Vidyadaan
Sahayyak Mandal
Transformation Through Mentoring

VSM Connect

April 2022 | Issue 22

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VSM in Numbers

- Website: www.vsmthane.org
- YouTube: www.youtube.com/user/vsmthane
- FB: www.facebook.com/vsmthane
- Twitter: www.twitter.com/vsmthane
- LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/company/vsmthane/
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- www.vawesomes.wordpress.com

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Editor's Desk

Greetings from Vidyadaan Sahayyak Mandal (VSM)! I hope you and your family are in good health and spirit.

This issue of VSM CONNECT touches a very critical aspect of our journey viz. "Our Admission Process for Students". One can say, it is the first step in the life cycle of VSM and epitomises the vision statement of VSM – 'Empowered Student, Empowered Nation!

According to the Legatum Prosperity Index 2021, India ranks 118th in education and the government spends around 3% of its total GDP on education. India being a demographically diverse nation, the government finds it tough to have far reaching effects when it comes to ensuring good education to every student. Not to mention, the pandemic has put further stress on the education system of the country. So, one cannot depend on the government alone to solve all the problems; civil society organisations must come forward to share the responsibilities. There are more than 77,000 organisations registered on the NGO Darpan (Niti Ayog) portal which are focused on education, working diligently and silently to make a difference. Given the scenario, there is no doubt that NGOs like VSM have a unique advantage of initiating change at the grass roots level and generate a direct and sustainable impact on society through education.

Having worked in this field for the last 15 years, our belief has got stronger that only education can solve social maladies like inequality, hunger and poverty and encourage positive social changes such as women empowerment, social inclusion and financial literacy. That is the reason why our motto has always been, 'Education is not preparation of life, but life itself' - John Dewey.

Dealing with underprivileged students over the years has led to a lot of learnings – the most important being a lack of proper guidance for the students. This prompted us to devise the student-mentor model in education.

The strong determination I have seen among students, some of them even orphans, to overcome all the vicissitudes of life - poverty, family problems, psychological issues to complete their education has always moved me tremendously. Their attitude to fight all their battles and emerge winners encourages us to be a part of their difficult journey and

Editor's Desk

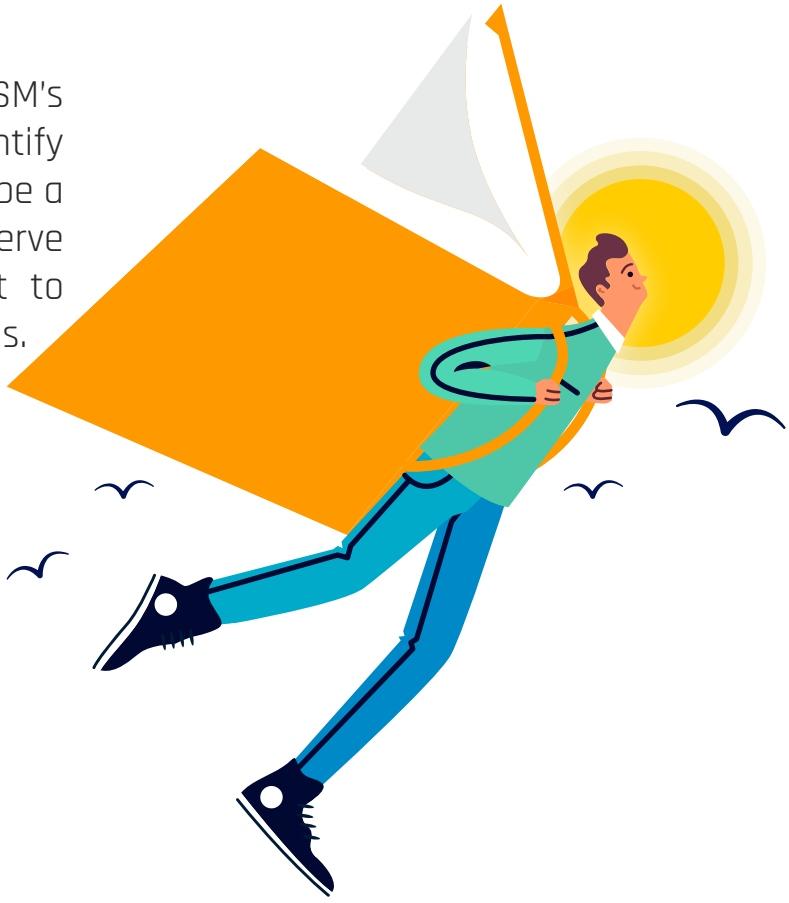
explore all opportunities of sustainable support. Their fortitude has also persuaded us to build a strong admission model to help us come to the aid of such helpless and rudderless students and support them embark on a journey of positive change.

