

# Samraksha

ANNUAL REPORT

## **Samraksha : An Introduction**

### **Who we are...**

Samraksha is a development organization which has been working with different communities in Karnataka for many years. Over the years, our work has predominantly been with individuals and families who are vulnerable to and affected by HIV. Samraksha values the strengths and potential of individuals and communities. It is committed to building on these strengths, so that they can deal with the impact of HIV and other adversities on their lives.

### **Our Vision**

Our vision is of a Society where every Individual has the capability to lead a life full of health, equality and dignity.

### **Our Mission**

- Samraksha engages with individuals and communities who are vulnerable and at risk, to strengthen their ability to live safely and with respect
- Samraksha cares for and supports people affected and living with HIV to enable them to have a quality of life, without pain and with dignity
- Samraksha enables individuals and communities to be who they are and to move towards what they aspire to be.
- Samraksha engages with communities to achieve this overarching purpose

Samraksha's current programmes are largely based in Koppal district in North Karnataka and Uttara Kannada district in coastal Karnataka. The focus is on improving the quality of life of families affected by HIV. The different streams of programmes – adolescent resilience building, palliative care and care and support services- all revolve round the basic unit of family, with the aim of overcoming the catastrophic impact which HIV can have on the families – in terms of interpersonal family dynamics, socially and economically. Additionally, in the last two years, the focus has also been on mitigating the impact – on physical and mental health as well as socio-economic well-being- of the COVID on these already vulnerable families.

Samraksha also found an opportunity for growing in newer areas in the last year. Based on our years of experience in promoting resilience and mental health among adolescents in vulnerable families, Samraksha has started working in partnership with government primary schools which serve underprivileged areas in Koppal, to promote mental health among the children.

## A holistic approach to working with families affected by HIV

### Ensuring Health and Well Being

For families affected by HIV, frequent health problems in one or multiple family members is a major issue which also affects emotional, social and economic well-being of the family. Samraksha is working with the families in different ways to ensure physical health and well-being of affected members.

### Adherence to ART

The anti-retroviral medicines given to control HIV infection in the body requires to be taken very regularly, without missing doses. These medicines are dispensed from the district hospital on a monthly basis and need to be collected by the patients. During the peak of the second wave of COVID when there were many travel restrictions, patients were reluctant to travel to the district hospitals (at times at a distance of 100 kms) to take the medicines. But through regular contact with on the phone, Samraksha was able to ensure that people understood the value of the treatment and remained adherent to it despite difficulties.

Additionally, people stop taking medicines for periods of time, mainly due to some misconceptions or because they are having severe side effects to the medicines. Such people drop out of the health care system and need to be identified and counseled to get back on treatment. Samraksha was able to reconnect 4320 people back to the health care services during this period.

Basamma, a 49 year old woman had stopped ART because she was having many side effects like skin itching and dizziness. She was adamant about not taking the medicines. After a few months, she became completely bed ridden because of diarrhoea. When the family reached out to Samraksha, Samraksha coordinated her in patient care in the district hospital, and helped her recover from the illness. The counsellor also helped her understand that taking medicines regularly can prevent such serious episodes of illness and the side effects she fears can be managed through changes in drug combinations. She is now taking medicines very regularly

Initiating the anti-retroviral therapy can also be a difficult time for people living with HIV as they cope with fears and anxieties about their diagnosis, understanding the need for regularity to treatment and also coping with the at times debilitating side effects which the medicines can cause. So, it is important to have support during this period and good support in this period can help them maintain their adherence levels at later stages. Samraksha was able to work with

437 people who were newly initiated on ART and provide support in the initial phase to ensure that they are able to continue ART.

### **Screening and early testing**

People living with HIV are also particularly susceptible to opportunistic infections like TB because of compromised immunity. Hence it is important to screen them regularly for symptoms which can help in earlier service seeking to manage the condition better. Through this screening, Samraksha was able to support 88 people to go for early TB testing and treatment.

Samraksha also supported 74 families for HIV testing of partners and children, following the HIV diagnosis of one family member. This can be a very traumatic time for the family and many of them fear taking the test. Testing at the right time is however critical for early treatment which can ensure good health outcomes.

### **Home - Care Support**

At times, people living with HIV may be acutely ill or suffering from other critical illness, which restricts their mobility significantly. It is then difficult for them to seek care from the health care systems frequently. Samraksha organized home care support teams consisting of a nurse and social worker, to support these people. The home care team visited the patients, arranged tele-consultations with doctors, supported diagnostics by drawing samples and also educated the family on ways of increasing comfort and support for the patient at home. 41 home care visits were undertaken in the last year, to support people living with HIV.

