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Night shelters slowly gaining occupants

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G. Angammal (65) does not have to worry about a safe place to retire during nights anymore. Many homeless persons like her have found accommodation in night shelters run by the Chennai Corporation.

“I came to Chennai from Kancheepuram a year ago as my sons deserted me. I wandered on streets and started sleeping on pavements of Thattankulam. I spend my day in the neighbouring park and temples. I get some money through begging and people in the area sometimes buy me food,” she said.

She visited the night shelter at Thattankulam along with Mariam (70) who suffered similar plight. “I used to be worried about dogs and had to rush for cover when it rained. I am now assured of a place to sleep and a meal,” said Mariam.

The shelter in Thattankulam was one of the first night shelters to be opened about six months ago. It is now home to 40

persons.

Many of the facilities are functioning in the unused buildings and schools. The civic body is running six shelters in localities, including Kodungaiyur, Koyambedu and Vallal Seethakadi Nagar.

The recently opened facility at Cox Colony, Chintadripet, is used by only a few persons. V. Ethiraj (72), who uses the facility, said “I was an iron merchant. I could not afford to pay rent then. I took to beggary few years ago. I would stay here during the day time if the shelter is left open.”

Many of those who use the night shelters are aged and destitute. They want the civic body to conduct medical camps and provide old age pension as they do not have any other source of income.

At Kannapar Thidal, nearly 100 families shifted from streets near Ripon Building and Periamet have been living without basic amenities. T. Selvam, a resident said “We were shifted here in 2002 by Corporation. But, we still do not have toilet and

electricity facilities. Many families continue to live here as their daily earning is only Rs.50.

Chennai Corporation Commissioner D. Karthikeyan said that nearly 11,000 homeless people were mapped in a survey based on which the night shelters were identified.

The shelters have bathing and locker facilities. “We are planning to provide recreation facilities too. A meeting would be convened with NGOs for sustained maintenance of the shelters,” he said. The civic body is set to open six more shelters soon.

Mayor M. Subramanian said the visitors to the shelters are being provided with identity cards. “We will take measures to admit aged destitute people in old age homes if they are interested. A camp would also be organised to get them old age pension,” he said.

The Corporation is also running a night shelter for street children in Kodungaiyur, he added.

Civic body set to open six more shelters soon