The New Idea

Ashok Rau is building a broad based support system for people living with HIV/AIDS by making communities responsible for providing care and support to patients while helping reintegrate them into society. His comprehensive system of care and support combines psychological and social aspects with clinical and medical methods. By involving students, teachers, lawyers, community volunteers and representatives of the citizen and business sectors, Ashok has placed the control of intervention into the hands of all members of society.

The Problem

India has the second highest number of HIV cases in the world and yet, there is limited public awareness about the epidemic. Ignorance about and social stigma associated with the epidemic have translated into a lack of jobs, rejection from family and friends, and social isolation for the HIV/AIDS population. In addition, medical intervention is inadequate. The focus of most work in the sector, including that of the government, is on prevention. This means that for the vast majority of patients, there is no support or comprehensive approach to care.

Impact

- In 1999, the National AIDS Control Organization (NACO) recognized Ashok's work as a national model for low-cost care.
- The Freedom Foundation's HIV/AIDS center in Bangalore has attracted patients from around the country and from Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka.
- The Foundation's substance abuse center has a recovery rate of 46 percent, one of the best in India.
- Centers for HIV/AIDS and substance abuse have been established in eleven cities in India with plans to launch in East Timor.
- The President of India has appointed Ashok as a member of the National AIDS Committee. He serves on several other international, national and state level committees including the International HIV/AIDS Alliance and the Karnataka state government's HIV/AIDS Task Force.