

Youth LEAD

Voices of Change



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Youth LEAD is grateful to its family members, friends, partners and stakeholders, who have been there since the conception, with special thanks to 7 Sisters and our regional network partners, Robert Carr Network Fund, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNESCO and UNAIDS for their continued support.

We hope you will enjoy reading the stories to follow and that they leave you feeling uplifted and excited about the leadership of young people in the fight against HIV and AIDS.



Thaw Zin Aye
Regional Coordinator, Youth LEAD

Foreword

It was in the early 1990s that the AIDS epidemics started to emerge in several Asia and Pacific countries, and by the end of the decade HIV was spreading quickly in many parts of the region.¹ Two decades later, in 2015, Asia is yet facing a complex and devastating HIV and AIDS epidemic.

Asia and the Pacific's AIDS response is showing mixed results, with each country in the region facing a different situation. While progress is being made in countries such as Cambodia, India, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, and Thailand, in others, such as Bangladesh, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka, the rate of new HIV infections is increasing.² New HIV infections are concentrated among key populations at higher risk, which include people who inject drugs, female and male sex workers and their clients, men who have sex with men, and transgender people.³

However, positive changes are taking place around the region, due to strong leadership and enhanced community education, advocacy, and access to treatment.



In fact, leadership has not just come from the quarters of government or intergovernmental groups, but also civil society, including young people.

YouthLEAD was founded in the summer of 2010, under the Coalition of Asia-Pacific Regional Networks on HIV and AIDS (7 Sisters) and financially supported by UNFPA.

It was further supported by UNICEF, UNAIDS, and UNESCO in the next coming years. Youth LEAD was founded with the vision of empowering young key populations with the necessary skills and tools to advocate for change.

We are very proud that Youth LEAD has grown over the past five years from a small pilot project to an independent regional youth network. Today the



network has over 56 country level representatives, or focal points, across South East Asia, East Asia, South Asia, and the Pacific.

Along the way, a clear strategic direction has kept us strong and helped us to continuously grow our reach and impact. Our three strategic pillars – to build capacity amongst the young key populations (YKP), to conduct advocacy for improving the environment for young key populations in the region, and to forge strategic partnerships with different stakeholders – have remained a focus for our efforts. We are proud that, together, we have made tremendous strides in these areas.

Our Mission Statement

Youth LEAD seeks to be the catalyst of change and empowerment for young key populations (YKP) at higher risk of HIV exposure through capacity building, advocacy, and the expansion of partnerships between local, national, and regional YKP organisations. We aim to ensure more meaningful participation and involvement of YKP in all levels of decision-making that impact their lives. Youth LEAD respects diversity and ensures gender balance in all aspects of our organizational structure and decision-making.





Networking Portfolio

20+ countries

50+ focal points

15-30 years/ages which Youth LEAD serves

Regional Scenario⁴

620,000

young people are living with HIV in Asia-Pacific

330

young people infected with HIV everyday

14

young people infected with HIV every hour

The Global Commission on AIDS in Asia indicated that over 95% of new HIV infections among young people are concentrated in young key populations.

Timeline

2009

- The idea of Youth LEAD was formed during the Youth Forum at the International Congress on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific (ICAAP) in Bali, Indonesia

2010

- Youth LEAD started as a small project under 7Sisters, conducted mapping organizations in the Asia Pacific region, and raising funds

2011

- Recruited focal points in 13 countries
- Held the first Annual General Meeting (AGM)
- Developed the New Generation Leadership Training Course together with partners, and initiated the pilot run in the Philippines
- Presented at the Asia Pacific Intergovernmental meeting and the Regional Universal Access meeting to emphasize attention towards young key populations

2012

- Began to strengthen advocacy work
- Started our first international exposure with advocacy activities conducted at the International AIDS Conference 2012 in Washington, DC
- Developed our first ever strategic plan for 2012-2015 and drafted our first governance handbook
- Participated in the Asia Pacific Intergovernmental Meeting on HIV and AIDS by leading youth sessions and speaking at the opening plenary

2013

- Received Robert Carr for Civil Society Networks Fund (RCNF) as the sole youth-led network being funded
- Increased participation made our network more visible at ICAAP

2014

- Legally registered as an independent Thai organization
- Regarded as a good practice example for young key populations at the International AIDS Conference (IAC) in Melbourne, Australia
- Selected as Asia Pacific delegate of the NGO Delegation to the UNAIDS Programme Coordinating Board (PCB).

