AY 2025-2026

Stories Numbers Don't Tell

- The XRCVC Impact

XRCVC
St. Xavier's College, Mumbai
www.xrcvc.org

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Xavier's Resource Centre for the Visually Challenged

Breaking Barrier… Achieving Access

St. Xavier's College, Mumbai

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Contents

A Word From Us…

Dear Reader,

It is our privilege to bring to you the fourth edition of XRCVC's Impact Beyond Numbers booklet. Every year, as we compile these stories, we are reminded that the true impact of our work lies not in the number of programmes conducted or people reached, but in the journeys of individuals whose lives are transformed through accessibility, inclusion, opportunity, and support.

The stories featured in this edition reflect the diverse ways in which change takes shape. They include students overcoming academic barriers, individuals gaining confidence and independence through assistive technology, professionals building meaningful careers, and institutions taking steps towards becoming more inclusive. Together, they demonstrate that disability inclusion is not achieved through a single intervention, but through sustained effort, collaboration, and a belief in the potential of every individual.

The year gone by also saw XRCVC continue to evolve in response to the emerging needs of the disability community. Alongside our ongoing work in education, accessibility, assistive technology, training, and policy engagement, we expanded our engagement into areas such as inclusive healthcare and inclusive product design. These initiatives reinforce the importance of embedding accessibility across all sectors of society.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to our funders, partners, donors, volunteers, and well-wishers whose support and faith in our work make these stories possible. We extend special thanks to Tata Investment Corporation Limited, Tata Capital Housing Finance Ltd, Boehringer Ingelheim India Pvt. Ltd, Hitachi Digital Services Pvt. Ltd., BarrierBreak Solutions Private Limited, Madison Resource Foundation, Dhun Pestonji Parakh Discretionary Trust, N.M. Wadia Charities, Katgara Foundation, Salsette Developers Private Limited, Lila K. Jagtiani Foundation, Sir JJ Foundation, Kakalia Foundation Kunashne, , Mr. Vikram Utamsingh, Ms. Dolly B. Mehta, Mr. Mikhail Behl, Mr. Donald Mariel Quadros, Mr. Oscar Gomes, P A Zaveri Energy Solutions LLP - Jilesh Zaveri, Mr. Mahendra Satiya, Dr. Kanti N Patel, Mrs. Rashna K. Munshi, Mrs. Jasmine Kharas, and Ms. Vahbiz Pestonjamasp for their invaluable support.

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As you read through these pages, we hope you will see not only the achievements, but also the possibilities that emerge when barriers are removed and opportunities are created. We hope these stories reaffirm the importance of building a world where every person, regardless of ability, can participate fully and thrive.

Team XRCVC

May 2026

Nurturing Potential – Early Inclusive Education Interventions

Ruhaan Hussain

Ruhaan Hussain, a four-year-old student with blindness, connected with the XRCVC when the Centre helped facilitate his admission into an inclusive school – the Beacon High School, Khar.

Further to this, the XRCVC worked on his early literacy skills and helped him explore Braille as a medium for learning. Recognising the importance of beginning intervention at an early age, his parents were eager to equip him with the skills and resources needed to participate meaningfully in school and everyday activities.

When Ruhaan first visited the XRCVC, the focus was on laying the groundwork for future Braille literacy. His family was introduced to a range of accessible resources, including tactile learning materials, Braille books, and pre-Braille activities that could be incorporated into his daily routine. Guidance was also provided on disability-related documentation and support services that would benefit Ruhaan in the years ahead.

To support his learning journey, the XRCVC designed a structured programme beginning with pre-Braille readiness skills. The training focused on developing fine motor abilities, tactile discrimination, tracking skills, hand and finger positioning, book handling skills, and awareness of Braille dots. As Ruhaan progressed, he was gradually introduced to reading and writing Braille letters, numbers, words, and simple sentences.

Ruhaan participates in a tactile sorting activity designed to develop foundational abilities needed for future Braille learning. Also exploring Braille writing equipment during a hands-on literacy session

A key aspect of the intervention was the active involvement of his family. Parents were encouraged to reinforce classroom learning at home through regular practice and meaningful everyday activities. This consistent collaboration between trainers and family helped ensure that skills learned during sessions were repeated and generalised beyond the training environment.

Recognising that successful inclusion extends beyond the child, the XRCVC also worked closely with Ruhaan's school. On 4 July 2025, an awareness and inclusion workshop was conducted for 20 teachers at Beacon High School, Khar, under the Antarchakshu® initiative. The workshop focused on disability awareness, inclusive educational practices, and practical teaching strategies

to support students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. This equipped educators with a better understanding of how to adapt teaching methods and learning materials to meet diverse needs.

According to a detailed school assessment conducted by Beacon High School, they noted Ruhaan's strong tactile discrimination skills, excellent auditory memory, and enthusiasm for hands-on learning experiences.

The impact of these combined efforts is already visible in Ruhaan's school experience. In his first-semester report card, his teacher observed that Ruhaan had shown "admirable determination and adaptability" and noted that he approaches learning with enthusiasm and an open mind. The report further highlighted his meaningful progress, successful use of tactile and auditory resources, and active participation in classroom activities. Sharing his results, his mother wrote: *"Thank you for all (the) support. He is doing well."*

Ruhaan's journey reinforces what XRCVC believes in: the importance of early intervention, family engagement, and school partnership in creating an inclusive educational experience.

Rujul Goythale

Throughout her school years, Rujul has regularly participated in XRCVC's training programmes and made extensive use of the Centre's accessible resources. As her academic needs evolved, so did the support provided. From learning essential computer skills and assistive technology to participating in STEM-related activities and concept-enrichment sessions, Rujul consistently engaged with opportunities that helped her access education on an equal footing with her peers.

One area in which XRCVC played a particularly significant role was access to educational content. For several years, Rujul has been a regular user of the Centre's lending library services, borrowing tactile diagrams and educational materials to support her understanding of subjects that rely heavily on visual concepts. These tactile resources enabled her to explore diagrams, maps, scientific concepts, and other graphical information independently and at her own pace. Given the demands of the school curriculum, she often retained these resources for extended periods, allowing her to revisit and reinforce concepts whenever required.

Rujul Goythale and other students at the Tactile Diagram and Geometry Session at Summer STEM Sense-ations

Beyond supporting her academic studies, XRCVC's Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) education initiatives helped nurture a genuine interest in science and technology. Through participation in STEM-related workshops and concept-enrichment activities, Rujul developed a strong curiosity for scientific concepts and problem-solving. Today, she hopes to pursue the sciences in higher education and has set her sights on becoming a computer engineer—an aspiration that reflects both her academic strengths and her growing confidence in technology.

As she progressed through higher grades, technology became an increasingly important part of her learning journey. Through training and guidance received at the XRCVC, Rujul developed proficiency in using computers and assistive technology for education. These skills eventually became instrumental during one of the most important milestones in her academic life—her Standard 10 SSC Board examinations.

Demonstrating both confidence and competence, Rujul successfully appeared for her Std 10 SSC Board examinations using a computer, applying many of the skills she had developed through years of training and practice. She passed with flying colours scoring 90.40% in her SSC Board examinations. Her achievement reflects not only her hard work and determination but also the value of equipping students with the tools and skills necessary for independent learning.

According to her mother, the support received from the XRCVC has played a major role in Rujul's educational success. Over the years, the Centre has been a constant source of guidance, resources, training, and encouragement, helping bridge gaps that students with blindness often encounter in mainstream education.

