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Special help at airport

SANJAY MANDAL

Calcutta: The special assistance counter at the Calcutta airport should help all passengers with special needs, not just those who need wheelchairs, said a speaker at a workshop held at the airport on Monday.

“The airport and airlines provide assistance to passengers needing wheelchairs. But what about those who are intellectually challenged? The authorities need to provide proper assistance for them also...” said Minu Budhia, psychotherapist and founder-director of Caring Minds, an OPD mental health clinic.

Caring Minds, in association with the Airports Authority of India, held the sensitisation workshop. The aim was to bring about an inclusive flying experience by reaffirming the



Minu Budhia and C Pattabhi at the workshop

commitment of the airport staff and airlines to the challenges faced by individuals with special needs.

The awareness is needed because intellectual challenges are at times not visible. “A passenger with special needs may not always appear to be someone who needs assistance,” said Budhia.

She said a dedicated corridor for intellectually challenged passengers and those accompanying them, should

be created. There should be a dedicated queue and counter for them at the security hold area, too.

“At the boarding gate, there should be a small room for the intellectually challenged passengers, particularly children. The boarding area is very crowded and it’s a huge area. So, often these children get overwhelmed.”

Calcutta airport officials said they provide assistance to specially abled passengers.

“Not only passengers needing wheelchairs, but those who are specially-abled are also provided assistance,” said C. Pattabhi, director of Calcutta airport, who took part in the workshop.

On the setting up of an area for intellectually challenged passengers, Pattabhi said: “We will put up a request with the headquarters in Delhi.”

Workshop held to ensure 'inclusive' flying experience



KOLKATA: Voluntary organisation, Caring Minds, in association with the Airport Authority of India (AAI) held a sensitisation workshop at the Kolkata Airport. The focus was to bring about an inclusive flying experience by reaffirming the commitment of airport officials, staff and different airlines officials about the challenges met by special needs individuals and families travelling by air.

Conducted by psychotherapist Minu Budhia, who is mother to a special needs daughter Prachi, and the founder-director of Caring Minds (OPD Mental Health Clinic), it was much appreciated by all the attendees and

senior officials present. Budhia said: "All Airport and Airline officials and staff need to be made aware of the fact that the Special Assistance Counter is not only for passengers requiring wheelchairs, but also for individuals with intellectual challenges. This awareness is essential as several intellectual challenges are invisible - a special needs passenger may not always appear to be someone who needs assistance. Intellectual Disability is included in 'Divyang' so special needs passengers and their guardians (parents/siblings/caretaker) have the right to use the Divyang lane too. It's a very simple thing that will create an inclusive flying experience." MPOST

Suffer to Suhana Safar: Special Mom conducts Special Workshop at Kolkata Airport

EOI CORRESPONDENT

KOLKATA, JUNE 12/--/Caring Minds in association with the Airport Authority of India (AAI) held a sensitisation workshop at the Kolkata Airport. The focus was to bring about an inclusive flying experience by reaffirming the commitment of airport officials, staff and different airlines officials about the challenges met by special needs individuals and families travelling by air. Conducted by psychotherapist Minu Budhia, who is mother to a special needs daughter Prachi, and the founder-director of Caring Minds (OPD Mental Health Clinic), it was much appreciated by all the attendees and senior officials present.

Psychotherapist Minu Budhia said, "All Airport and Airline officials & staff need to be made aware of the fact that the Special Assistance Counter is not only for passengers requiring wheelchairs, but also for individuals with intellectual challenges. This awareness is essential as several intellectual challenges are invisible - a special needs passenger may not always appear to be someone who needs assistance. Intellectual Disability is included in 'Divyang' so special needs passengers & their guardians (parents/siblings/caretaker) have the right to use the Divyang lane too. It's a very simple thing that will create an inclusive flying experience."

I am so happy to be speaking on a topic so close to my heart. It is my aim to be on this awareness journey till mental

health and special needs are no longer hush-hush or taboo. I am working towards an inclusive future where all individuals with special needs, intellectual challenges, and

mental health issues are treated with the dignity and respect given to regular individuals.

C. Pattabhi, IAP (Director, AAI) said, "It is an excellent initiative and Minu Ji must be congratulated for putting together a most unique workshop which was definitely a very



Psychotherapist & Counsellor Minu Budhia (Founder of Caring Minds, I Can Flyy, Cafe I Can Flyy) and C. Pattabhi, IAP (Director, AAI) at Suffer to Safar: Special Needs Sensitisation Workshop held at Kolkata Airport by Caring Minds. -EOI Photo

insightful session for us. Further workshops tackling more topics in depth will surely benefit our staff.

I applaud Minu Ji's dedication as a mother and a mental health professional. Most parents, as is natural, try to make their own children's

sufferings less. Minu Ji has gone ten steps ahead and is working towards the betterment of all special families of India - I wish her all the best in her endeavours."

To help make air travel a Suhana Safar for special needs families

Flyers with special needs: Airport staff get lessons

Tamaghna Banerjee
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Kolkata: Airline staff and CISF personnel at Kolkata airport, who screen and frisk passengers, were trained in handling the flyers with autism, speech impediment, attention deficit disorder and learning difficulties during a workshop on Monday. Held at the airport, the workshop was attended by 60 CISF personnel along with some airli-

TIMES VIEW: Sensitisation sessions are essential to make airport and security staff aware of the needs and rights of every flyer. Hopefully, cases of inappropriate treatment – which, anyway, are not very frequent – will reduce further. No flyer should be made to feel discriminated against.

ne officials and airport staff. The counsellors of a mental health institute, who conducted the workshop, taught them gestures and moves to communicate with the flyers with special needs.

"The special assistance counters at the airports are not only for the passengers requiring wheelchairs but also for those with intellectual challenges. The flyers with special needs may not always appear to be requiring assistance. Often, they look like normal passengers but they have certain difficulties. So, a thorough understanding of the conditions is important

TIPS FROM COUNSELLORS



The workshop in progress at Kolkata airport

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| ▶ Fast entry into the airport | her attendant |
| ▶ Special security check | ▶ Allowing the use of special toilets |
| ▶ Clear instructions and talks with gestures | ▶ CISF officials should remain calm and treat these flyers with patience |
| ▶ Communication with a flyer with autism, not his/ | |

and that is what we taught the officials," said Minu Budhia, founder, psychotherapist and counsellor of Caring Minds, I Can Fly and Cafe I Can Fly, that help hundreds of children with special needs in the city. Mother of a special child, who suffers from low IQ and ADHD, Budhia highlighted the problems faced by the special children and their parents at the airport.

"With intellectual disability included in 'Divyang' the passengers with special needs and their guardians have the right to use the Divyang lanes, too. It's a very simple thing that will create an inclusive flying experience for these passengers," she added.

The counsellors explained how simple things like standing in queues, baggage disappearance, following instructions and frisking thro-

ugh gadgets can be challenging for the flyers with special needs. The airline staff and CISF personnel were taught to make the process comfortable for these passengers.

Earlier, **TOI** reported the problems faced by the specially-abled flyers at the airport. Disability activist Jeeja Ghosh, who had faced harassment on multiple occasions, said, "Since I contact the CISF before travelling, I get a royal treatment now. Kolkata airport and CISF need to advertise about this facility so that others can avail of it as well." A senior airport official said they often fail to understand the needs of flyers with special needs and a miscommunication makes the journey unpleasant for them. "More workshops on the issue will benefit our staff," the official added.