

The XRCVC Annual Report of 2010-2011



A Journey of Breaking New Barriers and Creating Access

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2010-2011: A Journey of Breaking New Barriers and Creating Access.....

The Xavier's Resource Centre for the Visually Challenged (XRCVC), St. Xavier's College, a one of its kind support and advocacy centre for the visually challenged in India shares with you our work and achievements through 2010-2011. It takes us great pleasure to share that the year gone by has enabled us to make some ground breaking achievements, charter new territories for inclusion and continue our humble efforts at making the Indian environments more inclusive for persons with visual impaired with each passing year.

In 2010-2011, the XRCVC in addition to continuing work on advocacy issues of print access, financial access and educational access also added the component of Independent Living which covers issues of consumer, transport and legal access to its field of work. In addition the XRCVC's access technology project has expanded in a range of R & D work on products; train the trainer programs and consultation services for government departments.

Our annual report below shares our work through the year under our key projects

I. Re-defining Frameworks: XRCVC Advocacy Initiatives

XRCVC efforts in creating inclusive legislation, rules and products for persons with vision impairment have focused on three key areas: Print Access, Financial Access and Educational Access. This year this was further expanded to include issues concerning Independent Living specifically focusing on Consumer, Transport and Legal Access issues.

The advocacy initiatives at the XRCVC have been our key area of work as the centre has always used its unique ability to charter new trends in the field of inclusion through policy and regulation change.

Re Writing the printed word: Print Access

Furthering our existing endeavor to ensure an appropriate amendment to the Indian Copyright Act, 1957 to ensure the print disabled have equal access to written works the XRCVC following its representation to the Parliamentary standing committee followed up the matter with them. ***The standing committee report was tabled in Rajya Sabha in November 2010 which acknowledged and ratified the concerns of the representation submitted by the XRCVC and other organizations working for the print disabled.*** The said report is now to be taken up by the Copyright Office for final compilation and is due to be tabled in parliament in the coming year. This will mark a long awaited legislative change needed to open up the world of the printed word for the print disabled.

In addition, in our publisher partnership program this year the **XRCVC signed new MoUs to share accessible content with Tata McGraw-Hill Education and Jaypee Publishers**. Both the publishing houses were identified on a priority basis based on requirements of the visually impaired student community pursuing management studies as also physiotherapy education as the above two publishing houses have key academic titles for these courses published through them. Both the agreements have enabled the XRCVC to make available educational material to students as also build on its existing collection of DAISY books.

The XRCVC through the year was also actively engaged with various initiatives at the DAISY Forum of India (DFI) to further promote DAISY as an accessible format through both increased DAISY creation as also DAISY training programs and awareness. The XRCVC team also participated in DFI meetings and the International DAISY technical conference for capacity building in developing countries for making information accessible to all, including persons with print disabilities conducted in October 2010 at New Delhi by DFI.



(XRCVC team trained by Mr. Prashant Verma, DAISY Consortium)

Through 2010-2011 the XRCVC's DAISY production facility has created **58 new DAISY titles**. The XRCVC DAISY facility staff also underwent an advanced DAISY training sessions in August 2010 conducted by Mr. Prashant Verma, Consultant Training and Technical Support from DAISY Consortium. Mr. Verma also evaluated the XRCVC DAISY creation setup and gave a very positive feedback for the same commenting that **"XRCVC is perhaps the only institutions which is producing full text full audio DAISY books with synthesized voice in India"**

Further in October 2010 DFI meeting, a Committee for Training, Technical Support and Awareness creation for DAISY was set up and Mr. Prashant Naik, Program Manager, XRCVC has been made a member of the same. Mr. Prashant Naik has also been involved in training to set up DAISY production unit at the National Association of the Blind (NAB), India. The same has been provided constant support and assistance by the XRCVC.

Hence the year has been fruitful in making significant strides in the area of print access. With the legislation seeming to come through in the coming year, the XRCVC through the year has been actively engaged in building robust ground systems to ensure that accessible content is available for and reaches to the end users.

Building Equal Systems: Financial Access

The problems for equal and accessible banking for the visually impaired have been a long standing concern for the XRCVC. After the start made in the previous year to create a joint forum of banking establishment, this year the XRCVC in partnership with CII took up the issue of accessible banking for the visually impaired through a collective group of Banks.