“For Rujul, XRCVC was not just a place to learn a skill or borrow a resource—it was a partner in her educational journey, walking alongside her from Grade 2 to Grade 10 and helping turn access into achievement.”

What is particularly noteworthy is that even after nearly a decade of association with the Centre, Rujul continues to actively seek opportunities for learning and growth through XRCVC. In the two months following her Grade 10 examinations alone, she participated in the STEM Sense-ations summer programme, enrolled in an Orientation and Mobility training programme, and requested tactile diagrams for four different books from the XRCVC library. Her continued engagement demonstrates both her love for learning and her commitment to developing new skills that will support her future goals.

Rujul's story reinforces the importance of sustained support throughout a student's educational journey. While individual trainings and resources each play a role, their cumulative impact over time can be transformative. From a young child learning foundational skills to a confident Grade 10 student successfully writing board examinations using technology, Rujul's journey reflects the power of accessibility, opportunity, and perseverance working together.

As Rujul prepares for the next stage of her education, her ambitions, curiosity, and determination continue to shine through. Her journey is a testament to what becomes possible when a student is provided not only with accessible resources, but also with long-term mentorship, opportunities for exploration, and a supportive community that believes in her potential.

The Inclusive Education Support Programme

When a child with blindness enters a mainstream school, success depends on much more than academic ability. Accessing textbooks, understanding diagrams, participating in science practicals, using technology, navigating school independently, and building friendships often require specialised skills that are rarely taught within mainstream classrooms.

Recognising this gap, the Xavier's Resource Centre for the Visually Challenged (XRCVC), St. Xavier's College, Mumbai, launched the Inclusive Education Support Programme in 2022. Designed as a long-term, level-wise intervention, the programme supports students with blindness studying in mainstream schools by equipping them with the specialised skills, accessible resources, and confidence needed to participate fully in education and everyday life.

Students enter the programme at different stages of their schooling and progress through four levels that build systematically on one another. Beginning with foundational Braille literacy, introductory technology, orientation and mobility, and activities of daily living, the curriculum gradually expands to include accessible mathematics, geometry, graphing, laboratory skills, assistive technology, visual concept enrichment, independent travel, and preparation for secondary school and board examinations.

A student explores a tactile compass and a tactile diagram of an intersection on the street as part of her Orientation and Mobility training

Students learning skills in an Activities of Daily Living session

Students exploring models in a Visual Concept Enrichment session

The programme also actively engages with participating schools through XRCVC's *I for Inclusion* teacher training workshops. Educators receive practical guidance on supporting students with blindness in inclusive classrooms, while ongoing consultations help address challenges that arise during the academic year. The XRCVC further supports schools by producing Braille books, tactile diagrams, and other accessible educational materials, ensuring that students can access the curriculum on an equal basis with their peers.

Today, many of the students who joined the programme as young children are progressing through middle and high school with increasing confidence and independence.

For Feriha Fakharuddin, now in Grade 4, one of the most significant changes has been in her confidence as an independent traveller. Through the programme's Orientation and Mobility training, she developed the skills and confidence needed to begin taking the lead in using her white cane, enabling her to move more independently and engage more confidently with her surroundings.

The programme's impact often extends beyond the students themselves. Vivaan Shrirao, a Grade 6 student, now independently uses a computer at home and accesses his mobile phone using a keyboard. Reflecting on Vivaan's family's journey, his mother shared:

"I have learnt how to work with young children with blindness simply by observing the teachers at XRCVC. Not only have I learnt the skills they teach, but also how to communicate, interact, and maintain expectations that are on par with other children of the same age."

This partnership with families is a cornerstone of the programme. By involving parents in the learning process, the programme helps ensure that skills taught during training sessions are reinforced and practised in everyday life.

A parent experiments with a 3D drawing pen to explore possibilities of creating tactile diagrams

Beyond skill development, the programme also provides something that many students with blindness in mainstream schools rarely experience—a community of peers with similar lived experiences.

Anagha Sakpal and Shreya Shimpi, both Grade 8 students, have previously spoken about feeling isolated in their schools. As the only students with blindness in their respective classrooms, they often felt overlooked by teachers and excluded by their peers. Through the Inclusive Education Support Programme, they found a space where they could connect with other students facing similar challenges, share experiences, build friendships, and learn together.

As the summer training sessions came to an end, both students expressed sadness at the thought of no longer attending sessions—a testament to the sense of belonging and community they had developed over the years.

The programme also fosters a culture of independent learning. Anagha is a regular user of the XRCVC Braille Lending Library and an avid reader, frequently borrowing Braille books to support both her academic studies and personal interests. Access to accessible reading materials has enabled her to explore subjects beyond the classroom and cultivate a lifelong habit of reading.

For Jerusha Nadar, another student in the programme, the specialised skills training has had a direct impact on her educational experience. She particularly believes training in geometry, contracted Braille, and computer skills will help her participate more effectively in mainstream education and navigate increasingly complex academic requirements.

A distinguishing feature of the Inclusive Education Support Programme is that it extends beyond direct student training. Recognising that meaningful inclusion requires supportive educational environments, XRCVC also works closely with schools attended by programme participants. Through teacher training, consultations, and ongoing guidance, educators are equipped with practical strategies for teaching students with blindness and low vision in inclusive classrooms.

This collaborative approach helps ensure that students can apply the skills they learn during training within their school environments.

An 'I for Inclusion' training for teachers at a student's school

Over the past years, with even previous batches, the programme has demonstrated that inclusion is not achieved through accommodations alone. It requires systematic skill-building, access to resources, collaboration with families and schools, and sustained support over time.

The journeys of Feriha, Vivaan, Anagha, Shreya, Jerusha, and many others reflect the transformative impact of this approach. Students who once required extensive support are becoming confident learners, independent travellers, technology users, problem-solvers, and advocates for themselves.

The Inclusive Education Support Programme continues to reaffirm a simple but powerful belief: when students with blindness are provided with the right skills, accessible resources, supportive families, informed educators, and opportunities to learn alongside their peers, they are empowered not merely to access education, but to thrive within it.

Summer STEM Sense-ations Training

Background and Need

Students with visual impairment often face significant barriers in accessing STEM education due to the highly visual nature of concepts, diagrams, laboratory demonstrations, graphs, and experimental procedures. In many mainstream schools, opportunities for hands-on scientific exploration remain limited for students with blindness because of the lack of accessible teaching methods, tactile learning materials, adaptive laboratory practices, and exposure to assistive technology. As a result, students are frequently excluded from meaningful participation in STEM learning and practical experimentation, which can affect both conceptual understanding and confidence.

The STEM Sense-ations Training was conceptualised to address these challenges by creating an inclusive, multisensory, and experiential STEM learning environment for students with visual impairment. The program aimed to demonstrate that STEM education can be made accessible through tactile tools, assistive technology, adaptive teaching strategies, and hands-on learning experiences.

Objectives

The training aimed to:

- ✓ Make STEM concepts accessible through tactile and multisensory learning methods
- ✓ Build confidence and independence in Mathematics and laboratory-based subjects
- ✓ Introduce students to assistive technologies and adaptive tools for STEM
- ✓ Provide practical exposure to scientific experiments and laboratory environments
- ✓ Encourage curiosity, participation, and collaborative learning
- ✓ Strengthen conceptual understanding through experiential learning

About the Training

Conducted from 4th May to 16th May, 2026 between 10:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., the workshop engaged five students in grades 8 to 10. through a structured combination of tactile learning, assistive technology, adaptive laboratory exposure, and experiential activities. The training was designed as a structured and interactive program integrating Mathematics, Geometry, Chemistry, Biology, Environmental Science, assistive technology, and sensor-based scientific experimentation.

