

CHENNAI, May 30, 2011

Here are some home truths

Few would expect that, huddled in the midst of old fashioned houses a little away from majestic retail showrooms in T. Nagar is what 17 elderly people call their island of tranquillity – an area of 1,400 sq feet with a house keeper. “This place is better because many children come here on Sundays for story telling sessions,” says resident S. Arokiaraj (72).

Mr. Arokiaraj, a former factory worker, has fewer complaints, since after the death of his son and wife, he has been shifting from one old age home to another. But, as the number of elderly people increases in the city, concern over minimum standards required for a home need to be taken seriously.

“There are around 150 old age homes in the city, but 30 to 40 people huddled in a two-room apartment cannot be called a home. The Social Welfare Department should conduct regulatory checks on the homes,” says D. Rajasekaran, Secretary, Tamil Nadu Senior Citizens Association. The helpline for the senior citizens - 1253 - receives about 20 calls a day. “Many elders from poor families leave the house voluntarily, and many of them leave because they are not given food,” says R. Muthukrishnan, counsellor HelpAge India. Around 400 such people have been rescued this year alone, he adds.

Another concern is the rising number of older people with dementia, Parkinson's disease and Alzheimer's. “Most of them when bedridden are perceived as burden by their family members,” says A. Jayashree, general manager, Mahatma's Rishialayam, which admits bedridden elders. Many old age homes avoid admitting people over 75 years or with certain illness.

Counselling is as important as care giving, says V. Jeyaraj, of Hepzibah Home for the Aged. “Limiting the residential intake and keeping track of their activities is important. Several times elders in homes are seen begging. To check this, I have provided residents in my home with uniforms.” More night shelters could help, as many live in congested houses and don't have a place to spend the night, he says.

The elderly, who go to paid homes, can afford it. Some elders are sent to homes when their family members go for trips abroad. R.P. Raman (88) says short-term stays at Prasanthi Old Age Welfare Home are common for him. “I miss my son when he is abroad. But, he says he cannot take care of me at that time,” he says.

While fancier homes with excellent facilities have come up, they remain affordable only by a handful. S. Srinivasan, who wanted some peace, quiet and good service, chose one such home in New Perungalathur. “I went to several homes across the country for a good facility for my aunt, who was in Delhi. But, in the end, she and I came here,” he says.

S. Premkumar, manager, Srimathi Sundaravalli Memorial Residency, says most elders in the home have children living abroad. “

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