



# AALHAD SAMACHAR

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## From the Editor...

Welcome to the first issue of *Aalhad Samachar*, the newsletter for all things related to Sahara Aalhad Residential Care and Rehabilitation Centre, Pune. Inside you will find contributions from volunteers, information about the work happening at Sahara, and more...

When tackling stigma and discrimination related to HIV/AIDS, there is an important distinction to be made between "felt" and "enacted" stigma. Felt stigma arises from the real or imagined stigmatizing responses of others. It has an important role to play in "policing" the behaviour of people living with HIV/AIDS, causing some to deny their serostatus, others to conceal it, and all to experience anxiety about telling others and seeking care. The consequences of both felt and enacted stigma undermine efforts to challenge HIV/AIDS-related discrimination, stigmatization and denial. Both prevent people living with HIV/AIDS publicly acknowledging their serostatus and playing their full and proper role in prevention and care.

Interventions targeting discrimination need to take place concurrent with the establishment of a **supportive legal framework** that includes generic antidiscrimination laws covering health care, employment, education, housing and social security, as well as effective enforcement mechanisms. Other important and complementary activities must include efforts to change attitudes through communication campaigns in the media, education and training.

Mike Marshall

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We believe that this battle against HIV will be won or lost at the grassroots — you are the grassroots.

Sahara Aalhad and DISHA have partnered with PCI and launched a year-long initiative called *Wake Up Pune*. During this campaign we aim to reach more than 4 lakh people in a concerted effort to sensitise them on the need to support people living with HIV/AIDS and not isolate, blame or neglect.

For full details about the campaign, please visit the website at:  
[www.wakeuppune.org](http://www.wakeuppune.org)



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# COMBATING HIV/AIDS - FROM PREVENTION TO TREATMENT AND CARE

Himakshi Piplani

Two decades and an estimated 5.7 million infections later, India continues to struggle with its response to HIV/AIDS. Although India's overall prevalence at 0.9% is still below the epidemic mark, several states are facing full blown epidemics with the prevalence being as high as almost 2% sometimes. Reflecting global trends, India's five-yearly strategic plan for HIV/AIDS management, the National AIDS Control Program, has up till now focused primarily upon prevention and capacity building for surveillance and research. As a result, despite being home to the largest population of HIV positive people, treatment, care and support services for People Living With HIV AIDS (PLHA) have so far been neglected.

According to the latest NACO estimates, nearly 5 lakh people are in need of ARV treatment. Yet, only an estimated 10% these people have access to treatment of which only 23,784 PLHA have access through the public sector. Moreover, second line medications are available only on private sector prices. The ongoing patent battle between western pharmaceuticals and Indian generic companies is also threatening access to affordable treatment. Care and support services are almost

non-existent for PLHA. There are not enough care homes to take in PLHA who have been ostracised by their families. There is no strong legislation to protect their rights at workplaces and they continue to face discrimination even by the medical fraternity.

At the UNGASS +5 this year, however, the focus of the global response

**5.7 million people live with HIV/AIDS in India**

UNAIDS 2006

**Many more millions are directly affected by the pandemic**

shifted greatly towards treatment and allied services. Stakeholders at both international and national level are waking up to the realisation that treatment, care and support for those infected with HIV/AIDS are essential to an effective response and thus need to be integrated in a comprehensive manner with the ongoing prevention programs. Reaffirming this, the member

countries at the Session, including India, have committed to scale up availability and access to treatment and allied services for PLHA with the aim to achieve the ambitious target of 'Universal Access' by 2010.

The way ahead is challenging for it is time to follow up on lofty commitments with concrete action. If we are to ever combat the HIV/AIDS epidemic successfully we have to start by ensuring that those infected by HIV/AIDS are equipped to combat it in their own lives first.



SAHARA AALHAD -- AN ENVIRONMENT OF LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE

**“Join us in tearing down the walls of silence, stigma and discrimination that surround the epidemic. Join us, because the fight against HIV/AIDS begins with you.”**

**Secretary General of the United Nations,  
Kofi Annan**

## A VOLUNTEER'S PERSPECTIVE

Kimberly Lacroix

Sahara Aalhad was first introduced to me by a friend volunteering at the centre. On hearing about the work Aalhad did my first reaction was "Damn good work!", but not for me. I wanted to do something different and to me HIV was a field where loads of NGOs were working towards awareness and prevention. Although there was a need, a want to do something for others than myself, this want transformed into a resolution after my first visit to Aalhad.

My first visit brought me to the crude reality that life isn't as rosy as I thought it was. Despair, rejection, isolation and a defeated attitude towards life was written on the faces of the clients. Here was where I realised that awareness - important as it may be - is not enough, the unconditional acceptance and rehabilitation of those infected and rejected by their loved ones is just as important and necessary.