The XRCVC in partnership with CII- Ability Forum was involved in creating a handbook - Banking Access for the Visually Challenged: An FAQ. Through the year the XRCVC has been involved in discussing and planning with 5-6 key banks in India to take up accessible banking initiatives. These efforts have lead to banks forming action plans for implementation in the area which we hope will be implemented through the coming year making accessible banking initiatives a core part of banking establishments.

Through the year the XRCVC has also provided support to visually impaired members troubleshoot on making banking facilities available to them whenever the same were denied.

Establishing Inclusive Education Practices: Educational Access

Inclusive education has been debated, discussed and has been in the spotlights within government programs, social sector intervention and academic spaces. The realities of these discussions at the ground level have often been abysmal. The XRCVC has constantly engaged with various educational setups to ensure that inclusion is not only a concept of discussion in academic papers but a reality a visually impaired student is allowed to experience.

Within this spectrum of XRCVC's work in 2010-2011 has been a groundbreaking. The XRCVC through the last year had been working with a student Ms Kritika Purohit to ensure that she is permitted to sit for the entrance examination to the degree course in Physiotherapy which in Maharashtra and in most parts of India had been denied to the visually impaired. This case had led the XRCVC to take up the issue at the High Court level as despite repeated efforts Government of Maharashtra had not agreed to offer a level playing field for a visually impaired student to compete and learn the course of Physiotherapy.

In the historic judgment passed by the Honorable Bombay High Court in August 2010 the first ever visually impaired student was allowed admission to a degree course in Physiotherapy (B.P.Th) based on her own competitive score in the entrance examination. Subsequent to the court order Ms. Kritika Purohit based on her merit secured admission in one of the finest colleges in the city of Mumbai - Seth G.S. Medical College and KEM hospital. Whilst that was one of the biggest days for inclusive education and for Kritika who always wished to pursue this career path, it was only the beginning of the long road that lay ahead for the XRCVC. Following her admission the XRCVC has been involved in providing hands on support to the college, to Kritika and to the Maharashtra University of Health Sciences (MUHS) to create rules for study and examination within the mainstream set up for Kritika and to create accessible study material for the course first time in India . The

rules and regulations being worked upon reflect the principle of inclusion that whilst no content adaptation of the mainstream is required for the visually impaired to study in, method adaptation to learn and to test have to be ensured by educational intuitions to make the study and learning process meaningful for the visually impaired. Further the XRCVC has also been actively involved with the Maharashtra Occupational Therapy and Physiotherapy Council (OTPT) for them to issue appropriate rules within the necessary forums to permit visually impaired to practice as physiotherapists.

Following the court order of August 2010 the XRCVC was also made a member of the national committee set up by the Chief Commissioner of Persons with Disabilities (CCPD) to form national level guidelines on admission, study and examination for visually impaired students to study physiotherapy and has been involved in preparing the national level draft guidelines on the said subject.

In a similar pursuit to help another visually impaired student pursue his dreams the XRCVC worked with the CBSE board to create rules for science education at the XI and XII standard so that Mr. Kartik Sawhney, a student of New Delhi could take up the science stream of studies. ***Following XRCVC's representation to the board, the board was forthcoming in issuing the necessary rules which now permit visually impaired students to take up science at the CBSE level.***

The XRCVC has also been working with schools and universities to create models of inclusive education at the primary and higher education levels. For this purpose the XRCVC this year has begun dialoguing with two leading schools in Mumbai and with University of Mumbai and Azim Premji University, Bangalore. What the XRCVC hopes to achieve through these partnerships is create models of educational institutions that can practice inclusion across all their services beyond just permitting admissions. The XRCVC hopes that these beginnings made this year will yield fruitful results in the coming years. Once these models are created they become extremely effective advocacy tools for creating more educational institutions to follow in their footsteps.

Thus this year has been of great significance for the XRCVC in taking major strides forward in the area of inclusive education. With two first time streams opened up in India for the visually impaired the XRCVC is definitely beginning to create new trends and opening up new educational avenues for the visually impaired in India which were traditionally always denied to them.

