

Children in Children's Homes

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There are about 50 Children's homes in Mumbai catering to needs of a variety of about 50,000 children who are either in these homes or on the streets.

In children's home there are four different types of children viz.

1. Juvenile delinquents (Conduct disorder)
2. Run-away children (Street children)
3. Homeless children (Orphans)
4. Children of poor parents

Juvenile delinquents (Conduct disorder)

These are the children who repeatedly indulge in antisocial activities like stealing, shop lifting, chain snatching, pick-pocketing etc. On evaluation they usually receive diagnosis of conduct disorder. There is also a very high prevalence of substance use disorder in them. They are committed to children's home by the court for indulging in antisocial activities for a period of few months to couple of years or till they are major, i.e. 18 years old. In most of the cases their parents know that they are in a particular children's home and they come to meet them from time to time. Once they have served the court sentence they go back to their family.

Run-away children (Street children)

These are the children who prefer to stay of street. They have run away from their home and live a self-willed, free life as they want. They usually do not indulge in antisocial activities but bag or pick-up things from the road or dustbins. Some of them do some small job to earn some livelihood. They live in presence, for the day, not worried about tomorrow.

Homeless children (Orphans)

These are orphans whose parents have either died or they have been abandoned when they were very young. So they do not have any parents or guardians. They need parents; they need someone who would adopt them; they need a home like other children but unfortunately many times they end up in children's home where they have to stay with other court committed children for antisocial acts.

Children of poor parents

These are the most unfortunate children in a way as they have their parents or at least one of the parents and they have a home but since the parents are very poor and are unable to take care of all the children they send some of their children (usually boys) to children's home. Parents come to meet them from time to time and bring them some food, clothes, books etc.

In order to cater to the different needs of the variety of children we need different types of children's home. Broadly speaking we have three different models of children's homes.

- A) Children's home run by government primarily of juvenile offenders.
- B) Children's home run by some good citizens who adopt these children and look after them as their parents or guardians.
- C) Children's home by non-government organizations where street children can walk in and walk out as and when they want.

A classical government run children's home headed by a superintendent. Conventionally juvenile offenders are sentenced to these children's home by a court as a punishment for the crimes committed by them. They take care of basic needs (food, clothing, shelter) of these children. Here children attend the school in the morning and some vocational training program during afternoon. They also get to participate in various extracurricular activities from time to time and once or twice a year outings or picnic provided by some volunteers from non-government organizations. The structured environment of these homes inculcates good habits and discipline and keeps them away from the society which is mutually beneficial. After they complete 18 they can go back to their family or can get a job placement or they are sent to a hostel for youth.

On the other hand these children have to follow a strict discipline and have minimum freedom. Most of the time they are confined to institute though they can call or meet their parents, once in while with prior permission. If they break a rule or do not obey certain command they may receive severe punishment. They also have to participate in the work of the home which includes cooking, cleaning etc. Some of these children sometimes try to run away from the home. Though, these homes are good for juvenile offenders, they are not ideal for other types of children. The run-away street children feel much suffocated in these homes and try to escape as and when possible. Similarly, orphans and children of poor parents have to stay here with juvenile offenders and have to follow strict rules and regulations of the institute.

Children's home run by good citizens are ideal for orphans and children of poor parents. Here they get the love and care of the parents and the reasonable degree of freedom. They can actually stay and participate in variety of activities in the community rather than being restricted to the four walls of the home. Unfortunately there are very few homes of this model. The shortcomings of these homes may be limited financial resources and minimum supervision by external independent agency.

Children's home run by some of the nongovernment organizations provide the required facility for run-away children who prefer to stay on the streets. These children can walk in and walk out from these children's home as and when they want. As mentioned earlier, these children use the facilities of these homes usually when they are sick. They visit these homes stay there for a while and return to street once they are fine. There are minimum rules and regulations for the street children and lots of freedom and weight given to their preference. Whenever they want they are also provided facility for vocational training.

The shortcoming of this model is that these homes have a floating population and high rate of dropout from rehabilitation and vocational training program. Children attending these homes continue to stay on the street and continue to bag or do some odd jobs and indulge in use of illicit drugs.

Thus to conclude, it may be a good idea to provide different types of children's home for different types of children. All may not be a good fit in one type of facility.