

Samraksha HIV/AIDS programme

Samuha is among the first NGOs in India that entered the arena of care and support of HIV positive people. It works at improving the quality of life for the poor and marginalised people in rural areas of Karnataka and its capital city. In 1993, Samuha set up Samraksha, its HIV programme to provide a prevention and care continuum in the regions it worked in. Skillshare International's involvement with Samraksha has taken the form of a number of Health Trainers, and the building of a successful funding relationship with the Elton John AIDS Foundation in the UK.

Over the years health trainers have included

- A gynaecologist and STD specialist,
- A palliative nursing care specialist to train to run two one-week courses in palliative care for a 24-member team
- A senior development consultant worker, brought in to train the field staff and to help review its current programme.
- A nurse offering training to nurses and drawing up curriculum for different types of caregivers at Samraksha

Samraksha's staff report that Skillshare International's flexible and responsive approach towards the selection of trainers has helped the NGO equip itself to face the growing epidemic. The nursing staff, counsellors, doctors and field educators trained with Skillshare International support are today providing services to over 3000 PLWHA at the two homes, out-patient clinics and through home visits.

Manjamma's face lights up readily. The engaging smile masks it all. You will not get an inkling of the secret she holds within her. It spells rejection, loneliness, gloom and fear. And the 43-year-old Manjamma is fighting every moment to live her life with dignity. She is HIV positive. And she has not told anyone, not even her only child, a daughter, about her status.

Manjamma was 33 when she learnt that she had the virus. Her husband, a tailor, had died of AIDS two years earlier. When she got fever and had difficulty in eating, she was advised to take the test. She came to Samraksha in 1994. Her world had started crumbling around her with her husband's death two years earlier. Her relatives had deserted her, and her neighbours had stopped interacting with her. So there was just no question of turning to anyone for help when she learnt she was positive. She had only one desire - to bring up her six-year-old daughter and get her married so that she would have a family of her own in case anything happened to her.

Regular touch with the SEVA clinic ensured that she got timely medicine and treatment for her ailments. But best of all, it provided her space where she could be herself, open her heart out, discuss her problems and find a sympathetic ear. Samraksha had brought together a group of about 50 positive women. They meet regularly sharing experiences, discussing issues. They also receive a monthly subsistence ration from another NGO, called Milana.

Manjamma has only words of praise for Samraksha's SEVA clinic, its doctor and care givers trained by Skillshare International trainers. It has a flexible sympathetic approach to patients helping them fulfil their desires and ambitions. And so, she keeps coming back, even though the bus fare is 50 Rupees. She comes, sometimes seeking treatment for her infections, but mainly to connect with others and find a space where she is accepted for what she is.