

EVERYDAY SUPERHERO

Be the change you wish to see!



SCAN THIS
for an
important
message!



The temple town
of Trichy.

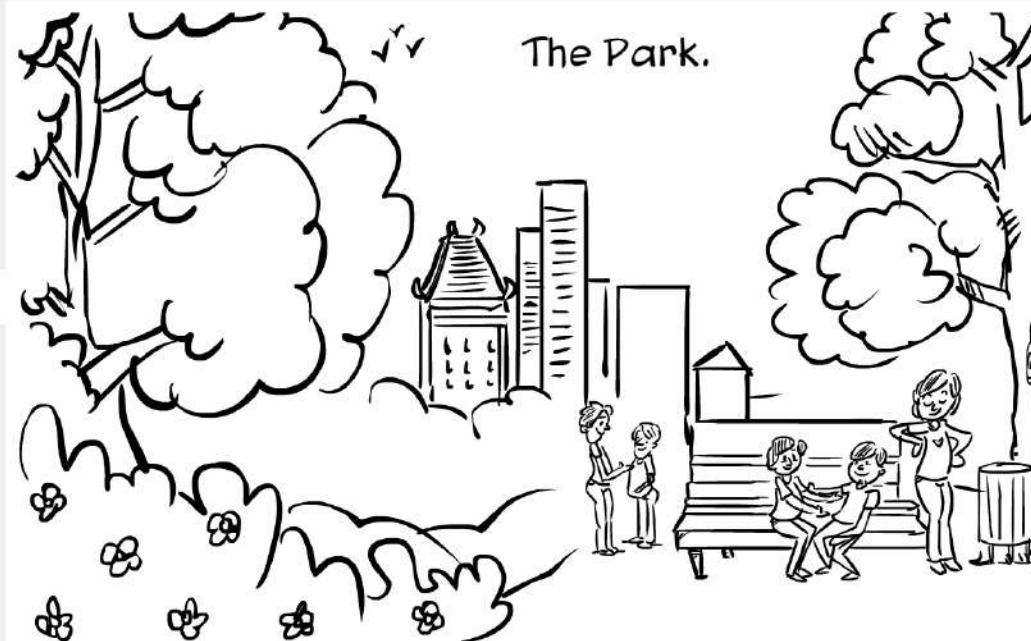


Vanjana, 23 years old,
and happy-go-luckily gay.

Hmmm, let's see
who I can meet
at the park
this evening, and
make out with,
tonight.



The Park.



I wonder if I should buy
a condom...

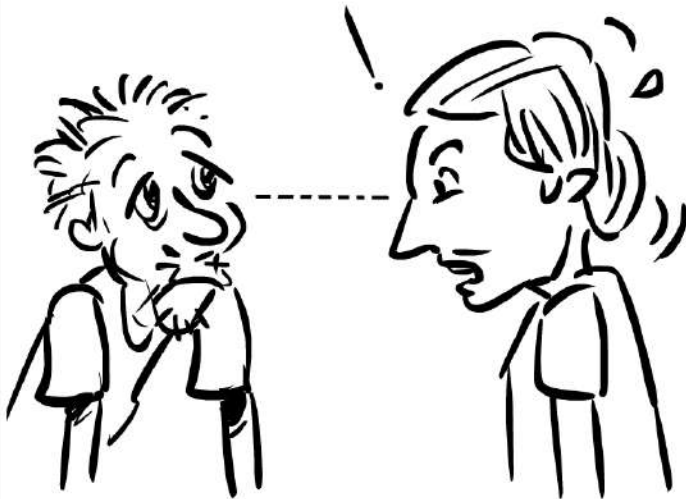
Oh well, on second thoughts,
nope. It's just no fun using
a condom!



Hell, sir. Can you buy me
a tea and a bun? I haven't
eaten for a week, and I'm
so hungry!



Sorry, I can't help you, sir.
My friends are waiting for me.



Wait! Do I know you?
You look familiar!



My name is Pradeep.
I've seen you around here.
I used to hang out here a lot.
I know, I look old. I'm actually
30 years old.



