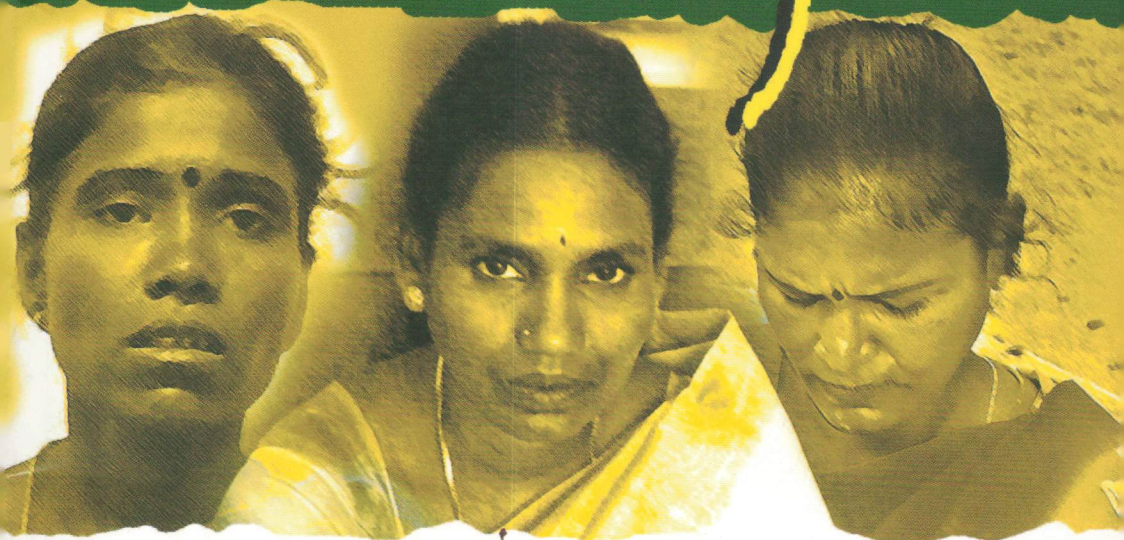


Testimonies on Positive Prevention

Agents of Change



TANSACS



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



APAC-VHS

AIDS Prevention and Control (APAC) Project, Voluntary Health Services (VHS), Chennai.



Testimonies on
Positive Prevention

Agents of
Change

Copyright	:	APAC
Year	:	2010
Documented and designed by	:	Ms. Asma
Designed at	:	The Design Depot
Advisors	:	Shri. Shambhu Kallollikar, IAS, Project Director – TANSACS Dr. Bimal Charles Project Director – APAC
Concept and coordination	:	Dr. T. Ilanchezhian Director–Program Operations – APAC

This document is a formal publication of AIDS Prevention And Control (APAC) Project (APAC-VHS-USAID), and all rights are reserved by the organization. The document may, however, be freely reviewed, abstracted, reproduced and translated, in part or in whole, but not for sale or for use in conjunction with commercial purposes.

The views expressed in the case studies by the author are solely the responsibility of the author.

foreword

H

IV/AIDS is a public health issue which has demanded worldwide attention. The AIDS Prevention and Control (APAC) Project has relentlessly worked towards combating this global catastrophe for the last 15 years.

In the last decade and a half, APAC has carved a niche for itself in the field of HIV/AIDS management, thanks to the innovative approaches it has adopted. Positive prevention is one such strategy which has been adopted to make sure that people who are infected with HIV become active partners in prevention.

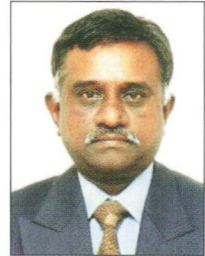
Positive prevention is a line of approach that needs to be integrated into the ongoing prevention and care programme to halt the spread of HIV. The case studies presented in this booklet are of core PLHIV women, who have adopted positive prevention as a policy not only to stay healthy, but also to make sure that the community and society they live in, is free from HIV.

We thank *Shri Shambhu Kallolikar IAS, Project Director, TANSACS* for leading the state and guiding the team to promote positive prevention. Our thanks to TANSACS, TSU, DAPCU, ICTC team members and the NGO team members, who motivate the core PLHIV towards positive prevention.

Our thanks to Ms Asma, Consultant for documenting the case studies.

My thanks to Dr T. Ilanchezhian, Director Programme, APAC for this innovative concept of bringing out the experiences in positive prevention, as a model document.

