

For a better tomorrow!

"It was ability that mattered, not disability, which is a word I'm not crazy about using," said Marlee Matlin. The meaning of this quote was evident during the event celebrating the success of the first West Zone Centre of Pankh in Mumbai and the launch of Pankh's website.

Kashmira Mirza gives a lowdown on this event.



Pankh - Wings of Destiny, an initiative by TRRAIN and Youth 4 Jobs Foundation for Persons with Disabilities, celebrated the successful completion of one year of the first West Zone Pankh Centre in L. S. Raheja College, Santacruz and the launch of Pankh's website, www.pankhindia.org

The event was held L.S. Raheja College, Juhu Road, Santacruz (W), Mumbai-400054, on May 7, 2014, 4pm onwards.

The event started with the inauguration ceremony of the Pankh Tech Mahindra SMART centre, followed by an address to the students of the 6th batch of Pankh (in Mumbai) by Ms Elizabeth Geo Zachariah, Director -HR, (Mumbai, Middle East & Asia-Pacific region), Tech Mahindra and Prabhakar Sarwade, Head of Technology Procurement Function, Tech Mahindra Ltd.

The inauguration then followed a keynote address by Ms Ameesha Prabhu, CEO, TRRAIN, welcoming the Tech Mahindra team for the launch of the Pankh Website amidst the students and the alumni of the West Zone Pankh Centre, Mumbai. The enthusiasm of the participants, who were

ex-students and students, was at an all time high and optimism shone on their faces. The Pankh website was unveiled by TRRAIN and Tech Mahindra teams and an informative PowerPoint session followed. Designed specifically for the requirements of PwDs, this will be a responsive website which will work on any technology and platform. This site will enable PwDs to connect to the retail industry and post their resumes even for future opportunities. Recruiters will directly be able to hire students from the site after reviewing their details.

After the launch of the website, Nilesh Yewle, a student of Pankh's 4th batch, currently working at Reliance Trends, came forward to share his journey towards acceptance, which was ably translated by Ms Taslim, the sign language trainer/interpreter. The story was full of warmth and the hope for a better future; the struggles he faced to be counted in mainstream society were moving, yet, narrated with a dash of humour.

Tech Mahindra has partnered in this great cause and has launched the Tech



Mahindra SMART Centre at the L.S. Raheja College. The sixth batch shall be closing on May 15 and the seventh batch will start from May 20. Speaking to *Apparel*, Ms Elizabeth Geo Zachariah, Director -HR, (Mumbai, Middle East & Asia-Pacific region), Tech Mahindra, said, "The reason why we are here is reaffirming the belief in the work that

this organisation is doing. We were on the lookout for projects where we could contribute. Pankh is doing excellent work in the area of Persons with Disabilities. It is very inspiring for us and we see a good reason for using our funds out here." Talking about the website, she further added, "This is definitely going to benefit all stakeholders immensely; it is a single platform where they can connect and dispel all their doubts."

We also spoke to Mr Jegan Tharmaraj from Tech Mahindra Foundation, who said, "This is a flagship programme of the Tech Mahindra Foundation. In this centre, we are focused on children with hearing, speech and orthopaedic impairments and how to make them enter the retail world. Our aim is to reach to around 200 youngsters, every year. We shall be teaching them foundation skills and technical skills. Though, our main focus will be on soft skills to make them independent and self-reliant."

Ms Ameesha Prabhu, the CEO of TRRAIN, said, "The main purpose of this event was to encourage community building amongst all our students and also to

launch a website dedicated to three of our stakeholders; our students, retailers and people who want to contribute in any way. The aim is that if there is a Person with Disability (PwD) sitting at home and wanting a job in retail, he/she should know that Pankh is the place to go to. The feeling of helplessness is a major psychological barrier that needs to be overcome. The moment PwDs find an opportunity, they excel. It is all about mapping the disability with the job profile. Today, there are definitely more retailers employing PwDs. We are also in talks with the Retail Sector Skill Council for the training of PwDs." Ms Prabhu also had a word of appreciation for the encouragement given by CMAI to TRRAIN in this initiative.

There was a photo session in which the alumni and students took part with full enthusiasm.

All in all, it was a wonderful event which was conducted with enthusiasm and the huge smiles on the faces of those present, were a testament to the fact that Pankh is indeed empowering PwDs with wings to search new horizons! 🍀