Putting them in touch with the real world

Borivli psychiatrist runs rehabilitation centre for destitute schizophrenics; after treatment, reunites them with family

Schizophrenics have hallucinations, hear voices and even laugh and talk to themselves. They are not mad, but sick. It would help to sympathise with them. People assume they are beggars and hand them money, which is of no use to them, as they don’t know how to use it.

BHARAT WATVANI, psychiatrist who runs the Shraddha rehabilitation centre

When I went to Orissa to reunite a boy who had been missing for 16 years, the family treated me like a God. It was a magnificent feeling to make somebody happy.

Sijoy Philip, volunteer at Shraddha

Those not accepted by their families are rehabilitated in the ashram and are given the opportunity to undertake farming activities or other small jobs, said Watvani. The male inmates cultivate rice and vegetables in the farm while the women help in the kitchen.

Psychiatrists trained to handle such patients communicate with them and treat them. Their motivation, Watvani said, was in watching patients reunited with their family.

“It is a feeling of contentment when we see these patients reunited with their families,” said Bijoy Philip, a volunteer at Shraddha. “When I went to Orissa to reunite a boy who had been missing since 16 years, the family treated me like God. It was a magnificent feeling to make somebody happy.”

Mugha Sood, Mumbai, May 30

Psychiatrist Bharat Watvani (left) with one of his patients, Pranod, at his rehabilitation centre Shraddha near Karjat.

A COLLEGE girl from Kolkata boarded a train for Mumbai three months ago to marry actor Shahid Kapoor. No, she was not another starstruck Bollywood fan, but a 25-year-old suffering from schizophrenia, who believed she was in love with the actor.

After spending two weeks in Mumbai — lost, confused, without food, spare clothes or a place to go to — she was mistaken for a beggar. Fortunately for her, the railway police brought her to Dr Bharat Watvani, a psychiatrist.

Watvani, who pretended to be Shahid’s father convinced the girl from Kolkata to stay at his Borivli clinic. After months of treatment, the girl was reunited with her family a week ago.

Nine kilometres from Karjat, on the outskirts of Mumbai, Watvani and his wife treat and look after 88 other destitute patients of schizophrenia found in Mumbai and nearby areas at their rehabilitation centre Shraddha, established in 2008.

“Such patients get hallucinations, hear voices and even laugh and talk to themselves,” said Watvani. “These people are not mad but sick. So, instead of disregarding them as merely ‘mad’, it would help to sympathise with them. People even assume they are beggars and hand them money, which is of no use to them, as they don’t know how to use it.”

Often, the railway police spot such destitute patients and bring them to us by offering them food.

Following treatment, when they are able to tell where they are from we try to trace their address and escort them to their family. The centre has treated over 1,000 patients so far and the reunion rate is 95 per cent, said Watvani.

In touch with reality again

Nine km from Karjat, Dr Bharat Watvani has constructed a rehabilitation centre for those suffering from schizophrenia. Over the last two years, he has been instrumental in treating and rehabilitating more than 1,000 patients, after they were found on the streets of Mumbai.