



P-ACT News

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From the Desk of the Executive Director

With the scale up of testing, treatment, care and support services, People Living with HIV have now a ray of hope. The ART services available free of cost in the government hospitals and care and support services provided by the civil society consortium have enabled PLHIV to accept their status and look ahead for a productive life. The psycho- social support from

the peers has given PLHIV hope for a positive life. With nutrition, treatment, care and support from peers, family and community, HIV can now be managed like any other chronic disease. We need to overcome the challenges and enable PLHIV to live a life of dignity.

*A. R. Nanda
Executive Director
Population Foundation of India*

Message from the Project Director

Stigma and discrimination and access to treatment are two important issues associated with HIV. Livelihood is a burning issue for People Living with HIV. Discrimination in society plays havoc in lives of PLHIV and their families. Unfortunately, PLHIV are still loosing their job due to their status. Infected and affected children with HIV are still discriminated

in schools. We need to address these issues in a holistic manner. The state level expositions provide a platform to discuss these emerging issues with various stakeholders to identify the way forward.

*Dr Mary Verghese
Project Director
Population Foundation of India*

*“My thoughts, nobody understood,
Everyone just saw me smiling,
No one could see my silent tears.*

*Everybody could see me living,
But my death was not realized.*

*My light, everyone could see,
But nobody saw the darkness of my mind.
I grieve, I was blamed, No one understood me.”*

A poem by a PLHIV in ‘Youth Mahotstav’, a state level exposition organized by PFI, Maharashtra state unit

Programme Updates

A platform for People Living with HIV to share and learn from each other - that's what expositions are all about. Its time to meet new people, make new friends, learn and move ahead with a greater zeal towards life. Expositions provide a ground for PLHIV to display their skills and talents, build capacities, gain knowledge and provide psycho social support. Since last two years, PFI is organising state level expositions in the six high prevalence states in India. These expositions provide a platform for People Living with HIV (PLHIV) involved in the program to share their experiences to a broad range of stakeholders. Moreover, these fora help PLHIV to represent their needs, get motivated and informed on services available. Representatives from District Level Networks (DLNs), Positive Living Centres (PLC), Community Care Centres (CCC), Comprehensive Care and Support Centres (CCSC), ART Centres, State AIDS Control Societies (SACS), senior officials of various government departments, colleges, banks, NABARD, NGOs, media participate in these events.

YOUTH MOHOTSAV

Youth is linked with adventure, experiment and a sprit to explore. Many a time this euphoria and peer pressure takes youth towards darkness. Unemployed, impoverished and migrant youth are particularly vulnerable. They lack adequate information, education and opportunities. They become vulnerable to drugs and HIV.

Population Foundation of India, Maharashtra state unit and Network of Maharashtra People with HIV (NMP+) organized Yuvak Mahotstav from 9th June to 11th June 2009 to address the issue of HIV and youth. Around 100 HIV positive youth participated from 35 districts of Maharashtra. From each district, two young PLHIV participated along with Treatment Outreach worker of the 'Access to Care and Treatment' program. The program was inaugurated by Mr Nilesh Nikam, Chairman, Standing Committee of Pune Municipal Corporation.



Participants in the Yuvak Mohotsav, state level exposition organized by PFI, Maharashtra State unit

The idea was to sensitize youth about positive prevention. This was done by sharing experiences, through games, clarifying doubts through interactive sessions with experts, Dr. Gangakhedkar, NARI and Mr. Bindumadhav Khire were the resource persons. They were provided information on sex and sexuality, Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI), HIV and Antiretroviral therapy (ART). It was found that 40% of the youth who were unmarried and recently married amongst the participants had a history of STI. The participants felt that they should come forward to reduce stigma & discrimination in the society and support DLN. They also volunteered to form peer groups to spread awareness about positive prevention. The competitions of poster, slogans, poems and street plays were organized. The three best DLNs were given prizes.