Dr Bimal Charles,
Project Director
APAC-VHS



“ I will not share the virus with anyone ”

I am 39 years old. My parents are from Thanjavur. My father used to be a party worker with a political party. He died when I was around nine years old. My mother was a cook with the mid-day meal scheme. She died eight years ago, when I was 31 years old.

We are eight siblings – four sisters and four brothers. I have two older sisters and three older brothers. I am the sixth child. I have a younger sister and a younger brother. My two older sisters are dead; they committed suicide due to unhappy marriages. My younger sister is a domestic help in Chennai.

My older brother has a rice shop in Kerala. Another brother runs a steel vessels shop in Thanjavur. The third brother is a plumber and the younger one is a farm hand, also in Thanjavur.

I went to school till the 2nd standard. I dropped out when my father died. I stayed in the house and helped my mother and older sisters with the chores. When I reached menarche, my mother, fearing for my safety, sent me to the Women's Protection Home in Trichy, where I started studying again. I must have been the first person, who was sent to a protection home, by her own mother, without having committed a crime. I was a good student and completed my 8th standard in three years after which my mother took me back home. I was 17 then. By this time, my older sisters were married, and had left home.



Revathi

After my father's death, my mother was living in her sister's house. My aunt did not like us living with them and used to take it out on me. She would beat me at the slightest excuse. I told my mother, I would not stay there. So my mother found me a match.

I was married in 1988, when I was 18 years old. My husband was a car driver from Tirunelveli. After I got married, I lived in Tirunelveli happily for about a month. One day, a month after the wedding, I discovered that my husband was already married. His first wife lived in Ooty. I waited for him to come home in the evening. After dinner, I slowly broached the subject. The next thing, I knew was I was lying on the floor with a bleeding forehead.

Then the torture began. It was as if there was no need for him to pretend to be a nice man, anymore. He constantly got drunk and beat me. He would often burn me with cigarette butts and once even cut my arm with a blade. One day, unable to bear the torture, I walked out of home. I just took the first bus available and landed in Trichy.

It was only after coming to Trichy I began to wonder how I was going to call my mother and let her know where I was. I knew that my mother would be very upset with me and I would not be welcome in my aunt's house. As I was sitting in the bus stand wondering,

an auto driver came there. He asked me to go with him. Not knowing what else to do, I went with him. He took me to a small room. There, he began asking me about myself. It was the first time in years that someone had spoken kindly to me. I broke down and told him my story. He consoled me, asked me if I wanted to stay with him. I agreed.

The auto driver Shankar (name changed) looked after me and

The moment I got to know I had HIV, I took a major decision. I have got this virus from someone. But I will not give this virus to anyone else. I am prepared to share my life with the virus, but I will not share this virus with another person.

”

helped me recover physically and mentally. It was many months before I could smile and laugh. Under his care, I began to recover. I also began to think of myself as his wife. I knew he was married, but that made no difference to me. He would spend a few days with me and a few days with this wife.

Some months later, I decided to take him to meet my mother. I knew that my mother would have heard about my running away from my husband's house and she would be worried about me. On reaching Thanjavur, Shankar and I went to meet my mother. At first my mother was very angry. But, as I began telling her all that I had

gone through in my marital home, she was at first shocked and then relieved that I had escaped that hell. She also became very grateful to Shankar for taking care of me.

I came back to Trichy and set up home with Shankar. A couple of years later I gave birth to a baby boy. I was very happy. However, during this time, Shankar had begun going out with other women. I was so wrapped up in my little home that I was blissfully unaware. Gradually, the signs of Shankar's womanizing began to appear in our life. He became irritable and bad tempered. He stopped giving money for household expenses. I did not know what to do. I tried doing odd jobs to keep the house

running. But there was never enough money.

During this time, I met a woman from our locality. I had seen her occasionally. She asked me how I was and I confided my problems in her. She told me that she knew of a way to solve my problems. She said she would introduce me to some people. All I needed to do was to sleep with one or two men and I could get enough money to feed myself and my baby. I agreed. She took me to a madam



who ran a brothel and I began working there. I would stand at the bus stand and get clients and take them to the brothel.

A few days later Shankar got to know about it. Instead of being angry, he seemed relieved. Gradually, he began getting me clients too. I began entertaining people in my own house too. During the course of my work, I became friends with many other sex workers. Some of them were a part of an organization called Anbaalayam. I also began coming for the meetings and soon became a peer educator.

