



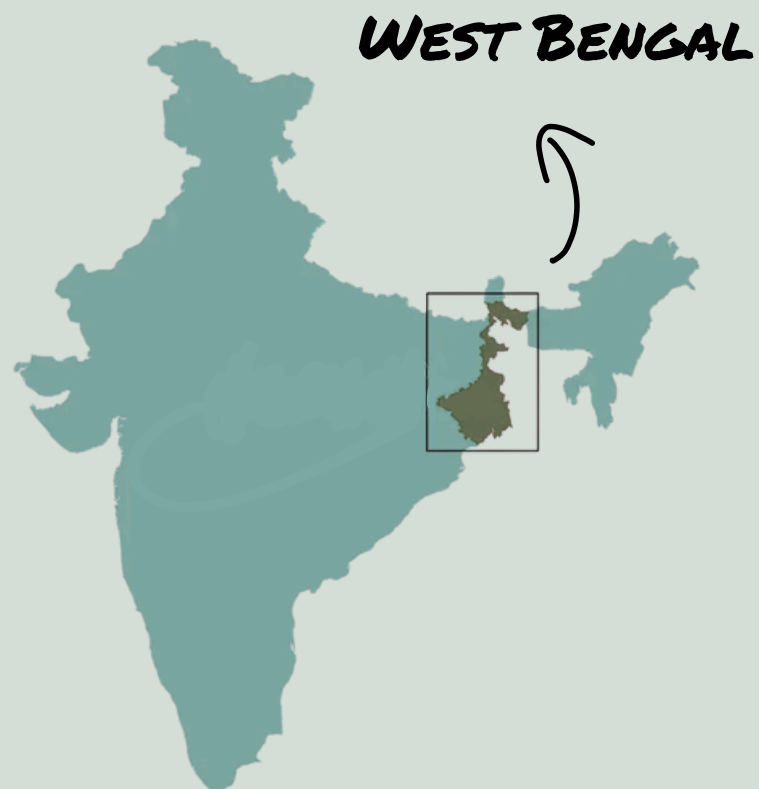
Bankura Vocational Training Centre, India

Helping young people affected by leprosy and disability to secure employment through skills training and employment support

Young people affected by leprosy face extreme stigma and discrimination in India. Not only is it feared that they will pass on the disease, but cultural beliefs mean that they are also thought to be cursed for past sins. Because of this, it is really difficult to find training opportunities and even harder to get a job.

Even if a young person has not had leprosy themselves, when a family member is diagnosed, everyone faces the same discrimination. This is incredibly unjust, because these young people are already highly disadvantaged. Extreme poverty means that they have no, or at best a broken education.

As you can imagine, in a country where one in five people live below the poverty line, leprosy is the final blow. It destroys all hope. Any dreams of marrying, having a family or pursuing a career are gone. People affected by leprosy are consigned to the bottom of the pile, living in the most dismal of conditions and often forced to beg for a living.



Bankura Vocational Training Center provides the solution

The Leprosy Mission's vocational training center (VTC) in Bankura, India, provides the solution. Situated in the state of West Bengal, the VTC is strategically placed to meet the needs of young people affected by leprosy. This is because this state has one of the highest leprosy rates in India, owing to its rural and poverty-stricken location.



Training in Marketable skills



The VTC offers free vocational training in seven professions: diesel mechanics, welding, electrics, sewing technology, tailoring, eco bag making and geriatric care. Five of these courses are residential courses offered at the VTC. Tailoring and eco bag making are community-based so that young women affected by leprosy who are unable to leave their families are also able to learn a trade. By receiving training in one of these professions, each young person who studies at the VTC learns a marketable skill which will help them to get a job or start their own business upon graduation.

Partnering with companies

The VTC works with local and regional businesses to offer placements and employment to students. The team helps employers to see that they do not need to fear leprosy by combatting misconceptions surrounding the disease. They also help them to better understand the needs of people affected by leprosy and disability. Employers are then invited onto campus to interview students approaching graduation. Many students then go on to work for these companies.

Training is provided in CV writing and interview techniques to further students' chances of getting a job after leaving the VTC. Last year, 80% of new graduates went straight into work post-graduation. This is an amazing achievement!



Looking after physical and mental health

Being specifically set up to help people affected by leprosy and disability, tailored healthcare is provided to ensure medical needs are met. Medical check-ups take place twice each week and any students found to require leprosy-related treatment are immediately referred to a nearby Leprosy Mission hospital.



