



**Autism does
not come with
a manual it
comes with
parents who
never give up!**

By - Ms.Shehrebhanu K

Marham presents you with yet another real life story of a woman whose life resonates resilience. She is Mrs Fatema Sheikh from Mumbai. Her son, Usaid, was diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder when he was a toddler of around three. Today he is youth of 22 with remarkable achievements. The first biggest proud moment for Fatema was when her son, Usaid, scored 90.2% in his class x Board Exam and this great news was covered in The Times of India. The second red-letter day in Fatema's life was when he successively completed his internship at McCann World Group, Mumbai and thereafter they employed him as Junior Editor. Another exceptional accomplishment of Usaid is his presentation on his experience at workplace at Stanford Neurodiversity Summit in 2021. Unbelievable! Unimaginable! Mind you these are just a few, read on to know more about Usaid - his challenges and how Fatema, his mom, helped to overcome them.





Initially it was very difficult for Fatema and the family to accept that their child is having a lifelong condition that is going to limit Usaid's socialization and also his ability to succeed in life. But then what helped them was to not look at it as a PROBLEM, but as a SITUATION. When you start seeing problems as situations, you start thinking in terms of possibilities. It then becomes easy to find a solution to every challenge that comes up in life.

Fatima did exactly that. She took hold of the situation, and to give her 100%, she quit her career immediately. She took the steering wheel in her hands and was all set to help Usaid live with the challenges. She started to learn from therapists and professionals : exploring, understanding and reading.



Fatema never burdened her autistic son with aspirations. She would set a distant goal but never looked beyond the next milestone. With total belief in his competency, she always allowed him to take the lead in whatever he loved doing and was happy with it, be it music, performing arts, or visual arts. In this she got full support from her husband, Usaid's elder brother Owais Shaikh, friends, and her close family, and their collective effort made life easier for them. Relatives who were nasty about Usaid's diagnosis were kept away .

After painstaking experimentation, Fatema decided to specifically work on his strengths and weaknesses. She focused on his ability and not his disability. His special interest in arts was detected at the age of 4. Usaid faced difficulty communicating with words and instead interacted by drawing and sketching in stick figures of what happened in school, at home, and on outings. Thus they used art as a medium to communicate with him and entered his world. Gradually Usaid started responding, opening up and connecting with the

When Usaid was 6 years, Fatema discovered his passion for music. She realised that music was therapeutic for him. It increased his sitting tolerance and focus. She immediately arranged a tutor for him and since then he is playing the piano and keyboard with expertise. His next fascination is drums. Drumming has aided him in planning as well as coordination of reflexes as it involves both hands and feet along with auditory input at the same time.

When his passion for dance got noticed, his parents arranged for the training. Usaid performed on stage for Shiamak Davar's winter funk in 2016 and that was transformational for him, a big leap in his self-confidence. They saw him as a completely changed person who came alive on stage, and the overload of light, sound, and chaos did not bother him at all. Dancing improved his resilience, self-regulation, planning, self awareness, and executive functions. He happily travels long distances for practice or for shows, and on stage, he like any other normal person knows his entry, exit, and his position, and moreover takes cues from his group and remains totally coordinated with them. Every show is a new exposure and experience for him.

To overcome his speech impediment and communication difficulties, Fatema enrolled Usaid in a course in Voice Modulation with Vandana Sengupta and Acting Course with Kabir Kapoor's Cinema Satsangi. During these three years there has been a huge improvement in his communication, tone, expression of emotions in his daily life. With Pankaj Purohit, his mentor, he discovered his love for rapping!



Over the years Fatema noticed that Usaid has a good photographic memory and loved watching Disney and Pixar movies. She channelised this strength and today Usaid is pursuing a career in Computer Graphics and Animation.

Apart from Fatema, Owais Sheikh, his elder brother, played a vital role in overcoming Usaid's social anxiety. He prevented him from staying in isolation by including him in his gang of friends. As a result, he too was invited to parties and celebrations.



Amazing, isn't it? Even a normal child may not succeed in achieving these many milestones in life. Credit goes to the parents, particularly Fatema, who walked their son to success with Love and Patience and Acceptance, and made the impossible possible!





Mrs Fatima claims that if we wish to connect with an autistic child, enter into the bubble formed around him and when he is ready, help bring him out into this world. She advises to give your autistic child an opportunity to prove himself by believing in him, by accepting him with his neurodiversity. So next time when we see a person with a difference, don't forget that he may have difficulty expressing himself, but he has the same emotions and aspirations as all of us. Let us accept them with their specialities with open arms and help them live their life with dignity and confidence.