Apart from the students benefitting from our work, I must say guiding them has also made us gain inner satisfaction and wisdom and it has added a new dimension to our personalities. There is also a sense of pride for being able to contribute to the cause of nation building through education.

I would like to end by saying that VSM's quest and commitment to identify deserving and needy students will be a continuous one. VSM will strive to serve the government's vision of 'Right to Education' to the best of its abilities.

Geeta Shah
Founder and Trustee

Interview in Progress



Main Feature: VSM Admission Process

Vidyadaan Sahayyak Mandal (VSM) was founded in 2008 with a vision to enable deserving but disadvantaged students to pursue the education of their choice and help them realize their dream. In organization's journey till now, VSM has supported around 1000 students (including 575 Alumni and 425 current students) to complete their higher education and guide them towards a socially responsible life.

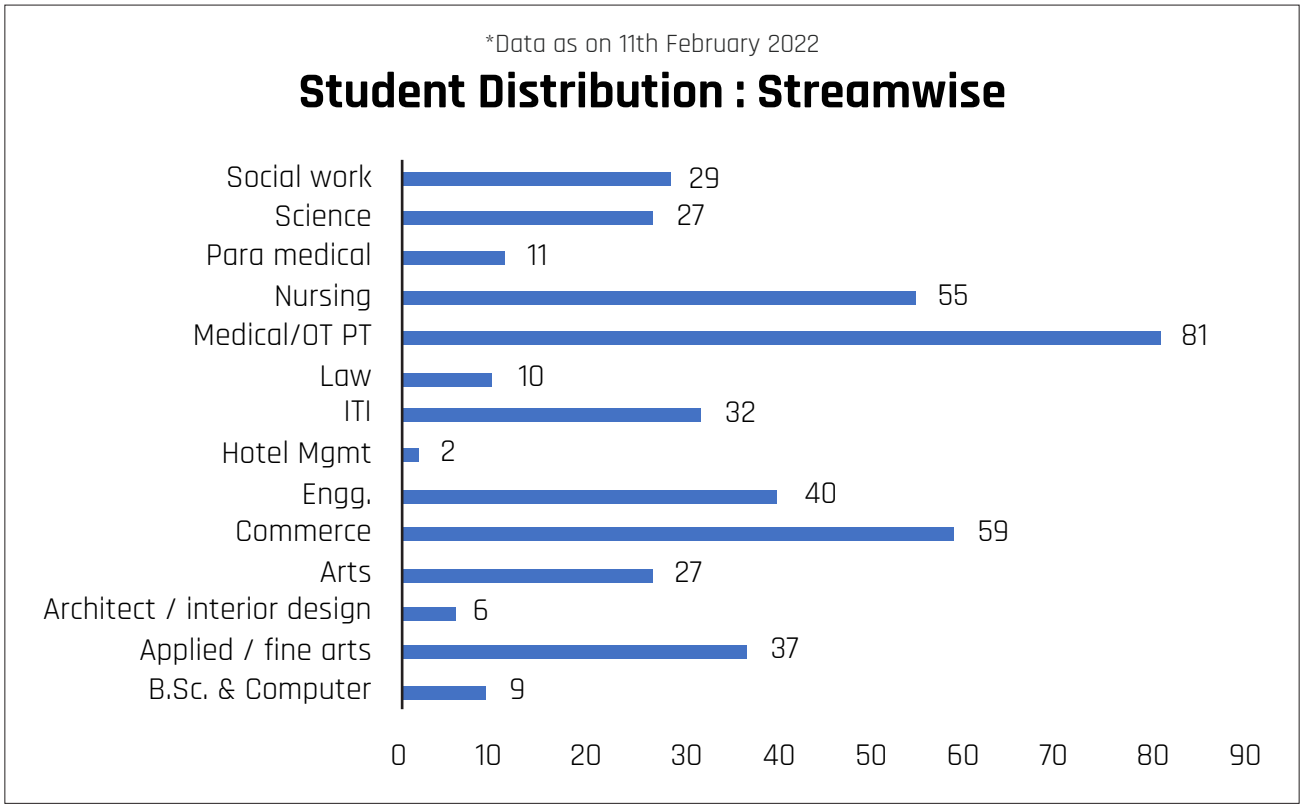
As we focus on these efforts, one question gets discussed frequently by internal and external stakeholders with curiosity – **'How VSM reaches out to these students and how do we ensure quality of students getting admitted every year?'**

