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'Civil society must chip in to extend helping hand to street, wayward children'

— By OUR STAFF REPORTER | Jul 30, 2017 12:22 am

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BHOPAL : Institutionalisation is not the only way to deal with juvenile delinquents and wayward children. The society has to join hands with the government for bringing these children back into the mainstream and a multi-disciplinary approach is needed to tackle their problems.

This was stated by Supreme Court Justice Mandan B Lokur in his keynote address at the plenary session of the State Conference on Juvenile Justice and Capacity Building at State Judicial Academy here on Saturday.

Speaking in the presence of the CM Shivraj Singh, chief justice of Jabalpur HC Justice Hemant Gupta and other dignitaries, he said the Juvenile Homes and other childcare institutions were grappling with infrastructure, manpower and funding issues.

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Justice Lokur said the number of abandoned children was so large that the governments simply could not provide institutional care to all of them. "We need to develop other mechanisms including foster care and sponsorship. And the care should not only be limited to providing them a roof over their heads and food to eat. Proper nutrition, education, medical care and counselling are equally important," he said.

Justice Lokur said civil society should also engage and involve in this cause. "If you will visit a childcare home on a festival and just talk to the children, you will be doing a great service to them," he said.

He also emphasised ensuring that the punishment handed down to juvenile offenders was not deterrent but 'restorative'. He said the police being the first-line responders to calls of distress by children, needed to be sensitised. He also emphasised establishing vulnerable witness courts.

If we cannot treat the disease, let us begin with the symptoms: CJ

Addressing the conference, Justice Hemant Gupta said poverty and illiteracy were the root of juvenile delinquency and children being abandoned by their parents or leaving their home. But, he said, these were diseases that could not be cured in the short-term. "So, let us begin with treating the symptoms," he said.

Justice Gupta said 42 per cent of the state's population was in the 0-18 years age-group. Given that 35 per cent of the state's population was below BPL level, it could be presumed that the number of children hailing from poor families must be running into crores. "It is pathetic that we are not able to provide them opportunities to grow and blossom," he said.

Child traffickers need to be dealt with an iron hand

CM Shivraj Singh Chouhan said his government would do everything possible to curb with a heavy hand the gangs of child traffickers who forced children into beggary, prostitution and addiction. He also referred to the various schemes launched by the government for ensuring that the children get enrolled in schools and did not drop out.

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