



Dear GYCA members and friends,

It is with mixed emotions that we share some important news with you. After extensive discussion and consultation with current and past focal points, members, GYCA founders and partners, and our current umbrella organization the Public Health Institute, we have decided that GYCA will close on July 31, 2016. We have made this decision to respond to the shifting landscape of the HIV response, especially as it relates to young people and SRHR, and GYCA's role within them, as well as the challenge in obtaining sufficient funding to run GYCA as it was originally intended as a youth-run network. Although we are sad to say goodbye, we are proud of our accomplishments and we are excited about the evolution of the youth HIV and SRHR movements.

Since its founding over a decade ago, GYCA has made significant contributions to the various movements that support young people's access to sexual and reproductive health and rights, drawing attention to the disproportionate impact of new HIV infections on young people. When GYCA was founded in 2004, the meaningful participation of young people living with and affected by HIV¹ was hardly a priority. There was no youth pre-conference before the International AIDS Conference in Durban in 2004, very limited presence of young people at major policy fora, and few initiatives that fostered collaboration and information-sharing among young people affected by HIV. Virtual platforms to connect young people with resources were scarce, as were opportunities for those most affected by HIV.

But young people at the time were taking action in their communities, spearheading innovative solutions to the challenges around them. A group of young advocates assembled at the International AIDS Conference of 2004 to form GYCA with the mission: *to empower young leaders with the skills, knowledge, resources and opportunities they need to scale up HIV and AIDS interventions amongst their peers.* This mission was underpinned by four pillars that were designed to guide GYCA activities: (1) networking and information sharing, (2) political advocacy, (3) capacity building, and (4) youth representation at key events.

Fast forward over a decade of GYCA existence to 2016: every International AIDS Conference now has a two-day youth pre-conference and Youth Programme throughout; intergovernmental organizations like UNAIDS have dedicated youth program officers tasked with supporting meaningful youth engagement; and there are a multitude of youth-led regional networks and coalitions working in these fields. Networks and organizations like the global Y+ Programme, YouthLEAD in Asia, the PACT consortium, the Global Network of Sex Work Projects, and many

¹ Such as young LGBT people, young people who sell sex, young people who inject drugs, young people who have lost loved ones to AIDS, and other young people who have been discriminated against and marginalized and are at disproportionate risk of exposure to HIV.



more are leading the way in the meaningful engagement of, and collaboration with, young people living with and affected by HIV around the world.

Today, the greatest gains in the youth AIDS response are happening at the national and regional levels. They are driven by empowered, knowledgeable, and inspired young people living with and affected by HIV.

Through a participatory process, the leaders and members of GYCA have come to the realization that there is no longer a need for a global network of GYCA's type, and we enlist the support and enthusiasm of our members to take this work forward in the spaces where it is most essential. Not only is community engagement vital to the HIV movement, but community *ownership* has been shown to be key to success time and time again.

GYCA has played an essential role in these achievements, and we believe it is time for GYCA to step back and support our colleagues to build on that momentum at a local and regional level. A series of consultations informed this realization as well as a reflection on the current landscape across each of the 4 pillars:

- ***Networking and information sharing:*** In order to ensure that young people from around the world could share knowledge, best practices, and opportunities, GYCA established a global online community. Although it is now commonplace to utilize online platforms in community organizing, we were one of the first youth organizations to harness social media to catalyze a global youth movement. Local trainings, workshops, rallies and press conferences held in country by our members were complemented by a global listserv and 12 regional listservs. Our members, focal points, and staff still share advocacy & grant-making opportunities, news articles, and updates from around the world in the fields of youth HIV and SRHR. There are now many listservs sharing similar opportunities and updates, as well as social media platforms and virtual spaces that inspire discussion and instant sharing (we will share these with you as well).
- ***Political advocacy:*** GYCA has advocated for young people's sexual and reproductive health and rights at the United Nations; with heads of state, ambassadors, ministers, and traditional leaders; with The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and on its Country Coordinating Mechanisms; and with partners at national, regional and international levels. Through the advocacy of our members, we have helped secure progressive language on young people's health and rights in international and national policy (such as in national adolescent health strategies in several countries), allocated dedicated funds to youth HIV prevention and treatment, replaced abstinence-only until marriage policies with ones based on science and harm reduction, and secured a stronger focus on the rights of young people living with and affected by HIV. GYCA has conducted research on young people, HIV



and SRHR, through community dialogues, e-consultations, articles, advocacy reports and briefs (all of which can be found in our [website](#)'s resources section). We have helped to mainstream a seat at the table for young people, with early contributions to UNFPA and UNAIDS' youth advisory bodies and fellowships, dedicated youth seats on national delegations to the UN in many countries, and participation on the UNAIDS Inter Agency Task Team on Young People and HIV (and other global consortiums).