CHILDREN AND HIV

Childhood is best phase in a person's life. It is associated with innocence, laughter, play and books. Ironically for some, a lot of it goes missing. These are Children Living with HIV. In newspapers, we often come across



CLHIV enjoying Iceland game- a game for unity at the state level exposition of PFI, Andhra Pradesh State unit

being thrown out of school due to their HIV status or being discriminated by community. Children Living with HIV (CLHIV) is a sensitive and important issue that need to addressed.

Keeping this in mind, Population Foundation of India, Andhra Pradesh state unit organized a state level exposition on 14th and 15th July 2009 at Vishakhapatnam. The theme for the exposition was "Children & Care Takers – A platform to discuss about children living with HIV/AIDS. Issues, Challenges and Solutions". Participants were care takers of CLHIV and CLHIV who are on ART. Nearly around 50 care takers and 50 children participated in the exposition. Officials from Andhra Pradesh State AIDS Control Society, NGOs working in HIV sector in Vishakhapatnam, District level Network staff members and representatives of NGO/Private sector consortium participated in the program.

Parallel sessions were organized for CLHIV and Care takers. The forum discussed on important issues like the problems faced by care takers in providing care to CLHIV, like discrimination in school, pressure to cope with other students, lack of physical development, missing school for ART, and children refusing to take medicines properly. It was recommended to start initiatives like life skill and support group meetings for CLHIV, low cost nutritious food and to provide economic support to CLHIV

Challenges faced and possible recommendations by care takers were advocated to the district government authorities and other stakeholders working with the issues related to CLHIV. Many of the CLHIV came to know about their status, many care takers came to know that children knew about HIV before coming to the program and were surprised with their knowledge. It was recommended to care givers that they should start talking about health issues with CLHIV at an early stage. Moreover, disclosure is not a one time event. It's an ongoing process. State AIDS Control Society has agreed to take up some suggestions given by care takers.

RECOGNISING THE CHANGE MAKERS

The Round 4, 'Access to Care and Treatment' program is being implemented in Tamil Nadu for the last four and half years. It has inspired many PLHIV to live a healthy life. The members of District level Networks, Positive Living



Participants at the " Change Makers 2009", state level exposition organized by PFI, Tamil Nadu State unit

Centers and Treatment Counseling Centers have contributed a lot towards effective implementation of the program. PLHIV in the ACT program have touched many lives in a positive way. It was time to recognize those who have come out of darkness, have accepted their status and helped many to accept theirs and to live a positive life. Keeping the theme "Change Makers 2009", Population Foundation of India, Tamil Nadu State unit organized a state level exposition from 29th to 31st July 2009 at Mamalla Beach Resort, Mamallapuram.

The exposition promoted good practices and provided PLHIV an opportunity to relax. Rewards, recognition and capacity building were the major tools used in the exposition to enhance motivation. Around 100 PLHIV participated in the exposition. The participants were members of District level Networks, Treatment Counseling Centres, Positive Living Centres, Social Workers, Counselors and Out Reach Workers. The sessions focused on the power of positive living. Resource persons were from UNICEF, TANSACS, APAC, Lawyers Collective, and Industrial Managements. Regional Coordinator from TANSACS shared her opinions on working with networks. Sessions revolved around important issues like spirituality and health, leadership and management. Expectations, responsibilities, qualities to be a good leader were discussed through interactive sessions. The face to face interaction between the networks and other stakeholders helped to develop better understanding and improved support to PLHIV. It attracted industries like Ashok Leyland and ITC to contribute to the networks in the form of providing nutrition, and mementos.

WOMEN AND HIV

Alarmingly, there is an increasing feminization of HIV/AIDS in India. Women face a lot of discrimination due to their HIV

status. Moreover, they are the primary care givers in a family and they are unable to devote proper time and care for themselves. Population Foundation of India, Karnataka state unit conducted a three day state level exposition from 20 – 22 July, 2009 at Kudalasangama of Baglkot District, Karnataka. The core participants were PLHIV especially positive women who are working as Volunteer Peer Educators in the ACT program.