2015

- Led the Youth Caucus in preparation for the Asia Pacific Intergovernmental Meeting on HIV and AIDS
- Global Fund Regional Expression of Interest approved to proceed with concept note development
- RCNF approved for 3rd round

Our Voices

Time and time again Youth LEAD has proven itself as a leading force in transforming young key populations into leaders that can stand up for themselves and their communities, advocate and lead change, and bring about innovation. When young people are given the skills and the platform to meaningfully participate in bringing the change, there is no limit to their potential. Youth LEAD is very proud of all its bright young members from different countries, appreciate all the hard work in leading the response.

Lets hear some stories from our focal points...





As soon as possible, as strong as possible, nonstop

Name: Soo

Age: 26

Key population affiliation: People Living with HIV (PLHIV) & Men who have Sex with Men (MSM)

Country: Vietnam

Organization: VPN+ (Vietnam Positive Network)

My name is Soo, I'm 26 years old and live in Hanoi. My involvement with Youth LEAD started in October 2013, when I joined the National Meeting on Young Key Affected Populations and became a Focal Point for Vietnam. As a Focal Point, I have concentrated mainly on improving legal frameworks for young people living with HIV and AIDS in Vietnam. Advocacy for young key populations is weak in my country, so I often have joined forces with other organizations to make a bigger impact. In particular, I have worked closely with the Vietnamese National Network of People Living with HIV and AIDS. In my view, the group that needs the most support are young MSM (Men who have Sex with Men). With Youth LEAD, I've had the opportunity to speak with high-ranking officials from the United Nations (UN), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the Vietnamese Ministries of Health and Justice. We discussed how to tear down legal barriers to education and medical treatment for young affected populations in Vietnam.

I believe we really need attention and financial support from the government and intergovernmental organizations such as the UN. In particular, more focus needs

to be put on the issues facing young people, as their needs differ from those of older populations living with HIV and AIDS. I have learned a lot from having a leadership role with Youth LEAD. Exposure to both my peers and to high-ranking officials has helped me to become much more confident. My self-image has definitely improved. Now I'm looking for more opportunities to make an impact. I would like to engage more with high-level stakeholders so that we can achieve real improvements to the legal situation for young key populations in Vietnam.

One key lesson from my work with Youth LEAD is that you need to seize opportunities quickly. The attention for the issues facing young key populations is short, so when there is a chance for working with the government and other actors, you need to act fast! My motto has become: as soon as possible, as strong as possible, nonstop. The young people involved in Youth LEAD will become the next generation of leaders in Asia Pacific. The skills training that the network provides is great, as is the sharing of knowledge and experience among all the national Youth LEAD groups. It is time to take seriously young people's desires and efforts to shape their own destinies.



Now, what young people say counts

Name: Ayu

Age: 28

Key population affiliation: People Living with HIV (PLHIV)

Country: Indonesia

Organization: IAC (Indonesia AIDS Coalition)

My name is Ayu. I joined Youth LEAD in 2012, when I became a Focal Point for Indonesia.

As a Youth LEAD Focal Point, I have participated in many new and challenging activities both at home and abroad. One of my most memorable experiences came in the summer of 2014, when I was selected to give one of the opening speeches at the International AIDS Conference in Melbourne, Australia. Being able to address such an influential audience – and as the only young person doing so – was a great honor and it made me feel that I was making a real impact. I've also taken part in other international meetings, including with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP).

Youth LEAD makes young people powerful. It teaches them to manage, lead, and become outstanding community organizers. When you become a Focal Point, you have an excellent platform for making yourself heard. That is exciting, but it is also a serious responsibility: you have to reflect on the message you want to send to the world. You have to be strong and focused. Everyone at Youth LEAD is still young, so we all still have a lot to learn. Every day teaches us a new lesson.

The biggest lesson I have learned is that stakeholders, including young key populations, the government, and international organizations, are all important partners. The network's leaders have passion and energy that I have not seen with other organizations. We constantly talk to each other and exchange opinions, ideas, and visions for the future of the organization. The principle on which the network operates is that Focal Points help each other. When you face a problem, you can count on members from 16 other countries to help you solve it! In Indonesia, it is hard to speak about issues young people are facing. Sexuality and the struggles of people living with HIV are considered inappropriate topics, especially in faith-based communities. However, I intend to make sure that these issues have a place on the political agenda. Now, what young people say counts, as evidenced by the tangible impact we have achieved. Until four years ago, the Indonesian government never talked about 'Young Key Populations'. Now, there is a section in the government's latest Action Plan on HIV that specifically addresses their needs.



