

# A dream fulfilled for a special daughter

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**Kolkata:** Parents usually push children to realize the unfulfilled dreams of their childhood. But for Minu Budhia, it was the other way round. As a child, she had wanted to be a doctor. But there weren't too many opportunities to do so growing up in Assam's Tinsukia where girls got to study only humanities. It was finally her very special younger daughter who inspired her to take up courses in mental therapy.

"It was in the late 1990s when my daughter was going to pre-school that I began receiving a lot of complaints. Since she never sat still, the teacher labeled her 'naughty'. A mother's instinct told me something was wrong. But there were no proper facilities available in Kolkata then. Awareness on such issues was very low," she recalled.

Budhia travelled abroad and finally did get her daughter diagnosed but once she learned about her condition, she lapsed into severe depression. "It lasted eight long years before I realized the need to accept her as a special child. Till then, not only had I put her through a lot of therapies that I now realize I shouldn't have done, I was also getting treatment for depression. Yet, even the subject of depression was such a taboo that no one wanted to talk about it," she recounted.

Once there was acceptance of the situation, things began to fall into place. She travelled again; this time not in search of a cure but to train herself to manage her daughter. She underwent formal training in child brain development in Philadelphia, US, followed by a basic counselling course from Kripa Foundation, Mumbai, and then a cognitive behaviour therapy course from London. After qualifying as a psycho-therapist, she became a student counsellor at JD Birla and St Xavier's and also practised at Belle View before deciding to open an integrated psychological and cognitive wellness centre.

"When I was in Belle View, I was constantly referring patients to other centres for treatments like remedial education and speech therapy. Soon I realized the



Minu Budhia at AddLife Caring Minds. Budhia feels she would not have been sensitive to the needs of special people had it not been for her younger daughter, who has special needs

need for a single centre where one could avail of all therapies under a single roof. That is how AddLife Caring Minds happened. Today, we have a clinical and non clinical wing," Budhia said.

From psychometric assessment and diagnosis to client psycho-education and workshops to therapy and treatment to psycho-social rehabilitation and follow up, AddLife Caring Minds is designed as a single stop for all solutions. Apart from psychometry, psychotherapy/counselling, the centre has a developmental unit providing speech and occupational therapy and remedial education in addition to a behaviour clinic. There are neurology, psychiatry and nutrition units as well.

"The first thing we do in child-related disorders is counsel parents. We make them understand that they

need to accept children as they are. Judging a child, comparing him or her with an elder or younger sibling is bad because they are sensitive and understand. Till the time I did not accept my daughter as she was, I was in a constant battle with myself. I was unhappy and so was she. As soon as acceptance came, we reached out to each other. In fact, now the entire family dotes on her. But for her, we would not have been sensitive to the needs of special people in this world. She has broadened our horizons and made us better persons," Budhia said.

The centre though is not only about special children, it is for everyone. As Budhia says, like abroad where everyone has a personal counsellor like a personal physician, in the pulls and pushes of everyday life, people here too are realizing the need to speak to someone who is non-judgmental and unbiased. "The biggest problem is in relationships. Marriages are breaking up in days as girls refuse to adjust and tolerate like their mother or grandmother had. Though boys have become more tolerant now, patience is no longer a virtue among girls. In any case, arranged marriage is out. In cities, only 10% marry in that manner," she pointed out.

The other major problem, Budhia finds, is demands that parents make of their children. With a child today growing up in a nuclear family, the spotlight is always on him or her unlike earlier when attention would get divided among multiple children in a joint family.

"The constant attention isn't healthy. Every parent wants his child to be first in class; they won't even allow them to make small mistakes and learn from them. Working parents get children engaged in multiple activities so that they do not have any free time. Mothers these days make so much fuss about a child not eating. I try to make them understand that no child in an average Indian family has died of hunger. He or she will eat when hungry. Just let the child be," Budhia tells those who attend the parenting workshops at AddLife Caring Minds.