

St. Stephen's College and Lemon Tree Hotels awarded 'Equal Opportunity Awards 2014'

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New Delhi, 28 August, Thursday: In a first of its kind event, India's top educational institution – St. Stephen's College and Premium Hotel Chain - Lemon Tree Hotels, jointly received the prestigious 'Equal Opportunity Awards 2014'. The award event, held at India International Centre in the National Capital, was instituted by NIPMAN foundation to create awareness about equal economic and educational opportunities for disabled people in India.

Speaking at the event, Revd Dr Valson Thampu, Principal, St. Stephen's College said, "St. Stephen's College values being recognised through the Equal Opportunity Award as an affirmation of its core commitment to equality and human worth as well as its keenness to play a proactive role in human empowerment. The College believes that caring sensitivity to the differently abled should be the bottom line of our sense of fellow humanity."

St. Stephen's College has taken numerous initiatives over the last few years to provide equal opportunity for people with special needs. The ground floor of the college main building and its rest rooms are wheelchair accessible. All classes of orthopaedically challenged students are held in accessible areas. Even, the College library has specialized equipments like Jaws-enabled computers and Zoom-Ex, and a large collection of e-books for visually challenged students. For the past four years the college has been organizing weekend treks for visually challenged students to help them experience outdoor adventure.

Mrs. Priyanka Malhotra, Managing Trustee of Nipman Foundation emphasised on the urgent need to create awareness in the country on this social issue, "Census 2011 has revealed that over 21 million people in India are Persons with Disability (PWDs). This is equivalent to 2.1% of the population. However, In India, less than 3% of PWDs are gainfully employed compared with between one third and one half in the developed world. Nipman Foundation's vision is to make India a barrier free country with equal opportunity for all to flourish. To satisfy our vision we are recognizing and rewarding organizations that are helping and ensuring India is an Equal Opportunity society we are instituting the Nipman Foundation Equal Opportunity Awards."

Nipman Foundation works in the sphere of Health, Dignity and Happiness for under privileged children and persons with disabilities.

Lemon Tree Hotels was another proud recipient. Sumant Jaidka, Chief Operating Officer, Lemon Tree Hotels called this award as a major morale boost for the company to continue with the good work. He said, "We are delighted receiving this award as a recognition of Lemon Tree's endeavour to be an Equal Opportunity provider. I hope that many more organizations recognize our societal responsibility and each

of us contribute our bit to promote equal opportunity workplaces. This is true contribution to nation building.”

Lemon Tree Hotels has been hiring people with disabilities since 2007. Currently, 9 per cent of its employees (255 people) are Employees with Disabilities (EWDs). The group plans to increase this number to 350 people by 31st March 2015. Lemon Tree has developed a structured process to induct people with disabilities into all its hotels pan India, including remote places like Muhamma in Kerala.