Sharanappa, a 45-year-old man living with HIV also has chronic kidney disorder which has considerably restricted his mobility. He is, at best, able to walk around the house. The home care team makes periodic visits to his house to support family members in understanding how to care for him, assess his symptoms and needs and also coordinate the collection of samples for regular viral load and CD 4 cell count monitoring. This has ensured that his lack of mobility is not affecting his adherence to ART or regular tracking of crucial health indicators.

## Clinics

Samraksha also conducted a clinic for HIV positive adolescent children. The clinic was supported by an experienced doctor with training in HIV medicine and the clinic allowed for monitoring of regular health indicators of the children living with HIV and also screen for symptoms of opportunistic infections at an early stage. 36 children benefited from this service.

## Linkages for Other Health Services

Referral linkages and care coordination was another crucial service Samraksha was able to provide to the people living with HIV. While many local doctors (in public and private health care systems) are capable of treating many of the health issues which frequently trouble people living with HIV, they still need to be motivated to seek the service and also supported to manage the health care

systems, which may require different diagnostics, follow up visits etc. Samraksha was able to support 290 people to access health care services and complete their treatment within the local health care systems. More than 75% of these people were women, who typically ignore their health issues until the problem worsens and in the context of HIV may be vulnerable, widowed and heading households and need some assistance in navigating the health support systems.

## Nutrition

Good nutrition is a critical part of living well with HIV, since it ensures that body is able to tolerate the toxicity of the drugs. However socioeconomic issues may hinder access to adequate nutrition for people living with HIV. While Samraksha focuses on nutrition counseling, helping people identify local and inexpensive sources of good nutrition, supplementary nutrition is also provided to the most vulnerable families. This supplement is locally made with locally grown products

Kavita, a 13-year-old child, living with HIV, has lost both her parents and is living with maternal grandmother and uncles. She was suffering from multiple opportunistic infections and needed to be evaluated at the ART center in Bangalore. Her family expressed extreme reluctance to take her to Bangalore, saying they could not spare the time and resources for the same and were unfamiliar with the place. But Samraksha worked deeply with the family, helping them understand the urgency of the situation and the potential benefit to the child's health if they could go to Bangalore. Samraksha team also coordinated with the higher center in Bangalore to ensure smoother delivery of services. She stayed in Bangalore for 15 days and benefited from the course of observation and treatment which was undertaken there.

and can be easily prepared at home. 150 families benefited from regular supply of supplementary nutrition during the last year.

### **Mental health and psychosocial well being**

Living with a life limiting condition like HIV involves many emotional stressors which can affect mental health and well-being not just of people living with HIV but their family members also. One of Samraksha's main focus areas is the psychosocial support and Samraksha is specifically reaching out to children in HIV affected families.

### **Psychosocial Support to Cope with Living with HIV**

Living with HIV entails many adjustments and behavioral modifications, ranging from strict adherence to medicines, to regular and nutritious meals, avoidance of unnecessary exposure and risk etc. Sometimes, the medicines itself have a debilitating effect preventing people from working productively. There is also a lot of fear and anxiety about the future, given that the disease is life limiting and cannot be reversed. Questions about what is possible in future, grief for opportunities lost in life as well as anxiety about own health of family members health plague people living with HIV. All these cause significant psychosocial distress for people living with HIV and they need regular counseling and emotional support. Samraksha was able to reach 1778 people living with HIV with regular counseling during this period, which helped alleviate some of this psychosocial distress.

### **Resilience Building among children in HIV affected families**

Children in HIV affected families, whether themselves HIV positive or not, face lot of stress in the early years of development. This is because of the impact HIV has on the family – socially and economically, and also because HIV causes fear, anxiety, marital discord among parents which affects their capacity to care for the children. Samraksha realized that it is important to work intensively with these children because such issues in their formative lives can mar their growth and development but intensive and appropriate support at this stage can help them develop qualities and skills which will help them bounce back from these difficulties and thrive in their lives.

## Promoting Life skills, self-confidence and self-worth

For the last three years, Samraksha has been working with children in HIV affected families. These interventions include structured group sessions, to promote life skills, self-worth and self-confidence and also create shared experiences which can promote bonding among the group.

Despite challenges due to the COVID pandemic, Samraksha was able to continue these sessions, through a mix of online and face to face sessions. There were 250 online sessions on zoom and 27 face to face sessions and a total of 130 children participated in these sessions.

