



THE LIGHT COMES
AS WE WORK TOWARDS IT

VMS NEWSLETTER



People around the world heaved a sigh of relief as we bid adieu to the year 2020 and stepped into 2021 with renewed hope. 2020 dominated by Covid-19 had a huge impact on all our lives and like everyone, we at VMS are overcoming the hurdles and coping with the new normal as best as we can.

Our very first newsletter of January 2020 was much appreciated by all our well-wishers and now on our 119th Founders' Day which takes place on 14th February, we are happy to present to you our second newsletter. We also take this opportunity to wish everyone a safe, healthy and happy 2021.

We have come far since our journey began in 1902, when, upon the death of Queen Victoria, prominent citizens of Mumbai decided to commemorate her memory by establishing a school for the blind, as there was no such facility until then. It was and is till today a school for blind boys, where education is imparted free of cost along with free boarding and lodging. We are proud that we have several success stories to boast of over the years, with our students having gone far in life in becoming successful and self-reliant. Many come back to visit us in recognition of the foundation that the school laid down for them.

The year 2020 began on a promising note with several plans for the school. However, soon the pandemic was upon us all, throwing life totally out of gear. Lockdowns were the order of the day as the Corona Virus engulfed the world. Establishments were asked to close down and our students and staff have been home with their families ever since.



ACADEMICS - EDUCATION POST PANDEMIC:

Despite the pandemic, education had to go on. The Internet and the Mobile Phone became our lifelines. Our Computer Centre played a key role in selecting the most suitable application that would enable our teachers in both the School for the Blind as well as the School for Special Needs Children (VMS Learning Centre) to start online teaching. **Teacher Training** Programmes were conducted online to orient teachers to this new application, namely Google Meet, which included functions such as Screen Share, Creating Links, Sending Links to students and scheduling time tables. Demo sessions were conducted to ensure the suitability of this Application.

Next step towards this process was **Parent Training!** Our students were now at home, and, being visually or intellectually impaired meant online education could continue only with the family's help. This was indeed a challenge! Most of our students are from economically disadvantaged sections of society, not having the facility of internet, Wi-Fi, or even smart phones. Some live in remote areas of Maharashtra where connectivity is a problem. Many have just one smartphone which has to be shared with parents who need to take it with them to work and with siblings who also required it for their online classes. We have recently provided smart phones/tablets to those students in need.

Our teachers contacted parents individually through WhatsApp calls, taught them how to install Google Meet and how to use the other functions. Demo sessions were held to make sure they understood the use of the Application. Diksha App of the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) and the Bookshare website is being used to access study material online. Parents were taught how to make study material at home. Study material was also sent home to children.

Teachers made a note of each child's daily routine and planned the time-table depending on the availability of parental or sibling help and the availability of a smartphone, sometimes taking classes even in the late evening. Classes are being conducted in groups of two or three. Over a period of time, children and parents have learnt to adapt to online learning and when technical issues crop up, our teachers resort to teaching on WhatsApp or even the regular mobile phone.

Kudos to our devoted teachers for adapting to the situation with each student and at the same time keeping in mind her own familial responsibilities, that of her children and other family members. **Kudos also to our children and their families** for so readily adapting and accepting the situation.

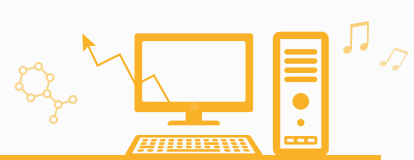
“

During this lock down, we have got to learn how to teach our child, I highly appreciate the efforts taken by the school”.

-A parent of student of our School for the Blind.

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Our SSC Results:

6 students appeared for the SSC Board Examination and all were successful with First Class marks with Ajay Panvalkar scoring 81.80%. He plans to pursue his career as a teacher. Our well-equipped

Navnit Shah Library & Resource Centre,

caters to the needs of our students as well as the visually impaired from the city. The over 850 members can enjoy the facility of Braille books, large print books, audio books and JAWS enabled computers with internet access.

During the lockdown period, the Centre has been running online classes for competitive exams. So far, of the 130 visually challenged members who registered for this course, 39 have cleared their exams and got into government employment. The Library has initiated MPSC coaching classes as well as motivational sessions once a month for its members and visually impaired from all over Maharashtra.

VMS-Radha Subrahmanian Computer Centre

Our full-fledged Computer Centre provides computer education to our students and others from the city with the help of JAWS (Job Access With Speech) as well as NVDA (Non Visual Desktop Access) software designed for the visually challenged. It is also an Authorised Learning Centre (ALC) for conducting Maharashtra State Certificate in Information Technology (MS-CIT). The MS-CIT course facilitates students to get Government jobs. Typing courses in English, Hindi and Marathi are also being conducted, ours being the first organisation to get the authorisation to do so for the visually impaired.

