

1. Title of the Practice - Community Outreach and Social Responsibility

2. Objectives

In keeping with the legacy of our Founder Bharat Ratna Maharshi Karve, SNTD Women's University has always taken initiatives to reach out to the marginalized and socially disadvantaged sections of society. Through its outreach and socially relevant programmes, the University has been providing an enabling environment and opportunities to the underprivileged sections of society to help them gain quality education and take strident steps in the professional sphere. In addition, the University also believes in making the community aware of socially relevant issues which would, directly and indirectly, impact society, the nation and the world in general.

1. To stimulate self-reliance and self-development in local communities, especially women
2. To provide financial, legal and life skill support for the overall growth and development of women in the community
3. To encourage and develop entrepreneurship in the community
4. To promote civic, social and environmental engagement

3. The Context

SNTD Women's University has always been a pioneering institution providing support and opportunities to the community, especially women, to help them become financially and economically self-reliant. The university has also been taking initiatives to promote awareness about socially and environmentally relevant issues to contribute to the process of development and growth of the community. The University has been initiating community and outreach programs to facilitate financial and digital literacy and life skills to the community. The students and faculty of the university have been involved in organising various capacity-building workshops and programs to help the community become self-reliant and contribute to the growth and development of the nation. In addition, the student volunteers of NSS and NCC cadets of the University have been actively involved in creating awareness about issues related to the youth in the community, e.g. personality development, health nutrition and hygiene especially for young girls, polio and substance abuse related support and rehabilitation as well as providing the much need emotional support to the youth who are undergoing stress and depression in their personal and professional lives. The volunteers also connect with and provide support and service to the elderly by regularly visiting old age homes and organising activities for the elderly and the destitute. The university also extends support to the Divyang students through its outreach programs and regularly conducts workshops for teachers and parents to help deal with the issues of the Divyang.

4. The Practice

The University has initiated a scheme, named 'Bhaubheej Nidhi' to reach out to young women with the desire to learn and who cannot fulfil their dreams because of financial constraints. Through the Bhaubheej Nidhi Scheme, the university appeals to the faculty members, alumnae and other donors to contribute and fund the tuition fees, hostel living expenses and even mess fees of the students who are not able to fund themselves because of their financial situation but have a strong desire to learn. The Polytechnic of the University has adopted orphans to provide them free technical and skill based education.

The University departments and conducted colleges regularly reach out to the local communities and organise community connect sessions with them. Surveys are done to understand the issues faced by the community and interventions related to digital, financial and legal literacy etc. are organized. Villages and slums are adopted by the NSS and NCC units of the University and activities related to health and hygiene, gender sensitisation and computer literacy are carried out. The NCC and NSS volunteers also regularly participate in youth civic engagement programmes organised by the state and the central government.

The Department of Nursing and the NSS Units of the University, with the help of medical practitioners, regularly conduct health check-up camps for the community.

Programs on Digital Literacy and financial literacy are regularly organised for street children and women from the adopted slums and villages. The university has also established a Resource Centre for comprehensive education for children with disabilities. The Centre for Distance Education and Department of Lifelong Learning and Social Work reach out to the community through the various programs for empowerment of marginalized and ostracized women. As a part of Internship students of Special Education are placed in a rural setting so that they develop an understanding of the civic engagement field. Students analyze the community needs, develop creative solutions to their problems related to rehabilitation of persons with disabilities.

The University has vibrant and active student bodies like the NSS, NCC and Rotaract club which organise programs of community outreach and national, social and environmental awareness regularly.

5. Evidence of Success

1. The University has been able to attract many first-generation learners who have completed their graduation and have also moved towards higher education.
2. Many students have been able to continue with their studies benefitting from the scholarships provided by the Bhaubjeej Nidhi Scheme.
3. Through Mission Sahasi 3000 college students were trained in the Self-Defense programme. The departments and conducted colleges also organize workshops in the community on self-help, bank loans and financial skills and skill development. This has led to many women starting their own small-scale businesses.
4. During Covid-19 lockdown, 42 volunteers from NSS and NCC worked in covid-19 centers for 6 months.
5. Hundreds of saplings have been planted by our teachers and volunteers across the state in an attempt to conserve nature.
6. The adopted villages have started showing signs of self-reliance and self-development and many women and children from the adopted villages and slums have attained digital and financial literacy.
7. Most of the women and young girls are now aware of their basic rights and approach the volunteers and concerned staff in case of crisis and in an attempt to attain financial self-reliance.

6. Problems Encountered and Resources Required

Space crunch and paucity of funds for organizing skill-based and awareness programs in the community are the major problems encountered by the University. In addition, women at times do not find the time to participate in the programs organised because of their busy schedules.

There is difficulty in connecting with local resource persons who can reach out to the community. Illiteracy and poverty are interrelated and deep-rooted problems of our society. For the financially disadvantaged, meeting their basic survival needs are the most important concerns and every hand in the family is perceived as an extra hand to ease the financial burden. Convincing the community to spare time to think about larger issues of civic and environmental importance at times becomes very difficult.