

## **1. Title of the Practice: Extended Service Activities / Service as a correlate of education**

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

‘A combination of head, heart, and hand is what we want’ – this statement of Swami Vivekananda sums up the harmonious development in a person that education is purported to bring. True culture of ‘head’, the primary preoccupation of education, ought to equip one with an integral vision of life i.e. an essential solidarity of existence. Such an insight must necessarily express itself in the feelings for others and in the working out of such feelings in actual deeds.

It is in the light of this principle that Vidyamandira, through various service activities, seeks to bring succor to those in need.

### **3. The Context**

Looking around, one finds how the current education system has been progressively playing itself into the deadly clutches of sensate culture. As a result, so called ‘skilled’ individuals, starved of values, are turning out to be veritable predators who possess no scruples whatsoever about depriving others and in leading an extremely selfish existence. The number of such individuals is alarmingly on the rise! Unless a corrective measure is in place, the existing state of affairs is surely poised to undermine our social fabric – eventually leading to a mayhem of no mean magnitude!

To stem the tide of such a menace, what is required is an educational ethos which, in addition to ensuring academic excellence, would imbue the learners with the ideals of philanthropy and service. Against this backdrop, Vidyamandira, drawing sustenance from the educational philosophy of Swami Vivekananda, deems it imperative to engage in service activities as a natural correlate of educational process.

#### 4. The Practice

Students, teachers, and monastics alike, in their respective ways, reach out to various sections of the society in the bid to serve. Here are the highlights of some of their endeavors:

- Responding to the needs of a number of school-going students (in the neighborhood of our college) for books and essential study-stationaries, our students have come up with a book bank christened 'Brahmananda Book Bank'. Through this book bank - books, pens and exercise books are regularly handed out to such deserving candidates.
- Every year, the onset of Durga Puja would find our students carrying gifts and new clothes to the children of economically disadvantaged section of the society in the locality. The smiling faces of the children, upon receiving these small tokens of love, make this limited endeavor of our students truly rewarding.
- On holidays, our students make occasional forays into the nearby Railway station for the purpose of cleaning the platform. And, it's not an uncommon sight to see our students planting saplings in the surrounding locality, spreading awareness in the locality about diseases, queuing up to donate blood in the blood-donation camps held in the college.
- One day in every year our students go out to raise funds for National Foundation for Communal Harmony. They set out in the morning and return in the evening. The collected money is sent to the National Foundation for Communal Harmony, New Delhi (An autonomous organization under the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India).
- It is owing to our teachers' magnanimous gesture that Vidyamandira currently offers free coaching to the economically-disadvantaged students of the locality. Fully financed by our teachers, this coaching enterprise has proved itself to be of considerable success in terms of attracting many deserving students from across the locality and their receiving right kinds of guidance in various subjects from the appointed instructors.

- Society is gradually waking up to the paramount importance of ‘values’ (such as love, truth, unselfishness etc.) in every domain of life. This is evidenced by the increasing number of discussion forums on ‘values’ being held in schools and colleges as also elsewhere. Responding to the organizers of these forums, the monastic members of Vidyamandira, despite their busy schedule in the college, often find themselves travelling to the near-by as well as far-flung places in West Bengal to speak on the core elements of character-building. Our monks look upon this activity as a labour of love.

## **5. Evidence of Success**

The nature of this best practice is such as would not easily lend itself to any quantitative measurement. Certain qualitative assessment can however be made.

Anyone who belongs to Vidyamandira-family unknowingly absorbs its spirit of philanthropy and service. The far-reaching outcome of this noble influence can be gauged from the few sampled evidence below:

- ✓ Our ex-students, not allowing this spirit of service die out, continue to band themselves into social service groups such as ‘Kheya’ , ‘Swapnangan’ , ‘Swami Vivekananda Work Circle’ , ‘Kalyan Vrata’ etc. through which they render yeoman service to the underprivileged section of the society.
- ✓ Our ex-students variously placed in Government and non-Government sectors have been known to exert a potent influence (of this spirit of service) on their colleagues. It is not uncommon to find an alumnus of Vidyamandira proactively starting off on an altruistic venture in his department of work – and others clustering around him!
- ✓ A substantial source of the non-Governmental scholarship in our college is the interest accrued from the endowments made by our alumni. The number of such contributions is on the rise. Indeed, this steady spirit of generosity displayed by our ex-students speaks volumes of the values they imbibed during their stay at their alma mater.

## 6. Problems Encountered and Resources Required

- Problems Encountered: There is no gainsaying that under the onslaught of consumerist culture the ideal of service is gradually disappearing from our society. In a fiercely individualistic society – sparing a thought for others is getting increasingly rare. These days, many of our students, coming as they do from such a society, are not naturally predisposed towards the ideal of service. Therefore it turns out to be an uphill task to get such boys interested in this noble ideal.
- Resources Required: “Men, men, these are wanted: everything else will be ready.” This observation of Swami Vivekananda is ever a truism! Indeed, the most important resource we have at our disposal is the human resource – motivated students, teachers, and staff. This motivated group of individuals, despite limited financial resource, has been working wonders. However, true excellence being like the ever receding horizon, we could still wish for a greater number of participants in all our service activities.

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