

# Positive Connections

Wake Up Pune Newsletter

## World AIDS Day: What's the Big Idea?

•The first World AIDS Day was 1 December, 1988.

•The day is about raising money, increasing awareness, fighting prejudice and improving education. World AIDS Day is important in reminding people that HIV has not gone away and that there are many things still to be done. But it is also a celebration of everything achieved by activists and people living with HIV.

•It was conceived in August 1987 by James W. Bunn and Thomas Netter, two public information officers for the Global Programme on AIDS at the World Health Organization (WHO). They took their idea to Dr. Jonathan Mann, Director of the Global Programme on AIDS (now known as UNAIDS) who approved the concept.

•The date of December 1st was suggested to ensure coverage by western news media. It was felt that because 1988 was an election year in the U.S. media outlets would be weary of their post-election coverage and eager to find a fresh story to cover. December 1 was considered long enough after the election and soon enough before Christmas that it was a dead spot in the news calendar and perfect timing for World AIDS Day.

•When the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) became operational in 1996, it took over the planning and promotion of World AIDS Day. In 1997 UNAIDS created the World AIDS Campaign to focus on year-round communications, prevention and education. In 2004, the World AIDS Campaign became an independent organization.

•Each year, Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI have released a greeting message for patients and doctors on World AIDS Day.

•Annual themes are chosen after extensive consultation with people, organizations and government agencies involved in the prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS, in order to highlight a particular issue connected to the pandemic.

•For each World AIDS Day from 2005 through 2010, the theme will be "Stop AIDS. Keep the Promise.", with a yearly sub-theme. This overarching theme is designed to encourage political leaders to keep their commitment to achieve universal access to HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment, care, and support by the year 2010. The sub-theme for 2009 was '*Universal Access and Human Rights*'.

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## Events by our partners

### Sahara Coffee Night



Last Friday (22<sup>nd</sup> January), Sahara held their Coffee Evening for all the clients at the hospice. The evening was an opportunity for clients to enjoy themselves by dancing to some Bollywood classics. The energy of the clients was electric with lots of amazing dance moves. No one would think that this close group of people had struggled hardships with their societies and families. When clients were admitted to Sahara, some had lost hope, strength and willingness to continue with their life. However with the support of the staff and evenings such as coffee night, they are able to have a good time, but also celebrate their own success and strength.





## “HIV POSITIVE” T-shirt: Purposefully Provocative

Yesterday, in a boot-camp for new volunteers, someone asked, “Shouldn’t ‘positive’ be in inverted commas?” He was concerned that people might interpret the t shirt as meaning that the wearer is literally HIV+. “That’s half the point,” responded an experienced volunteer.

The t shirts have been worn by *Wake Up Pune* volunteers for more than two years. We weren’t the first. The HIV POSITIVE t shirts first made an appearance at the International AIDS Conference in South Africa in 2000. The concept has since been picked up by NGO’s and activists world wide. They are initially shocking and persistently controversial, which is why we will discuss the pro’s and con’s of wearing them here.



First, the criticism: the t shirts are confusing. Without any explication of the word “Positive,” a passerby learns nothing about the virus or appropriate responses to it. Such a strong statement can also have the effect of alienating people. I’ve noticed that when we’re out distributing literature, I’m much more likely to have the pamphlet accepted from people on the street when I’m not wearing an HIV POSITIVE t-shirt. Another criticism

has been that by boldly proclaiming to be HIV POSITIVE, we are exploiting the condition and stigma in order to gain attention. Most of our volunteers are not HIV positive in the literal sense and therefore have no right to claim to be something that they can never fully understand. Finally, volunteers have suggested that if were to tone down the message, make it clear that the wearer is HIV POSITIVE strictly in the supporting sense, that more people would wear it and the message would have wider reach.