No matter how much money is offered, I will have sex only when a client agrees to use a condom.

”

In 2008, I began feeling ill. I had already heard of HIV during the many trainings at Anbaalayam. So, I went to the General Hospital, and got myself tested. The test results showed that I was HIV positive.

I had met several people who were HIV positive at Anbaalayam. They were healthy, and leading comfortable lives. Therefore, I was not scared. I told Shankar about it. He thought for a while and said that he also wanted to be tested. So we both went to Anbaalayam and got the test done. His result was also positive. Once the test results came out Shankar changed. At first he was terribly scared. No amount of counseling helped and he began to blame me for the infection. Finally, things got so

bad that we separated from each other.

After separating from me, Shankar went back to his wife. I had already met his wife before, so I thought I should go and speak to her about her husband's HIV positive status. I went there counseled her. I told her that there is nothing to be afraid of. HIV, today, is like any other chronic ailment like diabetes. I also advised her on safe sex.

The moment I got to know I had HIV, I took a major decision in my life. I have got this virus from someone. But I will not give this

virus to anyone else. I am prepared to share my life with the virus, but I will not share this virus with another person. Today, I do not have sex without a condom. No matter how much money is offered, I will have sex only when a client agrees to use a condom. I have also become very careful about my food habits. I eat well and on time. Nutritional support also comes in the form of 'sattu maavu' from Anbaalayam.

Somewhere around this time, I met one of my old clients. He is now my regular partner; but he doesn't live with me. He is not married. He pays me for maintaining the house and is close to my son. I told him of my HIV Positive status and I took him for a test. He is negative, and I make sure I use a condom with him. Though I am HIV positive, I still know that the health of the community I live in, is also my responsibility.

I joined Anbaalayam as a peer educator. Now, I am a Community Health Educator and a salaried staff. I am also undergoing a training in tailoring as part of the Shakthi Plus livelihood programme. I have also learnt aari work and jewelry making.

I can make Kundan jewels, and have begun selling these jewels from my house. I am hoping to set up a small business unit shortly. I do not do sex work anymore. I meet my partner once a week. I am happy with him.

Last year, I went for the test and found my CD4 count was 106. I, therefore, started on Anti- Retroviral Therapy. Presently, my CD4 count is 444. I am doing yoga regularly. I keep healthy by going for walks. At the NGO, I learnt that the guiding principles of every PLHIV's life should be Purinthidu (Be aware) Thittamidu (Plan), Seyalpadu (Act). I try to take care of myself and I am careful about not spreading the infection to my clients.

Though I am HIV positive, I know that the health of the community I live in, is my responsibility.

”



S. Krishnaveni

“Prevention is my mission”

I am 40 years old and live in Police Colony, Tiruchirapalli. My father was a draughtsman in the forest department, mother a house wife. I was one of four children – one boy, three girls. My elder sister is married and lives in Coimbatore. She has two children. My elder brother did B.Sc., B.Ed. and is presently running a small scale industry – producing factory lubricants. The younger sister finished her diploma in computers and is married. Her husband works in the Agriculture Department. They have two children – a boy and a girl.

I studied till the tenth standard. Then, I failed in Mathematics and my mother told me not to continue my studies. After that I studied tailoring and then stayed at home helping my mother. In 1996, I was married off to a security guard. Soon after my marriage, my in-laws began harassing me for dowry. They wanted my parents to give them another 25,000 rupees. My parents could not afford it and I was sent back to my parents. I was divorced in 1998. During the two years I was married, I had lived with my husband for merely three months.

In my parents house, I felt like I had become a burden to my parents. When my siblings started speaking to me badly, I began to look for a job. A lady, who I had met at the local grocery shop told me that I could earn good money if I did housework in Bombay. I knew my parents would never agree to my going to Bombay. Therefore, I left home without telling my parents. Once I reached

Bombay I found out that I had been sold into a brothel. I cried and begged to be let off. I told them that I was not a sex worker and I wanted to go home. But who would listen to me? Customers were forced on me and I was forced into sex work.

On the tenth day of my stay in the brothel there was a police raid. I was rescued and taken to an organization called Navajeevana. I was taught embroidery, tailoring and knitting by the social workers there. At the same time, the authorities also made effort to contact my parents and send me back home. In a short while, they traced

my parents and sent me back to Chennai. In Chennai my brother came to pick me up. He cried a lot when he heard what I had been through. My parents were also very understanding and asked me to forget everything and return to them. I went back home and all was well for a while.

