

HelpYourNGO VISIT REPORT

NGO Name: Dignity Foundation

Visit 1

Date of visit : Wednesday, 6th November 2019

Visit conducted by : Ms Winnie Dholakia and Mr Nishant Parekh

Location : Byculla, Mumbai

Visit 2

Date of visit : Friday, 15th November 2019

Visit conducted by : Ms Winnie Dholakia and Ms Suvarna Arvind

Location : Worli, Mumbai

About the Program:

Dignity Foundation runs Loneliness Mitigation Centers in Mumbai and Pune for underprivileged senior citizens. These Centers are euphemistically referred to as "Chai Masti Centers". They provide a platform to senior citizens to interact socially, build a support network, boost their self-esteem, and lead an active life. Importantly, being modelled on the Buddhist concept of 'Kalyana Mitrata' (spiritual friendship), the Centers provide crucial camaraderie and companionship to the elders thereby encouraging them to lead a life with dignity.

About our Visit:

The HelpYourNGO (HYNGO) team visited Dignity Foundation's Loneliness Mitigation Centers at Byculla and Worli and had the privilege to interact with the Sr. Program Manager (Mr. Rahul Ursekar), Center in-charge (Mr. Dilip Chauhan), and most importantly the beneficiaries.



Center:

Dignity Foundation has been running the Loneliness Mitigation program at the Byculla Center since 2016 and at Worli since October 2018. The Centers are housed in community halls that are part of Slum Rehabilitation Authority (SRA) project buildings. Both Centers are currently supported by the Rotary Club.

Beneficiaries:

The beneficiaries are the senior citizens residing in the buildings of the SRA projects, mostly living in joint families. They fall in the 50-80 years age group and belong to low income families. The beneficiaries at the Worli Center are economically more disadvantaged than those at the Byculla Center.

Days:

Both Centers run for 5 days a week – from Tuesday to Saturday.



Pic: Attendance register maintained at the Worli center

Timings:

2 hours per day

Worli: 11:00 am to 1:00 pm Byculla: 3:00 pm to 5:00 pm

Enrolments:

Worli: 80 senior citizens have enrolled. 45-50 elderly regularly attend the scheduled classes/activities.

Byculla: 100 senior citizens have enrolled. 60-65 members regularly attend classes.



Activities:

Dignity Foundation plans monthly activities with the beneficiaries keeping in mind their cultural background (e.g. Bhagavad Gita recital). These include Yoga, dance forms like Zumba, and sessions on positivity, health and nutrition, de-addiction, etc. These activities are conducted by professionals who offer a subsidized fee to the NGO for their services.

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Pic: Monthly activity sheet of Byculla Center

We witnessed the Zumba class at the Byculla center and the yoga session at the Worli center.

It was overwhelming to see the disadvantaged senior citizens dance to the tunes of peppy English music with such enthusiasm and joy. The oldest amongst the group (over 75 years of age) who couldn't stand and dance were seated comfortably but passionately moving their limbs, following the teacher's instructions.





Pic: Enjoying Zumba



Observing the yoga session was soothing even for our team. The senior citizens were deeply engrossed in controlled breathing exercises and meditation. As they meditated, the vibrations of 'OM' filled the room with positive energy. They all looked vigorous and vibrant after the session.





Pic: Engrossed in Yoga

Beneficiary Feedback:

The beneficiaries at both Centers are extremely pleased with Dignity Foundation's initiatives. They appreciate that nutritional drinks are provided to them every day.

The Loneliness Mitigation Centers offer the disadvantaged elderly a means to escape from their routine problems by indulging in planned activities. They also provide them something to look forward to everyday. Even after the sessions have concluded, most senior citizens form groups and 'chill' at the Centers. ©





Pic: Relaxing at the Worli Center

Challenges:

- Beneficiary feedback: The NGO organizes free medical camps (general health and eye checkup) for the senior citizens in association with other organizations. However, there is no followup mechanism to ensure that the prescribed medicines are being consumed since most of them face health related issues.
- Only women are attending the activities at the Worli Center, and efforts need to be taken to
 enroll men as well especially because men in the community have shown interest in enrolling
 in the program.