Living Independently: Consumer, Transport and Legal Access

The XRCVC this year has expanded its advocacy area to include issues concerning independent living for the visually impaired. The right for Independent Living has been well ratified under the United Nations Conventions for Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). 2008. Issues concerning this area related to the full range of Independent living facilities that all sighted persons have access to but as a visually impaired person because of environment constraints the same services become a barrier.

The three specific areas that the XRCVC is looking at under this head are consumer, transport and legal access. A range of daily consumer products and various facilities of the transport system remain inaccessible for visually impaired persons. Further the legal system oftentimes because of their lack of information tends to fail in addressing rights issues of persons with disabilities. Keeping these needs in mind the XRCVC this year did a consumer services survey amongst the visually impaired to identify needs of the community for inaccessible daily products. The XRCVC in the coming year will now take up the needs identified and begin the process of product development for the same. Some of the key needs identified include -remotes for a range of electrical products, TV DTH service menus, medicine packaging and labels.

Similar concerns also exist with a range of transport services. To take up concerns related to the railways and the bus system the XRCVC through the year has begun a dialogue with the Western Railways and the Central Railways systems. Meetings with the respective Divisional Railway Managers (DRM) involved the XRCVC sharing with the railway board specific concerns for the visually impaired and trying to find solutions for the same. Both the boards have begun the process of implementing some of the suggestions offered to them such as checkered titling at platforms, better vigilance of the coach for the physically handicapped persons against misuse etc. These efforts will be continued in the coming year for more consistent outcomes.

With the bus transport service in Mumbai - The BEST corporation the XRCVC this year has begun the process of finding the solution to one of the constant problems the visually impaired persons face with the service - that of identifying the appropriate bus number whilst waiting at bus stops. The XRCVC has been working with a research team at IIT, Delhi that has developed a technology solution for this concern. The XRCVC has begun networking with the BEST Corporation to begin a pilot test for the Bus Number Identification System (BNIS) so that the same can later be taken up for an implementation plan.

In addition the XRCVC through its advocacy work has noticed that lack of awareness amongst the legal fraternity about existing disability rights legislation and possibilities available to persons with disabilities has often been a hindrance to appropriate orders being passed in favor of persons with disabilities. The XRCVC through the channels of the Honorable Bombay High Court has been working at passing legal orders that ratify the rights of persons with disabilities as enshrined in the UNCRPD and other national legislation. The XRCVC was also invited to make a presentation on accessible technologies at the court hearing presided over by the Honorable Chief Justice, Bombay High Court that enabled a range of stakeholders - government and legal to get an insight into various accessible technology options available today and how the same can be implemented in various government programs. The XRCVC was subsequently also invited to become a member of the committee to make suggestions on the same to the Government of Maharashtra.

The XRCVC has thus made new starts in this year which will pick up pace and progress in the coming year.

II. The Access Technology Hub: Technology Training and Research Programs

The XRCVC has been a one of its kinds nodal accessibility centre for the visually impaired in India since some years. Carrying forward the tradition the XRCVC this year ventured into R & D of a host of accessible technology products and launched the first accessible Physiotherapy equipment for the visually impaired. In addition to its robust R & D processes the centre continued its training programs in access technologies for a range of stakeholders. In addition to direct training this year the XRCVC access training project started a certified train the trainers program in accessible technology for teacher educators and trainers. The XRCVC expertise in the area of accessible technology was also recognized through appointment on the Government of Maharashtra committee on accessible technology. The account of achievements of the year area listed below.

Access Technology R & D

The XRCVC in 2010-2011 has been at the forefront of testing a range of products for accessibility. These R & D initiatives have been aimed at some existing mainstream products and other newly developed access technology products. ***The XRCVC's role in R & D has always been focused on user testing and to ensure that products either existing or new satisfy user needs and requirements as closely as possible. The aim at the XRCVC technology unit has always been to make available accessible and affordable products to the visually impaired community.***

Through this year the XRCVC's R & D team was involved in testing the following products:

