

Caring for the disabled

BY NILOFER SULTANA

MOTHERHOOD, indubitably, is the apex of triumphal fulfilment for a woman. While the agonies of a childless woman are simply unfathomable, the grief of those mothers is immeasurably deep who, by an uncanny quirk of destiny, give birth to physically or mentally handicapped children. Day in and day out, they have to be around children who are blind, mute, paralytic or mentally handicapped. Are there any institutions equipped with the requisite paraphernalia and staff to help children with diverse deformities?

Arif Umar, 20, is one such boy who has been confined to bed ever since his birth, with all his senses numbed, save his eyesight. His father is dead and the mother is on her toes round-the-clock tending her son. The worst part of the ordeal is when Arif responds to the call of nature without any prior intimation, and she has to clean the mess. She feels no repulsion as she adores her son. But time has taken its toll. She is bone tired now; and feels crushed and shattered. Arif's physical condition seems incurable, and this has been taken as a fait accompli.

The mother needs some

medical equipment and devices that can make routine matters, such as responding to the call of nature, less burdensome both for her and her son. The mother approached AFIRM — an institute run by the army for the rehabilitation of handicapped people. She found the procedural formalities quite tardy and irksome. Some physical exercises were suggested for the boy that were to be conducted by the mother who has already exhausted all her energies. How will the boy survive if the mother falls sick, or when she dies? There are no such institutions where such handicapped persons can be accommodated and an exhaustive long-term treatment is carried out under the surveillance of experts in the field.

Abdullah is another 11-year-old boy who is blind by birth and has stammer in his speech. He was admitted in a school for the blind, but somehow he could not cope with the surroundings, assuredly not made congenial for him. He was said to be hyperactive and could not be allowed to attend school without an attendant. An attendant was provided, but due to negligence the poor boy got burnt. The hapless boy had to quit school and he

was put on sedatives.

Most psychiatrists advise sedatives and palliatives for patients with psychological problems. This makes the patients lethargic and causes obesity, too. Abdullah had to do away with sedatives. Understandably, in a couple of years, he will be considered over-age for admission at the primary level. This situation is impregnated with a plethora of questions. Is it easily possible and affordable for all the parents to get

attendants? Where lies the guarantee that the attendant would be honest and God-fearing enough to be of any genuine help to the child in his charge? If children such as Abdullah are denied access to the teaching institutions, does that mean their chances for self-improvement are debarred? The pressing need of the hour is to study and assess the case of each child individually, and to provide unstinted support through a thorough

research programme.

Komal is a cute and lovable girl suffering from multiple disabilities. She lives in Asghar Mall Scheme, Rawalpindi. Due to some defect in her palate, she cannot speak properly. She tries to communicate with others in her own way, but cannot pronounce words in an intelligible way. She is now 24. Her family members reminisce dolefully that when she was a little girl, she was taken to Al-Maqtoom, an institute initially established at a gargantuan cost of Rs54 crores. The principal at that time refused to admit her on the ground that she faced no

hearing impairment, and as such did not qualify for admission. This is a glaring case of lack of assessment and absence of an acceptable criterion for evaluation. She definitely needed speech therapy, and timely help would have saved her from languishing in nothingness for all these years.

Maryam is another girl born without the blessing of sight, but her parents are determined to kindle the candles of hope in her darkened world. She studies in a school for the blind housed in a colossal building in Shamsabad, Rawalpindi. Her parents very woefully point



Caring for the physically and mentally disabled demands both time and patience

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handsomely paid to inculcate
girl the spirit of devoting for the
of noble profession they are
are associated with?

Talking about Rawalpindi,
there are a few institutions
that are catering, though marginally,
to the educational requirements of the physically
and mentally-handicapped. Qandeel is one such institute
for the blind founded by Mrs Farooqi, a devoted philanthropist with an admirable
sense of commitment to the noble cause. The institute was initially housed in a temple
and primarily depended upon donations. The education was qualitatively viable, till at the
later stage when it was nationalized.

Parvin Mahmood is one of the luminaries of Qandeel, and is serving as an assistant professor in English in F.G. College for Women in Rawalpindi. She is a very popular and impeccable teacher. Qaisra Jehan and Samina, from the same institute, are actively engaged in the teaching profession. This amply proves that if institutes such as Qandeel and Aziz Jehan Trust (Lahore) are there to help the disabled, the gain is not just on an individual basis, but to the advantage of the society and nation, at large. Aziz

Jehan Trust has the added advantage of providing hostel and boarding facilities that can be helpful for the students living in remote areas. DRIP, Chanbeli and Sir Sayed School for the Deaf and Dumb are some notable institutions in Rawalpindi that are playing their roles for the cause of those who have to be brought out of isolation to join the streamline.

The programme for the education of special children has to be planned and coordinated and comprehensively scheduled. Liberal donations should come forward for this purpose that ought to be utilized honestly. A team of experts has to be formed for the assessment and evaluation of different cases. The teachers should be appropriately trained in the psychology of handicapped people. Accommodation facilities for them are a must, and those in charge of such institutes should be kindhearted and above mercenary motives. The victims of diverse disabilities do not need our pity and verbal sympathies, only genuine help and thoughtfulness.

In this hectic, jet-set life of wild hurry and scurry, how many of us spare a few moments to be with the helpless mothers looking tearfully at their children who cannot see, talk or walk? The thought should tickle the minds. Relevant international agencies have to carry out an exploratory study in this context to make life purposeful for the disabled. Any further negligence in the matter would simply be criminal. ■