The Math on Computer sessions introduced keyboard-based mathematical symbols, calculations, and problem-solving using computers, helping students gain confidence in accessing digital academic content.

Geometry concepts were taught through tactile and activity-based learning methods using tactile diagrams, Wikki Stix, and tools from multiple tactile geometry sets – including the Geom Kit and the TouchéTech Labs Geometry Kit. Students learned to create lines, angles, arcs, circles, symmetry, and other geometric constructions; this being the first time for most of them.

Students learning geometry construction using tactile tools

Abacus sessions strengthened mental mathematics skills by improving calculation speed, concentration, and memory. The trainer, Ms. Shalini Dubey, reflected on the experience, sharing: “Learning the abacus took me almost five months, but the experience of teaching these children has been truly worthwhile. Seeing their progress and confidence grow gives me a great sense of satisfaction and fulfilment.”

Students were introduced to laboratory layouts, safety procedures, and accessible experimental techniques. They explored laboratory apparatus such as beakers, measuring cylinders, droppers, tactile syringes, and talking weighing scales through guided practical sessions. Chemistry concepts were reinforced through tactile molecular models and activities involving scientific observation and measurement.

Hands-on exploration of lab equipment in a chemistry laboratory at St. Xavier’s College

The training also included visits to the Chemistry and Zoology laboratories, providing students with meaningful exposure to practical science environments often inaccessible in mainstream education. With the support of professors of the Department of Zoology, students explored preserved specimens and skeletal models through guided tactile exploration and detailed explanations. Additional anatomy sessions introduced body structures such as the knee, foot, elbow, and pelvic girdle using hands-on learning methods.

Exploring anatomy through real-sized educational tactile models

Students also participated in sensor-based experiments using LabQuest technology to explore temperature, humidity, and magnetic field sensors, encouraging scientific inquiry and data collection through accessible methods.

The training maintained a highly interactive environment through quizzes, recap sessions, rapid-fire rounds, and reward-based activities. Feedback from both students and parents highlighted increased confidence, independence, engagement, and excitement toward STEM learning.

Reflections

The impact of the training was strongly reflected in the experiences shared by participants.

Rujul Goythale, a student with blindness, described the overall experience as highly engaging and confidence-building, particularly in developing independence in practical tasks and mathematical learning:

> “For the first time, I drew lines, line segments, rays, angles, circles, and arcs using a geometry kit. I also used Wikki Sticks to make different shapes, which helped me understand concepts better. During the practical lab sessions, I gained hands-on experience with various equipment and safety tools like lab coats and goggles. I also visited the zoology lab, where I saw animal bones, a human brain, and a microscope. Even though I had used the geometry kit before, this was the first time I independently drew a circle using it. I really enjoyed the abacus session as it helped me revise and remember concepts I had forgotten.”

Another participant, *Jerusha Nadar*, reflected:

> “I did not know how to do Maths on the computer, now it's easy to do on the computer. I did not know how to use the geometry kit, but after learning here, I am able to do it independently. After

the lab skills session, I got experience of experiments done in the lab and also understood how the tools and equipment look like. I didn't know how to use the abacus, but now I can do addition, subtraction and multiplication easily and quickly."

Parents and caregivers, too, strongly appreciated the exposure and opportunities provided through the training:

Mrs. Merlin Nadar, mother of a student, said the training addressed learning gaps difficult to bridge at home "The session was very helpful, we find it difficult to teach them. We learnt how to use the geometry tool, till now we were using wrongly. The lab equipment and knowledge of that was very good, this they will not be getting in the mainstream school."

Dr. Vaishali Kavathekar, guardian to another student, stated that students were excited to attend these sessions, "It is truly inspiring to see the exposure and opportunities being provided to differently-abled children. Our children are enjoying all the activities, from Abacus and basic Mathematics to interactive learning sessions."

Students engaging in practical experiments with safety and inclusion

Conclusion

The success of the training highlights the importance of sustained and scalable inclusive STEM initiatives within mainstream educational ecosystems. The program demonstrated that with the right support systems and accessible methodologies, students with visual impairment can meaningfully engage with Mathematics, Science, and laboratory-based learning while developing independence, confidence, curiosity, and a stronger interest in STEM education at par with their peers.

Navigating Higher Education

Adhishesh Payas

Adhishesh Payas is a third-year student of the B.A. - Mass Communication and Journalism course of the St. Xavier's College, Mumbai. His journey is a testament to what grit and determination with support can do. He had taken admission in the St. Xavier's College, Mumbai in 2023 to pursue BSc in Statistics and Economics. However, he found the course overwhelming due to his disability.

Adhishesh Payas

His inability to cope impacted his mental health, to the extent that he started having bouts of depression and he felt like a complete failure. He constantly spoke of leaving college and academics thinking that he will never be able to cope with academics at all.

During this difficult period, he regularly remained in touch with the XRCVC. The XRCVC team continuously counselled him to pursue his education and helped him cope by assuring him that no one is a complete failure in life. There were difficult times when Adhishesh and his father sat through hours of counselling and talking with the XRCVC team. Eventually, Adhishesh left the college but with a determination that he would come back.

In the remaining period of the year, he completed a diploma course in music production and sound engineering. He was already a good tabla player and started accompanying music artistes at major concerts. This elevated his confidence Subsequently, in the academic year 2024-2025, he re-entered the college, this time with an admission to the Arts stream and took up a course in mass communication and journalism.

About this period, he says, "throughout this transition period, XRCVC and its staff supported and encouraged me immensely. They helped me understand that academics are important and that no challenge is impossible to overcome with the right guidance and mindset."

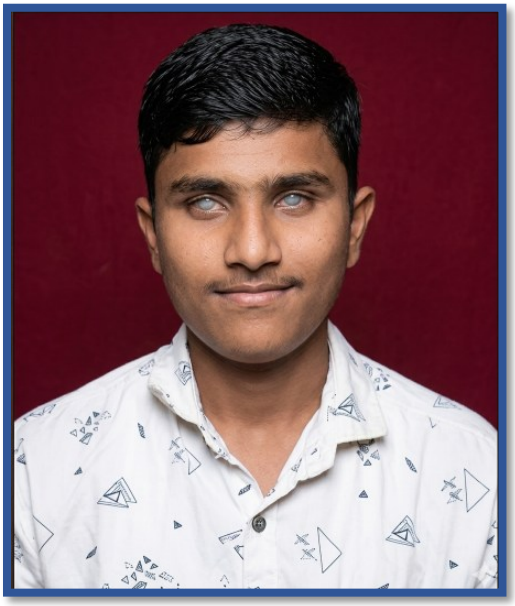
The centre provided him a support system to manage academics with his disability. An important aspect was providing notes in an easy-to-read format. When working on the mandatory Social Involvement Programme credits as a part of his academics, he himself learnt how to create easy-to-read notes. In doing so, he transformed a support that once helped him overcome his own difficulties into a resource that is now helping others overcome theirs.

Today, he is pursuing an internship with Doordarshan and will be graduating from the college next year. He credits all his success and transition to XRCVC.

