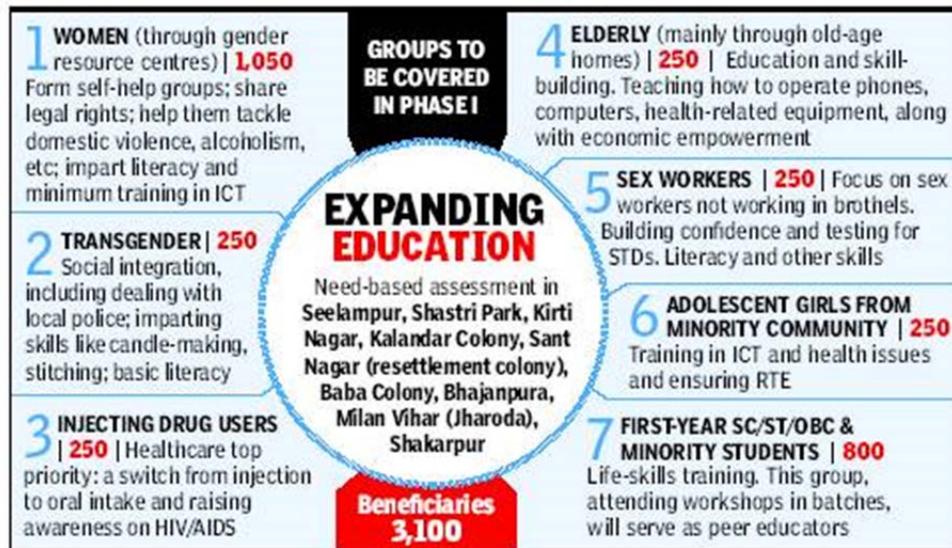


DU's research subjects to learn too

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New Delhi: Delhi University's Department of Adult and Continuing Education and Extension (DACEE) is taking learning to what have, till now, been only areas of research. Through a new programme — Vistaar — the department intends to deploy hundreds of college students, linking them with NGOs and its own researchers, to take education — basic literacy, awareness of rights and vocational skillbuilding — to Delhi's vulnerable groups.

In the first phase, they will work with over 3,000 women, senior citizens, transgenders, adolescent girls and sex-workers spread over some of the city's roughest areas.

The nature of intervention, says department head Rajesh , will depend on differing requirements of the communities. "Our research scholars are already working on actionbased research in all these areas and are in touch with the communities. Now, they are also gathering data for this project," he says. A student comparing education-levels among the elderly in Pakistan and India, will assess education standards and requirements for that segment; one researching the degrees of social integration of transgender populations of India and Bangladesh, will get to do it for that community. Based on what they find, the department hopes to actively remedy problems it only studied.

"Intervention will be on three fronts," explains Rajesh, "First is education. Literacy levels among many of these groups are very low. Second, we'll raise awareness on issues such as health, nutrition, sanitation, environment, communal harmony and human right. Finally, we'll focus on skillbuilding. As part of that we'll train communities in a variety of skills including computer use, tailoring and how to deal with the police."

The department isn't imprudent enough to take on this massive exercise on its own. Members will be teaming-up with a number of government and non-government organizations for both study and intervention. They've already started training college students. Interestingly, at least some of the 800 first-year SC/ST/OBC & minority-community students, who will be trained in life-skills and capacity-building, will also serve as peer-educators, the only set to be both beneficiary and deliverer, at least in part of the programme.

Rajesh says University Grants Commission includes "extension", that is active community work, as a "third dimension" in addition to teaching and research. However, 12th Plan onwards, it doesn't issue guidelines or allocate resources for it. "We decided to have our own guidelines," he says.