We can achieve anything

Name: Sally

Age: 23

Key population affiliation: People who use Drugs (PUD)

Country: Indonesia

Organization: PKNI (Persaudaraan Korban NAPZA Indonesia / Indonesia Drug Users Network)

My name is Sally. My involvement with the Indonesian Network of People who Use Drugs (PUD) introduced me to the work of Youth LEAD in 2013. I took responsibility for Youth LEAD's Indonesian community of Young Key Populations (YKP) affected by drug use. My experience with Youth LEAD has made me aware of the opportunities young people have to shape their future. It has taught me that you can achieve anything. Even for me, coming from the drug user community, there are no limits to what I can achieve. I am not different from my peers and have the same opportunities as other young people. I think that is a really empowering message for others in my situation and I hope that I can encourage others to reach for their dreams as well. Youth LEAD has provided me with a great blueprint for building a successful advocacy community. I have copied their model in my own country to make sure young drug users' voices are heard in Indonesia.

Youth LEAD has also given me the opportunity to work on a regional, and even global, level. This has provided me with the confidence and resources to build the first nongovernmental community for young drug users in Indonesia. The backing of the

network has been really important to my work, enabling me to expand my team but also allowing me to build the confidence to speak in front of large audiences and to explain my positions in a clear and convincing manner. These traits have helped me to get elected to public office - I just became the youngest-ever member of Jakarta's City Council! In my opinion, Youth LEAD has achieved a lot over the last few years. It started as a small project and now we have members in 20 countries and much better governance structures.

We also have great resources for training members in the all-important skills of public speaking, networking, and political advocacy. I truly believe that the organization has grown up and become much more diverse, allowing it to make a large-scale impact across the region. Yet there is still a lot of work to do. Many people give great speeches on issues pertaining to drug users and sex workers - but in reality, drug users and sex workers are still being discriminated on a daily basis. They still do not have access to services and medical treatment. This needs to change. There need to be real actions and real results.



We want to be the subject, not the object, of advocacy

Name: Arie

Age: 30

Key population affiliation: People Living with HIV (PLHIV) & Men who have Sex with Men (MSM)

Country: Indonesia

Organization: GWL INNA (Indonesia Gay, Waria and Other MSM Network)

My name is Arie. I work for the National Network for NGOs for LGBT and HIV in Indonesia. Since 2013, I have been the Area Coordinator for Eastern Indonesia, and member to the National Secretariat, working on capacity-building and organizational development. My journey with Youth LEAD started several years ago, when at age 29, I joined as a Focal Point and then shortly after as a member of the technical working group. In my life, I have faced many difficult personal challenges. I have suffered a double stigma as a young gay person living with HIV. I have also previously been a sex worker. Being a part of the Youth LEAD network has been a really positive experience. I have gained knowledge and absorbed many new lessons along the way. The main ones? Actively seek the information that will enhance the impact of your work. Get to know an issue thoroughly before getting involved. Keep an open mind. Be ready to learn.

One key area Youth LEAD has helped me learn more about is accessing global funding. The Global Fund is very big and hard to understand. How do you write a proposal? How do you submit it? How is it assessed? It is important for young representatives – and for communities – to know how to do this. One of the achieve-

ments of which I am really proud relates to being able to conduct this kind of direct advocacy. I was part of the National Strategic Planning process and Global Fund work in Indonesia. Young people want to be more active and have a meaningful say. We want to be the subject, not the object, of advocacy. We want to speak up and represent ourselves. Previously, this was done exclusively by the government and high-level decision-makers – but now, with the help of networks like Youth LEAD, we can do it too. My goal is to ensure treatment for people living with HIV is provided by our government and that they are treated in the same professional, respectful manner as other people.

In high school it was very hard for me to deal with my feelings and identity. Without any information or support, I kept things to myself. It took me ten years to come out to my mother. That was ten years of struggle. Now I want to share my story. I have no shame anymore. I have pride and I know I can do positive things. I want to do my best and to empower others.

The role of Youth LEAD Focal Points is to build the movement. You need a big network to make progress.



Youth LEAD's NewGen Program changed me

Name: Thura

Age: 29

Key population affiliation: Sex Worker (SW)

Country: Myanmar

Organization: PSI (Population Service International)

My name is Thura. I am a sex worker. I advocate for the rights of female sex workers.

