

## **Institute Distinctiveness**

### **Women Empowerment - A Propulsive Voice to change the world**

In simple words, Women empowerment is the process of empowering women. Women's empowerment refers to promoting women's sense of self-worth, their ability to determine their own choices, and their right to influence social change for themselves and others. According to E.O. Wilson, "The Education of Women is the best way to save the Environment". Recognizing its privileged position as a premier institute of higher learning, Vels Institute of Science, Technology, and Advanced Studies (VISTAS), makes consistent efforts to fulfill its social responsibility toward the downtrodden sections of society. The college authorities, staff, and students believe that "As women achieve power, the barriers will fall. As society sees what women can do, as women see what women can do, there will be more women out there doing things, and we'll all be better off for it". VISTAS has implemented & followed the basic women's empowerment principles to empower women in the marketplace, workplace, and community. VISTAS has implemented & followed the various strategies to empower women as follows,

1. **Women in Governance:** Women are actively involved in family and community work, and as a result, they are well aware of the real problems that ordinary people confront. This provides individuals with insight and perspective, which can help them contribute to long-term development. The presence of women in local governments encourages other women to pursue careers in a variety of fields, as well as dispelling prejudices about women's responsibilities in society and public space. To create high-level corporate leadership for gender equality in VISTAS, 35 women are excelling in their leadership positions in academic governance and 17 are in non-academic governance including Dr. Arthi K. Ganesh as Pro-Chancellor (Academic) & Dr. Preethaa Ganesh as Vice President - Vels Group of Institutions. Among the 35 leadership positions in academic governance, 4 are deans, 3 are directors, 2 are principals, 1 is vice-principal and the rest 23 are HODs. Out of 25 non-academic governances, 2 are directors, 6 are associate directors, and the rest 9 are assistant directors.
2. **Maternity Scheme in VMCH:** VISTAS has implemented & followed the "Champion equality through community initiatives and advocacy" through the maternity scheme in Vels Medical College and Hospital (VMCH) from January 2022 onwards. Under this scheme, each antenatal mother who confirms pregnancy is getting complete medical benefits free of cost throughout her maternity period that is from the day of

confirmation till her delivery and also after that up to her family planning. Once she registers in the VMCH maternity scheme, she is eligible to obtain complete maternity scheme benefits from VMCH which include free-of-cost investigations, medical treatment, health education about diet, exercise, mental health, delivery procedure, and family planning treatment. She is eligible to get monetary benefits (of Rs.20,000 - in 2022, Rs.15,000 - in 2023 & Rs.12,000 - in 2024) after her safe delivery. To date, more than 130 antenatal mothers have benefitted from various places in and around Chennai. All the medical expertise gives them the best medical care thereby to blossom their new life.

3. **V Fund to develop women entrepreneurs:** To implement supply chain, marketing practices, and enterprise development that empower women, VISTAS initiated and followed interest-free funding support to budding women entrepreneurs through an event “V fund” from 2021 onwards. Any woman with a viable business idea can apply for the ‘V Fund’. A jury of successful women entrepreneurs will shortlist applicants based on submitted business ideas. Shortlisted finalists will pitch their proposals in front of the jury at the VISTAS campus. Viable and best business ideas are selected by the Jury and given seed money of Rs. 1 lakh (now increased to Rs. 2 lakh) each for three winners every year. They should repay the amount after one year in 25 equal installments to VISTAS at Rs. 4000 per month (now 10 installments to VISTAS at Rs. 20000 per month). Selected winners will also get mentorship and support to enhance the business. To date, 12 budding women entrepreneurs have benefitted from this scheme. This event brought together women entrepreneurs to pitch their best business ideas on a common platform to meet investors and receive support, and advice to reach their business goals.
4. **Self-Help Bazaar to sell products:** In a bid to promote products and offer marketing avenues for women’s self-help groups (SHGs) in Tamilnadu, a Self-Help Bazaar, was initiated by VISTAS. Every year VISTAS organized a women self-help group workshop & university bazaar from 2019 onwards except 2021 due to COVID-19 to empower the women's self-help group. An exhibition of products by various women entrepreneurs was held at the VISTAS campus. There were approximately 40 stalls every year by women entrepreneurs with products ranging from clothes, readymade dresses, jute materials, millet readymade food powder packets, fancy jewels, terracotta items, flower pots, etc. A sum of around Rs.2.00 lakhs was generated through this exhibition by the women entrepreneurs every year.

5. **Women Achiever Awards during Women's Day celebrations:** To Measure and report publicly on progress to create gender equality, VISTAS has taken the initiative from 2019 by organizing the International Women's Day celebration on the VISTAS campus every year on 8<sup>th</sup> March. Usually, we call a well-known women achiever as the Chief Guest to motivate our young students and faculties. The chief guest will deliver an inspirational speech and distribute the Awards and certificates to meritorious eminent women personalities. To empower women further, from 2022 onwards women achievers from various fields have been conferred with the "Vels Women Achiever Award" by VISTAS.
6. **Women's Training programs:** To promote education, training, and professional development for women women's training programs are organized at VISTAS. Indigenous knowledge provides problem-solving strategies for local communities, especially the poor. Indigenous knowledge represents an important component of global knowledge on development issues. Indigenous knowledge is an underutilized resource in the development process. Indigenous knowledge is passed from generation to generation, usually by word of mouth and cultural rituals, and has been the basis for agriculture, food preparation and conservation, health care, education, and the wide range of other activities that sustain a society and its environment in many parts of the world. Hence, in VISTAS we organized and conducted a Training on upscaling of indigenous and traditional knowledge skill development on localized resources available on 24<sup>th</sup> & 25<sup>th</sup> November 2023 at Thennathur village in Tamilnadu. In this training program, nearly 100 village women were physically trained to make jute bags/jute folders/jute purses, artificial jewelry, aari work, set up vegetable nutrigarden, and preparation of health mix food products.