But.. but, what happened to you?!
Why do you look like this??



Yes. A lot has changed with me.
I'm not the same person anymore.
I used to have a job.
I used to be with my Family.
I used to be good looking, but not anymore.
and no strength in my body too... uh.....



Oh, come, Friend. Let me
get you something to eat.
And do tell me your story.



I used to drink and smoke a lot, and have sex with men without using condoms. One day, there was a blood donation camp in my office. The nurse told me I needed to take a blood test before I could donate blood. After I was done, I waited for about ten minutes. The nurse came back to tell me that I needed to go to the hospital to get more tests done. I was so confused, but I followed her directions and went to the hospital. When I finished taking my tests, the doctor told me he would call me in a couple of days to tell me my results.



Three days later while I was at work, I got the call from the doctor. I left my desk to go have the conversation in the washroom.

Hello Pradeep,
I'm really sorry
to say...

**WHAT!!! I'M
HIV POSITIVE!!!!**
Is it true??!!
Are you sure?!!



While I was talking to the doctor, I didn't know that one of my coworkers was in the washroom, too. He went back and told the whole office about it and a couple days later, I was dismissed.



At home, I told my parents about my test results and they started seeing me as 'different' from them - no one touched my plate of food and wouldn't wash my clothes. I couldn't bear to be isolated in my house, so I left home.



No one would give me work because of the way I looked - gaunt, eyes sunk and dark circles around the eyes. I was vomiting all the time. I became so depressed. I started sleeping in random places and was starving all the time...



Tsk, Tsk.



Oh God, but what about my own sexual misadventures with multiple men!! And without any protection too! Oh, I'm getting SO nervous now!



Pradeep, thank you for telling your story.. But I'm getting a little nervous, now. I have been having unprotected sex this past year and now am nervous about my future. Where can I get tested?

A government hospital! They do it for free! Please get tested as soon as possible

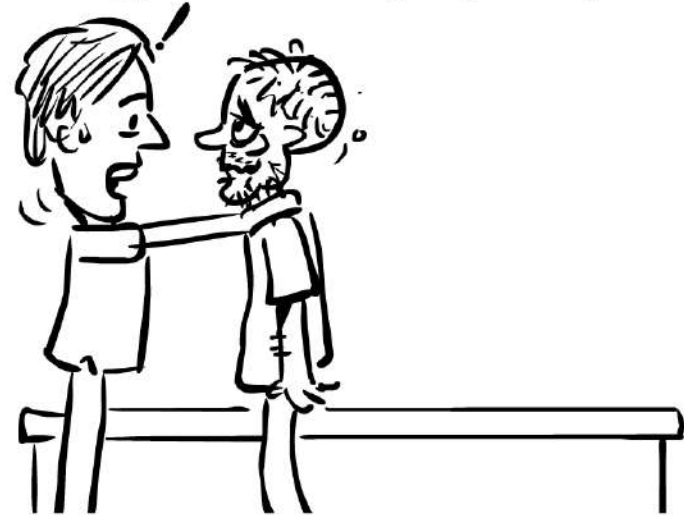


But Pradeep... I don't feel comfortable using a condom. It takes away all the pleasure.

Oh, c'mon Vanjana. It's all in the mind! Besides, we have such amazing condoms these days, that feel just like an extension of your skin.



Ah, you certainly are persuasive! Well i am convinced . But am sure my partners won't buy this, Pradeep!



Vanjana, all these are mere excuses. The advantages far outweigh such flimsy considerations. Responsible sexuality implies that as an informed partner it is also your responsibility to influence rigid mindsets and bring about shifts in perspective.



Yes, you have a point. And very well said, Pradeep!



I hope everything gets better for you. God bless you. I've decided to go to the hospital to get tested

Thank you for the food! I will always appreciate it. May God bless you too.



I cannot believe this happened to Pradeep.
I feel so sad for him. I remembered him as a lively person.
I now realize the importance of using a condom when I have sex.
I should tell all of my friends now to use condoms.
They should get tested too! I want them to live happy
and healthy lives. I don't want them to make any more mistakes.



