

Bankura Vocational Training Centre, West Bengal, India



Where your support is needed

Over half the world's cases of leprosy are found in India with West Bengal having one of the highest endemic leprosy rates. West Bengal has a population of around 2,128,000 with around 37% living below the poverty line.

Compared with other diseases, leprosy has an extremely high stigma attached. Because of myths surrounding leprosy and its physical impact on the body, such as visible deformities and unpleasant ulcers it can affect a person's chances at ever getting a job.

Bankura vocational training centre (VTC) was

established in 1998 to provide employment opportunities for young people affected by leprosy and disability. Often these individuals have been denied access to their rights, have been unable to find or keep a job because of their illness, and in many cases have been cast out by their families.



The ethos behind the work at Bankura VTC is that all are created in the image of God, and that each person deserves the same right to fair treatment, gainful employment and the opportunity to succeed. The VTC strives to ensure that students have the same rights as others in the community. Recognising their individual skills and personalities, the VTC supports them to further develop their potential and improve their earning capacity.

Why your support is needed

Due to disability, ulcers and stigma it is very difficult for leprosy-affected people to find work, even after they have been cured. Most people in this region are farm labourers; some cannot work as before due to disabilities, anaesthetic hands and feet or ulcers. Others are refused work because of prejudice and misunderstanding about leprosy. Many have no other skills which would help them to earn a living, so some have to resort to begging to feed their families. When asked, they say they're concerned for their children and wish for them not repeat the same life cycle.

Social stigma attached to leprosy and disability is a major obstacle to young people from leprosy backgrounds. Aspirations among these young people are usually low, with most believing that all they are capable of is manual labour or menial, low-paid jobs. At Bankura VTC, these disillusioned young people are shown that they are capable of so much more. As well as gaining valuable and employable skills, they learn that they are capable, worthwhile and valued.



They leave the VTC with higher aspirations, able to earn a good income and contribute to their local economy, and with a new sense of purpose and self esteem. Even better, they show others that those with leprosy and disability are just as competent as anyone else. All of this together will, in time, help to break down barriers of stigma, promote integration and break the cycle of poverty.

What your support will provide

The government of India have recently changed the standards required for accreditation of Vocational Training Centres. This means that the equipment used for training courses must be upgraded in line with these requirements. Without new equipment, the courses will no longer be recognised as reputable by employers.

Each year, 150 students are trained at Bankura VTC. Of these, at least 30% are girls, helping to challenge prejudice and promote equal opportunities. Bankura VTC has an excellent work placement record and each graduating student is followed up to make sure they're managing well. Current courses include welding, diesel mechanics, Information and Communication Technology, electrician training,

Your support of £15,682 will cover the new equipment that is desperately needed for the welding and sewing courses at Bankura vocational training centre. This will enable students to train in new skills and to give them opportunities for employment beyond what they could ever have imagined.

There are various different sewing classes, ranging from basic knitting and blanket making to highly skilled embroidery and high level market production. The new equipment will include a range of sewing machines as well as welding materials.

After completion of their courses, each student has a range of employment opportunities from paid work with local businesses to self-employment through business loans. Bankura students have an excellent success rate; 60% of graduates have a better income in their chosen profession than the national average. The VTC also works with the students' families and community to support their integration and combat stigma.

What feedback you can expect

The work at Bankura vocational training centre is regularly monitored, with detailed reviews taking place. These reviews include feedback from students, graduates and local employers, so you can be assured that the services you fund will be well-managed and effective.

We at The Leprosy Mission England and Wales will feed back to you twice a year, around March and August. We will send case studies, so you can meet the students directly benefitting from your support.

Thank you so much for considering supporting Bankura Vocational Training Centre, your support really will make an impact upon the lives of many young people