- **Capacity building:** With the advent of our Regional Focal Point program, which functioned for many years as an incubator for young leaders, we helped enhance the knowledge and skills of more than 100 young people working in the HIV movement through individual mentoring and support. Our E-courses delivered direct training to more than 900 young advocates in over 82 countries around the globe in project management, fundraising, political advocacy, and preparation for international conferences. Through our role as global policy partners in the [Link Up](#) program, we built the capacity of a cadre of more than 30 passionate youth leaders and youth-led organizations in 5 countries in Asia and Africa working to advance the sexual and reproductive health and rights of young people living with and affected by HIV. We are inspired to see many organizations, networks, and partners now supporting capacity building for young people in HIV and SRHR (such as HIV Young Leaders Fund, the PACT consortium, MTV Staying Alive Foundation, the International HIV/AIDS Alliance, and the Global Network of People Living With HIV).
- **Key event preparation and participation:** GYCA was one of the very first groups to facilitate the presence and active engagement of young people at convenings of policy makers, funders and other influential stakeholders. We were principal organizers of the Youth Pre-Conference at the 2006, 2008, 2010, and 2012 International AIDS Conferences; as well as the UN General Assembly Special Sessions on HIV/AIDS where we organized Youth Pre-Conferences in 2005, 2006 and 2008. We have continued to play a significant role in UN meetings, International AIDS Conferences, Women Deliver conferences, and other global forums, amplifying youth voices in the HIV and SRHR movements within global political forums. All of these conferences and forums now have youth pre-conferences and dedicated spaces for youth engagement and input.

In the coming weeks, we will be sharing information with you and our membership of other listservs, coalitions, and resources that will be helpful to you during this transition and may be useful sources of information and networking for you in the future. We are proud to have been a program of the Public Health Institute (PHI) for the past three years, where we joined a network of colleagues working in youth sexual and reproductive health around the globe. PHI is committed to building new program work in this area as the organization pursues its goal to achieve health



equity for all people—including through supporting sexual and reproductive health and rights, addressing the global HIV epidemic, and advancing solutions around communicable and chronic disease. There are two PHI programs in particular we would recommend for your further engagement:

- (1) [GoJoven International](#), which promotes and supports the development of young leaders to act as catalysts for social change to vastly expand youth adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights in Latin America; and
- (2) [Rise Up!](#), which advances health, education, and equity for girls, youth and women around the globe.

These two programs would be very happy to connect with you and to have you on their contact lists for further opportunities and engagement in this work. In addition, we will send you a follow-up email with several other listservs and groups that might be of interest to you going forward.

If you are interested in accessing any of the tools or publications GYCA has developed over the years, please visit our [website](#) for a comprehensive list. Our E-course curricula, alongside other publications and tools we have developed, will be available as resources to all GYCA members on our website until January 2017. After January 2017, many of the most recent resources will remain available on the [Public Health Institute](#) website. In addition, our regional listservs will continue to be run by our Regional Focal Points and members or by other programs at PHI, while those of you that are members of our global listserv will receive a list of other networks and listservs you can choose to join to access similar information and opportunities.

Just before GYCA closes its doors, we will be attending the International AIDS Conference in Durban this July and hope to see any of you who will be there. We plan to organize a small celebration gathering past and present staff, members, and partners. More details to come, but we hope to see you there to celebrate with us!

We would also like to take a moment to acknowledge the role of our funders and supporters over the years, who have shown commitment to supporting the youth-led HIV and SRHR movements by resourcing our work. These partners include the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, the United Nations Population Fund, UNAIDS, Global Youth Action Network, TakingItGlobal, International AIDS Vaccine Initiative (IAVI), International HIV/AIDS Alliance, the Dutch foreign ministry (BUZA), and the MTV Staying Alive Foundation.

It is important to us that you, our members, feel supported and valued during this time of transition. GYCA members have built such a camaraderie and connection through email, Skype, and social media that we've truly created a robust virtual space where young people's voices have been honored and respected, and where young people are recognized as experts in their own experiences. Your feedback and advice, based on open communication and on the transparency that this unique



space affords us, has helped us come to this decision. We believe wholeheartedly that you will continue to gain support and achieve great things in your work going forward. We are proud to have you carrying on GYCA's legacy of youth leadership, empowerment, and human rights advocacy.

Best,

Julie Mellin and Michaela Rahimi, GYCA staff members
Esther Tahrir, PHI Senior Program Director and Liaison to GYCA
Joya Banerjee, GYCA Co-Founder
Ricardo Baruch, GYCA Advisory Board member
Mila Gorokhovich, GYCA Advisory Board member and Co-Founder
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