Vanjana, your HIV test is done. The doctor
will see you in his room now.



Hello Vanjana, I have your results.
You've tested negative for HIV



Thank you so much,
doctor! I'm so
relieved!
What would have
happened if
I was positive?

We would have had you treated in our treatment center.
It is important to get treatment right away for HIV.
You should always get tested every couple of months.



Later that evening.



Yesterday, I ran into Pradeep. Remember Pradeep?
He used to come to the park a couple months ago.
When I saw him, he was very Frail and weak. He asked me
to buy food for him and in return, he told me
what had happened to him...



And that's why it is so important for us to use condoms and all of us should
get tested for HIV. This is very critical to our health and we want to live
happy and healthy, right? Let Pradeep's story be a lesson for all of us.
Who is willing to come to the hospital with me? I will come and give you
support. I went to the hospital yesterday to get tested
and I do not have HIV.



What if we get judged for getting tested?
What if people find out?

What happens if we test positive?
What would happen to us then?

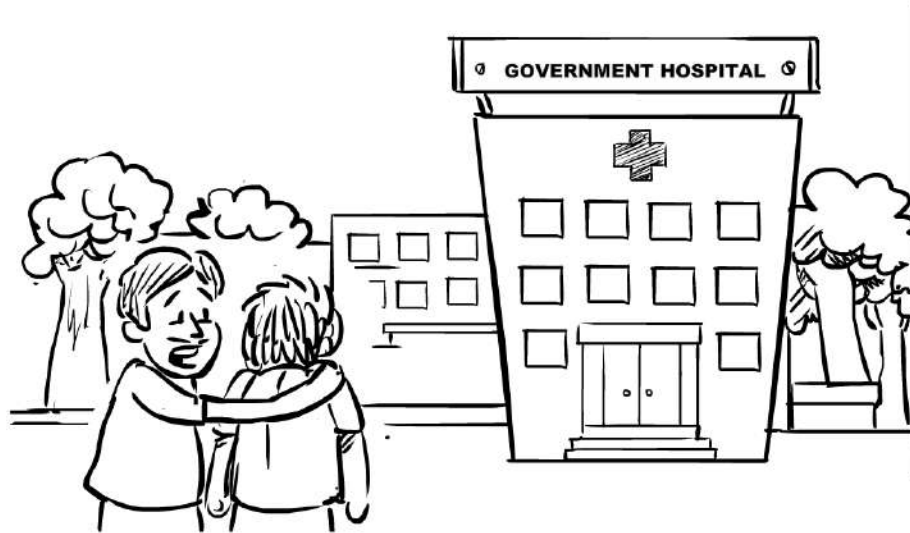


Don't worry, the test is confidential.
No one will know except you and the doctor.

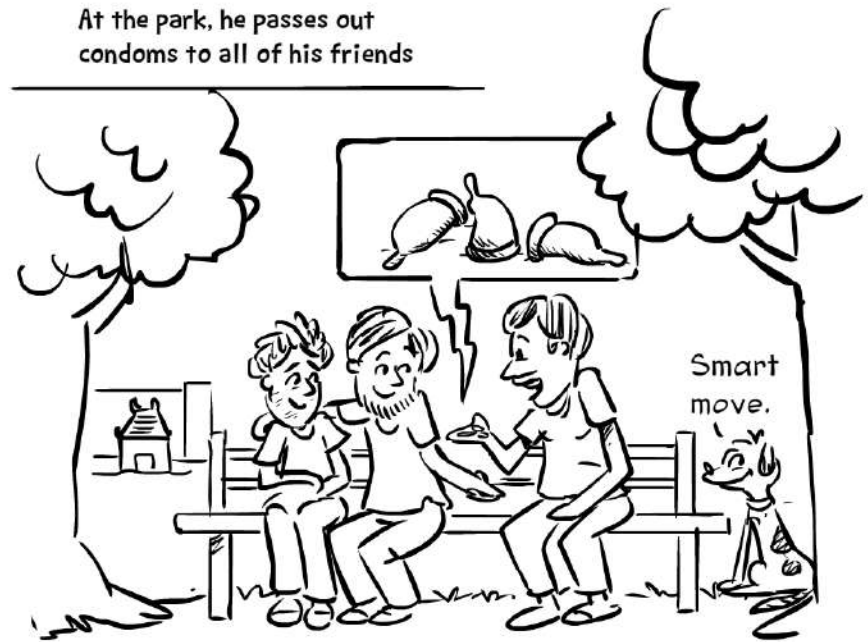
If tested positive, you would have to go to
treatment right away. The doctors and nurses
will help you with the treatment.



