

## **Best Practice – 1**

### **1. Title of the Practice**

Cultivating Empathy for the Underprivileged: An Annual Initiative by the Students of Gushkara Mahavidyalaya

### **2. Objectives of the Practice**

The key objective of this practice is to enable our students to cultivate and express empathy for individuals and groups belonging to underprivileged sections of their immediate social environment. Through this practice our students learn to undertake socially relevant initiatives for the benefit of fellow citizens such as people who are differently abled or people who are homeless. Based on humanitarian values and the basic principles of philanthropy, this practice will enable our students to become socially aware and responsible citizens by encouraging them to engage with contemporary social issues in a constructive manner.

### **3. The Context**

Our social milieu includes several sections or groups of people who are less privileged than others. They include, for instance, the differently abled people and the people belonging to economically backward segments. The presence of homeless people is clearly visible in public places like railway station platforms. Despite their visible presence, ordinary individuals, engrossed in their daily activities, often fail to pay attention to the predicament and needs of these marginalized people. It is, however, ethically important for us to respond to problems like poverty, disability and disease. As young citizens, our students need to cultivate a sense of social responsibility and compassion for those who need help. They should learn to organize and participate in welfare activities that aim to improve the lives of impoverished and underprivileged people. This ethical imperative based on the harsh realities of our social context has been foundational to the humanitarian initiative undertaken by our students.

### **4. The Practice**

The students of our college enthusiastically organize a special annual charity event that focuses on helping the people who live on the margins of our society. It is

organized and conducted primarily by student volunteers from the Department of English, Gushkara Mahavidyalaya. The initiative is funded by monetary contributions from the teachers, students and staff belonging to various departments including the Department of English.

This altruistic practice was initiated when in 2019 a group of students from the Department formed a philanthropic group which they named 'Abegi'. The Bengali word 'abeg' can be translated as 'emotion'. The name 'Abegi', therefore, denotes a state of mind that is characterized by emotions such as compassion and empathy. The goal of this group and its efforts is to provide emotional and material assistance to the people who urgently require help.

On 25<sup>th</sup> of December, 2022 a group of student volunteers organized a series of activities that expressed their genuine compassion for underprivileged children. The day began with a visit to Najrul Smriti Drishtihin Vidyalaya, a school for blind children situated in Gungpur, PurbaBardhaman. Our students befriended the blind residents of the school and spent the entire morning and afternoon with them. Not surprisingly, the children immensely enjoyed their friendly presence. They sang patriotic songs and played musical instruments beautifully. Keeping their musical capabilities in mind, our students gifted them a guitar and a couple of monochords. The musical session was followed by lunch arranged by the student volunteers. The children absolutely loved the delicious food they served.

Afterwards, our students went back to Bardhaman railway station where they distributed cakes, biscuits and chocolates among children who live there. These children belong to impoverished homeless families who permanently live on the railway platforms. Needless to say, the gifts made them immensely happy. Because of poverty, some of these children are forced to beg or work. For them, empathy is a rare gift. Our students then visited a nearby slum where they again distributed cakes, biscuits and chocolates among children.

One of the central purposes of higher education in our country is to create ideal citizens by disseminating certain moral values including altruism. The annual philanthropic event organized by our students reflects and upholds those ethical values.



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differently abled  
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## 5. Evidence of Success

The activities organized by our students at Najrul Smriti Drishtihin Vidyalaya, at Bardhaman railway station and at the slum substantially contributed to the emotional well-being of the blind or poor children. This is evidenced by the manner in which the children responded. Besides, these efforts have enriched our students morally. They have proved that they have the desire and the ability to organize constructive social welfare activities on their own.

These results indicate that higher educational institutions can play a significant role in stimulating moral values and a vigorous sense of social responsibility among the young citizens of the nation. Clearly, they can create a better world through their energetic and enthusiastic interventions.









## **6. Problems Encountered and Resources Required**

The desire or the ability to help others is not uniformly present in all students. While the majority of the students are enthusiastic about philanthropic efforts, some of them may lack motivation. Through our experiences we have realized that the task of motivating them is a possible one. Through meaningful conversations our teachers have been able to encourage these students to get involved in this initiative. At present the annual philanthropic event organized by our students is entirely funded by contributions from students, teachers and other members of the staff. We intend to broaden the scope of this endeavour by increasing the funds available to our student volunteers.

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