

# Grassroots awareness

**T**he government might show apathy towards sex education in school but awareness must start at the grassroots. It is the reason why representatives of two NGOs, Sukriti Kolkata Foundation and Lions Clubs International, felt the need to visit 100 schools in and around the city over the past 15 months to raise awareness on AIDS.

The students of each school were asked to write stories to spread awareness about the disease. Short films made on adaptations of three of the best stories were screened at a city hall on October 28.

The initiative was taken after surveys revealed that most students in the city are ignorant about HIV and AIDS and often indulge in unsafe sex. Some of these confessions were also screened on Sunday with the face of the students blurred and voice distorted. "I would certainly have used protection had I known of the consequences," admits a high school student in the presentation.

Members of the NGOs met with stiff resistance at reputed city schools when they tabled their project while many lesser-known schools were receptive of the idea.

"We were asked to leave midway through our presentation in some schools as words like 'AIDS' and 'condom' were considered taboos there," said Abhishek Sinha Roy of Sukriti.

It is at this point that the organisers decided to take on Sabyasachi Chakraborty as the anchor for the audio-visual presentation. "He is Feluda to students and so when he spoke on screen, they listened. The school authorities were more lenient too," said Sinha Roy.

A 10-minute film called *Clara, My Little Angel*, based on a story by Sreyashee Halder of Hartley's High School was judged the best. Her story was about little Clara who contracted AIDS through the blood her mother received at the time of delivery. Clara, all of nine years and full of life, dies suddenly at the end of the film. The death jolts the audience that does not know that she had AIDS. Sreyashee picked up a reward of Rs 7,500 for her effort.

The second prize was bagged by Zia Taufeer, a Class X student of Howrah Hat High Madrasah. In Zia's story, the protagonist, a bright student, comes to Calcutta from a village and falls for the charms of a girl he barely knows. He goes back to his village with AIDS.

These two films as well as the third, based on the story by Tushar Saha of Class XI, Behala High School, which deals with contamination from syringes used for taking drugs, also deal with the sufferings of the families and near ones of HIV-positive patients and AIDS victims.

Rith Basu

