

## Zero Leprosy Best Practices

**Best Practice:** *Challenging Stigma and Discrimination through Vocational Education and Employment for People Affected by Leprosy and People with Disabilities in Champa, Chhattisgarh, India*

### Subthemes

- Reduction of stigma, discrimination, and exclusion

### Target Audience(s)

- Program managers
- Persons affected by leprosy

### Contributors

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### Key Messages

Through this approach, young people affected by leprosy and disability (both leprosy-related and general disability) are equipped with the skills and knowledge to live independent, dignified lives and engage in the economy through a first job. This will be furthered by sensitization of employers on fair labour conditions and inclusion, as well as disability-friendly workplaces, along with sensitization of the families and communities of these young people on nondiscriminatory practices, thus facilitating their employability and inclusion.

### Key Informant / Date Submitted

M Rao, TLMTI, Champa, Chhattisgarh, India  
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## Description of the Best Practice

### Introduction

#### *What triggered the introduction of this best practice?*

Before Champa VTC was started in 1998, there was no other institute in the state of Chhattisgarh that provided skills training and job placements to people affected by leprosy in a holistic way.

#### *Problem(s) to be addressed*

People affected by leprosy are often excluded from society due to the stigma and discrimination associated with the disease. This includes people who are directly affected by leprosy and those whose family members have had leprosy. Young people affected by leprosy and/or disability are often unable

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to access education, skills training, and gainful employment. Even with the necessary skills and training, people affected by leprosy/disability face further barriers in finding employment because of engrained discrimination.

### ***Impact on the population***

The negative image about persons affected by leprosy and other disabilities is mainly attributed to historical stigma and fear along with a lack of information. Young people affected by leprosy and/or disability are perceived as having limited skills and potential by those around them—including their families, their communities, and employers. Because of these misperceptions, it is extremely difficult for them to break the barriers they face and gain employment.

### ***If not directly a leprosy practice, what is the relevance for leprosy control?***

Champa VTC's work in sensitizing employers is also beneficial to the wider community. Employers will understand that people affected by leprosy can be good employees and will therefore be more willing to employ more people affected by leprosy in the future. Raising awareness of leprosy in businesses and the wider community can help reduce stigma, which can also result in more people seeking health treatment and thus can increase the rates of early diagnosis.

### ***Which objectives were achieved?***

The staff at the VTC are involved in sensitizing potential employers and challenging any discriminatory beliefs they may have towards people affected by leprosy and/or disability. This approach has been extremely successful: in 2018, 93% of students studying at Champa VTC were given a job after completing their course.

### **Objectives and Methodology**

The main goal of the project is to ensure that employers understand that people affected by leprosy and/or disability are good employees and can contribute effectively to their businesses. This will break down and challenge stigma among employers and their existing employees and have an impact on the wider society. Extensive sensitization and engagement strategies were undertaken with potential employers to facilitate inclusive employment and fair work conditions for VTC trainees.

### **Implementation of Practice**

#### ***Main activities***

The VTC conducted different linkage events like job fairs and campus placements to link the trainees with potential employers.

#### ***Activities involved in "sensitizing" employers***

Examples of activities undertaken to educate potential employers to recognize the business value of hiring individuals with disabilities in terms of inclusivity included the following:

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- Employers were sensitized on leprosy and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016; all employers were willing to give inclusive placement
- Six employers came to VTC for a campus interview, and four campus interviews were conducted. Participating employers included Mahindra & Mahindra, Case Earth Movers ESCORT, HERO motors, and APARAJITA Motors.
- Three off-campus placement camps were conducted. Candidates were selected in fair practice conditions, with companies offering 6000-9000 INR with accommodation and food. Of 62 employers identified in 9 districts of Chhattisgarh, 49 were sensitized on inclusive employment towards leprosy disability and gender rights.
- TLMTI's fair labour score card is tested with all our employees, through direct interactions and feedback from the graduate employed in the company. Inputs are given to the employer after the scoring. Also, preference is given to companies under fair labour during placements.

### ***Did persons affected by leprosy participate in the design and practice?***

The 2017-2018 trainees were interviewed during the thematic evaluation, and their views were sought on how to develop the project activities. Similarly, prospective candidates and their parents were engaged in focus group discussions to understand their needs. Input for the project development was also taken from graduates, employers, village leaders and elders, and TLMTI senior staff, as well as VTC staff.

### ***Key implementers and collaborators***

For institutional-based training, current courses were upgraded and new courses will be introduced based on input from graduates and employers. For community-based training, the prospective trainees and their families are involved in identifying the courses to be started. Communities were involved in providing the necessary logistical support to conduct the community-based courses. A management committee and a technical advisory committee with representatives from the community played key roles in deciding how the community-based vocation training should function. They were also involved in reviewing the program every quarter or as needed. Feedback from trainees was taken on a regular basis to understand and address their changing needs.

### ***Resource implications***

Issues identified with resource implications included the following:

- Convincing traditional families to send their girls for residential vocational training. These girls have been unable to pursue higher education because of cultural and financial barriers as well as concerns for their safety if they leave home.
- Getting employers to financially invest in accessible and safe workplaces just to be able to employ women and people with disabilities
- Having graduates with a disability drop out from waged employment because of inaccessible transport, work environment, and attitude of peers

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### Results—Outputs and Outcomes

#### *What were the concrete results achieved with regard to outputs and outcomes?*

- 123 individuals affected by leprosy and other disabilities enrolled in the VTC. All of these individuals were trained in technical and life and business skills and were educated on rights, positive engagement, and fair labour conditions.
- 108 graduates were supported for placements
- 112 graduates were linked to the VTC alumni network

#### *Was an assessment of the practice carried out?*

P-Scale /Salsa /Graduate Satisfaction Form

#### *Is the project completed or are some results still to be expected?*

The previous phase of the project has finished. However, a new phase has started that will build on the work of the previous phase, with the aim of sensitizing an additional 60 employers.

### Lessons Learned

#### *Successes*

The TLM Shiksha Learning App has been extremely valuable for this project. The world has fundamentally changed as new technology has been developed. Mobile devices that were once considered classroom distractions now offer unlimited learning opportunities to students and are gradually reforming the core of education. Over the past 2 years the use of handheld devices has exploded, providing children with a wide array of technological tools at their fingertips to advance their education and learning.

With educational apps, VTC students can learn along with students globally with just a click of a button. The learning process is more informative, engaging, and captivating for children. Moreover, the students can learn at their own pace and not feel constrained by the preset time schedules, which can encourage absolute learning. Educational apps incorporate learning with visuals and have made the process compelling, interactive, and exciting for VTC students.

#### *Challenges*

- Ensuring 50% of candidates from the affected community are female
- Having state government conduct free skills development programs in block level
- Completing work-station modifications

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### Replicability and Scalability

*Has the practice been implemented in more than one setting?* No

*What long-term effects can be achieved if the practice is sustained over time?*

Economic progress and inclusion of people affected by leprosy and/or disabilities through vocational training and employment support.

*What are the requirements to sustain the practice over time considering contextual factors, institutional support, human resources?*

- Institutional support: 50% financial support
- Human resources: capacity-building for present staff

### Conclusions

TLMTI's vocational education program in Champa can be considered a best practice as it is working to transform the lives of people affected by leprosy and/or disability through training and skills development and through sensitization of potential employers and of the families and communities of these young people on non-discriminatory practices. These young people will join the Indian workforce as productive and socially responsible citizens, showcasing that given equitable opportunities and skills they can be role models challenging established systems, promoting social inclusion, and escaping poverty.