In this issue of VSM Connect, we will take you through the approach and admission process to share the journey of building a credible mechanism that ensures effectiveness and alignment with VSM vision.

Our footprint

VSM's journey that started with one student has increased manyfold over the years and at present is shaping up careers for **425 students**. With clear focus on our Vision, these 425 students are pursuing their academic dreams with strong support from **14 Career Teams** at VSM. These students are from all **36 districts of Maharashtra**, bringing in the diversity of their backgrounds, challenges and career streams. VSM admission process has enabled us to reach to needy but deserving candidates across the state with deep penetration into rural Maharashtra. With each passing year and increasing no. of students approaching

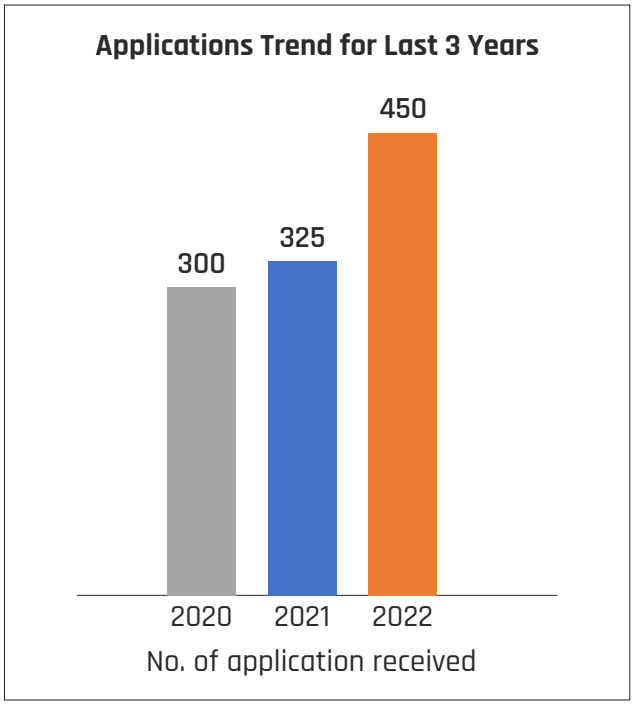
*Data as on 11th February 2022



us, we are committed to make this process more robust and sustainable.

Understanding the Admission process

This process is designed with an objective to identify students who have right **aptitude** and **attitude/passion for knowledge/higher education but are underprivileged** to complete their education. Focus of the process is to support students to build their careers with appropriate guidance and financial aid to help them achieve their life goals. The admission process has been seeing a steady increase in applications year on year. To ensure appropriate framework for judicious selection of deserving and needy students, the admission process has also been scaled up over years to provide better structure and to enable documentation for fairness. The process is also backed up by Admission policy which was rolled out in year 2017.



With clear focus on the vision, we have been maintaining an average **selection ratio** of approximately **50%** year on year. This is made possible with meticulous scrutiny by all career teams.

