



# THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS

[E-paper](#)

 

[Click here for Mobile Site](#)

• Friday, December 05, 2014 05:08 PM

[Home](#) > [LifeStyle](#) > [Health](#)

## Breaking the Sound of Silence

By Venkata Susmita Biswas

Published: 29th November 2014 10:00 PM

Last Updated: 29th November 2014 11:13 PM

[Email3](#)



Getting a seat in a crowded local train in Mumbai, especially during the peak hours, is not an easy task and Aman was more than happy to get one at the compartment reserved for the differently-abled. He was born with a hearing impairment and rightfully deserved a place there. But the ticket examiner refused to believe him and fined him ₹300. Aman's fault was that his speech was immaculate. He was only too happy to pay the fine and climbed down the rickety steps of the train with a smile on his face.

Thanks to Aural Education for Children with Hearing Impairment (AURED), Aman and thousands like him are leading a transformed life now. Once deprived from the world of sound, they can now hear and speak, if not perfectly, at least confidently enough to surprise people about the deformity they were born with.

The centre started in a modified kitchen with only six children as its founders Aziza Tyabji Hydari and Sheila Naharkar took a leap of faith to begin their dream in 1986. Now there are 720 children enrolled here. Being the first to introduce Auditory Verbal Therapy (AVT), AURED had a humble beginning. "AVT helps deaf children to develop their listening skills and eventually learn to communicate in spoken language," explains Aziza. However, Aziza and Sheila were not completely sure of what the outcome would be. "Theoretically, it seemed like an ideal method and the parents of six profoundly deaf children (age group two to three-year olds) were willing to partner with us. Neither we nor the parents regretted this decision, and the outcome was unbelievable," reckons Aziza.

AVT is an intensive process that requires one-on-one training where parents are encouraged to become the primary participants. Parents undergo extensive counselling to understand the process and the surgery involved with the cochlear implants. Once children start undergoing therapy and progressively use cochlear implants, it takes them about three to five years to pick up complete hearing and speaking skills.

"Unlike hearing aids, profoundly deaf children get cochlear implants that enables them to hear across the speech frequency range. Though it is very expensive—the basic model of the implant being over ₹5 lakh—more than 600 children out of 720 at AURED have been implanted. Eighty per cent of them come from underprivileged homes," explains Aziza. To provide these special implants to children, the centre collects and receives funds from trusts and individual donors.

However, AVT is not a cure for hearing impairment but children who undergo AVT can start responding with meaningful babbling within a few months. Vibha Shah, whose son Sunny attended AURED's therapy sessions for 14 years, says "I took my son to

AURED when he was one-and-a-half-year old in 1994. Within six months, he could ask for things he needed.” Today, Sunny is pursuing a dual degree in Industrial Engineering and Mathematics at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. “Aziza always insisted on integrating children in the mainstream environment,” recalls Vibha.

While Sunny does not remember his experience at the place, he says that a video of his progress at the age of nine made him emotional. “I was so shocked at my progress and I couldn’t believe how much I had improved,” he says. Sunny, Aman and others like him offer hope to parents of children with hearing impairment.

It also holds workshops for professionals to familiarise them with AVT and audiological management of cochlear implants. “We partner with Ali Yavar Jung National Institute for the Hearing Handicapped in a Teacher Training course, specifically in AVT. It is a complex process and needs highly skilled professionals,” says Aziza.

Started almost 28 years back in Mumbai, today AURED has a satellite centre in Hyderabad, an affiliate centre in New Delhi and an international centre in Nairobi, Kenya. Therapy is offered in multiple languages including English, Marathi, Gujarati and Hindi in Mumbai and Telugu, Hindi and English at the satellite centre in Hyderabad. At AURED fees are charged on a sliding scale and eighty percent of the children are taught free of cost.

With the spread of awareness, AVT has now become the norm with several state governments providing free implants to children from underprivileged homes.

For Aziza, AVT is a miracle that will not stop amazing her.