Karan Pawar

Born blind in a tribal family in Washim, Maharashtra, Karan Pawar has come a long way. In his society, blindness is considered a curse even today, but his parents, though uneducated, were enlightened enough to send him to a special school for the blind in Amravati – a long way from home.

Karan Pawar



Initially, Karan found it difficult to cope at school and missed his parents. However, gradually, he started enjoying and pursuing his studies. He was very impressed by some of his seniors and a blind teacher at his school. He was encouraged to study and take education from a good institution in Mumbai. After some hesitation, he was able to convince his parents to send him to Mumbai alone.

He took admission to St. Xavier's College, Mumbai and was initially awestruck by the overall college atmosphere. The prevalence of English all around intimidated him, but gradually he overcame his hesitation.

He is presently a student in the first year of Junior College and has grown a lot in the last 9 months. He owes his growth to the XRCVC, as he says, "If XRCVC were not here, it would have been difficult for me to negotiate through the drastic changes that I was faced with. Availability of reasonable accommodation, accessible content, and psychological support has done a lot of good in my life."

His is a story of adversity to ascendancy.

Siddhi Nikam

"I hope I clear my CA or CS examination as I want to be a professional in the area of accounting and commerce", says Siddhi Nikam, a 19-year-old student with visual impairment.

- Siddhi Nikam

Siddhi Nikam

Born as the first child of Mr. Ganesh and Mrs. Vidya Nikam, the family went into utter shock and tried various options to treat her blindness. However, they gradually realised that the condition is irreversible and started to train her with basic skills. Her mother, a homemaker, took a lot of effort to teach her at home the alphabet, simple arithmetic, etc. Eventually, she was admitted to Kamla Mehta Dadar School for the Blind, where she completed her SSC. She had an excellent academic record and always wanted to pursue different avenues and stand out.

She has varied interests such as singing, hosting live events, participating in elocution competitions, etc. Basically, performing arts excite her the most. After her HSC, she had made up her mind to get herself educated in one of the leading colleges in Mumbai – namely, St. Xavier's College, Mumbai. Initially, she was overwhelmed by the college atmosphere, but the support that she found at XRCVC slowly opened her up.

When studying commerce, she was sceptical whether she would be able to cope, but the support she received allayed her fears, and she has continued her excellent academic record even in college. She credits her success primarily to XRCVC as she gets her study material in an accessible format in a timely manner, which enables her to keep up with the class. She is also very grateful to the commerce department as special efforts have been taken by the professors to ensure that she attains success.

Today, she has made friends and is easily able to adjust to the college environment. There is a sea change in her from a timid Siddhi to a confident and audacious Siddhi.

Pathways to Independent Living

Anisha Kumari

For many persons with visual impairment, access to technology can be the difference between dependence and independence. However, for those living in remote areas with limited access to specialised training and support, learning to use technology effectively can be a significant challenge.

Anisha Kumari

Ms. Anisha Kumari from Bihar faced a similar situation. A CA Final student with low vision, she was determined to build the computer skills necessary for her education and future career. In February 2025, she reached out to XRCVC seeking support to learn computer skills from the basics.

Anisha subsequently enrolled in XRCVC's computer training programme, where she learnt to use a computer with the help of assistive technology. Coming from a region where opportunities for specialised training were limited, the learning process initially seemed daunting. However, through regular training sessions and personalised guidance, she gradually developed the skills and confidence needed to use technology independently.

Reflecting on her journey, Anisha shared, "Before attending the computer training session with Vikas Dabholkar sir, learning computer skills was a very big challenge for me. But now, after attending the training, I gained a lot of confidence and also started using the computer on my own."

Beyond technical skills, the training helped Anisha become more self-reliant in managing her studies and day-to-day tasks. She credited the patient guidance and encouragement she received during the programme for helping her overcome challenges and build confidence in her abilities.

Anisha's journey demonstrates how access to the right training and support can empower persons with disabilities to overcome geographical and accessibility barriers, enabling them to pursue their educational and professional aspirations with greater independence and confidence.

Purva Karangutkar

Digital literacy is an essential element of education, employment, and independent living. Through its computer training programmes, XRCVC seeks to equip persons with visual impairment with the skills and confidence needed to effectively navigate a technology-driven world.

One such beneficiary is Ms. Purva Karangutkar, a young woman with low vision who completed her Bachelor of Commerce (B. Com) from R. A. Podar College, Mumbai, and is now planning to pursue a Master of Commerce (M. Com). Seeking greater independence in managing her academic and future professional work, she joined XRCVC's computer training programme in December 2025.

Purva Karangutkar

Prior to the training, she was dependent for many computer-based tasks on others. Over the course of the programme, Purva learnt to independently complete tasks such as filling online forms, preparing presentations, and managing academic work.

Reflecting on her experience, she shared, "The training has not only improved my technical skills but has also positively impacted my confidence and independence in daily work and studies. The guidance, patience, and constant support provided throughout the programme were truly encouraging and motivating. This training has helped me feel more confident while handling computer-related work on my own."

Her journey demonstrates how accessible technology training can empower persons with visual impairment to pursue their educational and career aspirations with greater confidence and independence.

Swapnil Patil

When Swapnil Patil first reached out to the XRCVC in 2024, he was looking for ways to adapt more effectively to progressive vision loss caused by Retinitis Pigmentosa. An HR Manager working in the Ed-Tech sector, Swapnil had already developed some strategies to complete his education and pursue his professional journey. However, as his vision changed over time, he began facing increasing challenges in both technology access and independent mobility.

Swapnil alighting from the local train during the Orientation and Mobility training.

In his initial communication with the XRCVC team, Swapnil shared that tasks such as navigating complex websites, accessing graph-heavy presentations, and efficiently using workplace software had become increasingly difficult. Despite these barriers, he expressed a strong desire to continue performing at his full potential and proactively sought training support.

Alongside assistive technology training, Swapnil also showed keen interest in enrolling for Orientation and Mobility (O&M) training in his personal capacity. He also shared his enthusiasm for learning new techniques that would help him become more independent and confident in daily life.

At 33 years old, Swapnil eventually enrolled in the month-long O&M training programme with the goal of becoming more confident and independent in his travel. Prior to the training, navigating unfamiliar environments independently was a challenge, but the course equipped him with practical strategies and the confidence to travel safely and efficiently.

Swapnil appreciated the comprehensive nature of the training, which covered topics such as spatial directions, cane techniques, indoor and outdoor mobility, and protective techniques. According to him, one of the strengths of the programme was the teaching methodology adopted by the instructor, which combined conceptual explanation, simulation, and practical experience. He particularly valued the balance maintained during outdoor mobility sessions, where the instructor encouraged independent task performance while providing timely guidance whenever necessary.

Following the training, Swapnil began actively applying the skills learned in his everyday life. He now independently travels to work daily using a white cane and effectively combines mobility skills with assistive technology tools such as ride-booking applications like Uber. He shared that the course has significantly reduced his fear of travelling to unfamiliar places and has helped him become more aware of using multisensory cues to understand his surroundings and maintain orientation.

Reflecting on the impact of the training, Swapnil noted: “I am no more afraid of being in unknown places. The protective techniques taught are helping me a lot from getting hurt or injured. Please accept my gratitude towards the XRCVC team for being instrumental in empowering people.”

While he continues to face challenges with techniques such as shoreline navigation due to infrastructural barriers, he reports that the majority of the strategies taught during the course have been highly effective in supporting his independent mobility.

