

Issues of Disability Access and Universal Design in a Higher Educational Institution

Organizational work done for Persons with Disabilities from 2015-2018 in Indraprastha College for Women (University of Delhi)

Issues of Disability Access is one of the core thrust areas of the College along with facilitating the creation of the autonomous disabled woman. Thus the approach is multi-pronged and inclusive in that the focus is also on creating awareness and sensitization of the non-disabled persons as equal stakeholders.

A. Built Environment

The College continues to adhere to the norms of universal design that is effortlessly accessible and barrier free for all. Physically disabled and wheel chair users can access any part of the College through well laid ramps and the visually impaired can move freely using the tactile pathways. The College Library has a fully functional elevator enabling mobility of physically disabled students to all the floors and sections of the library. Also it allow access path to the new centres of learning resources. The New Academic Block constructed in 2015 and the redesigned Kalavati Gupta Hostel has similar ramp and elevator facilities. Giving access to students with disability to all the classrooms and activity areas like Audio Visual Lecture Theatre and centres of learning like the Music Archives and Listening Room. Toilets for physically disabled have been built in the students , faculty toilets blocks and the hostel unit alike. A closed-circuit teleconferencing facility additionally functions in a seminar room inaccessible by a lift, to enable wheelchair users to interact from the ground floor with their peers above. All laboratories have been shifted to the ground floor for physically disabled students in all departments with lab work. The Auditorium stage and the Sports Ground are accessible to wheelchair users.

Transport

The College has a 26 seater bus to cater to the needs of students, with usage prioritized for persons with disability students. The College also has an enabling

provision for arranging transportation facility to the persons with disability students during the winter semester examinations, to ensure that these students return to their destinations safely when it is dark. The College has a car and arranges vehicles when required to cater to staff needs, with usage similarly prioritized. The College community regularly interacts with the Delhi Metro staff at Civil Lines metro station and requests them to be vigilant helping our visually impaired students navigate the station and its exit points better to reach college safely. Security guards at the College gate are especially instructed and trained to assist such students to cross the road and police personnel have also been sensitized to their needs.

Services

Indraprastha College for Women feels humbled to walk an extra mile with its distinct services for disability access in the community of students, the faculty and the administrative staff. Among the major services offered by the College, are the following:

1. **Admissions:** The College adheres to the 5% reservation of seats for Person with Disability (PwD) in the annual student intake in every academic session. For the convenience of students with disabilities and their accompanying family members, the College has a single window, the 'Under One Roof' Enabling Unit, also offering admission facility. Also the token fee to generate admission receipt is paid and processed by the College for each candidate. Faculty and team of student volunteers assist each and every candidate in the admission procedure from start to finish.

2. **Mobility Services:** A mobility instructor is employed for a tenured appointment in the beginning of academic session every year, to provide basic mobility orientation to the visually impaired students and make them familiar with every section and area of the college. This mobility training helps the newly admitted students navigate the classrooms and activity areas better and gives them a feeling of warm welcome to their own campus. The College encourages White Cane usage and continually motivates visually impaired

students to shed their hesitation with the white cane and regard it an enabling device.

3. Computer Training: The College appoints a computer instructor on semester basis proficient in Screen-reading and other special Software. The selection process of the computer instructor includes detailed interaction and hands-on practical sessions, conducted by a panel of faculty which includes visually impaired faculty of the College as well. Available from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM on all working days, the computer instructor trains students in Computer basics, advanced computing skills, power point presentations, excel , English and Hindi typing etc., and offers other technology consultancy services. Regular semester wise in house examinations are conducted to evaluate the levels of computer proficiency gained by students. Currently, one of our student takes a University examinations on the computer using assistive technology and she is a role model for her peers.

4. Scribe Services: The College arranges scribes for the visually impaired students to assist them in writing and reading during their academic semester. A pool of volunteers from the NSS wing of the College responsibly extend their services to the students with disabilities, the College administration facilitates the process and encourages this volunteer work. An email id has been created to establish regular communication between the students with disability and NSS volunteers.

