

## ***Our story***

Cerebral palsy can create a powerful illusion of helplessness and hopelessness for the child that it affects. However, we believe that this is truly just an illusion. Beneath the thorny layers of an un-cooperative body and the challenges of mobility, there lies an intelligent mind, whose potential we believe is vast and can be unleashed.

Our founder Dr. Mithu Alur learned and understood all the horrific realities about the treatment of cerebral palsy and the treatment of the afflicted children in India first hand. In July 1966, after a very traumatic childbirth that lasted more than 40 hours, Dr. Alur gave birth to a beautiful baby girl. However, due to complications during childbirth, the baby underwent a period of lack of oxygen to the brain known as anoxia, and consequently was diagnosed with cerebral palsy. Dr. Alur faced a monumental struggle to get treatment for her daughter as most doctors in India during those years were dismissive of her daughter Malini's chances to live and if she did survive, they were convinced of her mental retardation.

Dr. Alur, did not accept these dire prognostications. She and her family researched as much as they could about cerebral palsy and eventually were able to get Malini treated by the more optimistic doctors in England. In an atmosphere of optimism and recognition of her very potent mental abilities, Malini prospered. She was treated with a combination of physical therapy, speech and occupational therapy and education. This approach worked wonders and her mental development was rapid. Her burgeoning personality developed and Dr. Alur soon understood how this combined approach had brought about this wonderful development in Malini's life.

On their return to India, Dr. Alur realised the lack of cohesiveness in treating children afflicted with cerebral palsy was a huge obstacle in their development. There were also prevailing myths and misconceptions about the mental development of the afflicted children and a lack of nuance in understanding and catering for their needs.

***Dr. Alur was struck by the amount of children whose future would be locked away due to their lack of access to the kind of facilities and treatments that her family could access for Malini.*** There was a need to provide better designed and more accessible services to these children.

Dr. Mithu Alur recognised these possibilities and her ability to take action in this regard, and in 1972 founded ADAPT (then known as The Spastics Society of

India) as way to provide treatment and education to children with cerebral palsy under one roof. This model has proven to be extremely successful in the care of the children.

ADAPT grew rapidly and the need for teachers and therapists became urgent. Programmes for professional training and capacity building were created, with an emphasis for selecting at least half the candidates for training from areas outside the city of Mumbai. This led to an increase in reach for the organisation and within a decade, service centres based on the first ADAPT model were established in Kolkata, New Delhi followed by branches in Bangalore and Chennai.

The first generation of ADAPT students were poised to enter the community and needed the necessary occupational skills and training to do so. In order to meet their evolved needs, in 1989, the National Job Development Centre was opened in Chembur, Mumbai.

In 1997 the Governor General of Canada, His Excellency Romeo Le Blanc and Mrs. Diana Le Blanc visited ADAPT. They were very impressed with what they saw and hearing about a need for creating a policy of inclusion for all the children, they expressed their desire to collaborate with us. With the help of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Dr. Alur was able to establish [the National Resource Centre for Inclusion \(NRCI\)](#), which would function within the ambit of ADAPT, and address the potential and possibilities for the inclusion of children with disabilities into the mainstream resources of the country.

In May 2001, ADAPT undertook a large two year action-research project called [Early Intervention in Inclusive Education](#). This project was headed by Dr. Alur, along with Dr. Marcia Rioux, who holds a Chair at York University, Canada. This project was started under the aegis of UNICEF and ADAPT and supported by CIDA. This project aims to demonstrate the tremendous benefits of inclusive education and ensure that inclusion becomes a reality for the nearly five million Indian children with disabilities under the age of five years.

ADAPT has been recognised both nationally and internationally for its committed effort towards providing excellent para-medical, educational, vocational and community services for children and young adults with disabilities. ADAPT has also evolved into a leading voice speaking up for the rights and needs of people with disabilities.

