

A brave mother who triumphed against society in her struggle to support her autistic daughter, Sharada Ram wants to share her experience and knowledge with those facing a similar plight, through her NGO Aarambh

AARAMBH FOR THE AID OF AUTISTIC KIDS

COMING from a remote place called Rajole in East Godavari district, J Sharada Ram and her husband's trial started when most schools refused to admit their three-year-old autistic daughter. "It took several years to diagnose it as autism. My daughter was just labeled a slow learner. After changing many schools, we were forced to join her in a school for the mentally-challenged but she didn't fit there too," said Sharada, as she narrated her journey from Rajole to Action for Autism, New Delhi - an NGO where she found answers to all her questions.

"I took a diploma course and also did some volunteering in the NGO. I learnt various teaching techniques that gave me a huge confidence and I started understanding my daughter better," Sharada explained. Sharada opened an NGO, Aarambh, dedicated to the needs of children suffering from autism in the city on Thursday.

Merry Baruah, Director of Action for Autism, who was present at the inaugural, said, "Mental

retardation and autism cannot be treated alike. Special techniques, trained and qualified teachers are required for teaching autistic children. Some of them are very intelligent, so handling them requires some skills and awareness."

One out of a thousand kids develops this problem and regular schools and teachers generally do not show interest in admitting such children. "In most cases, mainstream schools reject differently-abled children. However, if teachers are properly trained and schools cultivate an open attitude, an autistic child can attend a mainstream school," Merry said. She went on to add that movies and television serials on autism or dyslexia, though not always appropriately portrayed, were nevertheless successful in sensitising the masses on these lesser-known diseases.

Explaining the activities of Aarambh, which has trained and qualified staff, Sharada said, "We have family counselling sessions where parents will be trained on how to handle their autistic child free of



(From L to R) Action for Autism Director Merry Baruah, Aarambh founder Sharada Ram and Srinivas Rao at a media conference in the city on Friday

charge. We will be starting a day school for autistic children and have one-on-one sessions. A maximum fee of Rs 4,000 per month will be charged for each kid with substantial concessions for the economically poor." The NGO will go to various schools in the city to train their teachers and will eventually start a home for the girl child with autism.

"I want to share my knowledge and help others who are going through the same problems as I did. Treating autism is costly; I want to open our services to all sections of society so that the child is benefited," Sharada announced her objective.

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