5. Library Services: The College Library has a separate unit to assist students with disabilities in accessing library resources. It periodically arranges the reading material in such accessible formats as: Braille, DAISY and Audio. The Library now has 488 Braille books and 344 audio books and 10 Mathematical instrument kit, this number goes up as the new texts are added every year. The College has requested and received two copies of the Sign Language Dictionary. The Library has also ordered in advance the world atlas for visually impaired students to be available from the forthcoming academic session. The elevator facility and other customization features introduced in the Library are proving to be a great help for the person with disability to freely move around

and make use of the library resources on par with their non-disabled counterparts.

6. Financial Assistance: The College does not charge any fees from the person with disability during college and hostel admission. Candidates admitted under PwD category are provided concession in hostel mess charges as well. Additionally the College has a dedicated team of teaching and administrative staff to facilitate all PwD students particularly the visually impaired students to receive scholarships. It includes disseminating information, assisting with all the paper work and timely submission for various available scholarship schemes. Each and every visually impaired student in Under-Graduate and Post-Graduate courses registered with IP College for Women, is covered under various scholarship schemes in the academic year 2017-18.

7. Hostel Accommodation: Despite high demand for the hostel on the College campus, the administration has a proactive policy of accommodating maximum number of disabled students every year. The redesigned Kalavati Gupta Hostel operational since last academic session has ramp and elevator facility with special toilets and common spaces created for persons with disability.

8. Sports and Extracurricular Services: The College takes special interest in the promotion of sports and other extracurricular activities among persons with disability students. In this connection, the College annually organizes an intra-college and inter-college sports meet. Along with an inter-college academic and cultural festival called 'Samarthya' – both meant exclusively for persons with disability studying in various institutions affiliated to the University of Delhi. Various societies under the Student's Union of the College organize events in collaboration with the Equal Opportunity Cell for inclusive learning , recreational exercises and overall building of a sensitive environment for all in College. Uniquely, the Student Annual Magazine 'Aaroh', earlier released in Braille, now releases an audio version for the visually impaired readers. The students regularly visit National Museum for various tactile workshops and for visits to Anubhav Gallery every academic year.

9. Self-Defence Training: The Special Police Unit for Women and Children , Delhi Police conducted a fifteen days self-defence training programme for the visually impaired students enrolled with the College. Under the able guidance of Head Constable Ms. Bharti and her team hour long classes were held and the Unit has also been requested to conduct advance level training with the students in the next academic session.

10. Career Guidance and Placement Workshops : Regular career guidance workshops and employment opportunity programmes are organized in collaboration with Government institutions , private firms and NGOs for the persons with disability students of the College. The Equal Opportunity Cell plays an active role in organizing such events for the College. Members of the College Management from this year will also facilitate the placement of students with disabilities with its affiliated organizations.

11. Consultancy and Information Sharing Services:

The College Website is accessible through an App which can be installed in the mobile phones of all students and accessible to the students with disabilities, enabling information dissemination. The College Prospectus is similarly available. The Coordinator, Enabling Unit and Convenor, Equal Opportunity Cell meets all students admitted under PwD Category on weekly basis, wherein the latter are encouraged to freely share their concerns and any other difficulties they face in the course of their studies and life on the campus. Each issue raised and concern shared is addressed on a priority basis by the Principal, faculty and administrative staff. These weekly meetings are also used to share important information related to employment opportunities, scholarship announcements, Government schemes and private initiatives towards the empowerment of the persons with disabilities. Regular mail updates about the same are sent to all students with disabilities through the common email id created by the Equal Opportunity Cell of the College. The Coordinator Enabling Unit in the winter semester from January to May 2018 also provided remedial Braille reading and writing classes to few visually impaired students. This request stemmed from one such weekly meeting with the students and was immediately attended to.

12. Administrative Setup: Various services outlined above are made possible by the well-structured machinery of the Enabling Unit and the Equal Opportunity Cell, planned and supported by the College Administration. A Committee consisting of members belonging to both these bodies meet on a regular basis and supervise the activities undertaken for the empowerment of persons with disabilities. The College has developed a administrative work culture where by the administration serves a person with disability on priority basis in the Office and Accounts section of the College.