As the weeks go by, Vanjana goes to the hospital with his friends to get tested, one by one. During each of these hospital visits, he takes the time to educate his friends about the importance of using condoms.



At the park, he passes out condoms to all of his friends



I'm fine, too. Hey listen,
I wanted to ask you:
Have you tested for HIV?

Why, yes!
I've already
tested and I
don't have HIV.



Did you have sex after you got tested?
You should always get tested
every couple of months.

Yes, I did.
No I haven't
got tested.
Should I
go again?



Yes, of course! I can
go with you to the hospital.
Do you want to go tomorrow?

Er, ummm...
Sure, I can come
with you tomorrow.



The next morning.



As Charan fills out
the hospital form,
he pauses...

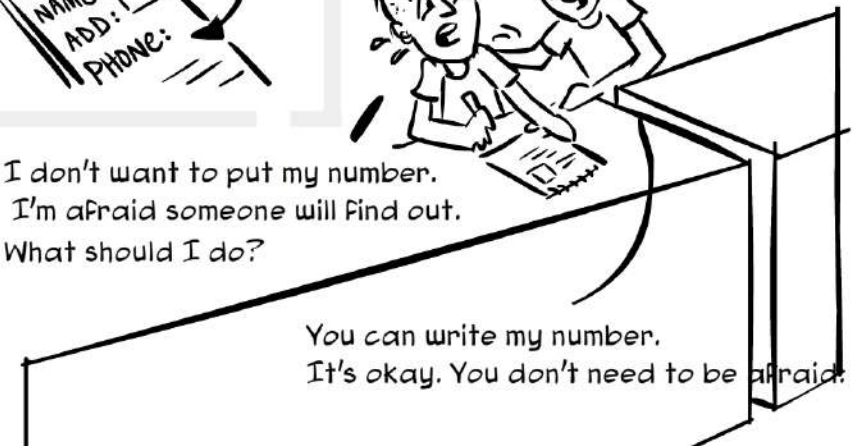


Go on, don't worry.



I don't want to put my number.
I'm afraid someone will find out.
What should I do?

You can write my number.
It's okay. You don't need to be afraid.





Uh, ok,
thanks.



Relax, please.



Thank you, Vanjana,
for coming with me.
It's always so scary
to go and get tested.



I am happy to help
you any day.

They have
my number
in the form, so
they'll call
and tell me
the results.
I'll let
you know.



The next day.

RRRRINGGG!



Yes?



Good afternoon,
is this Charan
I'm speaking to?

Oh hello, doctor!
This is his friend,
Vanjana.
Is everything
alright??



Please bring Charan
to the hospital
soon! This is urgent.
This is about his
test results.

I will,
thank you,
sir.



Oh no! I must
be calm...



Hello Charan...



Hey Vanjana,
what's up?



Charan, I need to talk to you for a moment.
Do you have time? *It's important.*



*What is it?
Is there something wrong?
Is this about the test results?
Am I positive?*



The doctor called me this morning
and they want you to come to the hospital. I can go with you.
I don't know anything about
the results but I know they want
you to be there.



Please, Charan. Let's go to the hospital...
you need to know the results

I am so nervous, Vanjana.
I don't know if I even want to know.
I don't want to go to the hospital.



Er... uhh...



OHHHH...!!



Oh k...



