



Tree of kindness

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October 10 is World Mental Health Day. It is also World Homelessness Day. What is alarming is that a quarter of the 78 million homeless people in India suffer from mental illness.

Chennai NGO The Banyan has been providing succour to homeless and mentally ill women for over two decades. To sensitise the civil society to the issue, The Banyan launched Kind People Happy City (KPHC) on October 2, in collaboration with the Chennai Mission and HCL Technologies.

"No amount of legislation, establishment of mental hospitals or proliferation of NGOs can stem the tide," say Vandana Gopikumar and Vaishnavi Jayakumar, founders of The Banyan. "What is needed is simply human kindness." KPHC is an attempt to inspire everyone to take care of the people on the streets. The initiative plans to actively recruit volunteers and inspire community participation to lead the street engagement programme and to help manage soup kitchens in various parts of the city. At the KPHC launch in Chennai, M. Mahadevan of Chennai Mission spoke of the need for stronger partnerships between civil society organisations and the government. N.K. Ranganath of Grundfos Pumps India and Srimathi Shivashankar of HCL Technologies, said CSR initiatives need to focus not only on philanthropic giving, but also on hands-on social engagement.

The programme will be reviewed quarterly and a KPHC index will be calculated, taking into account the number of homeless persons benefited, the number of volunteers recruited, soup kitchen statistics and the number of persons employed.

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