D. Information and communication technology and related aids and appliances

Indraprastha College for Women forging ahead with the mission of 'digital empowerment and assistive technology' continues to invest a considerable amount of financial resources in procuring modern aids and appliances that have a direct bearing on the performance of persons with disabilities. The College provides Desktops and Laptops, fully equipped with special Softwares, OCR Scanners, more than 90 Angel Pocket Readers, a Braille Printer and a Lex Air Camera. Under the scheme of Higher Education for Persons with Special Needs (HEPSN) sponsored by the University Grants Commission (UGC), the Enabling Unit set up by the College provides a complete 'Under One Roof' facility to students with disabilities wide-ranging services in the areas of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Assistive Devices, modern Aids and Appliances, Braille Dictionary and computer based learning. A person with disability faculty is made the Coordinator to have a general supervision over the ICT services and other activities undertaken by the Unit. The Enabling Unit of the College runs a fully functioning ICT Centre equipped with the Desktop Computers with special Screen-reading and OCR Software's installed for the use of visually impaired students and faculty.

The Computers in the Unit are connected to the College internet facility, thereby enabling the persons with disability users to access information on the web on par with their non-disabled counterparts. Besides the common ICT facility run by the Enabling Unit, each person with disability is also provided with a Laptop with special softwares installed in all of them and a dedicated staff looks into any . The College conducts periodic workshops and training

programmes on the effective use of Information and Communication Technologies and Assistive Technologies for educational purposes. It always takes the initiative in making the best use of various schemes and programmes sponsored by the University of Delhi and other Government agencies for the empowerment of persons with disabilities. Indraprastha College for Women continues to be the first to fully implement the Inclusive Print Project of the University of Delhi.

The College facilitated the installation of Lex scanning/reading software, Hindi Optical Character Recognition (OCR Professional) and Braille Face, the NVDA (licensed version). Advanced sessions of the Hands-on Workshop on the effective usage of NVDA and other assistive technologies are periodically organised under the theme “Reading without Seeing” in association with National Association for the Blind, Delhi. In compliance with the National Policy on Electronics and W3C Guidelines, the College Website is made accessible to the Screen reader users to the extent possible. The Online-Attendance Package and submission of assignments in soft copy run for both the students and faculty of the College is not only accessible to the Screen-Reader users, but has also become an empowering tool for them as it now allows them to manage attendance and evaluation records online which is far easier than to manage the same on paper.

E. Universally designed consumer products

Faculty and students from the Department of Computer Science under the Under-Graduate Research Grant , a unique feature of Indraprastha College for Women, have developed an Android Application named **Lecture Hall** for the visually impaired students of the College. Floation of this Android Application (Lecture Hall), for visually impaired students was conducted on completion of the project. They were informed about the various functions which could be performed by the android application “Lecture Hall” such as searching the relevant course, subject and papers and listening to the audio lectures online as well as offline by downloading. They can listen to the recordings in their desired media player as well. The feedback option allows them to reach out to us and write to us about their experiences and problems. This Application as of now, can be used by registered students only. All the students have Wi-Fi facility in their phones in the college campus. The application “Lecture Hall” was installed in the mobiles phones of all the Android users. A hands on session for the usage of the application was

conducted. The development of such applications can be of immense benefit for visually impaired students particularly in their University level education.

F. Mobility & independent living aids

The discourse of Mobility and independent living aids was interpreted innovatively by Indraprastha College for Women when it became the first institute of higher education in the country to offer a full course focused on the creation of a resource pool of non-disabled persons by introducing them to disability in general and special communication needs in particular, at the undergraduate level with a 6-credit course titled: 'Communication for Special Needs', for the students of B.A. Honours in Multi-media Mass Communication, Semester-VI. In a unique exercise of mobility and living aids, a batch of non-disabled students were taught by two faculty with disability, visually impaired and hearing impaired, through classroom teaching the above mentioned credit course. Along with a carefully designed, textual introduction and analysis of disability, the students had hands-on instruction in Braille, Indian Sign Language, white cane mobility and other accessible modes of communication, deployed predominantly by persons with disability persons. This first of its kind course in any Under-Graduate non-specialized Higher Education Institution in India, is a testimony to inclusive learning and enabling mobility with combined classrooms, where the difference between the disabled and its other merges and dilutes. Though Scribe Services are available in the College, the thrust is on moving towards personal autonomy through the use of assistive technologies made available in the College along with the training to access those. The College takes pride in these initiatives which has been very well received by its community of students, taking it forward with dedicated responsibility.