Swapnil also suggested expanding the programme with additional full-day sessions focused on certification and periodic meet-ups to continue discussions around Orientation and Mobility. He further expressed interest in sessions on practising mobility in uncertain environments and developing socialisation and networking skills for professional and social settings.

His journey reflects how structured support can go beyond the classroom to foster confidence, independence, and greater participation in everyday life.

From Access to Success

Rahul Gajjal

Rahul Gajjal, a middle-class boy, did his schooling in a special school for the blind in Mumbai. In such schools, exposure of students to the outside world is fairly restricted, but Rahul made a decision that changed his life.

He took admission for his undergraduate studies at St. Xavier's College, Mumbai – one of the oldest colleges in the country. Here, he was assisted by the Xavier's Resource Centre for the Visually Challenged (XRCVC). He also got the opportunity to learn the latest technology, such as screen readers, OCR, etc., which enabled him to succeed despite his visual impairment.

He also participated in various events organized by the centre, which added to his personality. As he says, “Being part of Antarchakshu® — The Eye Within helped me develop strong event management and interpersonal skills, while also deepening my understanding of how to raise awareness about visual impairment.”

Rahul Gajjal

Being a sports enthusiast, he was part of three national football tournaments for the blind. He also participated in several workshops organised by the centre, which built his confidence. He has had a good stint as a musician as well. Rahul says, “All these experiences collectively shaped my independence and confidence, encouraging me to pursue my MSc in Human Resource Management at Aston University in Birmingham, United Kingdom.” In fact, this confidence enabled him to articulate his accommodation needs properly at the University.

He has successfully completed his academic pursuit and has gone back to the UK to explore prospects for career advancements. He credits his success to the centre.

Rushikesh Kamble

"I would like to sincerely thank you for the invaluable support and educational accommodations you provided during my time at college. Your guidance played a significant role in helping me navigate my academic journey, and I am truly grateful."

- **Rushikesh Kamble**

Rushikesh Kamble

Born into a socio-economically weak family, Rushikesh Kamble, a student with blindness, studied in Aurangabad, but he always wanted to pursue his education in a big city. He took his admission at St. Xavier's College, Mumbai, and was helped in his academic pursuit by the XRCVC. He was a student in challenging times, as lockdown also led to disruption, but due to timely assistance, he continued his progress.

He graduated in 2023 with a degree in Economics and Sociology from the University of Mumbai. He continued his studies at a university in Pune with an eye on exploring productive employment. Eventually, he succeeded in securing a job as an administrative officer at United India Insurance Company Limited, a central government service. He credits his success to his education at the college and more crucially to the help that he received from the XRCVC.

Sabika Saiyed

The centre has had a long journey in getting mainstream physiotherapy education accepted as a profession for students with visual impairment. The most visible outcome of this struggle was the success of Kritika Purohit. However, this success did not automatically open doors for other visually challenged students. They continued to face barriers, as the Maharashtra University of Health Sciences (MUHS) did not have systems and policies in place for the inclusion of students with disabilities. This resulted in a continuing struggle.

Ms. Sabika Saiyed, a visually challenged student, took admission in a mainstream physiotherapy degree programme at a time when many of these challenges persisted. However, due to the

earlier developments, she came into contact with the XRCVC. The centre became a constant source of support for Sabika, both emotionally and legally. It performed an ongoing liaison role between the student, her college and hospital, and the MUHS.

Sabika Saiyed

In those early days, when there were no provisions for accommodations at MUHS for her academics, examinations, and practicals, the Centre worked extensively on drafting and implementing customised processes to facilitate examinations, practical training, and address other day-to-day challenges. There were times when Sabika found the dual task of managing her studies and navigating administrative procedures frustrating. However, it was due to the centre's constant procedural support and guidance that she was able to continue her studies with confidence. These interventions by the XRCVC ultimately paved the way for MUHS to develop Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for accommodations for students with visual impairment.

As Sabika often recalls, whenever she felt overwhelmed or frustrated, she would call the Centre. The team would counsel and reassure her that the challenges would be managed, allowing her to focus on her studies while they facilitated the process. Sabika went on to complete her Bachelor's degree with flying colours and successfully completed her internship.

Freed to concentrate on academics because of this support system, the academically strong Sabika secured an All-India Rank of 6 and was selected for a fellowship at the prestigious Swami Vivekanand National Institute of Rehabilitation Training and Research. However, she chose not to accept the opportunity as it would have required relocating to Odisha and living away from home.

Following this, she pursued a Fellowship in Rehabilitation Physiotherapy at the renowned All India Institute of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, where accommodations were provided in accordance with the SOPs that had been established during her MUHS journey with the support of XRCVC.

Sabika subsequently completed her Master's degree in Musculoskeletal Physiotherapy at Lokmanya Tilak Municipal Medical College and General Hospital. She has also completed her

Certification in Mechanical Diagnosis and Therapy, a globally recognised qualification, as well as a Certification in Kinesiology.

After a couple of years in private practice, she learnt of a vacancy in the Central Government and appeared for the recruitment examination. She was selected for a position at the AIIPMR, securing the 6th rank nationally.

Today, she enjoys her work at AIIPMR, where she interacts with a wide variety of patients. She has received an extremely positive reception from colleagues and the institution. As the institute is also involved in education and training, she has been given opportunities to conduct lectures and examinations for young students, further demonstrating her professional capabilities.

Sabika is a multi-faceted personality and has also published a book of poetry titled *Elixir*. She remains deeply grateful to the centre for being a constant source of support, encouragement, and confidence throughout her journey. Her story is not only one of personal achievement but also of how sustained advocacy and support can help create lasting systemic change for future generations of students with disabilities.

Saiee Puranik

Saiee Puranik, first visually impaired woman employee, at Unilever India. Her experience has been of losing sight gradually. Born with weak eyesight, she was enrolled into a regular school that was quite supportive towards her academic and other pursuits. Fortunately, she also had supportive parents who did not discourage her on account of her disability.

Saiee Puranik

Nevertheless, she met resistance at various levels when pursuing her education at her Junior college, and had to constantly advocate for herself. To put in her words:

“While these experiences strengthened my resilience, they also left behind frustration at the lack of structured, institutional support.

That changed when I joined St. Xavier’s College and became a beneficiary of the Xavier’s Resource Centre for the Visually Challenged (XRCVC). For the first time, I was asked what accommodations I needed. Stunned, I initially replied, “None.” Inclusion had seldom been offered proactively and systemically; it was often left to goodwill. As I gradually engaged with the Centre, a new world opened up—of accessible formats, assistive technologies, and mentors who understood my lived reality.”

Things underwent a major change when she took admissions at St. Xavier’s College, where XRCVC offered her accommodations for which she had to hitherto struggle. She gained confidence at the college, as she co-facilitated the XRCVC’s flagship programme – Antarchakshu®. In 2019, Saiee underwent Orientation and Mobility training at XRCVC, initially resisting the use of a white cane. The staff met her hesitation with patience, helping her see it as a tool for safety and independence rather than as a symbol of disability.

During COVID years, her eyesight deteriorated drastically, which rendered her unable to read/write regular print which till then was how she functioned. She learnt the use of screen reader with the help of one-on-one trainings from the XRCVC.

In 2022, a call from an XRCVC consultant resulted in her becoming an intern at Unilever India. Today as an employee there, she actively contributes to building inclusive workplaces. Hers is a story which indicates how resilience and self-advocacy coupled with structed institutional support could lead to a successful and exemplary life.