Many ADAPT alumni are pursuing careers in journalism, the IT sector, the financial sector and also making headway in academic life through post graduate and doctoral studies. Though ADAPT is proud of the replicability of its model and its increased reach in 18 states in the nation, we are acutely aware that the fight for the right of the child and youth with disability has a very long way to go still.

For thirty five years, we at ADAPT have worked tirelessly toward initiating inclusive practices in education and employment. ADAPT's four centres in Mumbai stand out as unique models, where special education is demystified and inclusion has taken centre stage. We provide services that range from assessment, treatment, inclusive education to continuum of support services for inclusion in schools, colleges and workspaces, skills training and job placement for all persons with disability and from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

We at ADAPT began with a model that provided services to the disabled youth and has done so now for more than a quarter of a century. However, we have now embraced a new paradigm and are moving from the provision of special schools to working towards providing inclusive education where the disabled and abled children will be able to learn alongside each other and from each other. This major breakthrough in policy came about as a consequence of Dr. Mithu Alur's doctoral research, published as *Invisible Children: A Study of Policy Exclusion*.

Dr. Alur's research revealed the alarming exclusion of children with disabilities from the Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS), which was a pre-primary education, immunization and nutrition service from the Govt. of India. Dr. Alur's research brought to light the over-reliance of the Government on NGOs to give attention to children with disabilities. This led to the exclusion of more than 90% of children with disabilities from obtaining services due to the lack of proper fund allocations and infrastructural shortcomings.

We at ADAPT continue to work on the macro level of policy and act as a watchdog to ensure that inclusive policies are implemented at the national level. At the National level, the presence of our Founder Chairperson Dr Mithu Alur on National Committees such as the CABE (the Central Advisory Board of Education) has led to the evolution of social policy and legislation through acts of Parliament such as the Persons with Disability Act and the Right to Education Act. The Persons with Disability Act provide specific direction to governments to employ disabled people. It further brought about an amendment in 2014 wherein the Bill covers 19 additional disability

conditions. Further, persons with at least 40% of a disability would be entitled to certain benefits such as reservations in education and employment, preference in government schemes, etc.

The Right to Education Act makes education a fundamental right of every child between the ages of 6 and 14 and specifies minimum norms in elementary schools. It requires all private schools to reserve 25% of seats for the poor and other categories of children which includes disabled children.

However its work is far from over.

Without having an organised and systematic approach to the implementation of the legislations passed, the intent of the legislation will never translate to tangible and measurable change on the ground.

Concerned about the implications of this shortcoming on future generations, we have reoriented our goals to embrace all children who could become potential victims and fall through the cracks of the government's legislative initiatives.

A person suffering from multiple disability such as cerebral palsy need inputs from an inter disciplinary team comprising of occupational therapists, physiotherapists, psychologists and social workers, special educators and vocational trainers – to be able to gather the skills and qualify for a dignified employment commensurate to his/her mental ability.

The lack of equal employment opportunities for persons with disabilities often means leading lives of poverty and social exclusion.

Similar is the case with education. Without quality facilities to build the capacity of teachers to address the needs of any child facing barriers to learning and participation, the implementation of the Act will not be possible.

As a pioneer, ADAPT recognizes its responsibility to lead and bridge this gap and has undertaken a new project covering an initial span of 14 years .At its heart are two key words – Capacity Building & Inclusion. At an execution level it means

Increase the number of inclusive schools across the 29 states of India but providing trained teachers and facilitators for the schools

Create employment opportunities for the disabled across India by (i) Creating Master trainers that can train the disabled in core and soft skills to adapt

to a Corporate environment (ii) tying up with Corporates and placing Job Coaches in the Corporates to facilitate an between the disabled employee and the Corporate as well as work with HR departments for the creation of a disable friendly ecosystem within the corporate

We believe that the disabled need never be invisible anymore. If we can create a society that aims to include and accept them and provide for their needs, we will have allowed them to become positive and contributing members of society. This would also enable us to create a more inclusive and compassionate world.

---