

# CASE STUDY: CENTERING YOUTH VOICE AND ADVOCACY: GLOBAL NETWORK OF YOUNG PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV AND ADVOCATES FOR YOUTH

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The Global Network of Young People Living with HIV (Y+ Global)<sup>i</sup> and Advocates for Youth<sup>j</sup>, two organizations centering youth voice in decision-making and advocacy, highlight that certain populations, particularly young people and youth groups, oftentimes require partnership with community-rooted funders to deepen their success and impact. These are adolescents who are developing skills for life. As Debra Hauser, Advocates for Youth's Executive Director, reflected, "Our partnership with young people accompanies their advocacy and skill development over many years."

Y+ Global's Maximina Jokonya added, "Y+ Global works directly with national and regional networks of young people living with HIV, community youth-led and youth service organizations, specifically serving and working with diverse groups that are most marginalized in decision making spaces that impact their health and rights such as young people living with HIV, adolescent girls and young women, young people who use drugs, those who sell sex, young people identifying as LGBTQI+ and those located in hard-to-reach areas, as these are the groups and young people most left behind."

Given this close, long-term relationship between youth and their organizations, Hauser and Jokonya were hesitant to define Advocates for Youth and Y+ Global as "intermediary funders." While both organizations regrant funds to young individuals and youth groups and acknowledge that funding is absolutely key to building capacity of youth, it is only one small part of the accompaniment and partnership they provide.

Although many donors are currently prioritizing youth voice, not so many are translating this into adequate funding for the capacity work needed with adolescents starting out in life.

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<sup>i</sup> The Global Network of Young People Living with HIV mission statement can be found at [www.yplusglobal.org/about](http://www.yplusglobal.org/about).

<sup>j</sup> The Advocates for Youth mission statement can be found at [www.advocatesforyouth.org/](http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/).

For four decades, Advocates for Youth has worked alongside thousands of young people in the U.S. and globally in their fight for sexual health, rights and justice. Advocates for Youth partners with youth leaders, adult allies and youth-serving organizations to push for policies and champion programs that recognize young people's rights to honest sexual health information; accessible, confidential and affordable sexual health services; and the resources and opportunities necessary to ensure sexual health equity for all youth. Valuing young people at Advocates for Youth means involving them in the design, implementation and evaluation of programs and policies that affect their health and well-being. Hauser noted that Advocates for Youth lives this commitment: they include youth partners in meetings with donors, building relationships while presenting, debating and assessing current strategies and actions. Centering the voice of youth has included youth involvement in HIV community planning groups, the HIV Vaccine Trials Network, the President's Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS and local school health advisory councils. Advocates for Youth also hosts a Youth Activist Network that has over 100,000 young members across many U.S. communities and 120 countries.

Y+ Global's HER Voice Fund<sup>k</sup> is focused on centering adolescent girls and young women in decision-making processes. Since 2018, Y+ Global has served as the coordinator of this 18-country initiative in sub-Saharan Africa that works through youth-led national consortia to offer small grants to organizations contributing to the reduction of HIV incidence among adolescent girls and young women. The grants are to amplify the voices and priorities of adolescent girls and young women within national-level advocacy and policy processes in order to inform decisions that affect their lives. Over the last three years, Y+ Global has engaged more than 1,000 adolescent girls and young women in training sessions, workshops and meetings that focus on advocacy and policy reform. One notable example among many is the advocacy and campaigning work protesting sexual and gender-based violence carried out by the HER Voice Fund Ambassador in Namibia. She was then invited by the president of the country to discuss setting up a committee to respond to sexual and gender-based violence and femicide issues in Namibia.

Both Y+ Global and Advocates for Youth stressed that funding for capacity strengthening and staffing of organizations led by young people is absolutely essential in achieving the outcomes outlined above — but such funding is hard to identify and sustain. Although many donors are currently prioritizing youth voice, not so many are translating this into adequate funding for the capacity work needed with adolescents starting out in life. Jokonya shared that "donors may view the lack of experience among youth groups as too much of a risk." Both Hauser and Jokonya emphasized that truly valuing and respecting youth voice means centering youth in decision-making and supporting that role with both financial and capacity-strengthening investments either directly or through community-rooted funders.

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<sup>k</sup> The HER Voice Fund is funded by ViiV Healthcare and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.