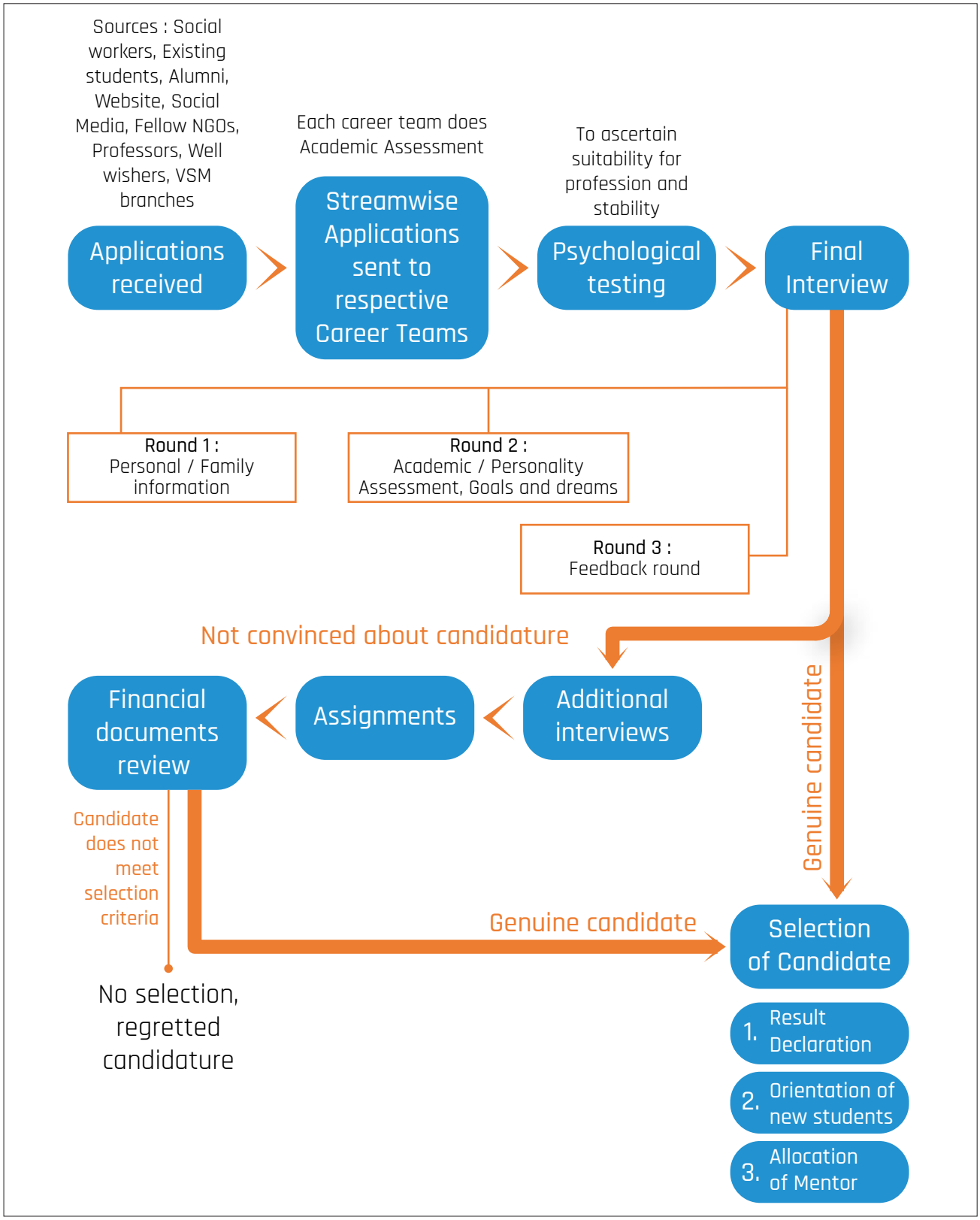
The process kick starts in the month of June and goes on till November across different streams. Admission process involves candid conversations with the student by referring person, Branch Coordinators, Admission Committee and Career Guidance team to help them understand VSM Vision and the rules for selection are explained in detail before the process starts. This helps the students, who are only looking for scholarships and are not fulfilling the criteria, to opt out from the process – leaving us with genuinely deserving students. **Academic Assessment by Career teams** focus on understanding the student, his/her academic interest, awareness about profession, goals in life, employment opportunity for this course to make him / her academically independent after the course, exploring earn and learn opportunities / internships etc.

Documents shared by Students

- Duly filled Application to VSM (along with family, financial details)
- Income certificate
- Cast certificate (wherever applicable)
- Recommendation letter by Professors / Teacher
- Five years marksheets , including Entrance Exam Marksheets
- Selection letter for current year course
- Certificates of Extra curricular activities
- Rationale for selection of a particular course
- Photo of candidate

Main Feature: VSM Admission Process

Admission process is carried out with several steps that keep up the fairness and alignment with our objective for selection. These are depicted in the process flow below.