Face to face sessions included group discussions, simulations and reflections, shared activities, role plays, art experientials and exposure trips. All of these were aimed to broadening the horizons of the participants and helping them strengthen their own relationships within family and community, develop self-confidence, and a range of life skills including better communication, problem solving and decision making to manage their lives better.

The life skills content was also adapted to an online platform, where again a range of activities including picture/video-based discussions, reflections, s and art experientials focused strengthening specific life skills. Special phone-based skills, like photo and video shooting and editing were also discussed and participants were encouraged to create material using the new medium. Many of the participants have made and shared their own videos and photos on different platforms, entering into the world of social media. All this has added to their confidence.

### **Some learnings shared by participants who graduated from this programme**

I have learnt how to plan to attain our goals, in a systematic manner, how to make decisions based on the circumstances..... Kavya, 17 year old participant

I have learnt how to maintain relationships in life, how to how to behave with others based on their behavior..... Hemakshi, 17 year old participant

I used to be very naughty and irresponsible, but now I am taking responsibility in the family, I want to make sure my mother has a good life..... Mukkanna, 15 year old participant

(Participants have made their own short videos sharing their learnings from the programme. These videos can be seen at <https://www.samraksha.org/impact-pageC>



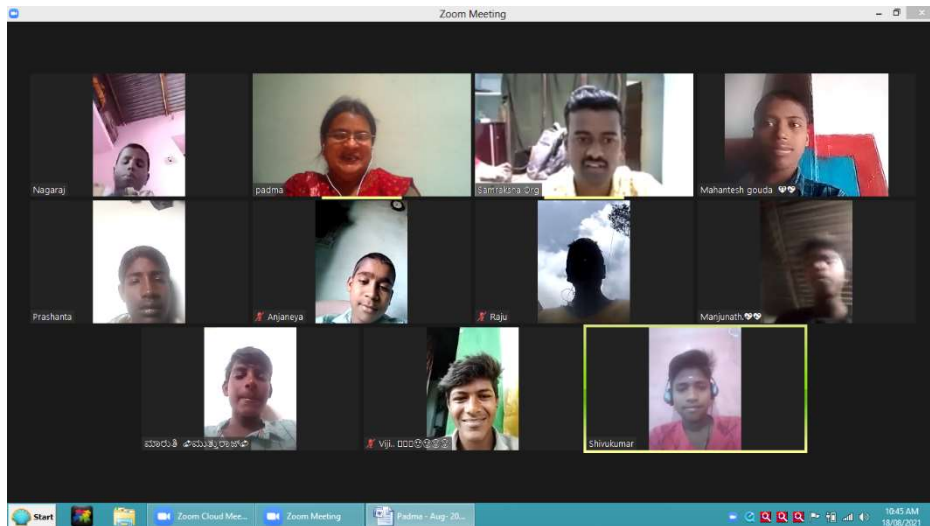
Exposure visits to broaden understanding of the world, have shared experiences which contribute to bonding and strengthen life skills.







Promoting practices like yoga and meditation to improve focus and concentration and for emotional regulation



Exploring New Possibilities on the phone : Online Zoom Session

## Brainstorming and Presentation



Shared experiences of joy and celebration to deepen bonds within the group



## Counseling and Mentoring

The group sessions were complemented by regular, structured one to one discussions with each of the children. This allowed for a deeper relationship to be established between the Samraksha team member and the child, so that they

could become a mentor and trusted adult who could support the child. It also opened up a space for counseling interventions with the child.

### Support for Continuing Education

Education for children in HIV affected families frequently suffers because of the economic impact of HIV on the family and also because children are at times expected to take on care giving or income generation work in order to support the family. And in case the children are living with extended families, their education is not prioritized in the family. With the long school closures due to the COVID pandemic, there was a significant chance that children may be forced to drop out of school altogether.

Samraksha worked with the children and families to ensure that all the children remained in school. After long closures, some of the children, specially those who were not doing well in school, were reluctant to go back to school. Some of them had started working and earning and felt this was a better option. Families were also inclined to let the child drop out. Samraksha worked with each of these families to ensure that the children remained in school.

Tuitions were arranged for children giving milestone exams, and this helped many children, prepare for exams specially because after long closures schools were rushing to complete the syllabus. Coping with this pace was difficult for many of the children, who already have significant learning gaps. Tuitions helped them cope with this.

Tuitions also allowed some participants, mainly girls, who had not cleared the exams in the past and but for this opportunity to remain in touch with studies and take the exam again, may have given up education altogether.