Computer Classes are being conducted online for our students since the lockdown as also Competitive Coaching Classes. Our Computer Centre has been a source of great guidance to all our staff especially since the lockdown when distance learning/teaching had to be done online.

Vocational Services

VMSB conducts Massage Therapy Training for the adult blind. The students are taught reflexology, foot, whole body and chair massage. They are trained by a qualified teacher and many of them are gainfully employed today. This course is set up with the intention of making the blind independent and self-reliant individuals of society.





Our Activities & Events:

Festivals

Ever since the advent of online learning post lockdown, the different festivals are being celebrated virtually. Parents and children have shown great enthusiasm in these celebrations!

The 118th Founders Day was celebrated in school on 14th February, 2020 by organising a Carnival for the students which they thoroughly enjoyed.

A Motivational Session was conducted by Dhruv Kumar, a visually impaired student from Punjab and Class 12 topper who spoke to the students giving them an insight into the advantages of further education.

A Capacity Building Workshop for Parents and Teachers was held in March 2020 before the lockdown when parents and students were made aware of the Corona Virus and TB.

Importance of Technology in Education -

Sessions were conducted by Dr. Homiyar, The Country Head of "Bookshare" to explain to parents the importance of technology in education.

"Bookshare", an offshoot of Benetech, a non-profit organisation in the U.S. makes reading easier for persons with dyslexia, blindness, cerebral palsy, and for persons with other reading barriers. They can customize their experience to suit their learning style and find virtually any book they need for school, work, or just for the joy of reading. It is an online platform for persons with vision impairment.

Parent-Teacher meetings are being conducted online regularly on a one to one basis to coordinate and resolve issues they may be facing personally and in the education of their child. Several families were provided with support by way of food grain supplies and other necessities.



Students Dressed as Krishna for the online Gokul Ashtami Celebration



Founders' Day Celebration



Our SSC Results:

Workshop for Teachers -

A CRE (Continuing Rehabilitation Education) workshop was held at school in January 2020, the topic being "Education & Intervention for Children with Multiple Disabilities." Another Workshop was held online in October 2020, on "Being Your Best through Emotional Intelligence." Teachers from both, the School for the Blind as well as the Learning Centre participated. Workshops on different topics are organised to keep teachers updated on various subjects.

Eye Way Help Desk -

This facility sponsored by CIPLA Foundation was introduced at our school premises under the auspices of the Score Foundation, based in New Delhi. Mr. George Abraham is its CEO. This Helpdesk has been a boon to the visually impaired from all over Maharashtra and Goa. They can call the Helpdesk and seek guidance and information on any of their requirements. Helpdesk Counselors are working from home since the pandemic, attending to callers to guide them how to continue their coaching and where they can procure their basic needs from during the lockdown.

To make the public aware of the Eye Way Help Desk Project and its activities, since August 2020, we have arranged Webinars called "Eye Way Encounter" for the visually challenged. The webinar is being organised once a month by inviting experts from different fields, the idea being to broaden the "vision" of the visually impaired and to make them aware of the different fields where their participation is possible. One visually

challenged speaker rightly said "you may not have sight but you can definitely have vision!"

So far, we have had 5 interesting, insightful and motivating speakers – Mr. Ketan Kothari, an Activist spoke on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities (RPWD), Kunal Vijayakar, well known Foodie, TV actor and Comedian, Taufiq Quereshi, the renowned music maestro, Anagha Modak a visually impaired radio jockey and Mrinalini Kher. Trustee and Hon. Secy of Kherwadi Social Welfare Association in Mumbai and Co-Founder of Yuva Parivartan, both NGOs at a national level. We have had a very good and encouraging response so far with participants logging in online and on Facebook.

Our Standard Chartered Conference Centre

comprises of a boardroom, seminar hall, amphitheatre and central hall which we rent out to corporates and other organisations to raise funds. The Standard Chartered Bank helped set up this Centre.

A Shining Example to All

Harshad Chakradhare, an ex-student, who topped the school in his SSC examinations with a score of 86%, in 2017, is currently studying for his B.A. Degree from Wilson College, Mumbai. His perseverance and helpful nature came to the fore during the lockdown. He had to leave Mumbai and go to his native Wardha to be with his family. There, he reached out to all those in need especially the disabled for whom this pandemic and resulting lockdown was a nightmare. He reached out to the District Administration and also to his school for resources for those in need of food, medicines and essentials and help just poured in. He is someone who makes most of the opportunities around him.