Main Feature: VSM Admission Process

Final interview with the Admission Team brings about conversations with the students to understand in depth about the societal, economic situation of the family, family's awareness and inclination to support student's further academic journey, academic progress of the student, thought process of the student while selecting a particular course, their aspirations and awareness about reality and responsibilities, their rigor to work towards their dreams, personality traits, social awareness etc. All these pointers help to understand the student beyond mere academics and enables us to take informed decision.

Every student is expected to write transcripts of their interviews which are later shared with their mentors to enable them to know and guide the student better.

Candidates are also encouraged to share which questions were liked by them during the interview, quality of interview (feedback and reasons), their experience about Group and personal interviews which pave way for betterment of the process and builds confidence in students to share their views.

Number of students selected each year is usually guided by the no. of students passing out in that specific year. Incremental 10% students are enrolled every year from all sections of society without any bias towards gender, cast, religion etc. and keeping sharp focus on deserving candidates who have profound interest in studying further. The selection strategy also focusses on **societal necessities** while enrolling students for specific streams. For example, in last few years, increased number of Medico, Nursing,

Salient Features of the Admission Function –

- The core objective of Admission Committee is to enroll deserving, needy and potential students in VSM
- Connecting a Right Mentor to students for meaningful relationships thereby realizing VSM Vision – Empowered Student, Empowered Nation!
- The Admission Committee regularly works with Career teams, Performance Evaluation team, Hostel team, Mentors, Accounts team to take feedback on newly selected students and to further improve the selection process
- To have common orientation program of newly enrolled students and mentors to have same understanding of working in VSM

Paramedical and Medical technician students are selected keeping in alignment with the Public Health Policy of Govt. of India to strengthen this sector in next 10 years. In last couple of years, many geographical areas had to face calamities such as cyclones, floods or were adversely impacted with the pandemic which devastated families crushing the dreams of young citizens. VSM took the responsibility to support such areas and initiated a campaign to enroll deserving students from these affected areas. This year we are growing by 20% and will be able to extend support to more students from these areas.

Post Selection Orientation

After the student is selected, next important step is to identify a suitable Mentor and To map the student to this mentor. Interview transcripts enable the mentors to identify

right development needs and also help to create a connect with the student. This connect creates a strong foundation for a Mentor – Student relationship.

Interview results are declared on a virtual meet (batchwise) where students and mentors are present. This encompasses an **Orientation for newly enrolled student and assigned mentor.**

In this orientation, students are given information about VSM, its culture and philosophy. This often answers questions that students are having about source of funds that enable their education, their role in VSM and expectations from them. It also helps them to understand important rules and processes.

Transformation of the admission process over years

Despite robust process, we have carefully **maintained flexibility** to cope with several changes in the environment and to learn from past experiences that may enable us to support and develop students even better. The origin of this selection process is dated back to VSM's first ever student who was identified from a newspaper article. Founder members had visited his house and given admission to him and VSM's journey started with him. As organization's size increased, the operations have also scaled up to accommodate increasing number of applications. We have come a long way to having focused Career teams, increasing number of mentors, structured policies and an online process for admission. Detailed policy and evaluation patterns were established to sustain increasing number of student applications.

The Selection process has also transformed to **move with time.** Pre-admission Aptitude tests, Psychological testing have been introduced (wherever needed) to ensure appropriate courses are selected by students as per their aptitude. Apart from Traditional graduation courses, vocational & professional courses came into foray for admission process, few such courses pursued by our students are **Artificial Intelligence, B.Sc. Neurology / Radiology, Economics PG courses, Humanitarian courses & courses in Development** segment.

With the pandemic in last two years, we **embraced digital empowerment** and are now conducting the admission process completely virtually. This has given flexibility to meet the candidates at their convenient time keeping in mind challenges faced by them in rural areas for electricity, heavy rainfall, network coverage, availability of place to attend interview, availability of phone at home and even financial paucity to physically travel to center for attending interview. If this approach was not extended to those students, they would have probably compromised their education. The virtual platform also helped us to increase our outreach to students from remote rural areas and still save cost on travel and physical meetings.

