

Fifteen Singapore halfway house administrators will visit the US for answers. CRISPINA ROBERT speaks to one of them, the man who will oversee Singapore's first home for Indian addicts

Heads of halfway houses head for US to learn



CHASING crooks and putting them in jail was what he did as a police officer.

Mr N Lakshmanan did that for nearly 13 years.

But he now has a new job — to reform drug addicts, but doing it outside the confines of an institution.

Mr Lakshmanan, 39, who left the police force four years ago for another job

Mr N Lakshmanan: To oversee first halfway house for Indian addicts. offer, will be overseeing the running of the first ever halfway house for Indian addicts at the beginning of next year.

Mr Lakshmanan is looking for tips when he visits the Delancey Street Foundation, one of the most successful rehabilitation centre in the US.

"I've read about them (Delancey Street Foundation) and am very curious to find out how they can run a place with such a high success rate.

"I'm fascinated with their programme just going by what I've read," he said.

The Delancey Street Foundation in the US is a world renowned programme for hardcore ex-convicts and drug addicts. (See below.)

This trip will be especially useful for Mr Lakshmanan.

He and his committee members are now looking into programmes to suit Indian addicts, who form about 16 per cent of drug population.

He is however looking for that X-factor formula that will make it a success.

"I understand that most of the halfway houses have about 60 per cent success rate.

"So when you hear about the 90 per cent success rate of Delancey Street, you naturally want to know how they do it."

Right now Mr Lakshmanan will go with an open mind but said it was important to keep the local attitudes and needs in mind.

This is why for his halfway house, called the Ashram, meditation and yoga lessons are being considered.

"Some people believe hard core criminals and addicts remain in that behaviour forever. I think with the right approach, the worst can get better," he said.

DELANCEY STREET FOUNDATION

■ WHAT IS IT?

It is a centre, set up 25 years ago and run by ex-cons and ex-addicts. It has about 1,000 residents in five centres in the US.

■ WHO IS IT FOR?

For men and women aged 18 to 68. The average resident is a hard-core drug addict for ten years, been to prison at least four times and many are gang members.

■ WHAT HAPPENS THERE?

It is voluntary and all residents have to stay for at least 2 years. During that time they study and learn some skill.

■ THE PHILOSOPHY?

The centre is run like an extended family rather than a programme. Older residents help younger ones and everybody works.

■ SUCCESSFUL?

Very. When they get out, 90 per cent stay crime-free.