A year or two later, things at home began to change. At first there were taunts about how I was a burden to the family and how I should have made efforts to stay married etc. I began to look for a job again. I got a job as a maid servant in a house in Thanjavur. However, the living conditions were bad and they did not pay me regularly. When I asked my employers about the payment, they told me that I was not a good worker and they did not want me. I left them

and went back to Trichy. However, I did not want to go back to my parent's house. What was the point? I knew they did not want me.

I had no other way of earning a livelihood. I decided to use whatever I had learnt in the ten days at the brothel and become a sex worker. I soon became a very sought after sex worker. My parents heard about it, but they did not want me to come back. I began to live on the streets.

Somewhere around this time, I began to fall ill. Some of the other sex workers, who were in contact with Anbaalayam, took me there.

The counselors made it their mission to help me understand positive prevention. The care shown by them was more than the care shown by my own family.

”

I was tested for HIV and it was found that I was Positive. When I was told about the test results, I was totally indifferent. This is because, I had not heard about HIV at all. My parents were contacted and counseled. They were shattered, but agreed to take me home. However, once I got home, they tried to keep me under lock and key. I still managed to escape and go out once in a way.

That is how I met my second husband. He was a coolie at that time, but now he works as a construction worker. He knew that I was positive but still decided to live with me. I married him without telling my parents. His family members accepted me as his wife without any problem. We settled down in Thiruvanekevil in 2007. I took up a job as a dishwasher in a hotel. A girl child was born to us in 2008, and we named her Vennilla. The baby is negative and so is my husband.

Now, I am a peer educator at Anbaalayam. It was here that I heard of positive prevention. The counselors made it their mission to help me understand positive prevention. The care shown by them was more than the care shown by my own family.

I attend their meetings regularly and avail services provided by them. I also spread the information about safe sex practices. Though my husband has a problem with it, I still use a condom for his safety. After all, it is also my responsibility that my husband, my family, the society I live in, is safe from HIV. These days I am undergoing training in jewelry making, embroidery, and tailoring as part of the Shakthi Plus livelihood programme.

My CD4 Count is 467. I am not on ART. I get nutritional support every month when I attend the Anbaalayam Support Group meeting. I also get good food from the hotel where I work and am in good health. The hotel work is from 10 am to 2 pm and I get paid Rs 75 per day.

***It is also my
responsibility
that my
husband, my
family and the
society I live in,
is safe from HIV.***

”



Salaith Mary

“The gift from my husband”

I am 35 years old and was born in Kannakudi, in Lalgudi town. My father and mother were both farm hands. We were 7 siblings: 5 girls and two boys. I am the second one. My elder sister is dead. Two of my younger sisters are married. One is yet to be married. The two brothers are still very young. One is working as a welder and the other is studying in the 11th standard.

I have studied up to the third standard. I stopped going to school, because there was no one to look after the children at home. My mother used to go out to work and I and my elder sister were forced to stay at home and look after the younger children. After my siblings grew a little older, I began to work as daily-wage labourer at a construction site. But the work was irregular and money was not enough. So I started working with my mother as a farm hand. My elder sister looked after the house. My younger siblings continued to go to school.

When I was 17, my elder sister was married off to a farm hand. Within three years of marriage she had two daughters. She got pregnant again. But by then she had become very weak and she died in childbirth, along with the child. My family thought that it would not be good to get a step mother for the children, who were 6 years and 5 years old. So I was married off to my brother-in-law. I was 24 years old at that time.

Soon after marriage, I had a boy. By that time my husband had

begun to fall ill frequently. I did not know what to do. I took him to several doctors. He was finally diagnosed as HIV positive. The doctors directed us to GHTM. He had developed TB and he died when my child was 6 months old. I was 26 years old. The shock killed my father.

Shortly after that I, too, began to fall ill. The doctors who knew of my husband's condition asked me to take a test for HIV. I took the test and was diagnosed positive. I had seen my husband suffer,

and I did not want to go through the same thing. I decided to commit suicide. However, my mother gave me courage and said she would stand by me. She took me home with her. I took the three children and went to my parents' house. My mother did not share my HIV Positive status with anyone, as she did not want people to stigmatize me.