Virtual interviews have also enabled us to have house visits during the interview helping us to connect with the parents,

witness the genuine condition at student's home and also identify areas that the student may need support after enrollment.

Building Capabilities to Sustain the Transformation

As the admission process has evolved, Career teams have been playing a pivotal role. We have been meticulously working on **developing infrastructure and capabilities of our Career Teams**. They are enabled by inviting industry experts, external professionals / skilled members for empowerment.

Empowered mentors are the backbone for empowered students. This is achieved by interventions such as Training for Mentors, roll out of Mentor Manual, assignment of Buddy KPs, Surveys and Feedback. With a campaign **'Chala Karyakarte Joduya'** we have been able to enroll 60 new mentors. This strengthens the organization as able hands are engaged to support increasing no. of students. We also aim to expand our network to external resources through campaigns such as **'Chala Shikshak Joduya'** which enables us to increase our outreach to deserving students through teachers.

Challenges in Admission Process

While Admission Team is relentlessly working towards their objective, it also faces few challenges in the journey –
To further increase outreach of VSM initiatives and programs to deserving students in remote geographical pockets. For enrolled students, who are basedat far interior villages and are away from VSM Centre locations, house visit (which is a governance mechanism) is a challenge.

Difficulties in Income verification, checking authenticity of information received becomes difficult as inconsistent income or income through unorganized labour may not be covered in the income certificates.

Several students reach out to VSM post completion of first year in their course. It becomes difficult to support such students in case there is a mismatch in aptitude and selected course. In such cases it is challenging to bring necessary impact.

Unexplored networking and collaboration opportunities in educational sector that may enable further students reach.

Impact of Selection of Right Students

When the students complete their education in VSM, are placed well and become financially independent, it is golden, memorable and precious moment for VSM. It gives us completeness and satisfaction towards realization of VSM Vision and Mission. This is the only reward and gift for mentors, who work selflessly and passionately for VSM.

With the efforts to drive a robust admission process, continued learning and support from mentors to shape up students professionally and personally, we feel humbled to reflect on the impact created over years in our students' lives.

Main Feature: VSM Admission Process

Sandeep Padwal

Sandeep Padwal from Tembhare, Shahapur is selected as **Garuda Commando** of Indian Air Force, after intense training of 12 months in West Bengal.

Jayant Shigvan

Jayant Shigvan, our Commercial Arts student from Raheja School of Arts is placed as Arts Director in **FirstCry.**

Sujit Vekhande

Sujit Vekhande from Shahapur is working at FBM KNM company as **Project designer at Dubai** after completing his Course as Mechanical Draftsman in Govt. ITI.

Sanket Vanare

Sanket Vanare who has competed his B.Tech. in Food technology from ICT is placed in **Swedish company Alfa Laval as Graduate Trainee.**

Vaishnavi Kulkarni

Vaishnavi Kulkarni from Aurangabad, pursuing Computer Engineering from Pune, is already placed at **Goldman Sachs as Analyst**.

Dr. Shubham Gedam

Dr. Shubham Gedam has completed his MBBS from GMC Yavatmal and is placed at **DCHC Yavatmal, Covid Centre as Medical Officer.**

Testimonials of Alumini

Gauri Vaidya

Fully funded PHD student at University of Limerick, Ireland. VSM Alumnus

Based in Aurangabad, I was facing economical breakdowns in the family while I was taking admission for graduation. With an aspiration to become an Engineer, I scored 176/200 in MH – CET exam and decided to pursue Engineering in Computer Science. I applied for various scholarship centers, personal loans – all led to nothing! ! I felt once that I might need to give up my dreams because of lack of money!

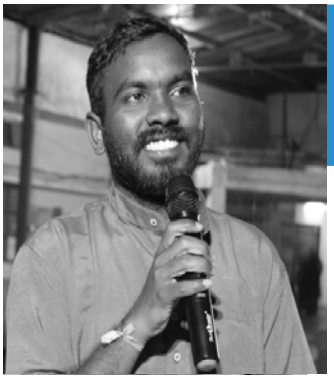
While searching for scholarships, I got introduced to Dr. Anil Kausadikar kaka who works for students in Aurangabad. However, he could not help with such a large amount back then with his institution, but then he introduced me to Geeta Mavshi from VSM and that started my journey to fulfilling my career.

