

SANGRAM PLUS REPORT

2010-11

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Last year, a more enabling environment for PLWHA began to emerge. There are visible signs of local government functionaries supporting PLWHA and their families in the villages, assisting them to access facilities. Examples of this include securing shelter, removing debt liabilities, addressing family harassment, accessing widow pensions, dealing with property disputes, and gender-based social and familial discrimination.

A greater level of discussion and documentation on HIV/AIDS and violence against women is being observed in village society, and in Gram Panchayat records for example. This results in legitimising these issues.

Due to SANGRAM PLUS, support between positive women has increased and more women are attending the meetings.

Annual Orphan programme

On 30th November 2010, a special educational trip was organised to Walwa sugar factory. DC staff got permission to allow the children to see the inside of the factory. 900 participants came from all over the district. Special buses were arranged from ten talukas. The sugar factory arranged food. The second part of the days' agenda was to visit a dairy project in Walwa. In the evening, a magician provided entertainment, which was enjoyed by all.

To mark World AIDS Day, a programme was held on 1st Dec 2010. Dr. Astekar, Head of Paediatrics, and his team from the civil hospital, were invited to deliver a lecture on paediatric health and care for PLHA. An open discussion followed wherein parents had many questions related to their children's health.

A physical examination camp for children was organised and local medical proprietors donated medicines. Government doctors were motivated to offer their skills and they examined each child and gave necessary medication.

The story of a woman member of SANGRAM PLUS

My story begins with being married when I was 15 years old. Within six months, I conceived. My husband was working in the dying department. I was staying with my in laws in the native village. When nine months pregnant, I went to the hospital for check up and I was detected HIV positive. After this, my husbands' family started troubling me. It was a bolt from the blue that I was HIV positive and to add to this my own people were torturing me. I was under considerable tension. The doctor suggested my husband should have a check up for HIV, but he never did. Then I delivered a baby boy. After my delivery, my husband came. He cursed me saying I had sex before marriage.

The doctor advised me to stop breast-feeding. My baby was given top feeding. My mother in law cursed me that because of my misbehaviour, the baby was suffering and that I was destroying their household. She started troubling me. My son died when he was six months old. This was another great blow. I was very depressed. I lost all my patience. Day by day, my mother in law and others started troubling more and more. I couldn't go to my parents, as they are very poor. I work on daily wages basis. My father is involved in a murder case, which occurred through family property disputes. He was sentenced to seven years imprisonment. Thus my parent's do not want me to fight with my in laws and leave the house.

Then my husband became severely sick and returned from Mumbai. He was suffering from cold, cough and dysentery. I took him to a private hospital to Karad. After the check up, it was detected that he was HIV positive. The doctors gave him medicines; but it was of no use. His digestive system failed and he had a tumour on his neck. My co-sister who works in an Anganwadi suggested I go to the government hospital where information on this illness given.

The next day I went to SANGRAM. The worker gave me all the information. I went to Vita and did the test for HIV and the remaining tests were done in the civil hospital. For three months took DOT medicines for TB. I frequently met the SANGRAM workers. They informed me about SANGRAM Plus, that they hold a meeting for such women on every fourth Wednesday of the month. The SANGRAM worker took me to the meeting every month. In the beginning there were only four women. The workers were guiding and supporting me in getting medicines from government health facilities. I was encouraged. I accompanied the SANGRAM worker to meet other women suffering from AIDS. I supported them by saying that I was just like them, and told them to take proper medicines and take care of their health.

After some days, the number of women in support group grew. We started organising regular meetings. I started taking them to the civil hospital for treatment. We shared our sorrows and worries with one another. We felt better and less isolated. My brother in law was troubling for a sexual relationship. But I refused. SANGRAM provided me confidence to do this. Another woman was undergoing the same problem. Her father in law wanted sexual relations with her and was threatening her. Four of us went to her house and threatened the father in law. After that he never troubled her. Like this I provide support to many positive women. I give information and even get them checked sometimes at my own expense. I am always eager to attend the SANGRAM plus meetings, more so than meeting my relatives.

In the meeting we got PPTCT information. All my friends persuaded me to have a baby, saying a child would be a good support for me. I felt the same and decided to have one. I conceived and after twenty-eight weeks started taking medicines regularly. I got a nice baby girl. All three tests of the baby were negative. I was so happy. My friends were very happy. Even my mother in law, co sister and other relatives feel better.

One of my husband's friend's working with him in Mumbai used to come to give me messages from my husband. His elder brother died of AIDS. Everyone knew that I was also HIV positive. My neighbours spread the rumour that I had had sexual relations with him. They troubled me a lot. My mother told them that we are already depressed and not to add to our troubles. I was so upset that thoughts of suicide entered my mind. In the nick of time, SANGRAM workers supported me. Because of their efforts I am alive. In the meeting, we come together and share our sorrows and joys. We feel relief. I help TB and HIV positive people by taking them to hospital for medicines and treatment. Considering my efforts, the doctors from PHC suggested that I should become a member of the patient welfare committee so that I will be able to solve problems of women in SANGRAM plus. I became a member of the committee. I have developed courage and strength because of SANGRAM Plus and I am now leading a very happy and comfortable life. I hope that all such women should benefit like me and I will help them and support towards this.