- Buddy (A DAISY Player): Testing of the newer version of the player for user issues for the same to be reported to the developers.
- Minitab and SPSS (Statistical software programs): As various visually impaired students pursue MBA and Statistics courses they need to use mainstream statistical programs for their studies and work. The XRCVC tested the said programs on their accessibility with JAWS (The screen reader) and gave feedback to users for more efficient use.
- I-ball ClickScan portable instant scanner: The XRCVC has always endeavored to make main stream product accessible for blind users. I-ball in December 2010 launched ClickScan portable scanner product which would prove to be extremely useful for VI users. The XRCVC tested the same for its compatibility with screen readers and other accessible OCR systems. Based on its testing efforts the XRCVC has taken up work with the I-Ball Mumbai team to add more features and iron out a few accessibility features in the product. We hope that very soon this main stream economical and portable product will be an alternative for flatbed scanners.
- SAP: A business management software widely used by companies to facilitate their business processes has had many accessibility issues. This limits a visually impaired persons working in a corporate where they are required to use SAP systems. In order to address this issue the XRCVC has started worked with the SAP team to make their products accessible to the visually impaired.

In addition to the above the XRCVC through the year has been involved in testing a range of other products and softwares. These include: Angel Multi function device, Lamp post scanner, Dolphin publisher 3.1 and HAL, Obi 1.2 and screen reader dolphin HAL and JAWS, Vidya Valan Unicode converter.

Through these efforts the XRCVC has ensured that users have constant technology support for meeting their day to day and specialized requirements and have the same met at affordable costs.

First time launch of Accessible Physiotherapy Equipment in India

The XRCVC through its advocacy initiatives this year had successfully got admission to a visually impaired student in mainstream physiotherapy education. In addition to the student there are many visually impaired persons who practice physiotherapy. A constant query for the visually impaired physiotherapist had been how do they operate the physiotherapy equipment with complex menus and screen visual displays. The visually impaired physiotherapists over the years had devised their own ingenious methods to operate the same however the questions of the sighted community still remained. In order to standardize and simplify equipment use procedures for the visually impaired as also to answer the doubts of the sighted community the XRCVC this year in partnership with Unique Medical Appliances worked on incorporating accessibility features in mainstream physiotherapy equipments.

The XRCVC through the year actively worked with Unique Medical Appliances and Tapsi Electro Medical Systems to make the Interferential Therapy (IFT) and the Short Wave Diathermy (SWD) machines accessible. Both the companies manufacture the mainstream product for the same and they worked with the XRCVC to install accessibility features of voice outputs in both their mainstream products. ***The R & D led to for the first time in India fully accessible IFT and SWD machines being launched in March 2011.***



(Dr. Kulkarni, Pro Vice Chancellor, MUHS launching the accessible Physiotherapy equipments)

Following the launch the XRCVC has conducted training workshops with visually impaired physiotherapists to orient them in the use of the new equipments. These workshops were conducted in Mumbai and also in Ahmedabad in partnership with the Blind People's Association (BPA). Both the machines have been very well received in the community,

This has been a huge breakthrough for the XRCVC and the community of visually impaired physiotherapists. ***The said models are available in the market off the shelf at the same price rate making inclusion truly see the light of day for this group of visually impaired professionals.***

The XRCVC has maintained itself to be a nodal technology centre for visually impaired persons since its inception. The XRCVC with its increasing recognition of being housing the latest access technology has taken on new roles for the community in the area of access technology.

This year in addition to running direct training programs for the visually impaired in access technology the XRCVC launched its train the trainer modules. These designed at three levels - beginner, intermediate and advanced aim at equipping other professionals in the field to train the visually impaired.



(Mr. Salim Shaikh conducting training session for B.Ed Special Education course students of SNTD)

This year the XRCVC conducted two train the trainer courses. One Intermediate level course for the batch of B.Ed in special education course students at S.N.D.T University, Juhu and another Entry level course for D.Ed in Special Education course conducted at NAB, India were held this year. In total these two courses covered 29 trainees. In addition Mr. Prashant Naik also conducted a training session on 'Technologies for the low vision' as part of the Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) Continuing Rehabilitation Education course where a total of 30 special educators and teachers from all over Maharashtra participated. ***Hence the XRCVC has reached out to 59 trainers through the year.***

In addition to the above the XRCVC continued its direct training programs to meet various needs of visually impaired persons themselves in use of access technologies. ***Through various training sessions conducted the XRCVC reached out to 110 visually impaired persons.***

Further the XRCVC this year was invited to make a presentation by the Honorable Chief Justice, Bombay High Court on accessible technology to the government and a range of other stakeholders involved in cases related to the visually impaired. Subsequent to the presentation Mr. Prashant Naik and Dr Sam Taraporevala of the XRCVC have been appointed in the core group of the Committee to assist all the Maharashtra Government departments through Social Justice department for procuring gadgets / devices / softwares for the visually challenged.

