

## Samarth – Enabling Unit of JDMC and SAKSHAM:

Saksham is a leading not for profit organisation which is working for inclusion and empowerment of people with visual impairment through a combination of advocacy and by acting as a service provider in the field of rehabilitation, education, training and assistive technology. On 5<sup>th</sup> August 2021, Saksham signed a memorandum of understanding with Janki Devi Memorial College, Delhi University, for jointly undertaking a Project towards promoting inclusion and full participation of the students and individuals with disabilities in education and all other activities of the college. This initiative seeks to

- a. Ensure inclusion and reasonable accommodation by identifying the existing gaps and design and undertake the suitable activities to address these gaps.
- b. Conduct seminars, workshops and other such events towards ensuring greater awareness, sensitization and inclusion.

The following section of this document describes the activities undertaken as part of this project so far

### Description of key activities:

#### Interactive sessions with students with visual impairment:

A series of individual and group interactive sessions were held with all the visually challenged students to understand their challenges and requirements for participating in educational and other activities of the college to their fullest, identifying the existing gaps if any and planning strategies and further action to address these issues.

The first such group session was held on 24<sup>th</sup> of August, in which the members of enabling unit of the college, staff members of Saksham and students with visual impairment participated. The main purpose of this session was to familiarize the students with the overall programme, and get an initial understanding of their challenges and requirements. Some of the key points and questions which were touched upon during the course of this session include

- a. What is meant by an accessible format book.
- b. Do the students have books that they need to refer to in accessible format?
- c. books available in accessible format?
- d. How do they access books that are not available in accessible format?
- e. How do they write their assignments?
- f. How do they write their examinations?
- g. Brief description of reading and writing solutions
- h. What kind of recreational activities are they involved in?
- i. Do they participate in any societies of the college?

Following are some of the issues which the students highlighted during the course of this session:

- a. Issues faced by them in securing front seat in class.
- b. Difficulty in grasping visual information.
- c. Students are not allowed to record online classes.

- d. The students primarily use insta reader application on their phone for reading their study material, which is not very accessible.
- e. It is difficult for them to write on their own due to slow typing speed in Hindi.
- f. Requirement of computer training.
- g. Network issues in rural areas.
- h. Many students shared that they were unable to participate in online competitions due to network issues.

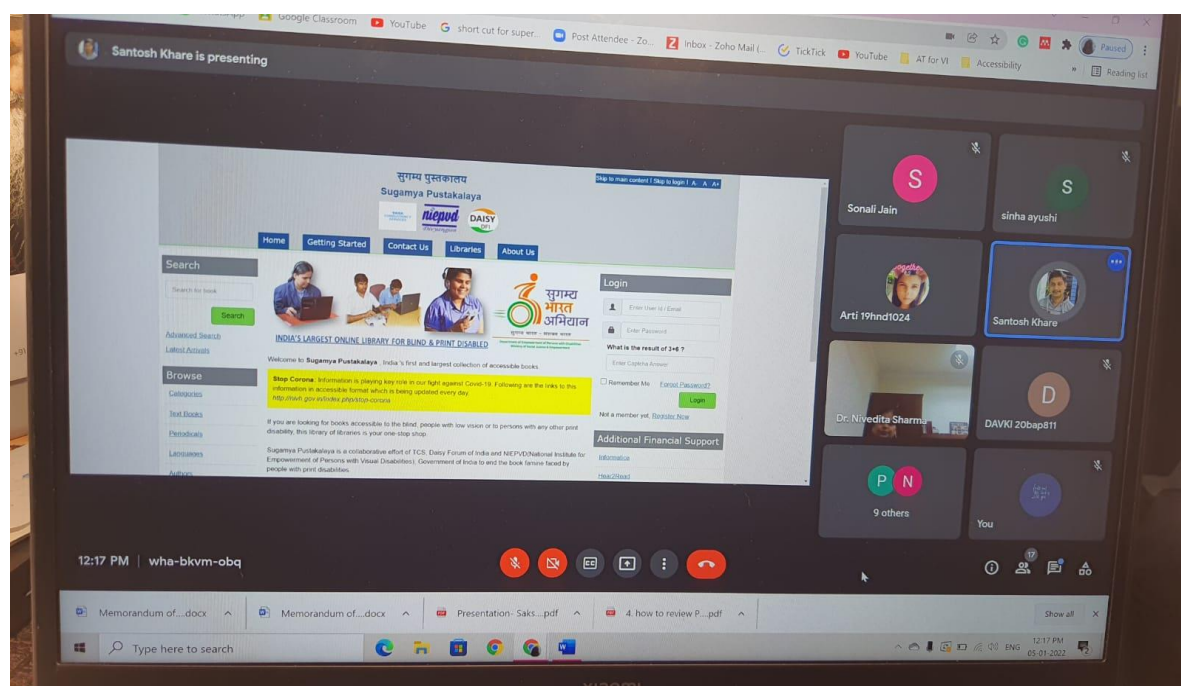
### Individual interaction with students:

