

Xavier's Resource Centre for the Visually Challenged (XRCVC) Report May 2007- April 2008

2007-2008 has been a very enriching year for the XRCVC. Some of the significant advances we made include:

- The XRCVC has become a nodal agency for advocacy and support services for visually challenged persons at the city and national level.
- The XRCVC has also maintained and updated itself with the latest state of the art technology and continues to be one of the best single stop technology support destination for visually challenged persons.
- We have been recognized extensively by the media and the larger community and acknowledged for the work we do.
- We have moved from being a mere implementer to being a consultant to diverse groups in helping meet needs for the visually challenged.
- Our student performance over the years has shown good results.

A list of our work through last year is listed below. Broadly speaking the work at the XRCVC can be grouped under five main areas: Advocacy, Networking and Consultancy, Awareness Work, Accessible Technology Training and Support and Student Related work.

I. ADVOCACY PROGRAMMES

The advocacy work at the centre aims at increasing access for persons with disability in a wide range of areas. This year we began seeing some of our advocacy work resulting in concrete outcomes.

- **Equal Rules relating to DMATT accounts:** The NSDL rules and regulations relating to opening and operating of DMATT accounts were skewed negatively for persons with vision impairment. The XRCVC following a meeting with Mr. Bhawe. (NSDL, MD & Chairman) coordinated with 21 other organisations across the country to submit a representation requesting the withdrawal of the NSDL circular.

Based on the representation the NSDL has withdrawn the circular; on 21st Aug '07 and issued a new circular meeting our recommendations and requirements. This means that now nationally the visually challenged can open and operate their DMATT accounts just like the sighted

- **E-Signs – Increased Banking Access:** The XRCVC has been working with CMC Ltd, a TATA enterprise in developing the software for finger print recognition on cheque books. This software would enable banks to permit equal access to cheque book facilities to visually challenged persons as it would permit banks to recognize and pass finger prints without the need of the person being in front of them.

The software 'E-Signs' has been ready and December was spent by the XRCVC and CMC in jointly running the first set of tests for the E-Signs version 1.0.

On account of the World Disability Day, CNN IBN ran a programme on accessibility issues for the visually challenged. As part of that programme the issue of financial accessibility was covered and E-Signs was featured as a solution being worked upon. E-Signs was also featured on a telecast on CNBC India as a new alternative

- **Copyright Access:** In May the XRCVC had a successful meeting with Seth Publishers, one of the leading publishers of educational books. Seth Publishers has agreed to speak to all their respective authors to allow us to get their e-books. Since then through the year Seth publishers has helped us build e-books for academic material for various college books

The XRCVC was also visited by the Copyright Registrar, Govt. of India in Oct 2007. The visit was to help us explain him our concerns related to the copyright act and its related amendments. The meeting has been highly successful to enable us to work towards the amendments

However there has been a transfer of the Copyright registrar and the XRCVC visited Delhi in Feb 2008 and met up with the new Copyright registrar helped to explain him the new cause as well.

- **RTI for PWD act implementation:** The XRCVC as part of its larger advocacy work, filed in a comprehensive RTI application regarding the implementation of the Persons with Disability Act in Maharashtra. The RTI is to be used as part of a pending case in the High Court related to the same.
- **Scribe guideline for Visually Challenged**

Availing of writers for visually challenged for their various exams has been a point of contention with various institutes and examination boards. We have been providing writer support to a range of students and are therefore aware of the various practical issues faced.

The XRCVC worked closely with Ms Kanchan Pamnani who represented the XRCVC in presenting draft writer guidelines to the Social Justice and Empowerment Ministry. These guidelines are to be now taken up by the ministry and standardized through the coming months.

II. NETWORKING AND CONSULTANCY

The XRCVC through this year has established itself as a nodal agency providing resource support not only to visually challenged persons but other organisations, institutes and government agencies. Our work in this capacity has included:

- **DAISY Forum**

The XRCVC has been a primary member of the DAISY forum of India since its inception in April 2007. This year the XRCVC hosted a networking meet around the DAISY forum meeting in April 2008. This year we have added and created a total of 20 DAISY books in full audio, full text. The XRCVC is one of the few DAISY production units that is involved in this type of creation.

