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## Meet to tackle mental illness

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With a view to discussing ways to tackle the growing issue of homeless people and mental illness, Kannagi Packianathan, secretary of the Department for the Welfare of Differently Abled Persons, organised a meeting with various non-governmental organisations in Tamil Nadu, including Banyan, which works with homeless and the mentally ill, here on Friday.

Requests for more space for the inmates and to tackle the problem of limited manpower with respect to caretakers and doctors unanimously topped the list of problems read out. Fund crunches, social stigma towards the differently-abled and the rehabilitation of the inmates when they join their families were also issues the secretary promised to look into. A main point raised was the need to consolidate the facilities already available in order to get maximum benefits out of them.

Packianathan, while addressing the representative of the NGOs present, said that there was a shortage of facilities because the people involved did not know how to harness the available manpower.

“We can rope in organisations like the Lion’s Club and the Rotary Club or bring in college students who can talk multiple languages to help with communication gaps in the case of inmates from other states. It is a matter of using what we have,” she said.

Vandana Gopikumar, one of the co-founders of Banyan said that this was the first time such a meeting was called.

“There are a lot of problems that need to be addressed when it comes to the homeless and the mentally ill. We called for this meeting so that we could draw up a draft of common guidelines, which would help us organise the facilities we have in a better way,” she said.

Packianathan added that they would be conducting a series of meetings with experts in the field, including psychiatrists and physicians later on to finalise a set of common guidelines with regards to the admission, treatment and discharge policies of the NGOs.

“The procedures for follow ups and their their documentation is also something that needs to be looked into. There needs to be a stringent system in place,” she said.

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