



Vincent, the focal point in Malawi (Photo: Eric Bond/EGPAF, 2017)



Elizabeth Glaser
Pediatric AIDS
Foundation

The Committee of African Youth Advisors (CAYA)

In the HIV/AIDS context, adolescents comprise the only group in which progress is declining.¹ In 2017, approximately 1.8 million adolescents were living with HIV worldwide.² The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) project that, without corrective action, new adolescent infections will increase steadily in the next decade, amounting to a total of 3.5 million new adolescent infections by 2030.³ In response to this trend, the Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation (EGPAF) has established a mutually beneficial mechanism to engage youth in the countries it supports. Adolescents have always occupied a central place in EGPAF's 30+ year mission to end AIDS in children. The Committee of African Youth Advisors (CAYA) maintains that focus.

What Is CAYA?

Public health professionals at all levels have long acknowledged a gap in the participation of young people in HIV/AIDS programs, advocacy, and political engagement. This demographic group has proved challenging to HIV test, treat, and retain on antiretroviral treatment. Adolescence is a complex and challenging time in an individual's life where social acceptance and risk-taking are priorities and barriers to HIV services are many—including difficulty obtaining parental consent for testing and treatment, school hours overlapping with clinic hours, weak educational platforms, and commonplace peer and social HIV-related discrimination.

As social influence plays an important role in adolescent behavior, meaningful youth engagement can have an impact on a population evading our grasp as prevention and care providers. Thus, EGPAF initiated CAYA in 2017—to ensure access to the views, insight, and on-the-ground expertise of youth. CAYA provides a structured mechanism for meaningful youth participation across EGPAF-supported countries. CAYA will inform internal decisions on the design and development of interventions targeting a diverse adolescent and youth population.



Tema, a CAYA member in Eswatini (Photo: Eric Bond/EGPAF, 2019)



Rosa, a CAYA member in Zimbabwe (Photo: Eric Bond/EGPAF, 2019)

¹ UNICEF. Children and AIDS: Statistical AIDS (2017). Available at https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/HIVAIDS-Statistical-Update-2017_0.pdf.

² Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS. AIDSInfo. 2018. <http://aidsinfo.unaids.org/>. Accessed May 24, 2019.

³ UNICEF. Children and AIDS: Statistical AIDS (2017). Available at https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/HIVAIDS-Statistical-Update-2017_0.pdf.

How CAYA Works

CAYA is composed of a heterogeneous group of youth (ages 15-29) from across EGPAF-supported countries who provide input on EGPAF initiatives and offer a youth lens. Developed through a consultative process, the CAYA structure ensures representation across EGPAF global teams and countries. Two CAYA members and one CAYA focal point (EGPAF staff designated with CAYA support functions) represent each country willing to participate in the program. The CAYA global team facilitates calls to enable discussion with and among CAYA members, move forward agenda items, and work alongside EGPAF global staff and country-based CAYA focal points. Participation occurs on a monthly basis, using virtual platforms to discuss, problem-solve, and engage new ideas and tasks. A representative from each EGPAF department acts as a liaison between CAYA focal points and the respective global team.

Getting Started

Prior to selecting CAYA members, terms of reference (TOR) were developed, and EGPAF country staff and leadership were briefed. Using the criteria outlined in the TOR, the task of member selection was given to country-based CAYA focal points and other staff. Once selected, CAYA members signed two-year volunteer agreements and attended a virtual training and subsequent orientation along with the CAYA focal points. CAYA focal points facilitate the delivery of monthly stipends of approximately \$42 per month to CAYA members for their participation. Monthly calls are structured to provide relevant updates, to review results of previous tasks, and to introduce and discuss expectations and details for new tasks.

CAYA Members

Currently, 11 of 11 EGPAF-supported countries with adolescent programs have accepted the invitation to join CAYA: Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eswatini, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. CAYA members are high performing youth leaders with diverse backgrounds who receive services or help implement EGPAF programs at supported sites. Currently, there are 20 active CAYA members.

CAYA Accomplishments to Date

Requests from global teams or projects are directed to CAYA coordinators, who then jointly develop the request into a workable task for CAYA members. All tasks seek the perspectives and feedback from CAYA members. Their first task was to provide input concerning three adolescent-specific guides so that health care workers can better support adolescent disclosure in various contexts. Subsequent tasks have included testing two forms of client satisfaction surveys for adolescent clients at health facilities, creating cartoons that address and discuss challenges

faced by adolescents living with HIV, brainstorming client-led differentiated service delivery models for youth, providing information on social influencers for young people across Africa, and offering insight on the relevance of issues presented in an advocacy video on adolescents growing up with HIV.

CAYA members have also focused their energy on developing tools to implement better programs for adolescent populations. Two are the [New Horizons Disclosure Toolkit](#) and a cartoon discussion guide that explores adolescent HIV issues. Both tools have been absorbed by country teams and are being used in psychosocial support groups and other contexts.

Early Lessons

Several successes and lessons were gleaned from the first year of CAYA implementation. Teams have been quick to integrate CAYA, demonstrating that the value-add of this group is appreciated. Because of their active involvement in and contribution to tools for adolescents, CAYA members are enthusiastic about and empowered by their roles in the global effort to end AIDS. Beyond the benefit of youth engagement to EGPAF and to the public health community, the CAYA program has directly benefitted CAYA members by educating them on a variety of subjects and by building their capacity and leadership. For example, Rosa and Tanya, CAYA members representing Zimbabwe, were thrilled to present the Disclosure Toolkit to their Ministry of Health.

CAYA members have increased EGPAF youth engagement at international HIV events such as the International AIDS Society Conference (IAS) and the Virology Education Conference— heavily attended venues which allowed their voices and experiences to be heard by many program implementers and donors. Through CAYA, members have learned about opportunities to broaden their worldviews and strengthen their networks via participation in other external activities.

Challenges: language barriers and technical communication difficulties have proven to be challenging. The deliverables developed thus far show that virtual communication is possible and can lead to results. However, maintaining this momentum does require continued support from EGPAF.

“CAYA helped our members find encouragement because it shows them people care about their status. It is a changing forum.”

—**Vincent Nyapigoti,**
Malawi CAYA focal point

To read more about our work in adolescents and HIV, [click here.](#)