



World Mental Health Day Forum for the Rights of People Affected with Mental Illness 2nd Annual Meet of Clients and Caregivers

Topic: Social Security Access for Mental Health Affected People



The Banyan gathered together clients and care givers from all of its projects (500 people from across 6 districts) to celebrate World Mental Health Day. The purpose of the occasion was to allow them to share their experiences of mental illness with each other and with officials from the Government of Tamil Nadu. The focus was on the availability of state provided benefits for those affected by mental illness to which all are entitled under the Persons with Disability Act of 1995.

Proceedings of the meeting

The programme was commenced at 10.50 a.m. by Ms.Porkodi, Director, CMHP welcoming the gathering and the guests for the day. The gathering was informed about the purpose of the event and the issues that would be discussed, including the provision by the Government of Disability Card and a monthly Disability Allowance for persons with mental illness.

Last year on World Mental Health Day, The Banyan put forward a request to the Government for a room at the State Resource and Training Centre in K.K. Nagar to start a Day Care Centre for people with mental illness. The Banyan wholeheartedly thanks the Government of Tamil Nadu for the support extended in granting this request. So far 35 clients have been registered and 17 clients have found employment through the Day Care Centre. The Banyan also thanked the DDRO, Mr. Joseph Xavier, who conducted two disability cards camps in SRTC, where 15 clients received the cards.

The clients and care givers speak

Experience 1: Mr. Samiyappan Pillai told of his wife's struggle with mental illness. The couple have obtained a Disability ID Card, but the benefits are not accessible unless the client has a 40% disability, as which Mr. Samiyappan's wife has not been certified. Stigma also has a great effect on their lives as does the lack of access to care in the villages.

Experience 2: The mother of a boy with mental illness spoke of the rejection her son faced from his siblings and from society. As a result they live together, isolated from the rest of their village and unable to regularly travel to The Banyan Community Mental Health Project (CMHP) in Kovalam because they have not been able to obtain the State provided bus pass for those with disability. The Disability Allowance provided by The Banyan is of great assistance to them, but she believed that it should be provided by the Government.



Experience 3: Chidambaram's daughter suffers from mental illness. He took her for treatment at a Private Hospital after which she got married. Her illness surfaced and her husband returned her to her parents - Chidambaram stressed that those unaffected simply do not understand a disability that is not physical, leaving the care giver to face the challenging behaviour alone.

AMITY (Association of the Mentally Ill Through You) Pledge renewed

This encourages all to unite for the rights of the mentally ill and stresses that an inclusive society is a responsibility of us all. A petition was given to Ms. Geetha Jeevan, Honourable Social Welfare Minister.



The Government of Tamil Nadu representatives respond to the care givers



Commissioner for the Disabled, Mr. Vijay Rajkumar addressed the gathering. His emphasis was placed on the Government’s commitment to schemes for the disabled and to both physical and mental health care. He spoke of the budget increase for the disabled sector from 24 crores in the 5 year plan of 2005, to 107 crores in the upcoming budget. The main challenge, he believes is a lack of psychiatrists to issue the disability cards to the mentally ill but stressed his commitment to rectifying this problem and implementing other services for those affected by mental illness including approval for some special schools.

The Honourable Social Welfare Minister, Ms. Geetha Jeevan echoed Mr. Rajkumar’s words on special schools and stated her admiration and support for NGOs, like The Banyan working with mental health issues. She agreed to raise the care givers’ afore mentioned issues with the Honourable Chief Minister for his consideration. She said that the existing medical board would play a proactive role in appointing a psychiatrist and that the department was considering private collaboration to improve services and increase the distribution of medicines and disability identity cards.

The day concluded with some entertainment and prize giving and the feeling that definite progress had been made in the establishment of concrete social security improvements for those affected by mental illness.

