



SAATHI Enabling Centre

Work with the blind students began informally when some members of the Sociology Club started helping them with recording of notes before the exams. This brought us closer to them and we realised that they are just like us. They have the same needs and aspirations; skills and abilities as the sighted students. There is only one difference! And this sets them apart from the mainstream college life. Unfortunately, there is a benign neglect of the blind students.

The activities of the Saathi Enabling Centre are as follows:

Study Circle: This provides academic assistance to the blind students in the college. The sighted and the blind students meet twice a week. Academic activities include reading of text books, working of English proficiency, recording notes or making the recorded notes available.

Peer Mentoring: A peer mentor called '*saathi*' is allocated to each blind student who is responsible for the general well being of the blind student. *Saathis* help in negotiating with the day to day life in college like filling up various forms like exam forms, scholarship forms etc., and reading notices.

Inclusive Practices: Conscious effort is made to include the blind students in regular activities of the Sociology Club like group discussions, street plays, workshops etc. This helps in building confidence and creating bonds of friendship between the sighted and the blind students.

Weekly Activity: The blind students and the saathis meet every Saturday to discuss about contemporary issues, have debates, quiz competition, essay writing, singing etc.

Writers/Scribes for the Examinations: This is one of the important needs of the blind students. A data base of volunteers from within and outside college is maintained and they are contacted during the exams. Some corporate organizations like Infosys Foundation, Tata Chrome & Mahindra Navistar have extended helped as part of corporate social responsibility.

Annual Celebrating Louis Braille Day – January 4: The blind students are actively involved in organising the events for the day. Eminent people in the field are invited to interact with our students. Our guests included people like Mr. Dhananjay Bhole, Coordinator of Advanced Technology Blind Students' Learning Centre, University of Pune, Prof. Sanjay Jain of ILS Law College, Pune, Ramdas Mahtre, Superintendent, Welfare of the Disabled dept., Ms. Rutuja Pitale of Apte Prashala Integrated Scheme, Manjushree Kulkarni, President of 'Saksham', Prof. Mahesh Deokar, Head, department of Pali, University of Pune, Ms. Prachi Gurjar, principal Mr. Doke and Vandana Gandhi.

In the cultural programme, the students display their musical, artistic and histrionic talent. Storytelling, play reading, poetry recitation, prize distribution for various competitions is also a part of the programme. An exhibition of teaching aids like maps, models of human body parts, and computer programmes for the blind, reading and writing instruments is held every year.

Capacity Building Workshops

1. *Guest lecture on “Career Opportunities for the Blind”* by Mr. Dhananjay Bhole of the University of Pune.
2. *Workshop on Human Rights for PWD* (25.8. 2011)
3. *Interaction with Sudha Murthy- Chairperson of Infosys Foundation* (3.9. 2011)
4. *Soft Skills and English Proficiency Classes:* (August 5, 2013 – September 24, 2013)
5. *Career Guidance Presentation:* (14.12.13) by Technical Training Institute of Pune Blind Men’s Association.
6. *Body Literacy workshops*(Aug 20 & Sept.24, 2014) by Tathapi Trust
7. *Issues of girl students with blindness:* a interactive session (10.1.2015)
8. *Understanding Love :* a workshop by Tathapi Trust (7.2.15)
9. *Coaching classes for Bank Entrance Exam* (5.1. 2015 to 25. 2. 2015)
10. *Personality Development workshop* by Mr. Tejas Toro (7.3.2015)
11. *Participation in book testing:* Tathapi an NGO working in the area of Women and Health is bringing out a book on body literacy for the people with blindness.
12. *Participation in a study:* Some of our electronics students are working on designing equipments that would facilitate the normal functioning of the blind people. They have designed an electronic stick that has a sensor to detect obstacles on the road and an audio notice board for the blind.

Participation in Workshops & Seminars Outside College:

1. *“Human rights for the visually challenged”* :(August 15, 2012) held in ILS Law College
2. *“Reading without Seeing”* A state level workshop (December 1& 2, 2012) University of Pune and XRCVC, Mumbai had arranged a workshop “Reading without seeing” in University of Pune
3. *Career Opportunities for the Blind* (28. 6. 2013) This day long workshop was organised by the University of Pune’s Advanced Technology Blind Students’ Learning Centre.
4. *Maths for Competitive Exams* (11.1.14) This was organised in Modern College, JM road. Two students Anuradha Thadake and Vikas Awghadrao participated in this workshop.
5. *Personality development workshop* (20.2.14) This workshop was organised by the University of Pune’s Advanced Technology Blind Students’ Learning Centre. This was attended by Elina Murmu and Hemangi Dhamane of SYBA.
6. *Attended the Fourth Akhil Bharatiya Aapang Sahitya Sammelan:*(February 21 & 22, 2014)

Get togethers & Picnics: To foster friendship between the blind and sighted students we organize a get together which includes several games, singing, dancing, sharing of jokes, parody, cricket match and *antaksharis*. Students have gone trekking to Sinhagad fort and for picnic to P.L.Deshpande garden.

Visit to XRCVC, Mumbai (December 17, 2011) : This is one of the best centres in the country.

Participation in White Cane Day Rally (October 15/21, 2012) organised by National Federation for the Blind.

Celebrating the World Disability Day (December 3, 2013) Programme included interaction with the principal and group reading of the PWD Act.

Awards:

Louis Braille Award – Fergusson College was awarded the Louis Braille Award by Louis Braille Andha Apang Kalyan Sanstha, Pune. December 2012.

Gift of Braille Books by the National Federation for the Blind: (December 7, 2012) NFB selected the Study Circle of Fergusson College to gift a set of 78 Braille books which were printed by the Federation with the help of government funds.

Sunita Pandhe Gupta Teacher Coordinator

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