***Pudhiya Nambikkai
(New Hope, a book
on HIV/AIDS) is
very informative
and comprehensive. It gave me
information on how
to lead a healthy
life after the HIV
infection.***

”

I began to work at a construction site, where the payment was irregular. Life was very difficult. Often there wasn't enough to eat. Once I was sharing this with a co-worker. She said that she knew of a way to earn more money. She spoke to the supervisor and he began to arrange clients for me to have sex with. These included the site engineers, supervisors, contractors etc. Since most of them were educated, they used a

condom. I feel happy that I did not infect anyone.

Three years ago, my mother died. I was around 32 years old at that time, and my younger sister got to know about my sex work. She began to prevent me from going to work. Her husband also began to object my working at the construction site. I got angry and left home.

Once I met an old friend in the bus. She said she was going to an NGO called LEAD – Link for Education and Development. She did not know I was a sex worker, but was aware of the fact that my

husband had died of AIDS. She invited me to go along with her, and I did.

At their office I was advised about safe sex and HIV prevention. Moreover, I got some monetary help, and the child was given school fees, school supplies and uniform. I decided to join the NGO and began to attend the meetings. I was appointed a peer educator in two months, and after a year was made the Community Health Educator. This is a salaried post and I feel I am now a part of the NGO. I attended a training in which I was taught about safe sex, how to use and negotiate the use of a condom. I was also told not to take my infection lightly. I was told that having HIV, made me more susceptible to other STIs and, therefore, I should always use a condom.

At the NGO, I saw the book Pudhiya Nambikkai (NEW HOPE). This was very informative, comprehensive and gave me information on how to lead a healthy life after the HIV infection. On my request, the counselor visited my house and spoke to my family members. This has helped in creating a safe space for me at my home. I may be able to use a condom at work, but I need good nutrition and peace of mind, to be able to lead a healthy life. This was provided to me by the counselor's house visit.

***I may be able to use
a condom at work,
but I need good
nutrition and peace
of mind, to be able
to lead a healthy life.
This was provided
to me by the
counselor's house
visit.***

”

As a part of the Shakthi Plus livelihood programme, I have learnt how to make sanitary napkins. I take them to the villages and sell them to young girls and women. I also use this opportunity to speak to them about menstrual hygiene.

After coming to the training, I have learnt to take care of myself. I began to do yoga and exercise to maintain my CD-4 count. It is 745 at present and I am not on ART. I get nutritional support in the form of sundal and rice from the NGO. I also eat good, nutritional food. I eat an egg every day, and also make it point to eat spinach often.

Uma Maheswari



“The NGO staff saved my life”

I am 35 years old. My father was a small time landlord and business man in Madras, and we were quite well off. My parents had 12 children and I am the 11th child. My mother died when my younger brother was born. I don't even remember her face. I have only seen photos of her.

When my mother died, my father decided not to remarry. However, to look after the children, he asked his sister, a widow, to come and live with us. My aunt was a very strict woman, a disciplinarian. She made it her responsibility to see that we were all well looked after. She made it a point to send all of us to school.

I did not like school. I studied up to the 4th standard, and then dropped out. I would wander around the locality, playing with other children. This made my aunt very angry.

Once when I was around 11 years, I had done some mischief, and she hit me. I don't even remember what it was. But I got very angry. I picked up a stone lying on the ground and threw it at her. The stone cut her forehead and it began to bleed. I got scared and ran away.

We lived near the railway station. In my fear and confusion, I climbed into the first train that I saw, and it was a train to Trichy. That is how I landed here. On coming here, I realised that I had around 15 rupees in my pocket. I had something to eat and then decided to see a movie. After the movie, I began to wander around looking for a place to sleep. Near the bus stop, I saw an auto driver fighting with

a woman and he stabbed her. I ran away from there and kept running till I saw a night constable on his patrol. I told him what I saw. After the investigation, he asked who I was and what I was doing alone at that time of the night.

I was scared to tell him the truth. I thought if he got to know my whereabouts, he will take me back to my father and aunt. So I told him that I was an orphan and I had no place to go. The policeman took me to the Women's Protection Home, in Trichy.

I stayed there for the next five years. The women (mostly sex workers) who were housed there, looked after me very well. For the first time in my life I experienced affection. I also began going to school and soon began to enjoy studying. In five years, I reached the 8th standard.

The NGO staff helped me deal with my anger, and restored my emotional balance. I also got the much needed courage to live, from them.

”

Soon I was nearing 17 years and it was time to leave the home. The authorities again asked me if there was anything I could tell them through which they could trace my parents. I was scared to tell the truth. So I begged a sex worker who was stationed in the Home to pose as my relative. She agreed. We arranged with some of her contacts to arrange a false relative who would claim me as his lost niece, and take me home. Our plans succeeded and I was free.