Hanumanti, a 17 year old girl living with maternal relatives had not cleared her 10<sup>th</sup> standard exam in her first attempt. Despite pressure at home to give up education and support the family in agriculture, she remained regular in tuition classes, but, unfortunately, she did not pay the exam fees in time and missed one more year. Still she did not lose heart and continued to attend tuition classes and finally cleared her 10 exam two years after her peers. But she is now convinced to continue her education and with Samraksha's support has also been able to convince her family to allow her to continue studying.

Raju, a 16-year-old boy, growing up in an extended family is extremely neglected. Even though he cleared his 10 exams during the pandemic, no one in his family was willing to support him to study further. Samraksha supported him to seek admission in a job-oriented diploma course which was being offered at a very subsidized rate and also helped mobilize resources, through well-wishers, to pay the nominal fees and also buy some essentials for the course. He is now doing well in the course and hopes to find a job as soon as he graduates.

12 children also started attending computer classes with support from Samraksha. These classes are giving them a lot of confidence, making them feel they have the skills to function in the modern world and hold down demanding jobs in the future.



### Socio economic support

Samraksha continues to make sure people living with HIV are connected to different social entitlements they are eligible for, including pension, loan subsidy, housing schemes etc. In the last year, 1388 people were successfully linked to social entitlements.

During the COVID lockdown, Samraksha was also able to work with other institutional donors in the area and ensure that 1235 very vulnerable and women headed households affected by HIV were able to get dry rations to help them through the lockdown period.

### New Beginning: Working with Children in Government Schools

The experiences which Samraksha has had in working with vulnerable families, especially children in HIV affected households helped in developing an understanding of needs of children in other vulnerable situations. In order to use this understanding and experience to benefit other children, Samraksha started an exploratory programme in partnership with the Government Higher Primary School, Gandhinagar, Koppal, in order to promote mental health. Core components of this programme

include group sessions to promote life skills, self-confidence and self-esteem and also one to one mentoring and counseling where needed, to help children overcome difficult situations. Samraksha started working with three classes in this school, and in the next year, we are planning to expand this work to include 6 to 8 schools in the area.



Group Activities to promote life skills among school children



**A note of thanks to donors**

We would like to thank all our donors who have made this work possible.- TTK Prestige, Haribhai Desai Foundation, JSW Foundation, Arghyam and Maharashtra Network of Positive People, who have supported us in the last year.

Our special thanks to all individuals who have extended support to our work, Mr. Mahendra and Mrs. Renu Arya, Ms. Maitreyi Ganesh, Mr. Pradeep Ramarathnam. Your recognition of our work gives us a lot of encouragement and we really appreciate your gestures of support.

We would like to thank Ms. Muktha Pujar and Sheetal Stores in Koppal, who have made generous donations in kind to support some of our vulnerable children.

SAMRAKSHA' FINANCIAL STATEMENT: 2021-2022

<b>Income and Expenditure Statement 2021-2022</b>		
Income	2021-22	Percentage of Total
Grant Received	6678876	86.20
Donation/Prog support	1012697	13.07
Fixed Deposit interest	52983	0.68
Others	3573	0.05
Total	7748129	
<b>Expenditure</b>		
Programme Expenses	6926492	89.40
Admin Expenses	573259	7.40
Excess of income over Expenditure	248378	3.20
Total	7748129	

<b>Balance Sheet</b>		
Assets	75284	0.32
Cash in hand	0	0
Cash at Bank	22448817	95.36
Loans and Advances	1015993	4.32
TOTAL	23540094	
<b>Liabilities</b>		
Corpus Fund	1000	0.01
General Fund	6243545	26.52
Capital Fund	75284	0.32
Donor Fund	16830708	71.50
Current liabilities	389557	1.65
TOTAL	23540094	

## Our Trustees

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Samraksha started in 1993 as the HIV/AIDS sector of a larger developmental organization, Samuha. Now an independent trust, Samraksha's vision is a society where every individual can lead a life full of health, equality and dignity. The current areas of work are Koppal and Uttara Kannada districts in Karnataka.

Samraksha believes in the strength and potential of individuals and communities. It works with them, specially the most vulnerable groups like children to strengthen their ability to overcome difficulties. Samraksha is also committed to ensuring care and support for people affected by HIV, to ensure that they have a good quality of life, and are able to live with dignity and without pain.

Samraksha also helps individuals and communities actualize their potential: to be who they are and move towards what they aspire to be.