

A centre for special children under the auspices of Punjab University aims to rehabilitate them as normal citizens

children  
to 303  
New

By Muhammad  
Iqbal Buzdar

**care**

# A channel to the mainstream

**T**hey are special. They sit under the same roof but in different groups. Some of them with speech defects, others with disabilities ranging from mental illnesses to visual and orthopaedic problems. And the place where they sit together is the Child Welfare Centre for Special Needs that the Punjab University has recently set up under the supervision of its Department of Special Education. Their declared mission being: to secure a future for those with special needs — the handicapped.

The centre has, initially, admitted special children of the university employees residing in the university's residential colony on New Campus for free. Although it began with a small number of students in the first week of February, now there are two dozen children on its strength. "The number of students is increasing as more people are gradually coming to know about the centre," said Ms. Munazza Rafiq, the teacher in charge of the

centre.

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Photos: Rahat Dar



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How was the centre set up in the university? "The centre is an organised expansion of the work the wife of the vice chancellor Nayyer Sabeena Arshad was already doing for the socio-economic uplift of poor women and female children in the university's residential colony," said Dr Abdul Hameed, the director, who is also chairman of the Special Education Department.

"During the course of time when the vice chancel-

lor came to know that there are many handicapped children of the university employees, he directed the Special Education Department to set up a centre which would enable them to live a useful and healthy life," said Dr Hameed.

Although most of the students are under the age of 15, there is no age limit set for those seeking admission to the centre. There are at least seven adult students of up to 40 years. The activities prescribed for students are meant to rehabilitate them as

normal citizens. Hence their sphere of activities is all embracing. "The focus is on every child's need-based development-cum-education, besides the students' social, emotional, cognitive and language development, making them creative and developing

among them a sense of identity," the teacher in charge said.

"The students' daily schedule includes a variety of activities: They begin with morning assembly and go through physical exercises, indoor games, individual and

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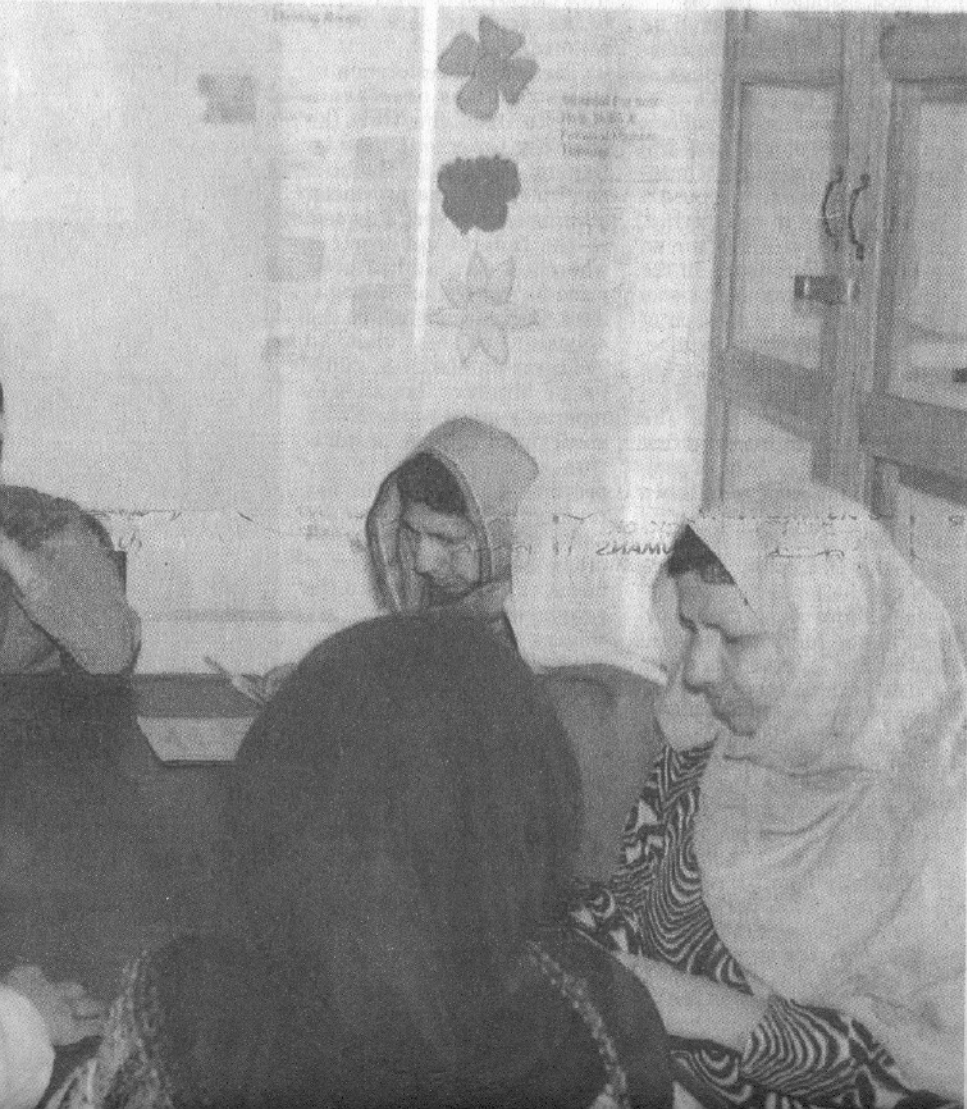
"The students are being trained in kitchen activities in different stages. The object is to make the students useful members of their respective families," she said, adding that students are also given daily assignments of gate opening and closing, bell ringing, furniture-setting, table-cleaning and table-setting for lunch.

