

Awareness on autism rises, inclusion lags

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Calcutta: While awareness of autism has grown, there remains a notable absence of mainstreaming and sensitivity, according to professionals working with individuals with autism.

Familiarity with the term autism alone is insufficient; teachers must be trained to support children with autism rather than passing responsibility to the special educator. Additionally, people should be more sensitive, they said on the occasion of World Autism Awareness Day on Thursday.

Mainstreaming in schools is still a far cry, said Indrani Basu of the Autism Society West Bengal.

"There are not enough schools that include children with autism. Many mainstream teachers, not all, ignore children with autism. They feel a child with autism is the responsibility of special educators," said Basu.

An inclusive classroom would empower the teacher with strategies and methods.

A former teacher herself, Basu said children with autism cannot stay unoccupied.

"We recommend that they bring to school a puzzle, play-dough that would keep them occupied while others finish their work," Basu said.

A teacher who makes that effort to be inclusive in her approach makes a huge impact and changes lives.

"There have been individuals who have acknowledged the fact that they were recognised in class, given a chance to speak even if they didn't know the right answer," she said.

The head of partnerships and communication at the India Autism Centre, Sakhi Singhi, said there was a



The walk organised by the Autism Society West Bengal on Thursday morning

lack of training in inclusive education.

The challenge is not always with the teacher or their intent, but in the lack of institutional support, said Arunasis Adhikari, a trustee for a residential facility of individuals with autism in West Burdwan.

There are teachers in mainstream schools who are overworked and under stress. It is a challenge for them to show sensitivity, said Adhikari, who also runs a special school in the city.

The attitude of parents is slowly changing, but some are struggling with denial, said Singhi.

The India Autism Center distributed autistic Barbie dolls on Thursday.

Autism Society West Bengal organised a walk from Safari Park to Menoka Cinema on Thursday morning. The Hans Foundation, with support from Science City, took children with autism, their parents and caregivers for a tour of the science centre.

The initiative focused on creating real-life inclusive experiences, enabling kids to explore and engage in a safe, sensory-friendly environment, said Mahua Chatterjee of The Hans Foundation.