I have always loved the way VSM takes steps to inculcate Sanskaars, with allocation of KP , that's my favourite part till date.

I had two KPs over the tenure of four years of my education. I shared a very close bond with both of them. I felt more connected to my second KP. He always understood my perspective and my problems even when I expressed with less words. He gave very special and important life lessons that I follow and will treasure for life.

My KPs and Geeta Mavshi understood my weaker areas that would make me uncomfortable in being myself, and they consciously took steps so that I would break my comfort zone and work towards better version of myself. This encouragement has helped me in my personality, career as well as life. Technical sessions conducted and guidance from seniors has helped a lot in the getting prepared for the job.

Testimonials of Alumini



Vaibhav Sonone

Executive, Professional Assistance for Development Action (PRADAN) VSM Alumnus

I belong to Pedgaon in Washim district of Maharashtra. Weather dependent farming at home was not a consistent source of income. While economic condition was challenging, my parents and I had determination to complete education.

Education till 12th standard was completed due to merit with support from scholarships. Aspiration at that time was to enter politics or to work in administrative services but I was restricted for means for it. When I landed in Pune for higher education, struggles started including challenges to get accommodation, differential treatment as I came from rural area and so on. In the first year of education my professor Ms. Kalpana Kanake introduced me to VSM. My KP guided me on multiple important decisions of my life and yet gave me freedom to decide for myself. VSM enabled my decision at a cross road to select between Azeem Premji University and Jawaharlal Nehru University. I was also developed with multiple facets such as maintaining expenses, prioritization in life, factors to consider while taking decisions and so on. My mentors and volunteers from VSM work towards enabling my growth till date.

Now I am working as Executive, Professional Assistance for Development Action (PRADAN). I am based at tribal belt in Madhya Pradesh focusing on areas such as women empowerment, rural development, employment, farming, Rights of Tribal communities.

Way forward

VSM admission committee strives for betterment of the process and wishes

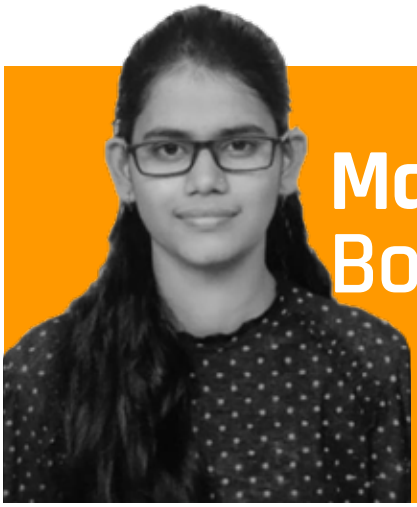
- To further explore the gamut of vocational education
- To regulate 'drop out rates' of girl students and supporting their career aspirations
- To encompass maximum possible careestreams under VSM umbrella
- To ensure 100% smooth placement for VSM students

We are aspiring to realize our dream that '**No child in India shall be deprived of education**'

The Govt. has taken a step forward by passing an act for 'Right to Education'. VSM is focused to be instrumental in carrying this right to every deserving student and open the gates of Education and Empowerment in their life.

Orientation session of New Students

Orientation session of New Students



Madhuri Bondre

I'm Madhuri Namdev Bondre from Bondrepada, Shahapur Taluka. After studying till 4th standard at my hometown, I had to leave home and move to my uncle's house in Titwala to avoid the long trek of 6 kms one way each day to reach school. Plus, we were also beset with financial trouble.

Meanwhile, after scoring 83.80% in the 10th standard, I started thinking about further studies. I was confused about which field to choose when my father advised me to go for Commerce. My parents have always supported my academic ambitions, but money was a big obstacle in fulfilling my dreams. I got admission in B.K. Birla College, Kalyan. However, we soon realized that just securing admission was not enough – we didn't have the means to pay the fees which was required to confirm the admission.

That's when my maternal grandfather informed me about VSM which provided financial support to those needy students who are passionate about higher education. We visited VSM's Shahpur branch with renewed hope. I witnessed many students sharing their experiences and participating in the interviews being conducted by VSM personnel. Though I was nervous, I answered all the questions regarding my family, academic information, and my financial condition. When I heard that I had passed the interview, I was elated to be a part of the VSM family. Nirmala Patil mam was assigned as my KP.