Oh. Vanjana... sob...!
PLEASE be with me!
I don't want to be
alone at the
hospital...



I will be there for you, no matter what.
Let's meet in front of the hospital tomorrow morning, okay?



The next day at the hospital.

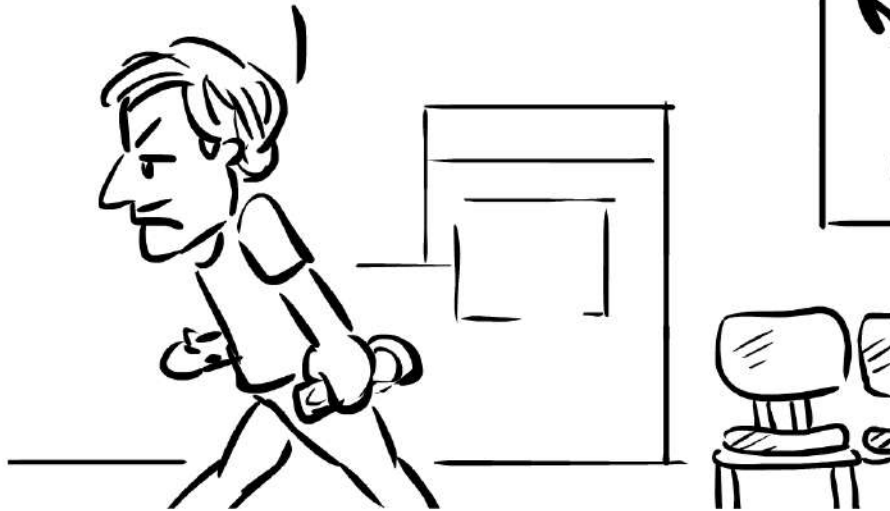
Where IS he? I thought he would come!!
How can he be SO irresponsible!
I don't understand...



This is the sixth time in an hour
that I'm calling him, and he's
not even picking up the phone!!



OHH, what's the use!
I'm leaving.



Charan! Where ARE you??
I've been waiting here for two hours!!
What is going on??!



I am so sorry, Vanjana. I was getting ready to leave to go to the hospital, but I became very scared. So scared, I decided not to come. I don't want to know my results.



OK, I'll come.



Oh Charan, you know you have my support.
Even if those results say positive or negative,
I will always be there for you no matter what.
But, you need to find out the result
in order to live a healthy life.



20 minutes later.



I'm so glad
you came!
You'll get
through this.

Doctor's office.

What is it doctor?
Is there something wrong?



The results of your test
is positive, Charan.
You are HIV positive.



I strongly recommend that you start treatment
as soon as possible, Charan. From now on, you must
be proactive with your health.



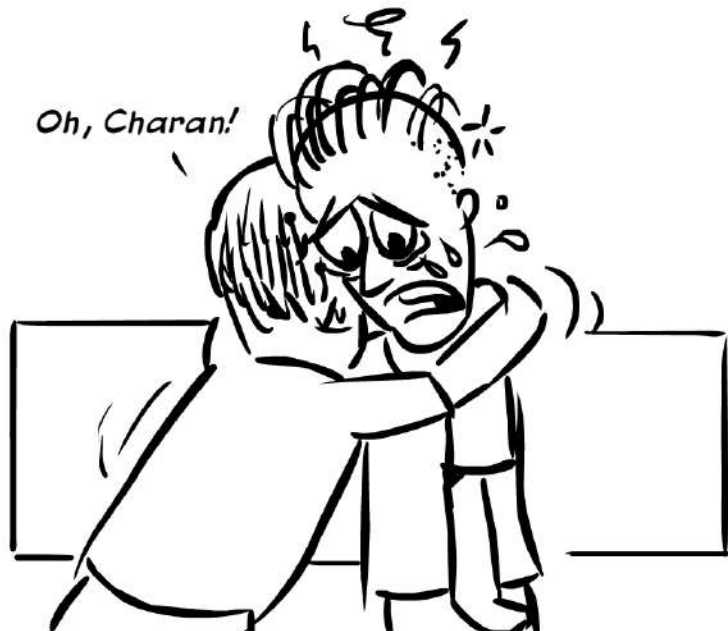
What do you mean, "I don't need any treatment"?
Charan, you need treatment! Why did you say that?



