

GIVING THEM A NEW LEASE OF LIFE

Marydas John

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to listen carefully and sympathetically. But to whom will one open up ones problem-filled heart? Who is there to listen to others' pathetic predicaments? Yes, there is one answer in the form of Thrani, a project of Foundation for Integrated Research in Mental Health (FIRM) - an NGO located in the heart of Thiruvananthapuram in Kerala.

Here anyone with a troubled mind can approach without any hesitation. It was three years ago that Thrani started functioning.

Its activities range from counseling and psychotherapy to community intervention programmes and training of volunteers as counselors. Its round-the-clock telephone counseling is a landmark service in the field of crisis management especially when the

State is in the grip of examination fever. This year, when the SSLC results were announced, there had been a deluge of distress calls from school students and parents to Thrani. Some of the students expressed suicidal intent while

others harboured suicidal thoughts. The most shocking revelation for the counselors at the Centre was that a group of girl students from a school in Thiruvananthapuram was actively considering mass suicide, as their results were withheld with no apparent reasons.

What is most distressing is that it is not only students who have failed in the examination who are troubled in their minds. According to Dr. Elizabeth, on the day the SSLC results were out, sixty students (a majority of them having distinction or first class) said they called up as they had failed to meet the expectations of their parents and teachers. Within three days of the declaration of the results, Thrani received above 3000 phone calls.

Counseling through telephones may not be the end in itself in most cases. It could only be a beginning in many cases. Or it could at best prevent the perturbed soul from taking any extreme step for the moment. "Often such phone counseling has to be followed up with face-to-face meetings at the Centre. In many cases we have to take help from other agencies like police and hospitals to tackle the victims," says T.S. Arunkumar

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IT is past midnight. The phone starts ringing, breaking the silence all around. "Is it Thrani?" The sound from the other end seemed quivering. "Yes, tell me what can I do for you." But, even before the answer is completed, the caller cuts into. "Will you somehow save me? I have decided to end my life. I have failed in the exam."

This is just one of the several hundred calls that kept the phone at the Thrani Crisis Control Centre engaged in the wake of the announcement of the results of SSLC exam in Kerala in May this year. According to Dr. Elizabeth, who heads the counseling team at the centre, most of the callers were highly distressed as they believed that they did not rise up to the high expectations of their parents and others.

Most of the problems that squeeze the distressed minds can be solved if the victims get an opportunity to open up their hearts to someone who is willing