Medical examination for WLHIV at the state level exposition organized by PFI, Karnataka state unit

The theme was "Women – Being the change makers in health and development". The aim was to improve knowledge about health and accessibility to services. This was an effort to educate and sensitize participants on issues like reproductive tract infection, cervical cancer prevention, second line ART, government schemes, low cost nutrition - preparation and demonstration, gender and enhancing health seeking behaviour among the women. Women Living with HIV discussed the issues with experts and cleared their misconceptions and doubts. Addressing the interactive session, the resource person from St John's Hospital, Bangalore gave an overview on cervical cancer, causes, risk factors as well as treatment methodologies. Treatment options for cervical cancer were discussed. Sessions on gender equality were also held. A medical camp was organized and medical test like blood group and Hb were conducted for the Women Living with HIV.

LIVELIHOOD AND HIV

Livelihood is one of the major issues related to The situation is grave in states like Manipur, where there are limited opportunities for occupation.



Dr. Kh. Pramod Kumar , PD (Technical), Manipur, SACS interacting to a SHG member at the state level exposition organized by PGFI, Manipur State unit

To address this serious issue, Population Foundation of India, Manipur state unit organized a state level exposition with the theme “Empowerment through Participation”. The broader goal of the exposition was to address the economic needs of the PLHIV in the state. Resource persons were from NABARD, Social Welfare, AMEA (All Manipur Entrepreneurs Association), and a proprietor of a small scale industry – Romi Bag Industries. Sessions focused on information about government schemes, capacity building and livelihood options for PLHIV. These expositions provided a platform for SHG members to exhibit their products and also an opportunity for them to learn about ways to improve the quality of their products in order to market them. The Self Help Group members also developed links with the government officials and private entrepreneurs through the resource persons who came as panelists for the exposition. . One of the major outcomes is that a Self Help Group from Thoubal is in the process of long term collaboration with Romi Bag for their bags made out of water reeds.

EMPOWERMENT AND HIV

People Living with HIV have the right to live a normal healthy life like any other person. For this PLHIV needs information about access to treatment and as well ways to sustain themselves. Empowerment of PLHIV is crucial to overcome stigma and discrimination and other problems faced by PLHIV. The theme of the two days state level exposition organized by Population Foundation of India, Nagaland state unit was “Empowering People, Strengthening Networks”. The exposition was organized in Dimapur Town Hall in collaboration with the Nagaland State AIDS Control Society (NSACS) and Network of Naga People Living with HIV/AIDS (NNP+) on 25th and 26th August 2009. More than one hundred and twenty PLHIV participated in this exposition. The participants were widows and widowers from various service delivery points of Nagaland. Dr Neiphi Kire, Project

Director, Nagaland State AIDS Control Society was the Chief Guest.

This exposition provided them an opportunity to get information on issues related to HIV/AIDS and livelihood. Various District Level Networks, Treatment Support Centre, Positive Living Centre and Community Care Centres established under the ‘Access to Care and Treatment’ program shared their best practices and lesson learned.

It motivated PLHIV and recognized the hard work of members and staffs of various service delivery points under the ACT program. To encourage them, various competitions were organized such as games, slogans, posters, music, rangoli, nutrition role plays and quiz. The participants actively participated in the competitions and were appreciated by prizes and certificates

Resource persons from NABARD and State Bank of India explained and informed participants about various schemes available. Mr Paul, Deputy Manger, SBI facilitated a session on how PLHIV can access banking, insurance and loan facilities from banks. He mentioned that small scale industries and agriculturists can avail loans through Village Development Board. He also shared loan system for Self Help groups. He also mentioned that in order to get Corpus Fund, SHGs need to have regular savings accounts. Ms Guite, Assistant Genral Manager, NABARD, Dimapur, gave a clear picture on various government schemes available like Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana, Prime Minister’s Employment Guarantee Progarm, National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme and schemes of Khandi and Village Industry Commission and Institute of Rural Development Planning. For Self help Groups, she explained training options and livelihood options for fishery, piggery, bamboo, ginger, forestry, oil, milk, bio mass, pineapple, tea among others. NABARD and SBI have shown their interest to support the training on SHGs and IGPs of PLHIV networks.

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