The XRCVC team has been closely involved with the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment in identifying a list of access technologies that can be used by visually

impaired employees at all class level jobs. The said tasks will be followed up by the government setting up procurement procedures for these for its employees. This will greatly benefit employees of the government in being able to function at their best level and thus making their work environments inclusive.

Hence this year the XRCVC has expanded its scope of work in sharing its expertise of assistive technology and training across to a wider range of groups and has entered the phase of taking on newer roles to spread the benefits of assistive technology.

III. Breaking Myths: Our continued Awareness Initiatives

The XRCVC's work has always shown how mindsets are the key to opening up areas of inclusion for the visually impaired. The XRCVC has regularly strived at creating awareness through innovative means for various groups of stakeholders on the lives of the visually impaired. Awareness endeavors at the XRCVC continued this year as well.

The annual awareness event of the XRCVC Antarchakshu - The Eye Within held in September 2011 this year worked on the theme of transport and education. Antarchakshu participants experienced a range of daily living tasks blindfolded including getting onto a bus. 1300 participants were sensitized through this experience. The event was also a starting point for beginning work of transport access in the advocacy programs of the XRCVC. The management members of both the bus and train transport system attended the event which began the process of getting key decision makers sensitized to the needs of the visually impaired.



(Antarchakshu participants experiencing travelling by Bus and visiting the exhibition)



*(Children at an awareness workshop
Playing with clay and other craft
Activities)*

In addition to the mass scale awareness event the XRCVC through the year also reached out to a range of stakeholders - students, schools and corporates to spread the message of inclusiveness. Through this year the XRCVC sensitized 180 visually impaired persons on various assistive technology and changing careers and living scenarios for the visually impaired in India. Awareness of this kind amongst the visually impaired community is as crucial as the awareness within society. It is only when the two are done will we have a changed scenario in practice.

The XRCVC reached out to employees of Johnson and Johnson and Mphasis Ltd. (40 persons) to spread ideas of inclusive employment. 483 school students through a mix of mass scale programs and workshops were reached out to teach concepts of inclusion early in life. Further 180 college and professional course students were reached out to help them locate and internalize the concept of inclusion within their respective stream of studies. These included media, architecture, social work, counseling and liberal arts.

Hence through the year the XRCVC through its range of awareness events and workshops has reached out to 2179 persons, bringing each participant closer to being open to having a visually impaired person participate alongside them in the mainstream.

IV. The XRCVC Service Delivery Model: Our direct work with the visually

The XRCVC has always been a strong user need focused organization. All our advocacy initiatives and all our work is guided only by the needs of our users' with whom we work very closely. The XRCVC regularly strives to ensure the best and timely service to all its members.

Continuing from our work over the years this year too the XRCVC continued to offer a range of services to its robust membership base of 165 members in the city and referral support to several members across the country.

Our direct services to our members for the year included: Volunteer support, Counseling support, access format creation, computer training, English language training and legal aid.

The XRCVC this year had an active volunteer base of 117 volunteers supporting our members across the city. The English language training program aided the new students at St. Xavier's College and some of our older students to better their English speaking and reading skills.



(Mr. Ajay Kumar with the annual Lions Club of East Bombay Scholarship)

In addition the XRCVC continued to run the XRCVC-Tech Mahindra Scholarship to support visually impaired students with a financial need for higher education. This year the scholarship attracted 68 applications. The XRCVC through its selection process awarded the scholarship to 10 students pursuing a range of courses - MBA, Masters in Social Work, Bachelors in Physiotherapy, B.Ed and Masters programs in various subjects. The XRCVC also continued the tradition of awarding the most meritorious visually impaired student studying at St. Xavier's College, Mumbai through the Lions Club of East Bombay Scholarship. The said scholarship was awarded to Mr. Ajay Kumar this year for his outstanding achievement throughout his academic career.