My life is over!
I'm HIV positive!
Why did this happen to me?



Oh, Charan!



I want to go home now.
I need to be alone,
be by myself...



I'm always here
for you.
I understand.



No, you don't!
You've no clue what I'm going through!

I too was in your
position not too
long ago!



But you didn't test HIV positive!
So it's easy for you to be upbeat
and spew out all the
positive psychology nonsense!

But it was such a narrow miss for me!
Yes, I do agree that I may not completely
understand what you are going through,
Charan! But at least am closer to it
than most people.

Please don't
apologize, Charan.
I'm always there for you.
Any time, any place.
No strings attached.
Just let me know!

Yes, that's true, Vanjana.
I'm sorry for the outburst!

Thanks, Vanjana! Actually,
it does feel better after the outburst!
And you are a terrific listener!



A week passes. Vanjana hasn't heard from Charan. He's worried.

Hello, Charan? Are you okay?
I haven't spoken to you in over a week.



I haven't left
my home.
I am still
in shock.



I know, I understand.
I think you should listen to the doctor
and get treatment.

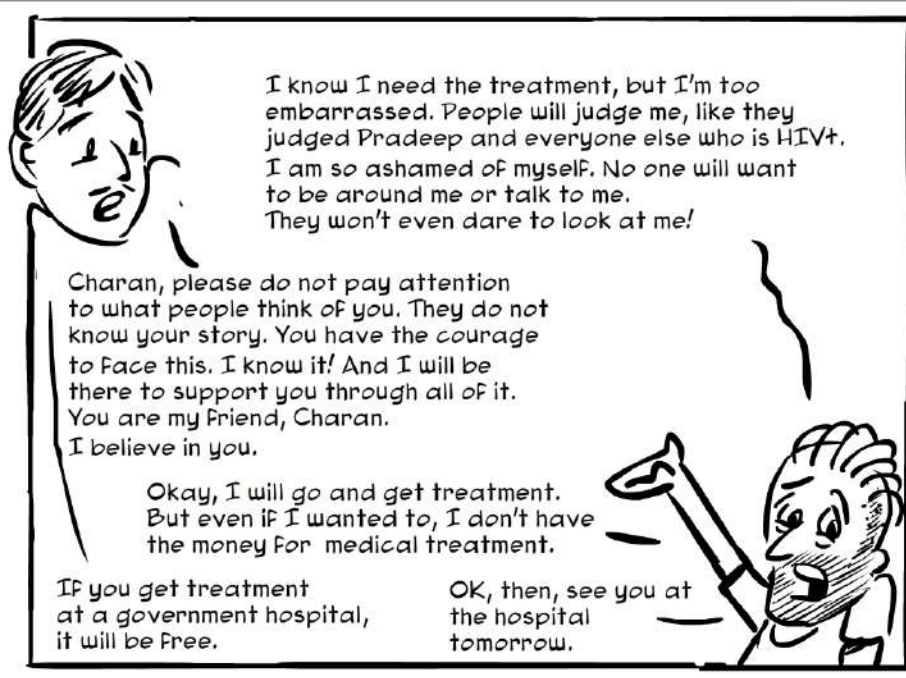
No! I don't want any treatment!

But, this is your health!
You need the treatment!

Stop deciding for me, Vanjana!
The right to seek treatment (or not)
is a basic human right.