Transforming Systems

Initiatives at Shantilal Shanghvi Eye Institute

XRCVC continuously adapts its interventions in response to the felt needs of the disability community, with healthcare access emerging as an important area of focus. Recognising this need, the Centre began exploring opportunities to advance healthcare inclusion by fostering collaborations between healthcare institutions and the disability sector.

A noteworthy step in XRCVC's journey towards addressing healthcare accessibility began in December 2024. During the Access Setu Assistive Technology Awareness Exhibition, members of the leadership team of the Shantilal Shanghvi Eye Institute (SSEI) visited the exhibition to explore the range of assistive technologies available for persons with visual impairment. The interactions led to discussions on how assistive technology awareness and disability inclusion could be strengthened within healthcare settings, particularly for individuals with low vision and blindness.

These conversations gradually evolved into a formal partnership. In May 2025, XRCVC signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Shantilal Shanghvi Eye Institute, with the centre serving as a knowledge and technical expert to strengthen the assistive technology component of the institute's Low Vision Rehabilitation Centre. Through this engagement, XRCVC began supporting capacity-building efforts and training of professionals working with persons with visual impairment.

The collaboration soon expanded beyond training programmes. On 17th September 2025, XRCVC and SSEI jointly organised an Access Setu Assistive Technology Awareness Exhibition for medical professionals and the general public. The event brought together 350+ participants, including 110+ ophthalmologists and other medical professionals from SSEI. The exhibition provided healthcare professionals with a first-hand understanding of the wide range of assistive technology solutions available today and demonstrated how technology can significantly improve education, employment, communication, mobility, and independent living outcomes for persons with disabilities.

Access Setu Assistive Technology Awareness Exhibition at Shantilal Shanghvi Eye Institute – 17th September 2025

As a part of the objectives of the MOU, on 18 February 2026, XRCVC facilitated a comprehensive eye check-up camp in collaboration with the Shantilal Shanghvi Eye Institute for the staff and students with disabilities of St. Xavier's College, Mumbai. The camp was organised with the objective of promoting preventive healthcare and early detection of eye-related conditions. It included vision screening, visual assessments, refractive error testing, intraocular pressure (IOP) assessment, and specialist consultations for the early identification of eye health concerns. A total of 210 individuals benefitted from the camp.

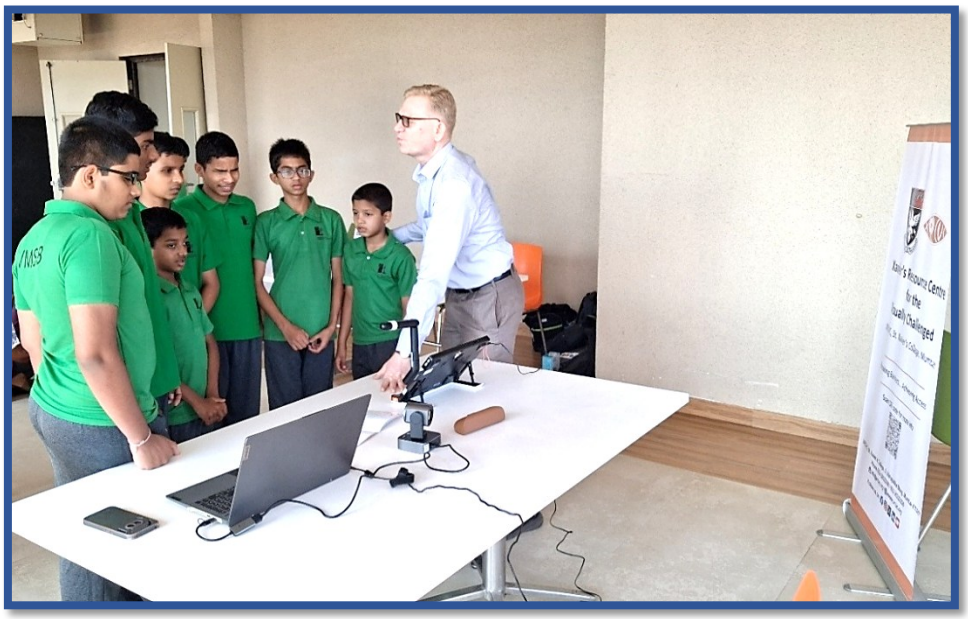
Comprehensive Eye Check-up Camp by SSEI at St. Xavier's College, Mumbai

As the relationship deepened, the focus expanded from assistive technology awareness to broader disability inclusion within healthcare systems. As part of SSEI's Beyond Sight Low Vision Awareness Week, XRCVC conducted its flagship Antarchakshu® disability sensitisation programme for the institute's staff on 27 February 2026. The programme provided participants with an experiential understanding of disability and accessibility, encouraging healthcare professionals to view patient care through the lens of inclusion, dignity, and equal participation.

Antarchakshu® 2.0 Disability Sensitisation Workshop at SSEI

The following day, on 28 February 2026, XRCVC organised an Access Setu exhibition specifically for patients and caregivers attending the programme at the institute. The exhibition enabled individuals and families to explore assistive technology solutions that could support education, employment, communication, and daily living, while also interacting directly with experts and users of these technologies. By reaching patients and caregivers at a healthcare facility itself, the programme helped bridge the gap between clinical care and rehabilitation support.

Access Setu as a part of Shantilal Shanghvi Eye Institute's Beyond Sight Low Vision Awareness Week



The engagement with the Shantilal Shanghvi Eye Institute demonstrates the potential of partnerships between healthcare institutions and disability organisations. What began as a visit to an assistive technology exhibition evolved into a sustained collaboration encompassing professional training, disability sensitisation, assistive technology awareness, healthcare outreach, and patient engagement. In doing so, it marked an important step in XRCVC's efforts to advance healthcare accessibility and inclusion for persons with disabilities.

Recognitions

AY 2025–2026 marked a proud moment of global recognition for XRCVC, with two members of its leadership team being included in **Diversability's D-30 Impact List**. The annual list honours 30 disabled leaders from across the world whose work is creating meaningful impact and advancing disability inclusion in their respective fields.

Dr. Sam Taraporevala and Mr. Ketan Kothari on Diversability's D-30 Impact List – an annual list honouring 30 disabled leaders globally

Dr. Sam Taraporevala, Executive Director of XRCVC, was recognised for his contributions towards advancing inclusive education, accessibility, assistive technology, and disability rights advocacy. Through his sustained efforts, he has played an important role in influencing policy, strengthening systems, and expanding opportunities for persons with disabilities across India.

Mr. Ketan Kothari, Managing Consultant – Programmes, XRCVC, was recognised for his extensive work in promoting accessibility awareness, strengthening inclusive education practices, advancing the use of assistive technology, and building capacities of stakeholders across sectors to create more inclusive environments.

This recognition reflects the impact of XRCVC's long-standing commitment to inclusion and accessibility and highlights the role of its leadership in shaping positive change within the disability sector, both nationally and globally.

Publications

Publication of White Paper: *Built to Include – Expanding the Reach of Consumer Products through Accessibility*

XRCVC released a white paper titled *Built to Include: Expanding the Reach of Consumer Products through Accessibility* to mark the occasion of Global Accessibility Awareness Day 2026.

The publication makes the case for embedding accessibility into mainstream consumer products, highlighting both the social and business value of inclusive design. Drawing on accessibility principles and user experiences, the paper presents recommendations for manufacturers to create products that are more accessible, usable, and inclusive for diverse consumer groups.

