

**Lay Counselling Course:** A six month certificate course in Lay counseling offered by **The Banyan Centre** was inaugurated on 8th Aug, 2016.



The course is conducted by trained volunteers for distressed individuals to provide emotional support and counseling under the supervision of qualified Mental health Professionals like Psychiatrists, Social Workers, Psychologists and Psychiatric nurses.



The evening also saw the inaugural of the Nalam Centre. Mr. R. Nataraj MLA, Mylapore constituency was the Chief Guest for the occasion.

Looking back...

Lay counsellors by their presence in the community, can promote mental health significantly. This model to alleviate distress has been tried in many cities and is found to be very useful.

A vital justifying factor in promoting mental health is the presence of community support, family support and support from other informal systems within the community, but with urbanization, modernization and nuclearisation of families these supports are diminishing, so it is wise to set up systems by using the available community people, who can address this vacuum. In the current scenario the key issues that come to the forefront as community needs, are the increasing rate of suicides, increasing substance abuse, sexual disorders, disharmony in the families, increasing divorce rates, rising crimes, school attrition, stress and depression. These are some of the indicators which are used to measure distress and its adverse consequences in society.

Mental Health systems like psychiatric institutions, medical college psychiatric departments, and outreach services are unable to address the above needs for various reasons. Some of them are as follows:

1. Perceived Stigma discrimination in the society preventing help seeking
2. High cost of these services
3. Non-flexibility in service provision
4. Lack of Time
5. Distance

A conventional informal system like traditional healers, faith healers, relatives and family members are not only unavailable but also unpopular amongst the community.

Keeping this in mind, an informal care system as lay counsellors has been thought of as an alternative. The Primary Goal of the course is to enable grass root workforce of wellness mobilisers and community people to address the mental health needs in their community. These trained lay counsellors can provide support and guidance to people experiencing

emotional problems. Lay counselling provides an opportunity for an easy access to such services closer to where people live.

On 8 August 2016, SMC DRIVE in collaboration with The Banyan, initiated a 24 weeks certificate course in Lay Counselling, (both theory and practical classes). The sessions were held on Mondays and Thursdays from 5pm to 7pm for 4 hours a week. It was provided at a nominal cost to meet the incidental charges (Rs.2000/ per candidate). 49 members with an average age of 36 years and above were enrolled. Even though the requirement was only 15 years of formal education, in this group, everyone, except one, is a graduate, some are post-graduates and PhDs also.. They are from diverse backgrounds and have also expressed their desire to do voluntary services at our centres. 30 members have been regular in attending the course.

The course is headed and conducted by Dr.KV.Kishore Kumar, Director, The Banyan.He is also one of the leading psychiatrists of Chennai.

A structured training programme was developed to build up the capacities of the candidates who were trained to provide emotional support and counselling to people in distress, through a series of guest lectures, case studies, group sessions, mock sessions and through practical exposure. Training covered various topics such as Basics of Counselling, Mental health issues, Mental disorders, Coping strategies, social supports, approaches to promote mental health and wellbeing, working with individuals and families, and on counselling techniques for people with chronic physical and mental health problems.

Candidates are trained in such a way that they can independently provide emotional support and counselling to people who are in need. Most of the trained candidates have given good feedback about the course and have expressed their interest to work in the communities and provide counselling services to distressed individuals. They have also expressed their desire to do voluntary work.

The main goal of the programme is training lay people to promote mental health by addressing mental health problems in their community.

30 candidates have successfully completed their course and will be receiving their certificates on 27, March 2017.

**Feedback given by a candidate**

*Greetings,*

*It was a wonderful learning experience. The doctor shared life examples, Which helped me to see its practicality...Through this course I was able to develop my professional contacts...Every class was relevant....*

*I learnt that learning has no age bar, as my classmates were senior persons. I joined this course to do counselling as a lay person. But the knowledge imparted was highly authentic and professional, equal to professional counselling. This course was very unique...with this knowledge I will be able to handle cases and provide the client with quality intervention..*

*Thanks & Regards*

*Bridgit*