

BEACONS OF HOPE A SHOT OF HOPE

Helpline sees to it that visually challenged students don't suffer during the pandemic

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New Delhi:

It was during the peak of the second Covid-19 wave that Delhi University's social work department collaborated with Blind Relief Association to create a helpline for visually challenged students and others who were affected by the pandemic. From providing mental health counselling to connecting

them with doctors for their health concerns, the helpline team has been working relentlessly for the past few months.

Sanjoy Roy, associate professor of the department, said, "We provide them medical support. We cater to their health concerns, connect them to doctors, hospitals, etc. We also make sure that our students who are trained to cater to queries of the visually challenged people counsel them and provide them emotional support. We have also counselled them on what to do when they contract Covid."

The associate professor stated that their department had sent a proposal to the Delhi government earlier this month to assist them in reaching out to all disabled people in the city.

Roy added that they got many calls from visually challenged students who were distressed about their online studies and the problems they were facing during the lockdown.

Nikhil Jain, assistant professor of Dyal Singh College, stated that "there are a number of apps and software for visually challenged students. They can get scanned copies of books from libraries or from the government of India's Sugamya Pustakalaya as well." He, however, added that "since the pandemic has begun, it has become difficult for these students to go to the college campus and get material."

Equally Opportunity Cell OSD Anil Aneja stated that "they have empowered the colleges to reach out to students and provide all the support they need."

Ayushi Sharma, a BEd student at Durgabai Deshmukh College of Special Education of DU, is one of those who dialled the helpline for some assistance. She said that most of her worry was about accessing books and materials and that while her course required several practical, field and laboratory observations; those were not happening currently. The Jammu resident, however, said that "most of the time, I am provided help by the college. They provide us study material in audio format and assist us during classes."

HELPING HAND

Department of Social Work and Blind Relief Association helpline

- Started on April 28
- Visually challenged people can **call on 8826248084, 9811819812, 7834873724, 9811699032, 8800127366 and 8638993216** to get counselling and health assistance

Students also used the helpline to overcome challenges such as

- Lack of access to books in Braille
- Absence of physical interaction with teachers
- Internet fluctuation while studying from home

SOLUTION

- Assistance from teachers who can give elaborate descriptions of pictures and images in online classes and repeat their lectures
- Students can download and use screen-magnifying and screen-reading software on their phones and computers



STUDENTS CAN ALSO USE TOOLS Such as IT-based text to audio software

Eye-D Enables blind users to take pictures, read text on objects and describe images

JAWS A screen reader, developed for computer users with low vision. Helps in reading and writing documents and emails

NVDA Allows visually impaired people to access and interact with Windows operating system and many third-party applications

Google Talkback Helps visually-impaired users experience their devices by using spoken word, vibrations and other audible feedback

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