

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF OLDER PERSONS – OCTOBER – 1, 2021

The Department of Social Welfare Celebrated the International Day of Older Persons by organizing a Symposium for the Well-Being of Senior Citizens on October 1, 2021 at the Delhi Secretariat Auditorium.

The symposium was opened by address of Spl. Secretary/Director, Social Welfare – Dr. Rashmi Singh – who spoke on the need for active engagement of community based organizations, senior citizen groups and youth for making Delhi a role model of an elder friendly city.

The event was graced by the August presence of Hon'ble Minister, Social Welfare Sh. Rajendra Pal Gautam Ji who lit the inaugural lamp and felicitated the dignitaries. Hon'ble Minister, spoke of the rising need for sensitivity, care and inclusion of senior citizens for the benefit of the society at large and especially the young generations in today's time.

Prof. Archana Kaushik, Delhi School of Social Work, shared that average life expectancy has increase which is resulting in increase in the population of senior citizens. But they are becoming vulnerable section as majority of them are considered unproductive. WHO has also shared that Elder care is home bound and initiatives need to be taken to make senior citizens productive.

The government of Delhi also gives importance to senior citizens, especially in Covid times too. Initiatives were made to bind the family together. Many researches were also done on senior citizen in Covid time and it came into light that senior citizen are feeling secluded in the contemporary times as majority of them do not have digital literacy. So, 'digital literacy for all ages' is required.

Ms. Akhil Shivdas who has decades of experience in field of HIV, reproductive health, Advocacy and Research and **Ms. Juhi Jai**, Deputy Director of Center for Advocacy and Research had the view that community based organizations are very empowering for senior citizens as sometimes it is difficult to engage them. In such cases these organizations provide avenues to them to interact with different people. She also shared the examples of two organizations namely Mahila Pragati Manch and Satark Yuvak Sangathan, who can be of great help in providing better conditions for senior citizens. Furthermore, we may learn from their failures. The engagement of women and youth organization with senior citizens needs to be done on priority basis to improve the quality of life for senior citizens.

Ms. Jaya Reddy emphasized upon the issues of Sevikas (caretakers) of Home for Leprosy affected people. She also proposed that Department of Social Welfare should device some mechanism to develop Identity Card for those leprosy affected/diseased people whose biometric cannot be registered.

Ms. Rosy Bala, Head of HelpAge India, briefed about the Elderline-14567, a dedicated helpline for senior citizens. The Department of Social Welfare signed a tripartite agreement with National

Institute of Social Defense and HelpAge India for operationalizing this helpline. She shared that it was launched on 25.05.2021 and till now approximately 51,000 calls have been attended. The helpline provides information, guidance, emotional support and field intervention in the matters related to senior citizens. It was also brought into the notice of the participants that a national helpline for senior citizens is also going to be launched on 01.10.2021 by the Hon'ble Vice-president.

Mr. Rokhsar Ahmed Khan, Suptd. (RTE) shared his insight on the 'silent calls' received on Helpline. These silent calls are usually made by those senior citizens who face serious issues in their life and do not have the strength to share it with an unknown person over phone. He shared that the call officers of the Helpline should be trained to address these 'silent calls'. He further reiterated that the call closure is equally important. He emphasized that voluntary campaigns should be organized to aware the people about the helpline as well as about the issues faced by senior citizens and these campaigns should not be restricted for senior citizens only, rather should be open for people of all age groups.

Mr. Gurpreet Bindra, President, Vasant Vihar Welfare Association, shared his experience of engaging with senior citizens. He emphasized that there are three primary areas which needs to be focussed upon in the case of providing better life opportunities to senior citizens and these are-welfare activities, health care and security. He shared that there organization has made efforts to attach one volunteer with each senior citizen residing in the area of Vasant Vihar. These volunteers were also in contact with the children of senior citizens. They worked throughout the first and second wave of Covid and are also active in present times.

Their organization also set up a 24*7 Doctor's helpline during the covid times. They also made efforts to arrange for discounts on lab tests by liaising with concerned persons. They also updated the list of oxygen cylinders available in the area and provided them to needy people. They also approached SDM of the concerned district for setting up isolation centers and by their recurrent efforts, the same was established in their area. He also shared that their organization is ready even for third wave as their local gurudwara have 1,47,000 beds and have adequate ration and milk for children, if needed.

He further shared that they also made effort to provide psychological and psychiatric support to the senior citizens through a rented assistance helpline. On the front of ensuring security of senior citizens, they had communication with local police as a result of which a constable keep a constant vigil of the area and DCP visit the premise once every three months. Furthermore, the servant verification has also been made necessary, especially in case of families having senior citizens. In addition to this, their organization also organize a camp once every two to three months.

He further shared that during the Covid times, their recreation centers organized virtual meeting on every Saturday in evening to be in contact with each other. They also organized puppet show

for the entertainment of senior citizens. In addition to this, the talks with doctor and vaccination drive were also organized to ensure the wellbeing of senior citizens during the pandemic times. They also ensured that ambulance should be available every time in case of emergency.

Mr. Varmani, Member- Resident Welfare Association (Vasant Kunj), shared that physical needs of the senior citizens are getting full filled to a certain extent in contemporary times, but emotional and psychological needs of the elderly sometimes lays behind. He also shared that their organization made efforts to provide doctors and free medical aids to the people in distress during the covid times. They also organized vaccination camps. At the peak of covid they also took steps to arrange for cylinders for covid affected people. They also organized the follow-up camps in this regard.

Furthermore, he shared that senior citizens who are more than 90 years of age and are staying alone are the priority groups for their organization and they organize different activities to develop a sense of belongingness among them.

In addition to this, their organization also provided subsidized food to needy people.

Joint Director (SW) made concluding remarks stating that senior citizens are not unproductive; rather we need to develop schemes to engage them in productive activities. In the present scenario, where the number of senior citizens is increasing the country may face Japan like situation by 2050, where population of senior citizen may outnumber others. In such situation policy reformation is required to engage with these senior citizens in a more meaningful manner. She further stated that suggestions of the present speakers will be valuable in forming these policies. She also emphasized on reviewing the Old Age Pension according to the present inflation along with making efforts to increase the number of beneficiaries.