

The Times of India

Title : TOI EXCLUSIVE - Stuck halfway: Their home's ready, but mental patients can't move in

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Location :

New Delhi:

Article Date : 06/02/2016

Five newly constructed halfway homes, a stopgap facility for people recovering from mental illnesses, are lying locked and unused for the past two years. With Delhi government's social welfare department yet to decide how to run these homes, potential patients and the contractors alike are getting the wrong end of the stick.

The facilities were sanctioned by the government in 2012 following a Delhi high court order that 18 such homes should be constructed in the capital. Of the five ready, three are in Rohini and one each in Dwarka and Narela. Built at a cost of Rs 63 crore, the homes are eight-storeyed buildings with residential and daycare facility for patients.

These halfway homes, so called because they are stopgap arrangements to ease people with mental illnesses back into the society, could have been a boon to patients. But for the moment, it is the contractors who are in pain. With the government not prepared to occupy the buildings, the contractors are forced to ensure the security and maintenance of the structures. Some have written to Delhi State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation (DSIIDC), the executing body for the projects, to take possession, but things have not moved forward.

“We completed construction work in 2014. Since then we have been writing to the government to take over the buildings,” said Satish Gupta, director of Satish Chand Rakesh Kumar Pvt Ltd. His firm constructed three homes, two in Rohini and one in Dwarka. “We have installed generator sets and lifts in these buildings. Their warranty periods will expire soon,” said Gupta.

DSIIDC pleads helplessness since it is the social welfare department's project. “They have to take possession. We have written several letters to the department and held meetings with officials, but we are yet to hear from them,” said a senior DSIIDC official.

When TOI visited the three homes in Rohini, it found the window panes broken and the barbed wires missing from the periphery fencing.

Social welfare department officials are working on finalising a policy for running these homes. “We have to provide 24x7 care to the patients,” said an official. “We have to provide medical care too because these people are recovering from an illness.” Because of the complexities involved, the department has considered several propositions such as a public-private-partnership model, an NGO or the government itself running these homes.

“We have sought the response of the Institute of Human Behaviour and Allied Sciences (IHBAS) and the Delhi health minister is aware of the matter,” said the official. IHBAS officials said they had submitted details to the government on management of the homes three months ago. A meeting to discuss ways to run these homes was held last week.

“As a mental health professional, it is saddening to see that the matters keep getting delayed because of the attitudinal stigma in quarters concerned towards mental health issues,” complained Dr Nimesh Desai, member secretary of the State Mental Health Authority.

As for the facilities being run by IHBAS or a similar organisation, mental health experts felt it would defeat the purpose of being halfway homes. “Worldwide such facilities are run on `social care model' and not on `medical or mental health model',“ said Dr Desai.





LONG WAIT: With the Delhi government's social welfare department yet to decide on how to run these homes, built at a cost of ₹63 crore, they have been lying unused for the past two years