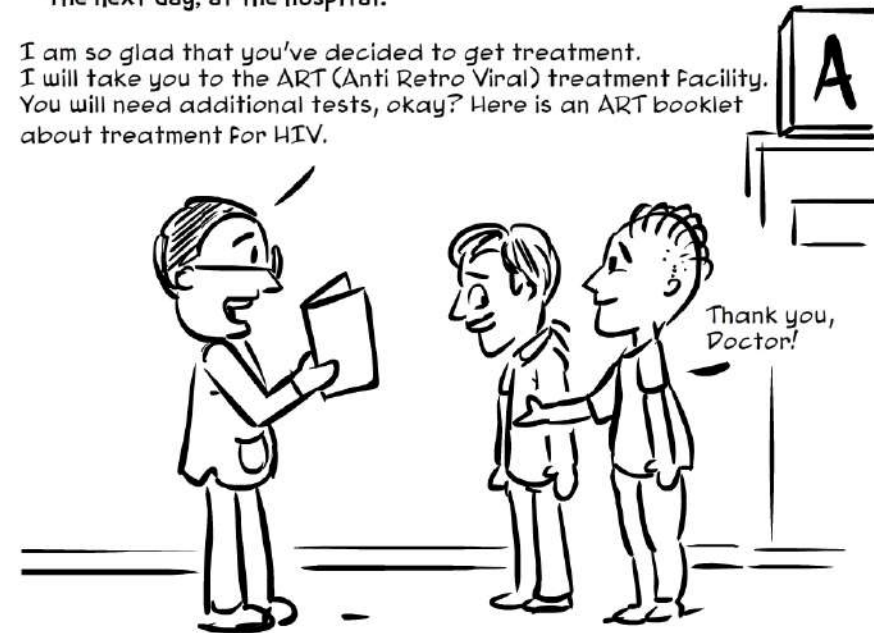
I guess we need to stop this
verbal juggling! Let's get down
o basics: You **need** treatment.





The next day, at the hospital.

I am so glad that you've decided to get treatment. I will take you to the ART (Anti Retro Viral) treatment Facility. You will need additional tests, okay? Here is an ART booklet about treatment for HIV.



Excuse me, Sir, are you getting treated at this center?



My name is Ranveer and I too found out I was positive when I was young . At First I was hesitant about getting treatment because I was ashamed, but I realized I needed to live a healthy life with HIV. I am 50 years old now. By getting regular treatment, tests and taking my medicine, I feel so much better. I am able to live like anyone else.



Thank you for saving my life! You've been my lifeline! I will always remember your reaching out to me when I needed it most.



DINTOONS!
by Dinesh Francis

Since helping Charan, Vanjana has been creating awareness among all the young men who come to the park about HIV and testing. He gives sustained support, strength and hope to those who have tested HIV positive and since then, has given them guidance and support throughout their treatment process.

Movements and causes are best given birth to by those whose lives stand to change as a result of their wins. Gen Y is dear to us at Swasti Health Catalyst because this initiative is the brain child of the grassroots LGBTQA+ communities, whose journeys we have had the privilege to be part of and support. This comic book is just one of the many ways in which these communities are speaking to the world at large about their lived experiences and stating their right to be seen and accepted for who they are, in all their diversity. Thanks are due. The comic book idea originated from a dream of a resource center for adolescents at risk, specially the gender non-conforming. Amber Jean Coyne and Dr. Angela Chaudhuri helped shape the idea of GenY initiative and the series of comic books. Our team led by Bhavani Kumaran and consisting of Shrirupa Sengupta, Priya Pillai, Nandini Murali and Natalie Macasa facilitated the storytelling sessions with the community members. Special thanks to Priya Babu, a transwoman leader, who inspired the youth to participate and be part of this movement. We look up to her for her leadership and consistent support. At Swasti Health Catalyst, we stand firmly as allies of the community. A special gratitude to the Canada Fund For Local Initiatives for funding support to Gen Y.

EVERYDAY SUPERHERO

Be the change you wish to see!

This story takes place in Trichy, a city in Tamil Nadu. The story starts with a young man named Vanjana, 23 years of age, who identifies as gay. After an incident at a park, he chooses to educate people about HIV. This story reflects the story of a person who Vanjana decided to help.

Written by : Divakar

Illustrations: DINTOONS by Dinesh Francis

Editors: Natalie Macasa, Nandini Murali, Sri Bhavani Kumaran

Published in: March 2018