

An inclusion message outside the cubicle

A special employee training initiative

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At a workspace in Thane, Tata Consultancy Services has launched a cafe that is operated entirely by individuals with visual impairment



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The Blind Bake Cafe at TCS in Thane; and (right) two of the staff members. PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Opportunities Desk

This cafe sports a design element that is likely coincidental, but could not have found a better place. This element comes across as a symbol of the initiative the cafe represents.

A decorative wooden ceiling over the space where people queue up to transact with the personnel in the cafe has an interlacing of triangles and trapezoids. The interweaving is so complete that one needs to take a pause and a close look to notice the two separately. It illustrates the diversity and inclusion playing out right below it vis-a-vis the people on both sides of the counter.

It is a Blind Bake Cafe, born of a collaborative effort between Tata Consul-

tancy Services (TCS) and National Association for the Blind (NAB) India Centre for Blind Women & Disability Studies. Located in Thane, at the Olympus campus of TCS, the cafe is staffed entirely by personnel with visual impairment trained by NAB in bakery, café management and customer service, according to a press release.

The release notes that this initiative marks the first café operated by individuals with visual impairment within a corporate campus. The team comprises two chefs and one service staff, who are skilled in preparing freshly baked cakes, shakes, snacks beverages and desserts.

The first and original Blind Bake Cafe is located at NAB India Centre for

Blind Women & Disability Studies in Hauz Khas, New Delhi. It is based on the template of empowerment through jobs and livelihoods to those with visual impairment, and that very same template has been borrowed for the recently launched cafe at the TCS facility in Thane. The Blind Bake Café at Thane is envisioned as the first step in a larger strategic plan to establish similar ventures across various TCS campuses, the release adds.

Shalini Khanna Sodhi, director, NAB India - Centre for Blind Women and Disability Studies, says, "We are proud to bring Blind Bake Café to TCS. This partnership represents more than just a new dining option - it is a pathway to independence and empowerment for vi-



sually impaired individuals."

D.P. Nambiar, VP - Human Resources, Tata Consultancy Services, said, "The café is a truly inclusive place that has been designed keeping in mind the needs of the staff and how they will interact with TCS associates. Right from enabling Braille marked equipment, to providing specialised training in alternate ways of cooking without seeing, this café will set a new benchmark in inclu-

sion initiatives undertaken by India Inc."

The press release notes that all proceeds generated by the Blind Bake Café at the TCS facility will go directly to the staff with visual impairment and the Blind Bake Café's operations.

These funds will be reinvested in training more individuals with visual impairment, enabling them to gain certification and employment as professional chefs.

KFC India trains its speech and hearing-impaired employees in writing and comprehension skills

To mark International Day of Sign Languages (September 23), KFC India has launched a programme that promises to have its speech and hearing-impaired employees trained in writing and comprehension skills by 2026.

'Kshamata', as it is called, has been launched in partnership with Atypical Advantage, a livelihood platform for people with disabilities.

Much of workplace communication being written, this programme addresses challenges speech and hearing-impaired (SHI)

team members face due to limited exposure to languages other than Indian Sign Language (ISL).

The 50-hour virtual training will cover basic grammar, email writing and reading comprehension, which are crucial learning gaps faced by many speech and hearing-impaired employees, who received early education only in Indian Sign Language (ISL). While ISL remains their first language and a source of pride, workplace communication often also requires English.

By strengthening written comprehension, KFC India is helping SHI teams work more independently, communicate confidently, and grow in their careers, says a press release. In 2024, KFC India became the first Quick Service Restaurant (QSR) in the country to launch a Sign Language training programme for

100% of its employees, the release adds.

The release says that 2% of workforce at KFC will be from the SHI community in the coming year.

Other milestones under KFC Kshamata include 2X growth in the number of speech- and hearing-impaired team members, as well as special KFCs (restaurants operated by SHI employees) in the last five years. Close to 5% of SHI team members have progressed their careers within KFC and hold restaurant leadership positions currently

In 2024, KFC became the first QSR to roll out mandatory Sign Language training. Today, every new employee undergoes this training during induction, leading to 18K+ people being trained in ISL.

KFC has a dedicated Sign Language Coach who works closely with them.