- **Wilson College Partnership**

The XRCVC has been appointed by the Wilson College as an honorary consultant to set up the Andrew's Vision Centre at Wilson College. In capacity as the consultant the XRCVC has been fully involved in setting up of the centre in areas of identifying the accessible technology and training of personnel. This centre was inaugurated on 28th Jan '08 and the XRCVC will continue working closely with them to see how services for the visually challenged can be complimented and delivered in the most effective way.

- **Visit to Central Scientific Instruments Organization (CSIO) Chandigarh and NAB – Delhi**

Mr. Prashant Naik along with some XRCVC members visited CSIO, Chandigarh to test their indigenous built hand held reading device. The device has been seen and our team has provided the chief researcher Dr. Sardana with improvement feedback which is to be worked upon to further improve the device. The XRCVC has committed to working with CSIO as far as possible to create a cheap-cost Indian based reading device.

- **Accessibility Software**

In June 2007 the XRCVC completed the testing of the IBM accessibility software that XRCVC had been part of. This was an open source IBM accessibility works – a web browser tool for low vision and partially sighted persons. The testing report was submitted to the Program Manager - CCR based in IBM, Bangalore.

- **Consultation with the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment**

The XRCVC has become a member of the core team involved in the scheme of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment working towards setting up of resource centre for visually challenged persons across higher education institutes in India.

As part of this team, the XRCVC was involved in preparing a draft of the scheme for resource centre requirements in Higher education. Further the XRCVC also provided its consultation towards a coaching course in enhancing the skill sets of persons with disabilities for Group A and B government jobs

- **Accessibility – Air Travel**

On hearing of several instances of mis-conduct with the visually challenged by several leading airlines during air travel, the XRCVC has entered into dialogue with one of the leading airline carriers and met up with them to discuss what sensitization programmes can be done with their staff. This would help tremendously in addressing the concerns that visually challenged persons are facing currently

III. AWARENESS

The awareness work for the XRCVC has aimed at opening mindsets amongst community at large to the myths and realities of the lives of visually challenged persons and persons with disabilities. Through this academic year the XRCVC has conducted awareness programmes for the following diverse groups.

- **College Students**

Antarchakshu 2007

The XRCVC, based on our successful experience of conducting awareness programmes during Malhar (intercollegiate student festival at St. Xavier's College) last year, continued the programme this year as well.

The programme fully organized by our students, took a step forward this year. In addition to the simulation exercises and games, we also had a photo exhibition 'Beyond Sight' by Mr. Partho Bhowmick. This exhibition is a photo exhibition of pictures taken by visually challenged persons.

This year, Antarchakshu drew even a larger crowd of 550 participants through the two days. We have received extremely good feedback as also positive press coverage on the event, and it has now become a regular feature of Malhar.

Real Eyes at Wilson College: The XRCVC conducted 'Antarchakshu' at the Wilson college grounds along with organizing a mixed cricket match.

The event saw over 350 participants go through the simulation experience and has created a very strong base at Wilson College to begin creating a sensitive atmosphere for visually challenged students and as a first step to setting up of support facilities for students on campus.

Disability Awareness workshop – Honour’s Programme: As one more of our new initiatives the XRCVC conceptualized and conducted an Honour’s Programme Inter-disciplinary workshop “Differences’ Is Ability – on Disability Awareness.

The Workshop conducted by the XRCVC is a 1 credit programme, open to students of all departments. The first batch was conducted from 28th-1st Sep '07. And the second batch from 31st March – 4th April.

The workshop covered a range of issues, from understanding disability, understanding legal framework, and concept of inclusion at the micro and macro levels.

- **School Children:** The XRCVC was approached by Bombay international School, Mumbai to run a sensitization programme for their school children. The centre ran a special awareness session for the group of 30 students, of both 2nd grade and the 4th grade. Also a session was conducted for a group of 9th Std students from JBCN Pan special school for a sensitization on the lives of the visually challenged
- **Employer Sensitization Training** Towards our continued effort to work for more and more equal opportunities employers, this year we have conducted programmes with senior management of Pepsi Co Industries, Huntsman Co – Araldite employees and Johnson & Johnson employees and their CSR team members.
- **Awareness Event- Kala Ghoda Art Festival:** The annual art festival in Mumbai, the Kala Ghoda festival was held this year through the week of 2nd- 8th Feb '08. The XRCVC helped Mr. Bhowmick coordinate his photography exhibition “Beyond Sight” through volunteer support to ensure its smooth running.
- **Awareness Event with M.Ed educators** In our work with inclusive education we have increasingly recognized the need for education professionals to be sensitive to the needs of special children. At the same time today’s B.Ed and M.Ed curriculums starkly lack in training future educators to work with children with disabilities. The XRCVC has identified this gap and strongly believes in working towards bridging the same. As a first step towards this the XRCVC conducted a special programme for M.Ed teacher trainees of Somaiya College in December.

