops for the visually challenged such as:
 - a) career workshops
 - b) goal setting
 - c) time management
 - d) stress reduction
 - e) motivation
 - f) communication
18. Helping the beneficiaries to develop a healthy balance between asserting their rights and discharging their duties with a sense of social commitment.

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