

Elderly take it easy in their comeback innings

Sharanya Gautam, TNN | Sep 19, 2011, 04.34AM IST

CHENNAI: From a leadership position in the Indian Administrative Services to being an accountant in a small firm may not seem like a wise career move. But Thulasidharan didn't mind the climb down. Two years after retirement, he was finding it difficult to keep himself occupied at home. "Since I didn't have any health issues or family responsibilities, I decided to start working again," says 62-year-old Thulasidharan. Whether it is to spend time more constructively or to ensure a small income, many elders in the city are opting for second careers.

"Many people who have led active professional lives are looking out for employment options and their numbers are on the rise," says A R Sreeja, general manager of Dignity Foundation, an NGO that works with senior citizens. The foundation has been running a placement cell for elders for the last six years. This year, they have placed nine candidates and collected almost 400 resumes.

Sreeja says that the need for companionship drives most of these people to look for new jobs. "They are not keen on a large salary. They want a low-stress work environment with flexible timings," she says. At the Dignity Foundation, it is usually retired engineers, teachers, accountants and construction consultants who send in their resumes. "It is not always easy to place them, but there are a few private firms that are eager to hire mature and experienced professionals," Sreeja adds.

Those like S Vinayagam, who retired as a senior officer in the Southern Railways in 2008, are looking for jobs that put their skills to use. "I am technically qualified and I didn't want to let my experience and knowledge in electrical engineering go waste," says Vinayagam, who worked on a project for the railways immediately after retirement.

Currently, he works with a private engineering firm as a consultant. Employers say that having older people in the workforce has its own benefits. Banks are one of the main employers and they hire senior citizens on a part-time basis as financial advisers.

The Porur branch of the State Bank of India employs around 22 retired professionals, the oldest one among them being 82 years old. "While selling insurance policies, people are more receptive to what an elderly person tells them. If an older person tells you to buy a policy, chances are that you will take his advice," says an official at the ING Vysya bank.

However, Vinayagam says that not everyone finds it easy to go back to work. "Many of my friends are not able to adjust to a new workspace. Often, they have to work under bosses who are younger to them and they are not agreeable," he says.