The hospital provides comprehensive care for every young person. Whether it be curing people of leprosy, performing reconstructive surgery on hands and feet disabled by the disease or distributing mobility aids such as wheelchairs, the hospital provides a wonderful service. Counseling is also provided to improve students' emotional wellbeing, as although the physical effects of leprosy are relatively easy to treat, emotional wounds are much more difficult. Most of the students have suffered from discrimination and trauma simply because they have leprosy.

Who will you be helping?



Lakhi carefully threads her bobbin. All around her she can hear the whir of sewing machines. Positioning her brightly patterned material, she makes her first stitch. This is the start of a transformation. From a simple rectangle of fabric, she will create something beautiful. Lakhi's name means "goddess of money", but she has never known wealth. Growing up, even food was in short supply. She often went to bed hungry and struggled to sleep. Then leprosy struck.

Slowly, the disease began to attack her nerves. Her fingers stiffened and curled into her right palm. By the time she was 12, she couldn't even grip a pen to do her schoolwork. Determined not to let that stop her, Lakhi learned to write with her left hand. But there were more challenges to come.

Her friends started to exclude her from games. Lakhi sat alone, watching them have fun without her. Eventually, she dropped out of school. She couldn't take any more reminders of what she had lost. Of what leprosy had taken from her.

For so long she had wanted to get a good job and support her family. Now that future seemed long gone. For years, she spent her days doing housework and looking after her family. Big dreams were for other people.

Eager to start her new future, Lakhi arrived at Bankura. It didn't take her long to rediscover her drive and joy. Where her days had been tinged with loneliness, they were now filled with the chatter of new friends. Hearing stories of people with disabilities who had climbed Everest inspired her. She was infused with a fresh determination to prove herself and build a better life for her family.

Thanks to the generosity of trusts and foundations, Lakhi's future looks bright. She is hugely grateful for the opportunity they have given her.

Will you bring fresh hope to people like Lakhi?

Budget

We are seeking funding to enable 90 young people affected by leprosy and disability to become fully accredited in a trade and have the best possible chance of getting a job. Below is a breakdown of the costs for 90 students:

Description	Cost (\$)
Education	32,333
Living Costs	28,174
Employment Support	11,348
Healthcare	6,278
Total	78,133

It costs just \$869 to provide a young person with the education, maintenance, employment support and healthcare they need to build a bright future.

Could you transform the lives of young people affected by leprosy and disability in this way?





Monitoring and evaluation

The Leprosy Mission has a stringent monitoring and evaluation process in place for Bankura Vocational Training Center. As such, you can rest assured that funds are well-managed and used for their intended purpose. Members of Leprosy Mission staff on campus oversee the training center to ensure that it is meeting its objectives, and data is recorded quarterly to assist with the monitoring of its progress.

A senior member of staff at The Leprosy Mission Trust India's head office provides additional oversight and support, and The Leprosy Mission Great Britain also closely monitors the project. It does this through visits to the center and six-monthly progress reports provided by staff on the ground. Any challenges faced, and areas for improvement identified, are discussed and promptly addressed. Students can also be involved in these discussions, as a student council enables them to share their views and have input on any changes made.


Sustainability

Bankura Vocational Training Center is becoming increasingly sustainable. This means that money donated now is even more impactful, as it is feeding into what will soon become a self-sustaining institution. The center generates its own income in the following ways:

- **Course fees:** Students who are neither affected by leprosy nor disabled pay course fees. These are then put towards funding places for young people affected by leprosy and disability. Plans to increase the number of places at the center through the introduction of new courses would increase income from this source. This would also reduce the cost per head and provide more places for young people affected by leprosy and disability.
- **Alumni:** Graduates who have gone on to be employed or who have started their own businesses give back to support the center. They do this both financially and with their time. It is envisaged that as the number of alumni continues to grow, this will become an ever-greater source of income. It is hoped that costs will also be reduced by increasingly drawing on their expertise rather than on that of external professionals.
- **Partnerships:** Local businesses are approached to provide financial and in-kind support. This has included donations of engines and other machinery for engineering students to work on. Local religious organizations such as churches are also approached for funding. The VTC has started to seek funding from organizations further afield in order to increase this income stream.
- **Sales of goods:** Items made in classes are sold to external partners and money raised is then injected back into the center.



Lakhi's story is not uncommon. Many, many others are weighed down by the burden of disability and stigma because of leprosy. Their futures look bleak, and they have nowhere to turn. Will you give them a second chance?

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