On 6th October, 1 to 1 discussions were held with 8 out of 13 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> year students enrolled in various undergraduate courses at the college. 4 students who could not join that day due to network issues were called separately within next few days, while 1 student could not be contacted.

Background and profile of the students, access to and usage of assistive devices, requirement of books and other assistive solutions and facilities, their career aspirations and participation and involvement in other activities of college were some of the topics which were covered during these discussions. The information collected from the students was collated through a google form created for this purpose. Furthermore, based on the findings of these interactions, a plan of action was also submitted to the college which is enclosed in annexure 1.

Similar 1 to 1 sessions were also held with students of 1<sup>st</sup> year after their admission, the findings of which are enclosed in annexure 2.

### Ensuring access of students to required content:



Workshop on Sugamya Pustakalaya

With the objective to ensure that students are able to avail the desired content in accessible format, a training workshop was organized on 5<sup>th</sup> January 2022 that focused on searching and downloading required books from Sugamya Pustakalaya and reading them with the help of user friendly applications like Simply Reading App on smartphone. Following this session, a google form was also circulated through which the students could let Saksham know about the books they require which can then be made available to them in accessible format. Even though the students have not submitted any requirements for books yet, we did get requests from one of them to convert the readings provided by her teachers into accessible form, which was done and provided to the concerned student. Moreover both Saksham's team and the faculty members associated with the Enabling Unit of the college have urged the students to talk to their teachers and share their book requirements well in advance, preferably at the beginning of each semester.

### Training for enhancing computer skills:

With the objective of upgrading the computer skills and knowhow of the students, Saksham organized a month long online training on MS excel in February 2022. This training was attended by 13<sup>rd</sup> year students from JDM College.

### Career guidance workshops for students with visual impairment:

During the various interactive sessions held with the visually challenged students of the college, it was observed that the students lack information about different existing and emerging avenues of employment which are open for them. This lack of sufficient knowhow can prevent them from making an informed choice about their future and choosing the best career options for themselves.

To address this critical gap, Saksham started a series of career guidance workshops wherein sessions are being organized periodically on the job opportunities available in various sectors for persons with visual impairment. As part of these sessions, visually challenged individuals involved in different professions share their experiences and have an interactive discussions about the scope, required skills and other related aspects associated with a particular job option. The aim of these sessions is to not only provide an understanding about the various avenues of employment available for the STUDENTS, but to also lay the groundwork for providing them the necessary support and skills which they would require for pursuing their chosen career option.

The first session in this series was held on 25<sup>th</sup> February on the topic 'Career Opportunities in the Finance Sector for Visually Challenged Candidates'. As part of this session, a Visually impaired professional working as a senior analyst in a highly reputed financial company answered the queries of the participants about how they can join this sector and work on various lucrative positions.

Participation in this session was open for everyone, and the interested students could attend it via zoom by directly contacting us or filling out an online registration form.

The next session in this series was held on 6<sup>th</sup> of April, which focused on existing opportunities and required skills for obtaining a job in the field of banking. 2 visually challenged persons working as senior manager in a leading public sector bank shared their experiences with the participants during this session. Some of the points which were covered in the workshop include:

- A. Type of preparation and skills required to get into the banking sector.
- b. Available job profiles in this sector.

- c. Avenues of career growth in the profession.
- d. Challenges faced by the persons with blindness in the sector.

Both the sessions were streamed live on our youtube channel where the students can visit and view them anytime.