IV. ACCESSIBLE TECHNOLOGY TRAINING AND SUPPORT

In continuing with ensuring that technology continues to help persons with visual impairment to overcome the sight barrier, the XRCVC has conducted numerous training courses in accessible technology and computer usage for a wide range of audiences. These courses have been conducted for students, professionals, senior citizens as well as educators and trainers working with the visually challenged.

These courses have then ranged from direct training as well as train the trainer's modules. A quick overview of the various training batches for the year include:

- Basic and advance training in computer use for students
- NAB teacher trainees workshop on assistive technology
- NAB Iterant teacher training in assistive technology
- Computer usage for professionals in advanced office based applications

Further regular support in assistive technology has been provided by Mr. Prashant Naik to a range of diverse visually challenged persons across the city as well as corporates who have show interest in understanding assistive technology and its usage for their current and potential employees

- **Audio Visual on Accessible Technology**

Further given the need to spread awareness about related to accessible technology the XRCVC this year has begun work on creating an audio visual on the same issue. The AV once ready would help us to reach this information to a wide range of groups

V. STUDENT ACTIVITES

One of our core areas of work continues to be our work with students. These can be briefly outlined as below:

- **Results, Admissions and Orientation**
 - HSC results - Mr. Ajay Kumar topped the entire HSC board in the Arts stream, Mumbai division not only in handicapped category but the overall general category and Mr. Rahul More our other student also got 71%.
 - Third Year results - 6 out of our seven students have secured a first class. Further all of these students are now well settled in terms of either working or having gotten admission in masters' programmes.
 - We had 4 new students at the FJYC level and 5 new entrants for the F.Y.B.A.
 - In April 2008 an open house session was conducted for aspiring new students for the next academic year, where students and

parents were given both orientation to the facilities as well as career guidance inputs.

- **Personality Development workshop**

As a beginning to the new academic year in June 2007, the XRCVC with the help and support of Mr. Amol Tope from Johnson & Johnson conducted a two day personality development workshop with a group of 13 students. At the end of the workshop each student prepared an action plan in terms of areas they would improve on and also what they would continue doing well

In April 2008 a three day workshop was conducted by Ms Rina Agrawal on 'Expressions' for a group of interested students across the years.

- **Student Support**

The XRCVC continued to provide volunteer support of readers and writers to its students and visually challenged persons in the city. This year we had a volunteer base of approximately 70 students. Further other student support provided continuously through the year on a need basis has been that for personal counseling and career guidance.

- **English Language Training**

English language training throughout the year on a need basis and vacation batches have been conducted. The classes conducted by Ms Chrissie D'costa are aimed to further refine students' spoken and written English skills

- **Employability**

In order to ensure that our larger objective of working towards employable graduates and visually impaired persons is achieved we are involved in the following activities:

- **Management Training:** In partnership with IMS learning centre the XRCVC has started a training batch for visually challenged students preparing for management entrance examinations.
- **Career Guidance – Career Seminar:** In order to orient visually challenged students to the vast array of career options and get them motivated to select the right career options, the XRCVC organized a two-day career seminar 'Employment- Expanding Reach'.

The seminar held on 13th – 14th Sep 2007, saw over 60 participants. The participants were both visually challenged students from different colleges in Mumbai and Pune as also parents and other professionals working with the visually challenged.

The seminar covered a range of careers from Computer & IT by Ms. Shanti Raghavan (Founder & Managing Trustee, Enable India, Bangalore to careers in Management and Finance by Mr. Divakar Kamath (Integrated Sales Lead – IBM India) and Mr. K. Ramakrishna (General Manager – IDBI).