Media Coverage

1. Inching towards inclusivity
Parsiana June 21-July 6, 2025

EDUCATION
COVER STORY

Inching towards inclusivity

Through its training and advocacy initiatives, the Xavier's Resource Centre for the Visually Challenged has been attempting to create accessible avenues for the disabled

Parinaz M. Gandhi

Located at the far end of the corridor on the ground floor, the sighted may miss the door leading to the Xavier's Resource Centre for the Visually Challenged (XRCVC). For Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) this may well be among the most frequently visited areas at St Xavier's College known for its accessible campus with tactile pathways and Braille labels on doors to guide those with visual impairment, and ramps and lifts to assist those with motor disabilities.

"We are a very small unit in terms of physical space occupied (one of the smaller classrooms in the Indo-Gothic heritage structure at Xavier's plus a second branch at the Viviana Mall in Thana) and manpower (12-member team) but we are well known in government bodies," stated Dr Sam Taraporevala, founder and executive director of this proactive organization that has come of age, having completed 21 years. "With an agile culture we have grown organically; we don't want to grow physically. We want to build replicable models, create pathways that others could tread," he reinforced.

An alumnus of St Xavier's College, during his 50 years of association with his alma mater, as a visually impaired student, as the first visually impaired associate professor, as the founder of XRCVC, Taraporevala's commitment has been commendable. At the turn of the century when he realized that visually impaired students preferred to join Ruia College that had a resource center rather than Xavier's, he approached the Jesuit management. They supported his proposal to establish a resource center at Xavier's if he was willing to shoulder the responsibility, managerial and financial.

Thus he started operations from an assigned space under a staircase with one computer and requisite software financed by the Tatas in 2003. XRCVC was able to draw visually challenged students from the following year. While students from the College availing of its facilities may average six to 10 a year, the Centre's impact is manifold. To ensure that we have the correct figures, Disha Kapadia, lead consultant — awareness, shares a PowerPoint presentation that reflects the magnitude of their work in three key areas of operations. In the sphere of inclusive education they have reached over 8,300 people with disabilities with over 700 accessible books and more than 2,000 teaching/learning aids. To determine the accessibility of products and services they have tested over 100 gadgets and reached more than 13,000 participants through assistive technology awareness events.

Their strongest impact though has been through awareness and advocacy work where they have reached over 45,000 persons. Under their registered trademark, Antarchakshu has conducted more than 680 simulation based sensitization workshops. As per their "1:10 philosophy, to

Top row, from l: visually impaired students learn the abacus; use the Braille; at the orientation and mobility course conducted by XRCVC; above l: ATM made accessible to the visually impaired; center: Dr Sam Taraporevala

2. Does NEP really account for visually impaired college students in Mumbai?
Mid-Day 11th July 2025

3. Visionaries for a Reason
Mid-Day 19th July 2025

4. Turning Technology Inclusive
Mid-Day 17th September 2025

5. Samarth by Hyundai: Bridging Barriers through Accessible Learning
Times Now Digital 16th October 2025

6. HSNC University Organises 'Antar-Chakshu' Workshop To Sensitise Staff, Build Empathy And Awareness On Visual Impairment
Free Press Journal 11th March 2026

7. **Sapna aankho thin ahi pan saakar thaay chhe atmavishwas thi Gujarati Mid Day** May 2026

02 મિડ-ડે

ખબરઅંતર

મુંબઈનું હવામાન — કોલાબા ૩૪.૬ ડિગ્રી સાંતાક્રુઝ ૩૪.૪ ડિગ્રી ૨૭.૦ ડિગ્રી ૨૮.૦ ડિગ્રી

દર મંગળવારે ઊપડશે મુંબઈ-અયોધ્યા અમૃત ભારત એક્સપ્રેસ

મુંબઈ અને અયોધ્યા વચ્ચે દોડનારી અમૃત ભારત એક્સપ્રેસ પાંચમી મેથી શરૂ થશે.

ટ્રેન-નંબર ૨૨૧૧૧ મુંબઈ (LTT)થી દર મંગળવારે સવારે ૭.૫૫ વાગ્યે ઊપડશે અને બીજા દિવસે સવારે ૧૦.૧૫ વાગ્યે અયોધ્યા કેન્ટોનમેન્ટ પહોંચશે. ટ્રેન-નંબર ૨૨૧૧૨ અયોધ્યા કેન્ટોનમેન્ટથી દર બુધવારે બપોરે ૧.૫૦ વાગ્યે ઊપડશે અને બીજા દિવસે બપોરે ૩.૪૫ વાગ્યે મુંબઈ પહોંચશે.

આશરે ૨૬ કલાક ૨૦ મિનિટની જર્ની દરમ્યાન ટ્રેન ૧૨ સ્ટેશનોએ થોભશે. આમાં સુલતાનપુર, મા બેલ્હા દેવી ધામ પ્રતાપગઢ, પ્રયાગરાજ, માલિકપુર, સતના, જબલપુર, ઇટારસી, ભુસાવળ, જલગાવ, નાશિક રોડ, કલ્યાણ અને થાણેનો સમાવેશ છે. આ એક્સપ્રેસ ટ્રેન સાથે કુલ

મુંબઈથી અયોધ્યા જવા માટે સ્લીપર ક્લાસનું ભાડું ૮૯૫ રૂપિયા થશે.

વર્ષા ચિતલિયા
feedbackgmd@mailday.com

સપનાં આંખોથી નહીં પણ સાકાર થાય છે આત્મવિશ્વાસથી

આ વાત સાબિત કરી છે બિલકુલ જોઈ ન શકતી કૌશિકી પટેલે. મહારાષ્ટ્ર બોર્ડની બારમા ધોરણની પરીક્ષામાં તે ૮૯.૬૭ ટકા લાવી છે. બોર્ડની પરીક્ષા ઉપરાંત લૉની એન્ટ્રન્સ એક્ઝામમાં પણ તેણે દમદાર પર્ફોર્મન્સ આપ્યો છે. ટેક્નોલૉજીની સહાયતા અને સઘન અભ્યાસ દ્વારા આ સફળતા મેળવનાર કૌશિકીને સંગીતમાં રસ છે, કીબોર્ડ વગાડે છે અને હવે ગિટાર વગાડવાનું શરૂ કર્યું છે

કીબોર્ડ વગાડતી.

પેરન્ટ્સ અને ભાઈ સાથે.

લૅપટૉપ પર પરીક્ષાની તૈયારી કરતી.

માર્કશીટ

વિષય	માર્ક
ઇંગ્લિશ	૭૮
ફ્રેન્ચ	૯૯
હિસ્ટરી	૯૪
પોલિટિકલ સાયન્સ	૮૯
સાઇકોલૉજી	૯૨
ઇકોનૉમિક્સ	૮૬
કુલ	૫૩૮/૬૦૦

આત્મવિશ્વાસથી કોઈ પણ સિદ્ધિ હાંસલ કરી શકાય છે એનું શ્રેષ્ઠ ઉદાહરણ છે બિલકુલ જોઈ ન શકતી સાંતાક્રુઝની કૌશિકી પટેલ. સેન્ટ ઝેવિયર્સ કૉલેજની આર્ટ્સની વિદ્યાર્થિની કૌશિકીને મહારાષ્ટ્ર બોર્ડની બારમા ધોરણની પરીક્ષામાં ૮૯.૬૭ ટકા આવ્યા છે એટલું જ નહીં, લૉની એન્ટ્રન્સ એક્ઝામ કૉમન લૉ ઍડ્મિશન ટેસ્ટ (CLAT)માં પર્સન વિથ ડિસેબિલિટીઝ (PWD) કૅટેગરીમાં પણ ઑલ ઇન્ડિયા લેવલ પર તેનો છઠ્ઠો ક્રમાંક છે. પેરન્ટ્સ, શિક્ષકો અને ટેક્નોલૉજીની સહાયતાથી તેણે અદ્ભુત સફળતા મેળવી છે. બે વર્ષ અગાઉ દરમ્યાન ધોરણમાં પણ તેને ૯૭.૮ ટકા આવ્યા હતા.