#### Sessions on challenges and available solutions for persons with low vision:

Saksham organized a comprehensive two-part webinar to address the needs of students and individuals with low vision. As part of this session, Dr. Sonia Srivastava, a senior faculty in the department of low vision optometry at the Shroff Charitable Eye Hospital shared her experiences of working with people newly diagnosed with low-vision conditions, and the rehabilitation strategies that follow diagnosis. This was followed by detailed presentations and demonstrations on various optical and non-optical aids and assistive technologies that can be used by persons with low vision for overcoming the many challenges which they face in their day to day activities.

The first session of this series was organized on 9<sup>th</sup> of February, followed by the session on 8<sup>th</sup> of March. Both the sessions can be viewed on Saksham's youtube channel

#### Saksham's visit to JDM College:

On 7<sup>th</sup> March 2022, a team from Saksham visited the college for a face to face meeting with the students, that consisted of Founder Managing Trustees of the organization Mr. Dipendra Manocha and Ms. Rummi Seth, along with MS Sonali and Mr. Vikas. In addition to the team members from Saksham, the Convenors of Enabling Unit of JDMC Dr. Sudnya Kulkarni , Dr Nivedita Sharma and Ms Mamta participated in this meeting.

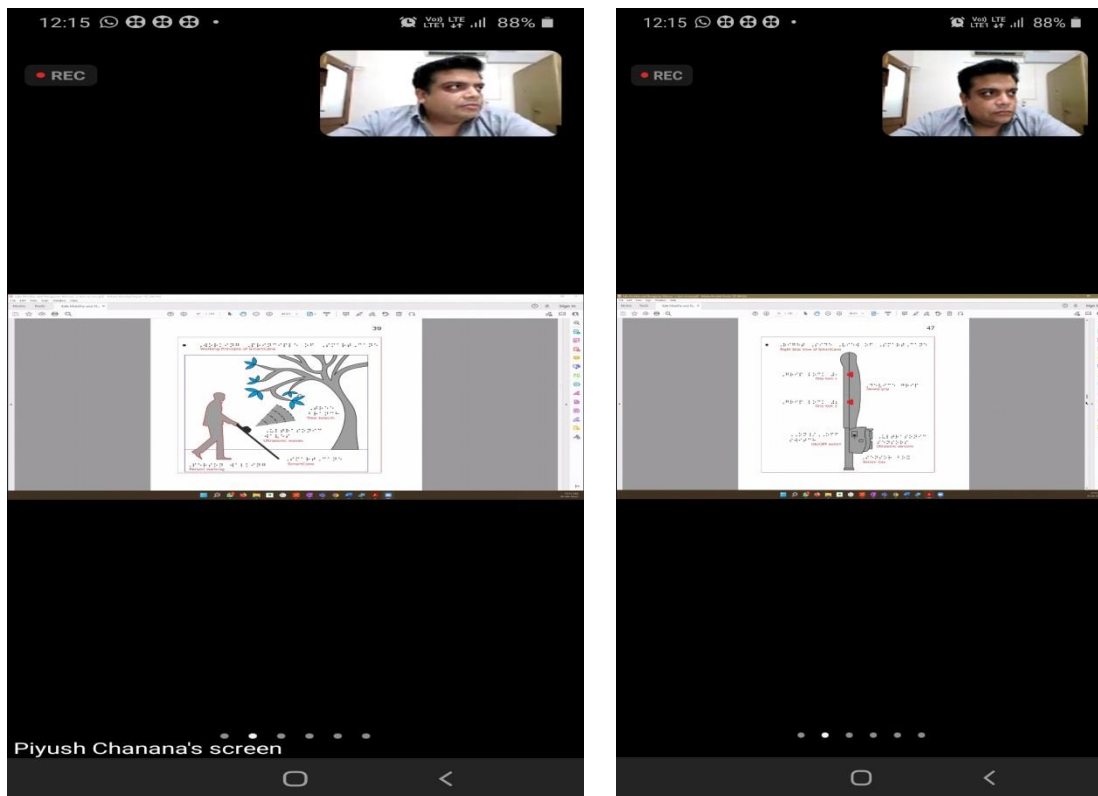
The meeting was attended by 6 students from 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year. This discussion began with Mr. Manocha providing an overview of the project being taken up with the college, which was followed by demonstration of various reading and writing solutions which the students can use to study independently. Saksham's subsidy scheme on assistive devices was also introduced during the course of this meeting, and the students were asked to share their requirements for the devices.