But let’s get into the original purposes of the t-shirt. It is true that it doesn’t actually convey that much information and could leave the casual reader confused. This, however, is intentional. Part of the purpose of the t shirt is to foster curiosity and encourage people to question the wearer as to the meaning of the shirt, thereby creating an opportunity for dialogue and some education. Even if a conversation doesn’t follow the confusion, the bold act of having those words read from one’s shirt is an act which breaks the oppressive silence regarding HIV.

Everyone who wears the t shirt accepts that many people will assume they are HIV+. And that’s OK, even potentially beneficial. It will shatter assumptions and stereotypes regarding people with HIV. The stereotype is that HIV+ people are poor, uneducated, and morally compromised in some way. The assumption is that it will be easy to spot someone with HIV; they will be skinny and morose, maybe with sores. Also, it gives those of us who are not living with HIV a small taste of the stigma that

PLHIV live with on a daily basis. And finally, it causes opportunities for educating the ignorant. Volunteers have reported being berated for using a public restroom, nasty looks, and other forms of discrimination. It is better that we provoke and air those fears and misconceptions in a controlled situation where we are able to inform and make aware.



After this explanation of our intent in wearing the t shirts, the criticism remains: are we trading shock value for wider-reach? How are we to weigh the benefits of the two strategies? The HIV POSITIVE t shirts exploit stigma in order to maximize effect and attention. A more fashionable and subtle t shirt would be hoping not to stir that stigma in order to open more doors. Is one better than the other? There are certainly arguments to be made on both sides, which is where we turn to you all. Is the reduced reach an acceptable cost for confronting stigma head on? Are we letting our passion get in the way of maximizing education of the public?

Ryan Turner

**What do you think?** We asked members of the public for comments on our T-Shirts, and here are the responses...

“My first thought is that the people I work with who are HIV+ deal with a lot of stigma and shame. Although I can see that the T-Shirt tries to do away with the stigma, I think it is too stark on its own. Is there a "wake up Pune" bit to the T-shirt to soften it or put the message in some context? have you had feedback from those who are HIV+? What do they think when confronted with the T-shirt?”

“They certainly look good and obviously catch the eye and would prompt thought - but I think its design might be still a bit too subtle. Subtle in terms of conveying the intended 'Be Positive About HIV' message. Otherwise, without explanation, one might think you are simply HIV Positive and proud. Hence, if extending the use of these t-shirts to places where people are very busy and evasive of any real personal contact (e.g. London) - I think the pun would be lost of many people. So I would recommend the text should simply read 'Be Positive About HIV' and the slogan might stay in the minds of the bypassers as well as those to whom you actually manage to explain it in conversation.”

“Being totally honest, if I was to see a person wearing it my first thoughts would be shock (as people are never that open with any kind of illness) and then intrigued. I'd want to know why you were wearing it... and I guess that's what you want people to think so that you can talk to them about it. It stands out and is to the point... so I think its perfect.”

**Got an opinion?** Send it to [info@wakeuppune.org](mailto:info@wakeuppune.org) and we'll put it in our next newsletter

## Campaign Update: Past and Future Events



**Since the last edition, the Wake Up Pune team have been present across the city campaigning and raising awareness. As well as Bootcamps, awareness sessions and kiosk, we have tried to go a step further in thinking up new ways of getting people interested in the campaign.**

We kick started the middle of the year with a very successful Bootcamp to educate people about HIV/AIDS, stigma and discrimination as well as sex and sexuality. By the end of the Bootcamp every participant had been educated and made aware of the various important issues and can now spread the message to their respective families, friends and communities. **HAMMER FEST** was one of the main events of the