As a follow up to the career seminar the XRCVC has created an information CD and data pack which can be used as a very effective career guidance and career choice pack for the visually challenged. We have distributed over 100 CD's already across different parts of the country,

- **Student Internships:** In May 2007 two of our students were placed for internships. Mr. Sandeep Singh and Mr. Sidharth Dadhwal with ITC Maratha Sharaton in their Sales and Marketing team. The XRCVC has played the support and liaison role for the process to come through.
- **E Library and Database** The aim of the XRCVC library project has been to set up an electronic database of resources, both academic and non-academic for the use and access of visually challenged and print disabled persons.

The total numbers of titles available today are nearly 5000 ranging from e-books, audio books and DAISY books. These titles are available in diverse interest areas and subjects including fiction and non fiction. Academic titles of History, economics, sociology, political science, management and self development are found only to name a few.

VI. OTHER HIGHLIGHTS

- **Website** This year the XRCVC made its website fully accessible and complying with the W3C web accessibility standards. The new website can be accessed at www.xrcvc.org
- **Seminars and Presentations by XRCVC Staff:**
 - Dr Sam Taraporevala, Techshare Conference, Delhi - 'The Copyright Challenge – The Indian Case'
 - Mr. Prashant Naik, Techshare Conference, Delhi – 'Banking Access for the visually challenged – The Biometric Option'
 - Dr Sam Taraporevala, Ms Neha Trivedi – International Colloquium on Inclusion, Mumbai, - 'Sensitization towards Persons with disabilities within college education'
 - Ms Neha Trivedi , Print Access for All , IIT, Chennai - "Copyright & Print Access - Response & Challenge: A Higher Education Case Study"

- **Research:** The XRCVC in Nov has commenced collaboration with Ms Wendy Brown and Mr. Peter Clough visiting from Liverpool Hope University, UK, Deanery of Education for a joint research project. The research paper is a comparative study of access and use of support services by visually impaired students at higher education at St. Xavier's College and Liverpool Hope University.
- **Recognition and Awards:** Dr Taraporevala, Director, XRCVC in November was nominated and recognized by Hindustan Times as part of their 'Spirit of Mumbai' campaign. The campaign recognized and felicitated what Hindustan Times identified as the top 15 people contributing most to the city.

WHO HAVE WE REACHED OUT TO?

Over the last 12 months the XRCVC has reached out to a large number of persons. These include:

- *Over 1200 persons in Mumbai through our awareness work*
- *Over 25 visually challenged persons across the city have been trained in accessible technology at the XRCVC and a further of over 30 special educators have been trained/oriented in accessible technology use with their students*
- *In addition over 20 visually challenged students are part of St.Xavier's college and over and above these the XRCVC has reached out to scores of other visually challenged students, their parents who seek our referral and other services and participate in our diverse programmes.*
- *Our change in DMATT account rules have affected the lives of visually challenged persons across the country numbering over 10 million*

OUR SINCERE THANK YOU

None of what we have achieved through the last year would have been possible without the help, support, assistance and guidance that we have had from all our well wishers.

We would like to extend our heartiest thank you to Johnson & Johnson, Mrs. Nergesh Khurshedji Dady Public Charitable Trust, HDFC Ltd, Sight Savers International, New India Assurance Ltd, Tata Mutual Fund, IBM, Bank Of America, Central Bank of India, Cowasji S.D. Adhenwalla Trust, Metro Entertainment Pvt Ltd, Seth Pestonji F. Davar Charitable Trust, Lions Club of East Bombay.

We would also like to thank CMC Ltd, Jenaz Printers and Godrej Hi-care for their continued partnership and support.

A big word of our gratitude also to all our individual donors and supporters, Mr. Chuck Gupta, Ms. Roda Sen, Mr. Abhay Chaturvedi, Ms. Rashna Doongaji, Ms

Rivka Israel, Ms. Gool Plumber, Mr. P.J Shanklesha, Mr. Snadeep Earully, Mahavir Auto, V.C Tech, Biji Roy.

And of course none of this would have been possible without our the unending support of St.Xavier's College management specially Principal, Fr Frazer Mascarenhas S.J and our countless volunteers who have been the backbone of all our work and activities. A big thank you to all of them.