The students also highlighted the requirement of trainings in mobility and computer skills. Furthermore, Mr. Manocha asked the students yet again to share their requirements related to books and content in consultation with their teachers, and to participate in career guidance workshops that would give them a better understanding about the various alternatives for mapping their future.

#### Workshop on mobility and navigation:

Based on the suggestions given by the students during the meeting held on 7<sup>th</sup> of March, an online workshop on mobility and navigation was organised for them on 21st April 2022, which focused on various fundamental mobility techniques that they can use on day to day basis along with latest smartphone apps that can aid them in traveling independently from one place to another. The workshop began with the resource person Dr. Piyush Chanana asking the students about the various challenges that they face in going from one place to another. Some of the challenges shared by the

students included difficulties faced by them in identifying the bus numbers and boarding the bus, detecting obstacles in their path, issues in understanding vibration patterns of SmartCane etc.



Online session on Mobility Training



Students attending the session



Interacting with students

The 3 major aspects that were covered during the workshop include orientation, obstacle detection and navigation. Some basic tips were provided to the students to orient themselves and obtain a sense of direction in familiar environment, such as gaging one's direction through sun, installing compass app in the phone and utilizing alternate senses like smell, hearing and light perception.

The next part of the session focused on mobility with white cane. Maintenance of cane, selection of the cane of correct height and shore lining were some of the things that were covered. This section was followed by a brief explanation about how to detect obstacles and traverse a path safely using SmartCane.

In the final part of the workshop, features of 4 navigation apps were discussed, namely, google maps, lasarillo, moovit and be my eyes.

### Equipping the students with laptops:

With the objective to empower students to read, write and work independently, 14 students were provided with laptops under Saksham's subsidy scheme with the support of the college. Out of these 14 students, 6 of them are in 1<sup>st</sup> year, 4 in 2<sup>nd</sup> year, while the remaining 4 are in 3<sup>rd</sup> year.

Out of the total cost of the laptop that is Rs. 41400, Rs. 23000 was covered by Saksham as subsidy with financial support from Access Braille, which is a U.S. based philanthropic organization working for persons with print disabilities. The remaining amount of Rs. 18400 was to be contributed by the students, but due to economic condition of their families, a few of the faculty members stepped forward to further subsidise the cost of the laptops for some of the students. Before handing over the laptops to the students, they were configured and loaded with all requisite softwares that can aid the students in reading, writing and performing other such day to day tasks.



Our Principal Prof Swati Pal presenting Coffee Table Book to Mr Dipendra Minocha



Our Principal with Saksham Team



Students attending the session



Mr Dipendra Minocha, Founder Managing Trustee of SAKSHAM addressing the students

The laptops were distributed to the students during an event organized in the college on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2022. This event was attended by the Principal of JDM College Prof. Swati Pal, conveners of the college's Enabling Unit Dr. Sudhya Kulkarni, Dr. Nivedita Sharma, Ms Mamta and other faculty members, Founder Managing Trustee of Saksham Mr. Dipendra Manocha along with the other members of the organization, as well as the visually challenged students studying in the college. The

event began with a brief introduction by Dr. Nivedita Sharma, followed by remarks by Prof. Pal and Mr. Manocha. Following this, a small video was shown on accessible content and how it can be read with eyes, ears and fingers through different assistive devices. The event ended with short testimonies from few of the students who described how a laptop can help them in pursuing their education and in improving their future prospects.

Subsequent to the distribution of laptops, the assessment of the training needs of the students is being conducted, and customized training support will be provided to each of them as per their requirements.

### Plan for upcoming months:

The activities in the upcoming months will be carried out in line with the plan of action that was prepared based on the interactions with the students and feedback provided by the faculty members. Some of these activities include:

- a. Gathering content requirements of the students and making it available to them in accessible format.
- b. Sensitization workshops for faculty members and other students of the college in order to make them aware about the issues and challenges faced by the persons with visual impairment and the available solutions and alternatives which can help them in being independent to a large extent.
- c. Organizing cultural activities for the students.
- d. Conducting more career guidance workshops and assisting the students in gaining the requisite skills for their chosen professions.
- e. Meeting other training requirements of the students, such as for using provided assistive devices, and giving them any other support as per requirement.