I first met Thaw Zin Aye, the Regional Coordinator of Youth LEAD in 2010, when I was 25 years old. Back then, Thaw was in Myanmar recruiting for country Focal Points. I have since been a part of Youth LEAD. In Myanmar, the overall prevalence of HIV is declining among young key populations (including drug users and sex workers). This is because the community is engaged and because NGOs – such as AIDS Alliance – are very active. It is also because together we are building a network: of individuals and community-based organizations that support young people. Yet a lot remains to be done. And if I had to identify two of the biggest challenges in HIV and AIDS prevention among young key populations in Myanmar right now, I would say they are: lack of relevant data, and the capacity of young key populations to be involved in advocacy and policy-making. Lack of data is a real problem – we need good quality information that we can take as evidence to donors and the government. While there is energy and commitment among young people, we need more technical support. Young people should be doing more than outreach, they should be involved in, and influence,

policy-making. To do this, we need skills in reporting, presenting, fundraising, conducting research, and so on. This is where Youth LEAD comes in.

Youth LEAD's NewGen program changed me. It made me more confident. The Training of Trainers course enhanced my skills to become a leader. In 2014, I organized a 3-day event, 'Health rights and dignity', attended by 350 mostly female sex workers from across Myanmar. We used Youth LEAD New Gen materials at the event and it was a great success – one of the outcomes was a declaration that included a commitment from partner organizations to build support and secure equal treatment and health rights for young female sex workers. Along the way, my Youth LEAD mentor Gerard has also taught me a lot. He is the same age as me but has a lot more experience. When I have been stressed or tired or discouraged, he has been very positive. Last year, he encouraged me to write to the International Congress on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific (ICAAP) committee for a scholarship. While I didn't get the scholarship, I am proud that my paper on stigma and discrimination against young sex workers in Yangon was accepted to be presented at the ICAAP in Bangkok in 2013.



I have optimism for the future

Name: Setia

Age: 25

Key Population Affiliation: Men who have sex with Men (MSM)

Country: Indonesia

Organization: Fokus Muda (Indonesia Network of YKP)

My name is Setia. Currently, I coordinate the media and youth department of MSM Transgender National, developing media strategies for young MSM (Men who have Sex with Men) and transgender people. I also co-founded and coordinate Fokus Muda, a youth-led network for young key populations (YKP) in Indonesia. Fokus Muda connects Indonesian YKP to each other and is based on a similar organizational model as Youth LEAD. We have 13 members from 11 different provinces. I started working with Youth LEAD in 2011 to represent YKP and to increase the level of community response to the problems facing them.

There has been some progress for YKP in Indonesia over the last five years in terms of policy. We now have the National AIDS Strategy and Action Plan (SRAN) for 2015-2019. However, the definition of key populations remains too vague and too broad to effectively address their needs. Most stakeholders still do not understand that young people between the ages of 15-24 are a distinct group with distinct needs. That notwithstanding, I have optimism for the future. The establishment of platforms such as Fokus Muda is a real step forward.

Another example of a step forward is the decriminalization of drug users. All drug users in Indonesia are now entitled to rehabilitation services, decreasing the stigma and discrimination suffered by many people living with HIV.

I think one of the biggest benefits of being part of the Youth LEAD network is the peer-to-peer support it offers. The mentor-mentee mechanism has been really good for me. We can also pass that forward – now we can mentor others within our communities. Having the Secretariat and technical group as our mentors has been really fantastic as well. The sustainability of Fokus Muda is my focus now. While we are grateful to have had financial and organizational support from Youth LEAD, we're working on a strategy to achieve sustainability. Once Fokus Muda stands on its own feet, I would like to go back to university to study for a Master's degree in Public Health. My commitment to YKP will continue, even as I get older. We need more adults who support YKP issues.



Never give up

Name: Chin

Age: 27

Key Population Affiliation: Transgender (TG)

Country: Philippines

Organization: Positive Action Foundation Philippines Incorporated (PAFPI)

My name is Chin. I initially met Youth LEAD during the first NewGen training at Baras, Rizal, Philippines in November 2011. In August 2012, I got accepted as a Focal Point for the Philippines. It has been an amazing experience to be a part of Youth LEAD. I conduct learning group sessions and focus group discussions to enhance the knowledge and skills of young people living with HIV so that they can become future leaders of the community. This includes mentoring them and providing them with communications, self-empowerment, positive prevention and legal training.

I have had several successes since joining Youth LEAD. First of all, I had the chance to attend the 11th International Congress on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific (ICAAP) where I got to meet both Senior and Youth Leaders from Asia and the Pacific. Secondly, the Positive Action Foundation Philippines Incorporated (PAFPI) gave me an opportunity to handle projects and organize events such as fundraising and mentoring the young key populations (YKP). Last but not least, I participated in the fellowship exchange program, which allowed me to stay in Indonesia for two months to study the local response to sexually transmitted infections, HIV, and other humanitarian issues.

