

# Students of Ambedkar Univ design services for homeless

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**NEWDELHI:** Vocational training for homeless women, storage facilities at night shelters and addressing gender-based violence—these were some of the “services” designed by students of Ambedkar University as part of their end-semester project on homeless people in shelters.

As a part of their “service design studio”, 13 postgraduate students of the varsity’s School of Design submitted their projects last week, after observing the lives of homeless people in 12 night shelters in the Walled City area. The students interacted with people living in these shelters several times to be able to design services that could make their lives better.

Studio director and assistant professor Venugopal Maddipati said the night shelters were presently designed to function as rooms for people to sleep in, and needed to be thought of in terms of services they could provide.

For instance, Bhawna Parmar, one of the students, has looked at incorporating vocational training for women in these shelters.

“The women I spoke to said it was difficult for them to leave their children behind in the shelters and travel long distances to acquire skills and earn. So my

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ATHIRA NAIR, student

project revolves around finding means for them to learn skills and work at these shelters,” Parmar said, adding she had approached a popular community-based initiative to conduct classes at these shelters.

“As the women were very keen on fashion designing, the service I planned involves training the women to stitch their own clothes, coming up with the brand name, setting prices, deciding how to sell and assigning roles among themselves,” she said.

Athira Nair, another student, looked at the problem of the lack of storage facilities in these shelters. “Homeless people have to carry around their possessions,” she said. “Hence I created a simple service wherein a person comes to the storage area, fills a form, is given a key and a receipt

and can go and store their belongings in a locker,” she said, adding that these storage facilities could be plugged into existing infrastructure.

While these two projects involved roping in members from outside the community, Rubina Singh decided to tackle gender-based violence (GBV) in these shelters. “Involving law enforcement officials was out of the question since the women refused any outside intervention. So I came up with the idea of a community-based collective for immediate prevention and redressal of GBV and providing after-care services to survivors of GBV,” she said.

The collective could also design a shelter-led helpline for women facing violence, offer training for bystander intervention to shelter residents, provide information and access to legal and medical services.

Visiting faculty Swati Janu, who has worked on the issue of homelessness, said people living in these shelters often do not know much about secondary healthcare. “So a student’s project revolves around setting up workers who would tell the homeless on the kind of healthcare they need to access. Since these are mostly daily-wage labourers, they also recommended setting up of aaramghars in mohalla clinics,” she said.