Further the XRCVC continued to provide referral and legal aid to its members wherever their rights have been denied. This support ranged from moving the court to ensure one of its members was given the appropriate use of a writer for the exam or liaising with institutes for admission for visually impaired students and working with banks for ensuring appropriate banking facilities.

The XRCVC this year in order to support initiatives across the country has become the nodal centre of the western region for disbursement of various schemes on electronic products run by Saksham Trust, New Delhi. These schemes aimed at making available cell phones and laptops to the visually impaired at a better rate than the market price. The XRCVC facilitated the process of distribution in the western region making sure the visually impaired get the best available products at their door step.

Thus the XRCVC through the year has continued to provide robust services to its range of members.

V. Expanding Linkages: Networks and Presentations

The XRCVC has always recognized the value of networks and partnerships for it is only collective effort that can bring about the mass scale change that we continue to work towards of inclusive societies and environments.

In its continued efforts to garner the value of partnerships the XRCVC has been involved with various seminars and workshops at the national level as well as has been part of various committees across forums. The following is an account of the same for the year 2010-2011



(Dr Sam Taraporevala at the Special needs In Education International Conference, Dubai)

- Dr. Sam Taraporevala presented a paper on “Print Access: The Indian Story” at “Edict 2010 Conference” (Enabling Access to Education through ICT), New Delhi in October 2010.
- Mr. Prashant Naik did a demonstration and presentation on the ANGEL player at the DFI Conference, New Delhi in October 2010.
- Ms. Neha Trivedi shared the work of the XRCVC and its achievements at the Sightsavers South Area Partners meet in Vizag in November 2010.
- In January 2011 Mr. Prashant Naik made a presentation on divers assistive technologies on the invitation of the Honorable Chief Justice of Bombay High Court to the government and a range of stake holders at the court hearing on a collective set of cases related to rights of persons with disabilities.

- Dr Sam Taraporevala presented a paper at the Senior Scholars Seminar series held at K.J. Somaiya College on Smart Technology for Reaching the Unreached in February 2011.
- In March 2011 Dr Sam Taraporevala at CUSAT, Cochin's first annual national workshop for law students on "Re-thinking Intellectual Property Rights Studies" presented a paper on "Reading and Watching in the world of the disabled: A New Perspective to Concerns and Solutions"
- Dr Sam Taraporevala in April was invited at the Inaugural Special Needs in Education International Conference - Inclusive Learning Environments held at Dubai, UAE organized by Higher Colleges of Technology, UAE to be a panel member for the discussion Assistive Technology and its Human Interface where Dr Sam Taraporevala presented on the facet of Making Education Inclusive. At the same conference he also conducted a workshop on Assistive Technology: A step to Inclusive Education.

In addition to the above the XRCVC representatives also attended meetings on committees they have been part of. This includes the General Council of National Institute of the Visually Handicapped (NIVH), Dehradun, Braille Council of India, the advisory committee on assistive technology to Government of Maharashtra, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, the Daisy Forum of India (DFI).

Our Gratitude as the Year ends and a New one begins...

2010-2011 has been a year that has kept the XRCVC team on the edge at various levels; it has taken us to fight battles we would have not envisaged when we started this year. It has also made us stretch our own expertise to reach out to more visually impaired persons and to newer area of work extremely needed in India. Whilst we continue on this journey we would like to acknowledge that we would have not been able to be here without the kind support, constant encouragement and never ending belief of the people we work with - the visually impaired community, our volunteers and the St. Xavier's College management and staff. A special thank you to Fr Frazer Mascarenhas, S.J, Principal, St. Xavier's College for his constant support and encouragement.

Our work has also been able to see the light of the day this year because of the constant support from our funders. We would like to extend our thank you to Sightsavers, Tech Mahindra and Sir Ratan Tata Trust for their continued support. Our thank you also to Container Corporation India Ltd, Johnson and Johnson Ltd, Samruddha Resources Ltd., Group M Media Pvt. Ltd. , TATA Sons Ltd, Shah Steel & Tubes, BPCL, Varun Industries Ltd and Lions Club of East Bombay.

We would also like to extend our special thank you to Ms. Sillo Billimoria, Mr. Abhay Chaturvedi, Ms. Roda Sen and Ms. Lila Jagtiani for their generous and kind support.

With this the XRCVC finishes yet another year of initiatives looking for new challenges of the coming year.