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downtown PLUS

Padma Sadashivan and
Shoba Fernandes
Chowpatty

In this modern age when young people have no time for each other, and even couples have very little time for their spouses, it is no wonder that elderly people are left to their own devices to entertain themselves. Children too have the TV and computer games for their entertainment in which they are so immersed that grandma stories are no longer in demand. Old people in the twilight of their lives often are at a loose end and feel unwanted and unloved.

For such people the Day Care Centre for the elderly at Lower Parel, run by the Social Welfare Agency is a boon indeed. This organization which started as a small social welfare centre in the year 1950 dealing with the problems of individuals and families during the post-partition period, started getting involved in child welfare, helping downtrodden women

and even helping in adoption so that orphaned children found a loving home. While working with individuals and their families, specific needs, problems and strengths of the elderly were identified and it decided to focus on senior citizens coming from the lower strata of society.

In the year 1979, it introduced certain need based services through its Multi Service/Day Care Centre. These services, aimed at their training, self-development and growth are meant to enrich their life. And also with sensitizing the community about this special group's needs and problems. They include services like medical check-up/aid, health camps every Friday, conducted with assistance from Helpage; nutritional aid to chronically ill/single elderly; recreational programmes like games, picnics, films etc.; therapeutic services like yoga,

physiotherapy; information about problems related to old age; developing health related support groups for diabetes and orthopaedic; developing self-help groups among the elderly; developing legal aid cell; counselling on issues such as elder abuse, neglect etc; outreach services like old age pension, facilities for the elderly etc; family related activities like intergeneration dialogues, relations etc.

It has also developed a cell, which focuses on training of volunteers, para-professionals and professionals and equips them to work with the elderly. The training is specific to each group and has three modules built into them aimed at developing their skills, knowledge base and attitude.

It is also developing a network among organizations who are working in the area of the elderly with the main aim of initiating multiservice Centres

(like the one mentioned above), in different areas of Mumbai. The main purpose of networking being that each agency can pool each one's resources and share them.

The agency does not charge any membership fees from those who use its services. Only a nominal charge is taken towards health camps. For an agency that has devoted itself to the welfare of the elderly coming from the lower strata of society, getting funding for even minor activities like taking them out for a picnic, screening old films, is an ongoing struggle. However Alpa Desai, social worker says, "once people are convinced about the cause, individuals, corporates, Organisations are ready to fund them.

The Agency is all set to make its vision a reality, of transforming Mumbai into a city which cares for its elderly people."

HELP SAVE THE REAL G'OLD'