AGAINST ALL ODDS

S he 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 the effort as it's a quite her only son's future.

Ankur is lucky. But autistic people get and guidance in time poor infrastructure. Cases the parents can therefore, these espec remain a prisoner of their disability. According to a Rehabilitation Council of India survey, one in every 250 people suffers from autism.

Being the only Delhi dedicated for autistic pe NGO is force down thou parents appro to a c. "W ol"
Autistic Children

Acording to researchers, not all autistic children are provided with the right care. In India, many of them are not able to afford the necessary treatment. This means that even those who are in need of special care do not get it. The situation is particularly critical in rural areas, where public services are scarce.

"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.

"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 Snehana 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.