



The People With Disability Act in provision for free education and transport among other things

the effort as it's a question of her only son's future. Ankur is lucky. But autistic people get little support and guidance in times of crisis, especially in areas with poor infrastructure. In such cases, the parents can become, therefore, these special children remain a prisoner of their disability. According to a survey by the Rehabilitation Council of India, one in every 250 people suffers from autism.

Being the only school in Delhi dedicated exclusively for autistic people, the NGO is forced to turn down thousands of parents who approach it for help. "We have a long list of children who are waiting for admission," says Himani.

AGAINST ALL ODDS



■ **Risha Chitlangia**
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She drives down from Vivek Vihar in east Delhi to Jasola Vihar in south Delhi every morning to drop her nine-year-old son, Ankur (name changed), to school. And for 36-year-old Himani, this has been the routine for the past five years and will continue for years to come. Even Ashok Ganguly committee's neighbourhood school concept is of no use to her, as Ankur is autistic. Today, Ankur is studying at the Open Door School run by Action for Autism, an NGO, which is the only school in Delhi exclusively for autistic people.

Autism is a behaviour

disorder, characterised by impairment in social communication, social interaction, and social imagination.

"My husband took a transfer to Delhi from Jaipur after it was confirmed to us that Ankur is autistic and needs special care and guidance. But the facilities here were no better. We have a own house in Vivek Vihar and I have no choice but to drive down, as the Open Door School is the only school for my child," says Himani, who is a qualified trainer for autistic people at her son's school, says, "This was the best think to do. As I had to come here to drop him, I decided to work for such people." Himani feels it's worth

Students at Open Door School, the only school in Delhi exclusively for autistic people



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out to more and more people but can't have more than 60 students in the school. Autistic children require specialised care and we don't have many trained professionals in this field," says Merry Barua, who started Action for Autism and is on the board of National Trust for welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities.

Unfortunately, there's no official diagnostic tool available to certify a person suffering from autism. "The National Institute of Mental Health, Hyderabad is working on a diagnostic tool, which hopefully would be made official by July this year and only then we would be able to give certificate for autism," say Dr Vinod Aggarwal, chief executive

officer, National Trust for Welfare of Person with Autism Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities. Till now all autistic people are clubbed with mentally challenged people.

"First, not many autistic people get the disability certificate. And even if it is given the point is they are not mentally challenged. They need extra care. In fact, most of autistic people can be successfully habilitated into the society if they are timely diagnosed," says Shobhana Takiar, who is fighting the case for creating better facilities for people with autism.

The People With Disability Act, 1995, clearly states provisions that are mandatory for the state and central government to provide. This includes, provision for free education, transportation, step for prevention of occurrence of disability etc. But no facility is available. Apart from Action For Autism, there are five NGO in Delhi,