

ASUTOSH COLLEGE
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POLICY DOCUMENT FOR SPARSHA

ABOUT SPARSHA:

Sparsha meaning ‘Touch’ is a truly unique endeavour. It was conceptualized in 2017, when the Asutosh College Retired Teachers’ Wellness and Well-being Committee was formed. This in itself was an outgrowth of an annual event, the Tea Club get-together which for decades had been held on the last working day of the year (24 December, but sometimes also 23 December). Professor Basanti Mukherjee of the department of Bengali had instituted this event in order to bring together current and former teachers – whether retired or serving in other institutions. A cultural programme, in which former teachers would sometimes participate, would be followed by a sit-down lunch, and that would bring the year to a close.

Functioning under the aegis of the Tea Club, *Sparsha* was conceived as a means of expanding our footprint. Many of our retired colleagues lived alone, their children settled in other cities, and it was then that a decision was taken to reach out to them throughout the year, with medical aid being made available to them from college as and when required.

This proved to be very helpful during the pandemic years that came soon after. The very different circumstances of the lockdown years brought home to us the realization that the human touch – *Sparsha* – was required even more in an age of technological advances and the resultant real-world isolation that became the fate of many people.

Post-lockdown, when the college resumed its normal functioning, the *Sparsha* committee took a conscious decision to expand the ambit of its activities to include students and current members of staff, teaching and non-teaching alike. An important decision was taken to connect with all faculty members on a day special to them – their birthday. Non-teaching members of staff have access to several medical and financial initiatives. Everyone has access to yoga sessions for de-stressing.

Our students, the future of society, have also been touched by *Sparsha*. They receive financial help when necessary and their academic achievements are recognised by the institution.

OBJECTIVES:

- 1) To maintain living links between different generations of teachers.
- 2) To strengthen the bonds between teachers and students.
- 3) To reach out to society by involving all our stakeholders- teachers, students, and non-teaching members.
- 4) To humanise the process of education in an age driven by technology.
- 5) To create institutional memory, something generally lacking in our country.

MODE OF FUNCTIONING:

A) Retired and former teachers:

- 1) Their contact numbers are meticulously updated to the extent possible. In this way a complete overview of our retired colleagues is there at our fingertips.
- 2) Prior to the pandemic, the invitations were printed and hand-couriered. Nowadays phone calls are the norm.
- 3) Every effort is made to erase the passage of time. Former teachers are introduced to the new teachers, especially those teaching in their own departments.
- 4) Current teachers keep in touch with their retired seniors, providing them with support for medical check-ups and arranging for home delivery of essential medicines if required.
- 5) Retired teachers are paid home visits and their memories recorded and archived. Many of them have given us write-ups about their days in the institution. All these are now being prepared for publication.

B) Current members of faculty:

- 1) All birthdays, of teachers and non-teaching members alike, are celebrated with a customised card, a pen, and flowers.
- 2) Yoga sessions are conducted, not just on 21st June, but also on other dates. Although primarily meant for students, teachers are also invited to join and de-stress.

C) Students:

- 1) Academic achievers have various awards to motivate them further.
- 2) The economically weak get financial support, for instance, free provision of books to continue their academic journey.
- 3) The Tea Club has initiated a programme to felicitate and motivate economically weaker students.

OUTCOMES:

- 1) A reaffirmation of the enduring bond between all stakeholders -past, present, and future.
- 2) The creation of institutional memory through the collection of the individual memories of our retired, but not forgotten, colleagues.
- 3) The reaffirmation of human values: a reminder to students, teachers, and non-teaching members of staff that a very human touch ties them indissolubly together even in this age of mechanisation and digitisation.

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