ટેન્થમાં પણ ઝળકી હતી

પોતાના દમદાર પર્ફોર્મન્સ વિશે 'મિડ-ડે' સાથે વાત કરતાં ૧૭ વર્ષની કૌશિકીએ જણાવ્યું હતું કે 'વિઝ્યુઅલી ચૅલેન્જ્ડ બુક્સ, ડ્રાયાગ્રામ અને સ્ક્રીનરીડર સૉફ્ટવેઅરની મદદથી નોટ્સ તૈયાર કરી હતી. કૉલેજમાં બિલિમ્બ્સ એક્ઝામ લૅપટૉપ પર આપી હતી, પણ બોર્ડની પરીક્ષાનાં પેપર લખવા રાઇટરની મદદ લેવી પડી હતી. મહારાષ્ટ્ર બોર્ડની પરીક્ષામાં બારકોડ હોય છે એટલે લૅપટૉપ પર પરીક્ષા આપવાની પરવાનગી નથી હોતી. બોર્ડની પરીક્ષાની સાથે-સાથે લૉની એન્ટ્રન્સ એક્ઝામ CLAT પણ આપી હતી. એમાં ૮૬.૫૦ માર્ક્સ સાથે ઑલ ઇન્ડિયા લેવલ પર PWD કૅટેગરીમાં મારો સિક્સ્થ રૅન્ક અને મહારાષ્ટ્રમાં ફર્સ્ટ રૅન્ક છે. અગાઉ દરમ્યા ધોરણમાં ICSE બોર્ડની પરીક્ષામાં ૯૭.૪ ટકા આવ્યા હતા. મારી આ જર્નીમાં પેરન્ટ્સ ઉપરાંત નૅશનલ અસોસિએશન ફૉર ધ બ્લાઇન્ડ (NAB)-વરલી, ઝેવિયર્સ રિસોર્સ સેન્ટર ફૉર ધ વિઝ્યુઅલી ચૅલેન્જ્ડ અને સ્પેશ્યલાઇઝ્ડ હેલ્પલાઇન તરફથી સમર્થન અને માર્ગદર્શન મળ્યું છે.'

૩ મહિલાનામાં જ દૃષ્ટિ ગુમાવી

રેટિનોપથી ઑફ પ્રીમેચ્યોરિટી (ROP)થી પીડિત કૌશિકીએ તેનું સ્ટ્રગલિંગ અર્લીરીનો પ્રાઇમ એરેમીથી પૂરું કર્યું હતું. ત્યાર બાદ તેણે સેન્ટ ઝેવિયર્સ કૉલેજમાં આર્ટ્સ સ્ટ્રીમનો અભ્યાસ કર્યો. હવે તેને મહારાષ્ટ્ર નૅશનલ લૉ યુનિવર્સિટી (MNLU)માં પાંચ વર્ષના ઇન્ટિગ્રેટેડ લૉ પ્રોગ્રામ માટે પ્રવેશ મેળવ્યો છે. ROP એવી સમસ્યા છે જેમાં બાળકને જન્મ વખતે વિઝન એડક્વેટ ઓછું હોય છે અને એક વર્ષની ઉંમર સુધીમાં સંપૂર્ણ અંધત્વ તરફ દોરી જાય છે. આંખની આ ગંભીર સમસ્યા સામાન્ય રીતે પ્રીમચ્યોર બેબી અથવા તો ગર્ભાવસ્થા પૂરી થયાનાં ૩૧ અઠવાડિયાં પહેલાં જન્મેલાં બાળકોમાં જોવા મળે છે. એમાં રેટિનાની નાજીઓ અસામાન્ય રીતે વિકસે છે. કૌશિકીનો જન્મ ૨૮ અઠવાડિયાંની ગર્ભાવસ્થા બાદ થયો હતો. જન્મ બાદ આંખની સમસ્યા હોવાનું નિદાન થયું હતું. ઑક્સિજન આપવામાં આવ્યો એના પરિણામસ્વરૂપ રેટિના વધુ ડિટેચ થઈ ગયો. જન્મ થયાના ૩ મહિનામાં જ તેણે સંપૂર્ણપણે દૃષ્ટિ ગુમાવી દીધી હતી. તેનાં પેરન્ટ્સ પ્રવલાઈ અને રૂપાલીભદેન ડિપ્રેશનમાં આવી ગયાં કે જોઈ ન શકતા બાળકનો ઉછેર કઈ રીતે કરીશું? ધીમે-ધીમે પરિસ્થિતિને સ્વીકારી લીધી. કૌશિકી પોતાના જીવનમાં આગળ વધી શકે અને પગભર થઈ શકે એ માટે એજ્યુકેશન પર ભાર મૂક્યો. મગજ સારું છે એટલે બ્લાઇન્ડ સ્કૂલમાં નથી ભણાવવી એવું નક્કી તો કર્યું, પરંતુ ઘરથી નજીકની કોઈ સ્કૂલ કૌશિકીને સ્વીકારવા તૈયાર નહોતી. NABએ સ્કૂલ શોધવામાં હેલ્પ કરી હતી.

થિયરીમાં રુચિ

કૌશિકીને થિયરીવાળા વિષયોમાં રુચિ છે એટલે તેણે આર્ટ્સમાં એડ્મિશન લીધું હતું. લૉની સ્ટડીમાં પણ થિયરી સબ્જેક્ટ વધુ હોય છે. અભ્યાસમાં હોશિયાર કૌશિકીને સંગીતમાં ખૂબ રસ છે. તેના ફ્રી ટાઇમમાં કીબોર્ડ પર બૉલીવુડ અને ઇંગ્લિશ ગીતો વગાડે છે અને ગાય છે. કીબોર્ડમાં ટ્રિનિટી કૉલેજ ઑફ લંડનથી લેવલ ૬ પાસ કર્યું છે. તેને અલગ-અલગ સંગીતવાદ્યો શીખવાં ગમે છે. આ વેકેશનમાં તેણે ગિટાર વગાડવાનું શરૂ કર્યું છે. સોસાયટી કે કૉલેજના કૅમ્પસમાં તેને લોકો બર્થ માને ત્યારે હતાશ થવાને બદલે વધુ આત્મવિશ્વાસ સાથે આગળ વધે છે. તેનો ૮ વર્ષનો નાનો ભાઈ છે. તેના પપ્પા પ્રવલાઈ બેન્કમાં કામ કરે છે અને મમ્મી રૂપાલીબહેન ગૃહિણી છે.

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8. **Design shortfalls of everyday items leave blind users vulnerable** Mid Day 21st May 2026

9. **White paper calls for more accessible appliances for the visually challenged** Mid Day 21st May 2026

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