Aalhad is where I received a deeper understanding of what it is like to be in the shoes of a positive person. It is here that I realised that it is very easy to talk and boast about acceptance but very difficult to actually practice these ideals. It dawned upon me that whatever I did, even if it was for a short period of time would make a difference to at least a small amount of people whether recognised or not.

One of my intentions was to try, as far as possible, to change the client's attitudes from a defeated one to a healthy, normal and positive one towards life with the knowledge I have on counseling being a psychology student. As the weeks went by my resolution was strengthened even more. Each day at Aalhad is a new learning experience for me, which makes me even more aware of the emergency of the situation and the need to act towards it.

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## THE REIKI EXPERIENCE

Ryan Turner

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I was recommended to Aalhad because of my background in Reiki, an eastern system of healing. In the USA people are incredibly skeptical of the metaphysical and are embarrassed to be prayed for. I thought it would be the same in Aalhad, expecting it would be a few weeks before the clients warmed up to me to work Reiki on them. I couldn't have been more wrong.

On the first day I worked on three clients, by the end of the week it was ten. Everyday more clients call out to me to be prayed for. I have been continually surprised by their hunger for prayer and their faith in its ability to work. Many of them have shown remarkable emotional upliftment after the Reiki sessions. A big factor affecting the clients physical health is their emotional and

mental frame of mind which has been bettered by the Reiki.

I am not able to share the language and so I cannot ease their emotional pain through counselling. They cannot tell me their deepest painful situations and the scars it has left but I definitely can be like family to them true to the Aalhad philosophy. As I pray over them and do Reiki, I see them as my brothers, sisters or children in a sense as GOD sees them, because while society many a family and friends have forgotten them, they have not been forsaken by GOD who is working wonders through the compassionate care rendered by the entire team at Aalhad who are so devoted. May God shower his choicest blessings on them always. Love and concern gives life.

## SAHARA BAND: ROCKING PUNE FOR A CAUSE

The Sahara rock 'n' roll band visited Pune in November to launch the *Wake Up Pune* HIV/AIDS awareness campaign. During their visit down from Delhi, the band played shows to enthusiastic audiences at three venues in the city.



At each show, theme posters and banners were displayed and condoms and ribbons distributed.

Many thanks to all the band and crew who entertained everyone along the way and helped to kick off the campaign with a bang.



## ABOUT SAHARA AALHAD

As Pune's only care home for people living with HIV/AIDS, Sahara Aalhad's philosophy includes never turning away a person in need. Created in 2001, Sahara Aalhad cares for acutely ill persons with HIV/AIDS. Most of Sahara Aalhad's residents have families who have rejected them and have no other source of shelter, food, or medical care. Sahara Aalhad does not turn people away based on religion, ethnicity, gender, or social status. When single mothers arrive at Sahara Aalhad, their children are also welcomed.

While Sahara Aalhad has a bed capacity of 30, it is the only place where many can turn to for care. As such, it is not uncommon for Sahara Aalhad to be 50% or more over capacity. Sahara Aalhad is situated on the Pune Nagar Highway and is strategically located to serve both the city and its surrounding areas. Currently, Sahara Aalhad runs with no outside funding

Sadly, stigma related to HIV/AIDS is one of the most significant problems facing the residents of Sahara Aalhad. HIV/AIDS-related stigma is the reason so many families refuse to care for our clients when they are ill and refuse to allow them to return home after they have recovered from their acute medical problems.

Sahara Aalhad is part of Sahara, a 28 year old organisation whose mission is to empower people facing difficult situations due to substance use and/or HIV/AIDS. Sahara is a therapeutic transitional community working with people irrespective of their beliefs, economic status, literate or illiterate and the marginalised. Its aim is to make people confident, independent and free them from the systems that ensure that their lot in life will not improve.



HIV is REAL  
HIV is HERE  
HIV is NOW

### The Needs Zone

Refrigerator (360 Litres) x 1 unit.  
Metal Cots x 10 units.  
Mattresses x 10 units.  
Ambulance x 1 unit.  
Desktop Computer x 1 unit.  
Inverter (1.5 KV) x 1 unit.  
Nutritional Support x (Medicinal)

If you would like to donate or contribute towards any of these items, please contact us. Thank you for your support.

### The Gratitude Bowl

Your support made a difference

Mr & Mrs Mehra, Pune  
Ms Mary Shepherd, Canada  
ABC Farms, Pune  
St. Paul's Church, Pune  
SSU—DeNobli College, Pune  
Rev. Thomas, Pune  
Ms Shruti Shetty & Ms Ruth Beberman, Pune

Thank you.

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