Once I was released, the sex worker took me to her house. She lived alone with a six month old baby. She

looked after me as her younger sister. I began calling her *akka* (older sister). She never asked me to go out for sex work. I generally took care of the house and the child, while she went out and earned money. Life was pleasant and I was happy. However, a few months later akka was caught in a police raid. As is the practice, she was sent to the remand home for six months. I was left alone in the house with the small child. For two days, both I and the child went hungry. On the third day, I went out to do sex work. What else

could I have done? I could not have let a small child starve. A couple of days later, I got lucky. A client paid me a huge amount of money. With that money, I got bail for my akka.

After that, I began to do sex work regularly. A couple of years later, I met an auto driver. He came as my client and soon fell in love with me. I also loved him a lot. He was already married and had two children. I stopped doing sex work and began living with him. We got married and I had two children with him. We lived happily for ten years. However, around six years ago, he fell severely ill and was diagnosed with HIV. He got TB and died in a few days.

After my husband died, an old friend of mine- from my days as a sex worker- came to see me. She told me about Anbaalayam. I went there and they asked me to take a test. I agreed because I thought I was not infected. The result came out, and I was Positive. I was shattered. I thought I was going to die.

I returned to sex work. I also began to drink heavily. My only concern was to feed my children. Apart from that I did not care for anything. I slept with whoever could give me money. Everyone from policemen to pimps became my clients. As long as I could afford food and alcohol, I was happy.

Around this time, I came in touch with a peer educator from SEVAI-Society for Education and Village Action Improvement. She asked me to come for a meeting. I refused. After much cajoling, I went to a meeting. "What did I have to lose", I thought. "After all, I was going to die." Once I went to the meeting, I was shocked to see that there were several women who had HIV. They were peer educators, community health educators, office staff etc. That moment, my life changed. I suddenly realized that I was not going to die and felt my courage return. I sat through the meeting, and learnt all I could about HIV.

I realised the importance of safe sex. I also began reducing the number of partners, and I am very particular about not having sex without a condom.

”

The NGO staff also helped me deal with my anger and helped restore my emotional balance. With newfound courage, I also realised the importance of safe sex and began acting on it immediately. I also began reducing the number of partners and I am very careful about not having sex without a condom.

Soon after this, I decided to go for a CD-4 test. My CD-4 was only 266. The doctor told me that I could increase my CD-4 by eating good food, and living a healthy life. I decided to take up the challenge. Today, I eat on time, drink boiled water. I eat plenty of vegetables and greens. I also do yoga and go on long walks. All this has helped me maintain a good CD-4 level, and I am not on ART.

Recently, I became part of the Shakthi Plus livelihood programme and am now learning how to do embroidery, basket making and aari work. I still go for sex work sometimes, but make it a point to use condoms. Now I feel, I have to live long. And I know it is easy, if I follow the basic principles that I have learnt from the NGO.



5

DECISIONS

1. I will always use a condom.
2. I will reduce my partners.
3. I will not infect any other person, at any point in my life.
4. I will not allow any new infection to enter my body.
5. I will adhere to healthy and safe practices, and take care of my health and live a long life.

Acknowledgements

Ms. Gayatri Mishra Oleti,

Director– SP & P – APAC

Mr. Ebenezer Luke,

Programme Manager, Care & Support – APAC

Ms. Christina Dorothy, APAC

Mr K Senthil Kumar,

Secretary, Anbaalayam

Dr K Govindaraj,

Executive Director, SEVAI

Mr I Ambalavanan,

Secretary, PDI

Ms N Radha

Executive Director, LEAD

Ms Bobby, PCO, PDI

PCOs, Outreach Team in PDI, LEAD

Dr. (Mrs.) Manimegalai, Director,

Dept. of Women Studies

Bharathidasan University

Ms Cynthia Xavier,

Consultant- APAC

Positive Networks

Members, volunteers who contributed to this book

&

All members associated with the Shakthi Plus
Livelihood Programme



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



APAC-VHS

AIDS Prevention And Control (APAC) Project

APAC-VHS-USAID

Voluntary Health Services (VHS)

Rajiv Gandhi Road, T.T.T.I. Post, Adyar, Chennai – 600 113.

Ph.: 044 – 22541965 / 22541048

www.apacvhs.org

E-mail: apacvhs@gmail.com / apacvhs@eth.net