

Youngsters to be trained in counselling distressed peers

Nimhans project helps youth empathise with their age-mates

Ramzaava Chhakchhuak

BANGALORE: Who can understand youngsters and their issues better than their peers and age-mates? The National Institute of Mental Health And Neuro Sciences (Nimhans) has launched a project, on a pilot basis, to train youth to help their peers and age-mates on such issues as mental health and safety.

The 'Integrated Mental Health Promotion Services' project has been undertaken in association with the Department of Youth Empowerment and Sports in Kolar and Chikdaballapur districts. It will be gradually launched in other districts.

Under the project, five youths aged 16-29 from each district will be trained as master trainers who will, in turn, impart training to 30-50 facilitators at the grassroots level. Here is how the trainers and facilitators will be of help.

'Lay counselling'

With the number of suicides and road accidents involving youngsters going up over the years, the youth facilitators will provide their peers and age-mates "lay counselling" on the dangers and consequences of such traumatic experiences.

"If anyone needs help, the facilitators will provide it from a network of organisations after due resource mapping. They will then refer him/her to the right people and organisa-

tions. The programme is essentially about 'youth for youth' and for youngsters to act as catalysts for change," said Dr G Gururaj, professor and head, department of epidemiology, Nimhans.

The professor heads the novel venture which will also have faculty from other departments.

The facilitators can use their newly developed skills to carry out advocacy and influence the government and government institutions on education and health, besides conducting awareness programmes in schools, colleges and other institutes.

In the run-up to the project, consultation workshops were held for experts, parents and youngsters.

"The biggest problem the youngsters expressed at such workshops is their inability to make their own decisions. When a decision plays an important role in saving or ruining a person, counselling and guidance are extremely important. The youngsters were also concerned about their inability to communicate with their parents," Dr Gururaj said. "It is such issues that the programme seeks to redress."

11 modules

Eleven modules — youth and safety, youth and health, relationship issues, youth and addictive behaviour, personality development, crisis management, academic, educational and emotional issues, support and counseling skills — are be-

ing finalised for the programme.

After the pilot study, the programme will be rolled out in 10 other districts and then in the rest of the State. This will help develop "a chain of youth volunteers in each district", said the professor.

Pradeep Banandur, associate professor at the Centre for Public Health, Nimhans, is currently coordinating with the stakeholders concerned in Chikdaballapur.

"Trainers and facilitators need to have the right level of aptitude and penchant to work with the youth. The criteria are being finalised," he said. The incentives for the trainer and the facilitators are also being decided.

DH News Service

