

Students find disabling disparities between Sweden and India

Karsten Miranda | TNN

Margao: It was only when they saw first-hand the infrastructure and facilities provided for persons with disabilities in Sweden, the disparity between the state and international standards came into sharp focus for a group of students from Chowgule college, Margao, on an exchange programme trip to the country.

The students were pleased to see how empowered the disabled persons in Sweden were as they are provided with facilities including special schools, disabled-friendly transport facilities, public facilities and special educators for disabled students studying in mainstream schools in addition to other facilities including summer camps and innovative concepts like short-stay homes that are offered by municipalities.

Short-stay homes are where special children are housed for a short duration to enable their parents to concentrate on other areas, other children if any and find some time to relax.

"It is very touching to see how the Swedish government is concerned about parents of these disabled children. In these short-stay homes, health care workers teach the residents basic self-care and help them to prepare to be away from their parents when they grow up," said Karen Braganza, a second-year BSC student of Chowgule college.

As part of its annual cultural exchange programme, students and fac-

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India: The Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) regulates and monitors services given to persons with disability

Sweden: The central government and the municipalities are responsible for services provided to the disabled

Structure of education

Goa

Prerequisites: Medical certificate from Institute of Psychiatry and Human Behaviour

➤ Based on the diagnosis, schools develop a tailor-made programme considering needs of the parents as also the extent of disability

Sweden

Prerequisites: Medical certificate from doctors

➤ Main focus of a special programme is independent living

Contents of education

Goa

Personal: Self care/help

Social: Communication

Academic: Reading, writing and math

ulty members from Chowgule college, visited Swedish institute of Tullinge gymnasium and Sodra latin gymnasium, both high schools in Sweden. During their two week stay, the students conducted a comparative study and re-

Recreational: Music, drawing, painting etc

Sweden

Personal: Self care/help

Social: Communication

Academic: Reading, writing and math

Recreational: Music, drawing, painting etc

Educational schemes

Goa

Children with special needs are entitled to financial assistance for:

➤ Grant for books and other stationary per annum - ₹500

➤ Fixed amount for uniform per annum - ₹800

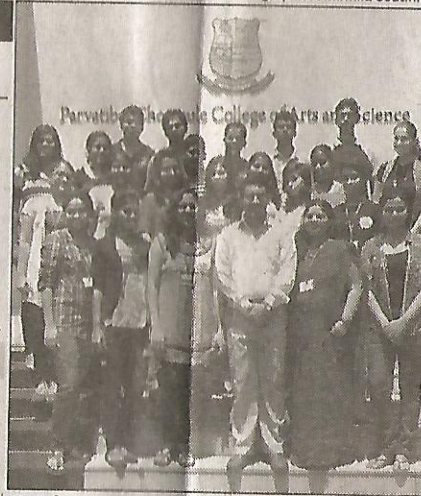
➤ Travelling allowance per month - ₹200

➤ Actual expenses on equipment required for facilitating the child's education up to a maximum of ₹5,000

➤ Escort allowance per month subject to attendance of 60% in the month - ₹200

search on rehabilitation of disabled children and adults into the social fabric of the community. "Simply put, they are provided with the same opportunities as others," Vanessa Gonsalves, a student said.

Infographic: Sharmila Coutinho



Sweden

➤ Education is free in Sweden

Public facilities in Goa

➤ Provision for place reserved for the disabled in buses in Goa under the Disability Act, but it is not always put into practice

Public facilities for the disabled in Sweden

➤ Washrooms which have been designed to suit the needs of disabled in public places

➤ Special ramps alongside escalators constructed in public places

Public spaces have special washrooms designed for disabled people and even have mechanisms to carry wheelchairs across stairs where construction of ramps is not possible. At bus stops, the bus lowers its floor to the level

of the pavement and forms a ramp for easy access of wheelchairs. "Periodic audio-visual announcements are displayed at bus stops, trains and trams. At every pedestrian crossing, there are audio signals which indicate to the visually impaired that it is safe to cross. A taxi service is available on request to pick or drop disabled person to their destination," said Nandkumar Sawant, vice principal, Chowgule College.

With regard to education and growing up with a disability, Sobita Kirtani, associate professor; department of psychology, Chowgule college pointed out that a special educator is provided for the disabled in mainstream schools as well as in separate schools for children who cannot be integrated into mainstream schools. "Social communication, interaction and recreational activities such as drawing, music and dance are all part of the curriculum. We visited the culture school or 'Kulturskolan' to participate in one such dance class," said student Prachiti Chodankar.

The students, who had conducted a brief study on the facilities available in Goa as other parts of India before visiting Sweden, pointed out that there is a Disability Act in both the countries, whose common aim is to allow people with disabilities to be able to participate and live freely within the society like everyone else. However in India, the disabled are mostly protected by their families and the concept of inter-dependency runs deep. In contrast to India, independence is more valued in Sweden.