month. While the crowd of over 300 enjoyed the music, our volunteers went in to the crowd to spread the truth about HIV/AIDS protection and hand out condoms. Our very own Meredith Zoltick got up on stage and talked about being HIV Positive – positive about education, positive about awareness, and positive about prevention. As well as being present at one the main events in Pune, our army of volunteers organised an awareness session at Pune railway station, an area that we had not hit previously. The response from the people was overwhelming as volunteers managed to distribute over 1000 information leaflets and tons of red ribbons during just few hours. **World Blood Donor Day** at Sahyadri Hospital Karvenagar, Pune was another major event of the month. Blood donors in the city were felicitated during the programs. 4 Blood Banks of Pune (Ruby, KEM, Inlaks & Sayadhri), in association with the Lifeline Community Network were present at the occasion. International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Drug Trafficking on the 26<sup>th</sup> of June was a big event in Wadia College where WUP organised a talk show. Guest stars included Dr. S. L. Bonde Vice Principal, Guest of Honor Dr. (Mrs.) Girija Shankar Vice Principal N. Wadia College and the panelists. A hall packed with over three hundred students, recovering drug addicts, NGO leaders and interested citizens listened as knowledgeable panelists spoke about the issues related to the day. “Say no to drugs but not to drug users,” was the main message of the talk show. Often the stigma attached to drug addicts prevents them from getting adequate support and help to stop their addiction. In addition, many

panelists touched on the meaning of harm reduction. Since not all addicts are the same and often respond to treatment differently, the message of abstinence from all drugs fails to effectively work for many. Therefore, NGOs and other treatment centers focus on teaching safer methods of drug use such as oral substitution and safe or no injection habits.

In July we made Bharati Vidyapeeth University Medical College HIV positive! The students were educated about HIV/AIDS and also the dangers of stigma and discrimination. This session was particularly important because these seventy students will go on to become doctors in the future. We organised another awareness session which was attended by over 40 volunteers, many were foreign volunteers who were interested about HIV/AIDS. On Sunday July 26th, Wake Up Pune joined two hundred music fans at Altersonic, a rock concert held at Lounge One in Koregaon Park. Members of each band could be seen wearing red ribbons to show their support for people living with HIV/AIDS and the efforts in stopping stigma and discrimination.

The month ended with a meeting of 30 volunteers all wearing their HIV positive t-shirts at the German Bakery.

One of the biggest events of the August was **Breaking The Silence at Osho Ashram** (1<sup>st</sup> August). A group of twenty volunteers went to combat the discrimination taking place at the Osho Ashram in Koregaon Park. In order to get participate in an Osho program one must take an HIV test, if they are HIV + they will not be allowed to enter. Friendship Day followed soon after (3<sup>rd</sup> August) organised at Nowrosjee Wadia College, Fergusson DES Law College, Marathwada Mitra Mandal's College of Commerce, Bharati Vidyapeeth University Medical College, Pune. After weeks of preparation, teams of volunteers visited four campuses across the city to spread awareness and support of people living with HIV and AIDS. We passed out red ribbons, the international symbol of support for people living with and affected by HIV, and flyers with information about the day and HIV in Pune. A few weeks later, we organised a BE HIV POSITIVE fundraiser at High Spirits Bar in Koregaon Park (12<sup>th</sup> August). Fighting the stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS by wearing HIV Positive shirts, volunteers managed to distribute over 1000 information leaflets and tons of red ribbons in just few hours. The army of volunteers also organised an awareness campaign at Pune Railway station (29<sup>th</sup> August) to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS to all.

One of the main highlights was World AIDS Day, where the team orchestrated a fortnight of events throughout the city which was aptly named 'Join the Fight' Fortnight. Everyday since the 18<sup>th</sup> of November, the

team had organised to be in many locations throughout the city. From the railway station to the shopping malls, the team canvassed the city handing out leaflets, posters and red ribbons. Many passers by were intrigued by our very bold t-shirts and most of the team had a positive response. December 1<sup>st</sup> saw volunteers, PLHIVs, and partners take to the streets and march for the courage and strength of those living positively. Chanting 'Puneka Rano, Jagee va', the rally grew in size from 200 people to 550 at Shaniwar Wada. People marched for what they believed in, being HIV POSITIVE. Positive about education, support and awareness. Unified and together, we made a difference.

But it doesn't stop there. Wake Up Pune has kicked started this year with a very successful and positive Bootcamp at Deep Griha Society on Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> January. People from all backgrounds attended to promote the work of Wake Up Pune but to also see how it is possible to get involved.

