

## Puppet show, music give message - 'say no to drugs'

A colourful puppet show, narration of real life experiences of the fight against drug addiction and some soulful music were part of events here Monday on the eve of the International Day Against Drug Abuse.

'Celebrating the spirit of recovery', as the event was called, invited recovering drug abusers from across the society to participate and share their experiences with the audience.

Organised by the ministry of social justice and empowerment and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the event was one of the many lined up to mark the International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking June 26.

Tushar Sampad, one of the many recovering from drug abuse and now helping others recover as well, stood up to relate his experience.

'I have been very lucky that I had a strong support system in the form of my parents who were confident that I will overcome this challenge. It was difficult initially, and to top it all people look at you differently because of the social stigma attached.

'But today, nothing makes me more happy than reaching home and meeting the smiling faces of my parents. No one takes any decisions in my home without consulting me. That's the confidence they have in me,' Sampad related soberly to the packed auditorium.

If Sampad's story touched one, so did the puppet show put up by children of the Salam Balak Trust, an NGO for street children, under the guidance of noted puppeteer, Dadi Pudumjee.

Using different shoes for different characters, the play revolved around how innocent children get trapped in the vicious cycle of drug abuse and trafficking. Inviting peals of laughter, the play managed to drive home the message perfectly.

Meira Kumar, minister of social justice and empowerment and the chief guest, said that the day was a celebration of the human spirit. 'Recovery is a process, it can't happen in a day. But the challenge is not to give up just like Tushar Sampad.

'Every year there is a theme to mark this day. This year it is 'do drugs control your life?' And the answer is 'my life, my community, no place for drugs',' Kumar said.

She added that there should be a conscious effort to prevent promotion of lifestyle drugs. 'The task is daunting but no task is impossible. We at the ministry will be conducting a national survey on drug abuse in India followed by a national household survey.

'Also, we have started a national level awareness campaign for the young people on the consequences of drug abuse. With the UNODC we are spreading awareness on drug abuse in schools as well,' Kumar added.

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