All these successes would not have been possible without my mentor Celestino Ramirez (Vice-President and Training Director of PAFPI), the Youth LEAD family, and my friend and fellow Philippines Focal Point (now part of the Secretariat) Jeffry Acaba. In my mind, Youth LEAD's biggest achievement has been to identify and mobilize the YKP leaders in Asia and the Pacific to become one family with common goals.

However, YKP still face many challenges. In the Philippines, young people living with HIV (YPLHIV) do not receive healthcare coverage from their companies. Some young sex workers are allowed only one free HIV test. Stigmatization, discrimination and gender insensitivity still occur, including from the service providers. Service accessibility and availability are patchy, especially for people 12-17 years old. Being part of Youth LEAD has changed its members from being a passive recipient of health-related services into a leader who helps to shape such services. I have expanded my network, knowledge, and skills in communicating and empowering YPLHIV in the Philippines. I have learned to always believe in myself and never give up. My goal is to help save more lives in the Philippines and I am grateful to everyone who supports this goal.



Take change in your own hands

Name: Srijana

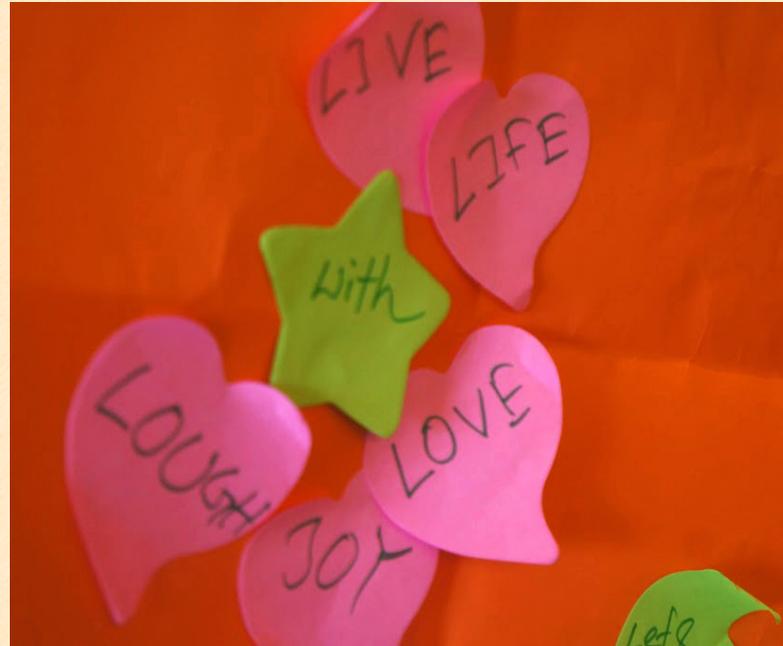
Age: 25

Key population affiliation: People who use Drugs (PUD)

Country: Nepal

Organization: YKP Nepal

My name is Srijana. I joined the Youth LEAD family in December 2013. A young activist for female drug users, young key populations (YKP) and young women living with HIV in Nepal, I approach my Youth LEAD role with utmost passion and determination. Stigma and discrimination have always existed and they stop women, particularly young female drug users, from getting access to services. Women are treated like second class citizens, now imagine what it must be like for a young female drug user or a young woman living with HIV. Cross-cutting issues such as sex work and drug use in any context place women at great risk, especially without access to proper education in sexual and reproductive health. Youth LEAD's New Gen training in 2013 strengthened my leadership skills and expanded my activities for female drug users. In my mind, outsiders come, listen, give sympathy but disappear. This is why I attended New Gen and will take change in my own hands to support my community of over 6,000 female drug users.



Secretariat

Based in Bangkok, Thailand, the Secretariat are in charge with the day-to-day work of the network; facilitating coordination between the countries and region; and ensuring that the advocacy, leadership, and partnership are strengthened and scaled up.