When college started, I struggled with the English language and adjusting to the new environment. I confided in my KP, who advised me to focus on studies and face the struggles bravely. I listened to her advice and passed 12th with 76.31%. Then, I took admission at Joshi Bedekar College, Thane, for a degree in BMS. Varsha Joshi madam became my KP. She even took the pains of specially tutoring me in subjects like Operations Research and Tax, because of which I was able to complete my projects and presentations on time.

Being a part of the VSM family helped me in many ways. From the Be Frank team, I learnt about organizing, co-ordination, and creative thinking. I participated in all the programs and study tours organized by VSM. This helped me build my confidence. The special English classes allowed me to overcome my language barrier. With my KP's encouragement, I even participated in various competitions and won prizes for the college.

All my efforts, along with the steadfast backing of VSM, bore fruit when, upon graduating, I got a job at HDFC Securities as a Relationship Manager. Any roadblocks that came in my way at the job front too were addressed by my KP patiently. I really feel blessed to be with the VSM family, which has steered my life towards a new and positive direction.

My name is Prathamesh Ayare. I am an architect by profession.

I live in Thane with my maternal grandparents who raised and educated me. Though poor, they encouraged me to pursue higher education. I have been good at drawing and maths since childhood. At one time, I wanted to take up arts but my family didn't support me. They didn't see any scope in the field. As for me, I never wanted to do engineering and medicine was out of question because of the cost involved. So, I decided to go for architecture, which involved both my passions – drawing and maths.

Once again, the issue of money came up, but my teacher encouraged me to follow my dream. After my SSC, my school teachers tried hard to get financial help for my education. They introduced me to various donors. That's how I met Bhau Nanivadekar at Sharada Vidyalaya, Thane. He asked me some questions about my dreams and my goals. He liked my determination towards architecture and I became a part of the VSM family.

I liked VSM's work structure and their concept of Karyakarta Palak. This is what students like me needed the most – a proper mentor and guide. My KP was Swati Agate Mavshi and talking to her gave me a lot of solace.I felt positive about achieving my goals. She helped me by finding people who could make me understand the concept of architecture, and also about the various entrance exams I needed to give. She held my hand throughout the admission process. In my 2+ years with VSM, I have attended various programs organized by VSM like 'Be frank', elocution competitions, and VSM foundation day which have helped me in my personal development.

I got admission in IES College of Architecture, Bandra. The four years were full of challenges the long commute to college and back and the work was exciting. I fell terribly ill in the third year and I was hospitalised close to 2 weeks without proper diagnosis. But I ploughed through with motherly support during this illness from my KP Swati Agate Maushi. Then in the 4th year, I was elected as Exhibition Head in the college council – one of my biggest achievements. I also won a lot of prizes in various competitions in my 4th Year.

During these years, VSM not only helped me achieve my goals but also to improve as an individual overall through English communication, various workshops which made me confident while making presentations. I will always be grateful to VSM for making me the person I am today!

I have been working for the past 4.5 years as an Architect and am currently employed at Burns & McDonnell Engineering Pvt. Ltd, India a MNC operating in multi dimensional projects.

Event Calendar
December'21 to May'22

Past

5th Dec.- Building Projects for Engg. and Infotech team

12th Dec.- My Oxford Journey by Ms Saurabhi for Law Team

29st Jan.- Interaction with Arts Team by Alumni Rupesh Bawne

13th Feb.- Resume Building and Aptitude Test for Engg. and IT students

27th Feb.- Nursing Event by Dr Shobha Gaikwad

18th Mar.- My Future Plans - Applied and Fine Arts Team

27th Mar.- Full day online STEP conference by Social Work Team

Forthcoming

10th April.- Geriatric Care by OTPT Team

17th April.- Interview Preparation & Communication by ITI Team

26th April.- Book Bite with Insights by BE FRANK Team

8th May.- Student's experience sharing by Engg and IT Team

8th May.- Portfolio making for Architecture Students

8th May.- Introduction to Welding Technology for ITI Team

22th May.- Vachoo, Gau Anande by Library Team

Besides, ongoing events viz. GST Concepts, English Communication, Computer Skills, BE FRANK through out the quarter