

Employees Drive HIV Awareness Initiative

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HIV/AIDS which affects 2.5 million individuals in India. Fear of infection, coupled with negative, value-based assumptions about people who are infected, leads to high levels of stigma surrounding HIV and AIDS. Since one of the main causes of HIV is unprotected intercourse, the disease often carries a moral baggage. HIV related stigma has left many victims abandoned by family and shunned by society. Educating society and spreading awareness about HIV and AIDS is essential to ensure that those affected can lead a normal life. Our country needs concrete strategies to address HIV health care, including issues relating to privacy and spouse/partner notification. As HIV patients risk hostility and are often abandoned if their HIV status is disclosed, they often fear admitting to it, which goes a long way in spreading the disease. There is a critical need to reduce stereotyping and discriminatory attitudes directed at these people.

Being cognizant of the situation, PepsiCo India embarked on an HIV/AIDS awareness journey in 2005. Undertaken in association with the International Labor Organization (ILO), an 'Each one Teach one' approach was adopted to further spread the message and amplify awareness. A pool of employees was trained by ILO to create Master Trainers and Peer

Educators who could take forward the programme. Beginning with a 360-degree awareness model, the programme reached out to our key stakeholders.

It was the passion of the company's employees that overcame several obstacles to expand outreach of the programme to the communities we live in. Creative means like street theatre, talking doll shows, and film screenings were used, and community engagement was undertaken by creating interactive platforms at community celebrations like Durga Puja and Ganesh Chaturthi across the country.

There are several people who live with unaddressed medical and social problems even though they can lead a normal life. By sharing experiences and understanding the true nature of the illness, HIV victims can embark upon a struggle free life.

Such has been the impact of the initiative that by 2011 the programme has spread awareness and rebuffed HIV related myths amongst 4.5 million people across the country! Today, the initiative has generated 114 Master Trainers and 65 Peer Educators from the employee community. We hope to help transform several other lives by creating widespread awareness amongst a larger number of people by World Aids Day 2012.

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