Name: Thaw Zin Aye

Country: Myanmar

Position: Regional Coordinator

I am born in Myanmar, and one of my greatest passions is helping others. I am passionate about making a difference. At age 14, I would visit shelters for AIDS orphans to teach English, and play games and organize fundraising activities to help them with their daily sustenance. After I graduated from the university I got an internship opportunity with 7 Sisters. This gave me broader perspective on working on HIV and AIDS advocacy and understanding how changes happen through advocacy. In the beginning, I noticed that there were no platforms and programs to address the issues of young people from key

populations. That was how I, together with my colleagues, brought together all the young key populations and organized Youth LEAD. As a Regional Coordinator of Youth LEAD, my work includes overseeing regional programs, coordinating focal points and country networks, and managing the overall work of the network. I have been involved with Youth LEAD since the beginning and continue to work at the Secretariat level to ensure that the network has continuous support and is reaching young key population in the Asia Pacific region, particularly at the grassroots level. Youth LEAD and its focal points nurtured my leadership skills helped me grow professionally and personally. Youth LEAD has come a long way and has transformed in extraordinary ways since we started five years ago. These ordinary young persons from key populations doing extraordinary work continues to inspire me until today.



Name: Jeffrey Acaba

Country: Philippines

Position: Education and Advocacy Lead

I first met the Youth LEAD Secretariat team at an ASEAN Task Force on AIDS (ATFOA) Special Meeting then called “Most At-Risk Young People and Most At-Risk Adolescents” in Lao PDR in 2010. I was a speaker representing young Filipino migrants affected by HIV back then. I remember them inviting me to be part of Youth LEAD but was not as enthusiastic because I have never seen myself as a young person. I was totally wrong.

Since my membership – from Focal Point to becoming part of the Secretariat - Youth LEAD has made me realize

that I am a young person myself, and that many young people from key populations like me face compounding issues because we are young and are part of a group that are considered “immoral” or “engaging in unacceptable behaviors”. Youth LEAD changed my perspectives about young people and honed me to become a leader myself, lifting young key populations’ rights a little higher – one advocacy platform at a time.



Name: Gaj Gurung

Country: Nepal

Position: Program and M&E Lead

I am a young development practitioner from Nepal. My passion to work in the development sector ignited through my studies in social work during my Bachelor’s. In 2009, I started working for women living with HIV in Nepal. In 2010, I met with the Youth LEAD secretariat and they inspired me to work for young key populations (YKP) and started the first YKP network in Nepal called YKAP Nepal. In that same year, I was selected as a youth delegate to the Developing Country NGO Delegation to the Board of

the Global Fund. Since then, I have been actively working for YKP at the regional and international level. In 2013, I moved to Bangkok, Thailand to become part of the Youth LEAD Secretariat as the Program Lead. My work areas revolve around program development and management, monitoring and evaluation, research, organizational development, resource mobilization, capacity development, and governance. During my free time, I love playing outdoor sports and watching movies.



Name: Sujitra Sriwannawit (Prae)

Country: Thailand

Position: Programme Associate

My name is Prae and I am a young Thai lawyer who has a passion for human rights and applied ethics. I have been a volunteer for development issues since 2009 when I joined AIESEC, an NGO that provides young people with leadership development and cross-cultural internship and volunteer exchange experiences across the world, and have continued to do so on my own since then. Human rights with an emphasis on child rights was my main focus in law school. With

my advocacy and academic involvement in the legal aspects of key populations such as the rights of migrant workers and the decriminalisation for people who use drugs, I am determined to make a contribution to their needs and rights. With the aspiration of exploring and contributing to the sexual and reproductive health rights, I discovered Youth LEAD as a prominent network in advocating for the needs of young key populations and became part the network and started to gain a well-rounded perspective on the issues facing young key populations. I am now the program associate at the Youth LEAD Secretariat with the main responsibility of assisting grants and projects in partner countries.



Name: Nounvan Suwanviwatana

Country: Thailand

Position: Finance Officer

I have over 7 years of experience in finance and accounting with a global bank and international NGO. It is such a privilege to contribute Youth LEAD team with my in-depth knowledge of accounting, cash management and forecast, financial report, budget planning and control.



Moving forward...

Looking to the future, we aim to reach out even further, to drive more change, to raise the voices of young people from key populations.

We hope more stories like the ones presented emerge – stories of courageous, driven young people with an eye to making a difference for their communities and helping end the AIDS epidemic in Asia and the Pacific.

Get Involved

Addressing HIV and AIDS is a huge task, requiring a shift in perceptions, laws and cultural barriers. Want to help? We want you!

If you fit any of the following categories, please email info@youth-lead.org

- Legal professionals interested in pro-bono work
- Researchers and public health professionals interested in leading research projects for Youth LEAD
- Young people interested in peer outreach
- Corporate supporters who can provide technical support or services
- Corporate sponsors who are interested in funding grassroots activities

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