

Assistance sought for differently abled

Staff Reporter

CHENNAI: Life changed drastically for Lakshmanamma (85) fifteen years ago when her son, an electrician, was diagnosed with schizophrenia. Things became even more difficult when he became paralysed after an accident and the ailing lady had to attend on him all day round.

Last year, after a lot of struggle, she managed to get an identity card for him from the government certifying his disability, but the allowance that he was entitled to never reached him. He passed away a couple of months ago.

While this incident is yet another reminder of the condition of the mentally ill persons who exist in acute deprivation, it is a pointer to the need for ensuring regular financial assistance to help them improve their situation.

This concern was raised here on Tuesday at a programme organised to commemorate World Mental Health Day. As many as 500 persons with mental health problems from different centres of The Banyan and the All India Federation of Mental Illness (AFMI) participated in it.

Hailing from various districts of the State, including Tiruvarur, Kancheepuram, Coimbatore, Cuddalore, Pudukottai and Chennai, the persons with mental disabilities and their caregivers raised many issues that concerned their living and sustenance. They urged the State government to extend its support to them by providing the "much needed maintenance allowance."

40 lakh persons in Tamil Nadu

Studies have revealed the prevalence of major mental disorders among 40 lakh persons in Tamil Nadu alone, of whom 13 lakh live below the poverty line, said Gayathri Balagopal, research head, The Banyan. Livelihood options, she said, are severely limited by mental illness especially due to physical disabilities caused by the illness.

Though medical services, counselling and rehabilitation are being provided to many persons with mental health problems, recognition of their needs by the State and grant of regular monthly compensation will reduce the financial burden of a family member, said Porkodi P.L., director (advocacy), The Banyan.