

# Vocational training for city beggars

HT Correspondent

■ letters@hindustantimes.com

**KOLKATA:** Now beggars in the state can dream of making an honourable living. In a one-of-its-kind initiative, Dankuni-based NGO People's Participation has taken up the issue of rehabilitating beggars by providing them vocational training.

People's Participation is presently conducting beggar-rehabilitation projects in Dakshineswar and Nimtala ghat. The Dakshineswar project, sanctioned on a Department for International Development (DFID) grant of ₹11,38,000 was initially a one-year project. DFID, an arm of the UK government, sanctions funds for development projects.

The Dakshineswar project was extended for another year

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A FORMER BEGGAR

and completed only last month, in the course of which People's Participation claims to have rehabilitated 26 beggars. Buoyed by the success, the NGO now wants to replicate the model throughout Bengal.

"There are approximately 600 beggars in Dakshineswar and Nimtala ghat. In Nimtala ghat, we sent 166 beggar children to school, but only 70 are pursuing studies at present. In Dakshineswar, we targeted 40 youth but could return 28 of them to the mainstream,"

Dipankar Mitra, secretary of People's Participation, said.

The 28 youths have undergone training in repairing electronic devices such as television sets, refrigerators and air conditioners at the Belgharia Television Training Institute, with which People's Participation has a tie-up.

"What is needed is a central act on vagrancy. There are 13 different acts of vagrancy followed in different states throughout the country. Beggars are arrested, put in homes and then released after they complete their sentences. But they soon return to their old ways. What we have tried is to provide them vocational training so that they are able to lead honourable lives," Mitra said.

Agrees 18-year-old Pradip Bhowmick, a resident of Dankuni. Bhowmick used to beg

in the Dakshineswar Kali temple premises and earn around ₹9,000 a month. But he shunned begging and took up a job as an electrician with a firm on a meagre salary of ₹2,500.

"Though what I earn now is quite less than what I used to, I am living with dignity and fulfilling other people's requirements. That is a different satisfaction altogether," Bhowmick smiles.

Mitra also urged the necessity for a head count of beggars so that proper facilities could be provided to them for their uplift. "Most beggars belong to the poorest sections of society, who migrate from the villages to earn a living. If facilities available for rural poor such as Antyodaya Anna Yojana are properly implemented, they would not feel the need to beg for a living," Mitra said.