The centre provides counseling and guidance to parents on the problems of the children with particular needs to make them more independent. Parent-teacher meetings are held regularly to discuss the strengths of students, areas where improvement is needed, and to get suggestions from parents. "The teachers also make home visits to convince parents that their children are handicapped but not a burden, so they be given special attention for their development," the head teacher said.

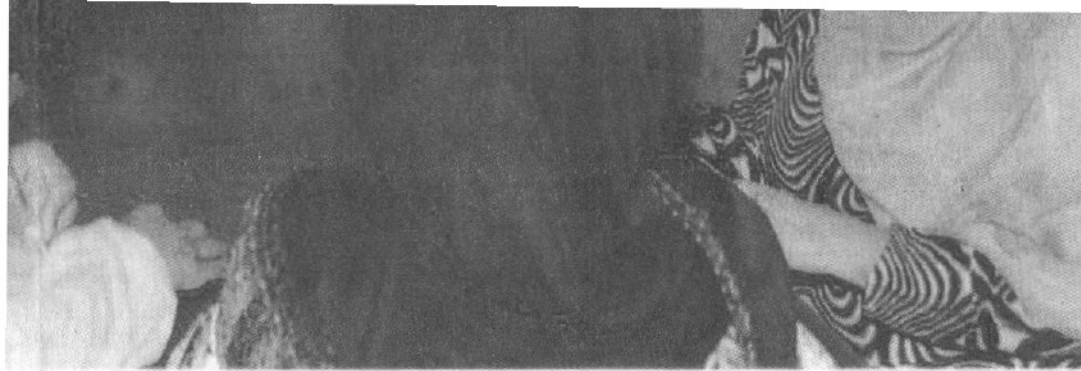
She said the medical examination of students is conducted regularly and they are provided medical aid for free. A medical officer visits the centre once while a homoeopath doctor twice a week for the purpose.

The centre also conducts case studies of students — two children on each alternative day. "In the case studies, we see how much progress has been made in a child's development towards normality," she said. "We are also planning to involve students in sports activities and to observe a sports day once a month. In sports activities, the Special Olympics Pakistan has agreed to collaborate with the centre," she said.

"The postgraduate students of the Special Education Department are providing free services to the centre to ensure that each child will have individual attention," said the Special Education Department Chairman, Dr Abdul Hameed. About the centre, he said, "It







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indoor games, individual and

group based education,  
recreational activities (art-  
work and music) with a break  
for lunch," said Ms Munazza,  
who is also working on her  
Ph.D thesis on 'attention  
deficit hyperactivity disorder'  
at the Department of Special  
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About the centre, he said, "It  
will serve as a transition  
(referral) centre as it will  
refer the special children to  
normal schools when they  
are able to study with the  
normal students. This will be  
their integration in the main-  
stream society. And this cen-  
tre a model for other  
schools," said a confident Dr  
Hameed.