

A team on a mission to save lives

Pushpa Narayan TNN

Chennai: In 2008, corporate trainer Nalini Ravindran's 20-year-old son, who was on his way to college, bled to death on the road after meeting with an accident. Even though a bus filled with his college mates passed by, no one stopped to help him. That's when she decided to do something to help victims of road accidents. Today, she works with ALERT, an NGO that has trained more than 15,000 people on why and how road accident victims need help.

Ravindran teaches children road safety through story boards and pictures, talks to college students about the increasing incidence of accidents in the city and tells autorickshaw drivers, housewives, techies and entrepreneurs how they can help accident victims get medical attention at the earliest.

On Saturday, she smiled as Tamil Nadu Governor K Rosaiah released the CD of the computer-based training programme dealing with golden hour care and emergency response. "A few days after my son's death, my friend asked me if I would like to make my grief a bitter experience or put it to better use. I could never get over my loss, but I have moved on," she said.

When Ravindran heard about ALERT, she decided to meet its founder-members Kala Balasundaram and Rajesh R Trivedi. She was impressed by how the techies had managed to gather like-minded people for one mission -- to help road accident victims.

ALERT wasn't born overnight. Balasundaram and Trivedi travelled by the office shuttle to work everyday. Daily, they saw at least one accident spot on the Old Mahabalipuram Road, and one death in every 10 days. "Our bus would go around the body of the victim or the accident spot. It disturbed many of us and we often asked why someone can't help a victim. And, suddenly, I felt guilty because I wasn't doing anything either," said Balasundaram. That day, she told her friends that she wanted to do something to help them. Her close friends joined her.

The group began their project with a sample survey. They asked a few hundred people why they did not stop to help accident victims. The three most common replies were fear of police harassment, lack of knowledge and apprehension about being dragged to court as witness.

The easiest thing for volunteers to handle was the lack of awareness. The team trained itself in first aid and prepared a training module with the help of the Indian Medical Association and senior doctors. "We know the change will happen sometime if we are persistent," said Trivedi.

Slowly, the members managed to gather support from the police and judiciary. The members have managed to get senior police officials, advocates and judges to say that those helping accident victims will not be harassed by police or be frequently summoned at court. "That was a success. But we still have a long way to go," said ALERT's communication vice president S Vasudevan. The association is now working to get hospitals not to shun patients.

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EVERY SECOND COUNTS: (From left) Rajesh Trivedi, Diya Vinod, Kala Balasundaram, Nalini Ravindran and S Vasudevan train people to help accident victims