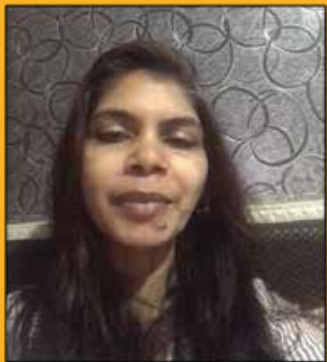
VMS LEARNING CENTRE

This Centre provides services to boys and girls with Special Needs between the ages of 5 and 18 years. These children are provided individually conceptualised education – Functional and Pre-Vocational Training that focuses on the abilities of each child in order to prepare them with a suitable vocation. Here too our Special-Ed teachers are taking online classes with the help of parents. The biggest challenge was to get Special Children to focus as they get distracted very easily by a screen in front of them. However, with time, children and parents are learning to adapt. Teachers employed various techniques such as game based learning to improve attention spans and to empower students to express their creativity. Parents and care-givers helped children navigate new schedules and systems ensuring lessons are accessible and distractions are minimised – all this while balancing their own family and job responsibilities.



In the lockdown situation, the online classes are helping the students to continue with the studies. We appreciate the dance and physical education classes which are very useful for the kids.

- Parent of VMSLC student.



VMSLC is doing a great job by continuing the classes for our kids through online studies, I am very thankful for all the efforts they are taking for our kids during this pandemic.

- Parent of VMSLC student.



After the school lockdown, i was not only worried about the education of my child but also about feeding the family. The school has been very considerate to facilitate our basic needs; teachers were very supportive and patient to train me with the teaching applications on the mobile phone. I really appreciate the efforts taken by the school and the teachers. With their support my child will surely be able to achieve success.

- A parent of student of our School for the Blind.





Results of the Learning Centre - Pratham/NIOS: All the students cleared the NIOS exam with flying colours. Delzad achieved a top score of 79%. Children celebrated various festivals and events during the lockdown online from their homes with great enthusiasm

Students participated in online "Best out of waste" Competition

Redevelopment/Renovation of the Learning Centre

At long last permissions from the relevant Government Authorities are in place and work has commenced on the much required renovations of the Learning Centre. Our "special" children have a lot to look forward to with a brand new Centre to come back to - brighter and more spacious classrooms and more organised facilities to cater to our increasing numbers! Our grateful thanks to our regular patron Mr. Noshir Gotla for so kindly and generously funding the entire work.

VMS-Vijay Merchant Centre for Life-Skills & Development

Our in-house Therapy Centre offers services such as Diagnostic, Speech and Communication, Occupational and Remedial Therapies, Counselling and Art Based Therapies all under one roof not only to our students but for anyone who needs these. We also provide Counselling Services for emotional, adjustive, educational and psychological problems for all age groups as also Parent Counselling. Aptitude Tests are also conducted. Therapies and Counselling is being conducted online post the Pandemic.

Future Goals/Plans

- To switch over entirely to digital learning over a period of time
- To complete redevelopment of the VMS Learning Centre - in progress
- To develop our tactile lab with the latest and the best equipment
- To start new skill development training programs for students after Class 10 and for adult visually impaired library members
- Continue organizing Continuing Rehabilitation Education (CRE) programs for in-house teachers as well as for teachers from other special schools, parents, siblings, and society at large
- To build up our school corpus
- Children from both schools have over a period of time learnt to adapt and are happy to meet their friends and teachers virtually but eagerly await the day when they can meet them and play and study with them in person



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Special Thanks to Our Current Major Donors

Morgan Stanley, Alkyl Amines Chemicals Limited, Blue Cross Laboratories Limited, CIPLA Foundation, Navnit Manilal Shah Foundation, Nihchal Israni Foundation, Sahachari Foundation, The Australian Consulate General, UTI Asset Management Company Ltd., Mahalaxmi Temple Charities, HT Parekh Foundation, Ammada Trust...

and to our devoted Teaching and Non-Teaching Staff without whom the achievements especially post the pandemic would have been impossible.

Trustees & Committee Members

The Hon'ble Chief Justice of the High Court of Bombay

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Mrs. Mala Goenka

Mr. C. V. Kothari

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Jt. Hon. Secretary/Trustee

Member

Member/Trustee

Member

Member

Member

Member



Mission

To provide quality education and rehabilitation opportunities to the differently abled.



Vision

To encourage, nurture and develop differently abled individuals; to empower them to take their place in the world and society, as confident and productive adults.



Value Statement

To strive for a better quality of life for every visually impaired and intellectually impaired individual by providing education, training and rehabilitation opportunities, thereby making them self-reliant individuals.

The Victoria Memorial School for the Blind

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