

WINDOWS

WOMEN IN THE NEWS

HER DOOR IS ALWAYS OPEN

SHE was stunned when her four-year-old son was diagnosed as being autistic. A dazed **MERRY BARUA** walked out of the doctor's into a library to read about autism. Though it was one of the best in town, the library had only a few old books which cited parenting and lack of love as the reasons for autism. Sending her son to school didn't help him either.

In desperation, Merry pulled him out of the school and taught him at home for one-and-a-half years. The child improved dramatically. With guidance from the Option Institute, USA, and books, Merry



PHOTOGRAPH: IRENE SINGH

realised that wrong handling is the main reason why autistic children turn violent.

Later, approached by other parents, she started Open Door, a school for autistic children. It has six teachers and 38 children, of whom 12 come in daily.

Open Door draws letters and midnight calls from places like Bijnor and Saharanpur, from parents who need counsel. Autistic children are thought to lack affection. Not so, Merry avers. It is because, she says, "They don't know how to show affection."

As Suthirto, one of their students, pointed out in a letter to the President of India, "People don't understand what autism is." Well, Suthirto has understood our shortcomings better than we comprehend his.

— BENITA SEN