Roshni Mehta

Photos by Satraj and Vibuti from Symbiosis Media College



Above: students from BJ Medical College perform a street play.  
Below: World AIDS Day Rally 2009



## Challenging Discrimination: Pune and Worldwide

On 1 August 2009, a group of twenty *Wake Up Pune* volunteers set out to challenge the discriminatory policy of the Osho Meditation Resort in Pune. Currently anybody wishing to participate in any of their programmes are required to take a HIV test and if found to be positive are forbidden from taking part. Our volunteers took a tour wearing jackets over their 'HIV Positive' t-shirts, which they revealed once inside the Ashram. When they tried to ask questions at the end of the tour they were told by the tour guide that he knew it was discrimination but that he didn't care.

It is widely recognized that stigma and discrimination against HIV is contributing to the AIDS epidemic. It discourages governments from acknowledging or taking timely action against AIDS, deters individuals from finding out about their HIV status, and makes those

who know they are infected less likely to share their diagnosis and take action to protect others and seek treatment for themselves.

Laws and institutions that discriminate against people living with HIV reinforce negative stereotypes and legitimize stigma. On World AIDS Day 2009, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon urged countries to dismantle legal frameworks that institutionalize discrimination against people living with HIV and people who are at most risk of infection, saying that 'punitive laws, policies and practices that hamper the AIDS response are counterproductive and unjust...Successful AIDS responses don't punish people, they protect them.'

2009 saw both the USA and South Korea overturn travel bans for people living with HIV, but UNAIDS estimates that there are still fifty

seven countries that impose some form of travel restrictions on people living with HIV. The problem is far from solved.

This brings us back to Osho, and what we were trying to achieve. Although a small action in itself, challenging Osho's discrimination is part of the worldwide struggle against practices which reinforce myths about the danger posed by people living with HIV.

Wake Up Pune does a lot to break the silence surrounding HIV and AIDS; a silence that leads to ignorance and fear which promotes stigma and discrimination. Only by talking about HIV, and by challenging myths and discriminatory practices, can we overcome the stigma faced by people living with HIV everywhere.

Kate Evans

## New Faces... Dan and Emeline are taking over as *Wake Up Pune* coordinators



**Daniel Wilson** is from Sacramento, California USA. Dan graduated from the University of California at Davis with a BS in Physical Anthropology, specializing in primate behaviour. When in Sacramento, he works as an HIV and HCV Test Counselor, is an activist working on homelessness issues, and is an ardent harm reductionist specializing in syringe exchange programs and outreach to hard to reach, underserved populations. Dan arrived in Pune on Dec 1, 2009 to work as a volunteer for Deep Griha Society (DISHA) and Wake Up Pune and will be here until April 2010. This is Dan's 2nd time around working as a volunteer at DGS and WUP, having spent a month working in what was then the harm reduction programme at Patel Estates and Pimpri (in collaboration with Sahara) in August and September 2008. Dan is committed to expand on the incredible work that's been done by his passionate predecessors by emphasizing sharing, collaboration, empowerment, and organization.

**Emeline Rougeaux** has recently finished her internship in HIV and AIDS, health and gender-based violence at the World Health Organisation and will be working with Wake Up Pune and partners for the next 5 months.



### Events coming up for *Wake Up Pune* & HIV activism worldwide...

8 March—**International Women's Day**—Globally, HIV/AIDS is the leading cause of death among women of reproductive age. It has been estimated that 90% of women living with HIV in Asia were infected by their husband or long-term partner.

24 March—**International TB Day**—TB is the leading infectious killer of people living with HIV, and accounts for an estimated 13% of AIDS deaths worldwide. HIV and TB closely connected: HIV activates dormant TB in a person, who then becomes infectious and able to spread the TB bacillus to other .

20 to 26 May—**Global AIDS Week of Action**—Look out for our Candlelight Vigil.