

‘SAHAPADIKKU ORU VEEDU’ - A HOUSE FOR OUR FRIEND

As per the Vision and Mission and the values that the college upholds, the college wants to instil in the minds of the students and other stake holders the concern for the marginalized groups. There are thousands of people without proper houses to live in. Some of our students and staff members also belong to this category. Realising that the college can play a positive role to help at least some of them to have a house with the financial support of the students, staff and management, this practice was started in 2017.

Objectives of the Practice

- **To help, uplift and support our DiST family members** who do not have pukka house to lead a healthy and secure life.
- **To make our students and staff aware of the existence of a large number of people without the basic necessities** like food, clothing and shelter and thus, to create a social consciousness.
- **To make the students get involved in planning, organising, implementing and evaluating community projects.**
- **To construct at least one house per year** for the unfortunate members of DiST family by utilizing internal and external resources.
- **To inculcate the values of helping each other to help themselves, develop empathy and social commitment among the DiST students.**

The Context

The motto of the Vincentian Congregation is “To preach the Good News to the poor” which is derived from the Spirit and Charism of St. Vincent De Paul, our Patron Saint. Imbibing this spirit, DiST implemented this community project with the aim of joining the central and state governments goal of "Shelter to All". DiST believes that the ultimate goal of any higher education institution is to grow children into professionally enriched & socially committed citizens who can use their knowledge, talents, and skills to sustain themselves and others. The context of this practice is the thought that living in a poor-quality house or not owning a house may affect the safety, psychological development and self-esteem of the students which in turn may adversely affect the learning outcomes and professional achievements. It is in this context that this noble project *Sahapadikku Oru Veedu*, ‘a house

for our friend' was started with the cooperation of the staff, students and management of DiST.

The Practice

The project is designed and implemented in such a way as to provide a safe and secure house, every year, to at least one most deserving among the staff and students. An official committee is constituted to manage this house project which includes the principal and representation from the college management, teaching staff, non-teaching staff and students. This committee initiates actions every year from the identification of the neediest DiST family member(s), planning, mobilization of resources, organization of DiST students, local community people and skilled personnel to implement the project. The committee also undertakes an evaluation in different phases to check the progress until the house key is handed over to the selected household.

Identification of beneficiary is made from the requests received from the DiST family members for the purpose. The committee shortlists the requests and verifies the actual conditions by visiting these houses. Once the beneficiary is identified, the committee chalks out the plan of action, mobilisation of financial resources, labour and materials from the campus and the local community. As part of mobilising the financial resources for the project, students have brought down their personal and group expenses they usually make for celebrations and most importantly the festival of Kerala 'Onam'. DiST management, staff and locally identified financially well-off people also contribute to the fund. Apart from identifying the financial resources, the students and staff of DiST extend their physical labour to construct the house. They wholeheartedly lift the bricks, mix cement & sand and support other construction works to build the house for their friend. The feeling of smug and enjoyment of all who take part in these works is inexplorable. Students, directly and indirectly, learn many things while involved in this community project such as planning, organising, implementing, evaluating and moreover develop empathy towards the financially deprived people, concern about the poor, the value of help & support, etc. Similarly, there are many constraints and limitations for this project particularly amid Covid 19 when classes were online and parents of students were in financial crisis. The mobilisation and identification of funds and skilled workers for the construction were challenging tasks.