

## **Adolescence is hard enough: What happens when you are HIV positive, too?**

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This was the question posed to a colleague and myself as we started our month-long global health rotation with the International Alliance for the Prevention of AIDS (IAPA) NGO in Chennai, India. IAPA was founded in 2004 to deliver clinical care and education to HIV positive individuals in southern India. During this clinical experience, we participated in home visits to HIV positive children who often times either lost one or both parents to AIDS. IAPA offers a monthly stipend to these children, helping support their nutrition, growth, and access to healthcare. On a larger scale, IAPA teaches community members about nutrition, hygiene, first aid, injury prevention, and other general child health topics.

To focus our work with IAPA, we asked what we as pediatric residents could offer. It was shared with us that many of the children who initially started with IAPA were now reaching adolescent age. They were starting to ask questions about their health, if they could transmit the virus to others, and some were starting to show interest in forming romantic relationships. Here was our opportunity to help educate adolescents about their HIV status and what that meant during their young adult lives.

We decided to create a handbook tailored to the questions that these teenagers were beginning to ask. Because IAPA would provide free health education in the communities as well as formal training for healthcare providers, we wanted our deliverable to not only be age appropriate but also be complete with health resources should someone need more information. We referenced educational material from the United States Department of Health and Human Services, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the American Academy of Pediatrics. Such resources were free, readily accessible on the internet, and most importantly, were evidence based because we wanted to ensure our audience would have reliable sources rather than random hits from their internet searches.

Over the course of our month in Chennai, India, we published an adolescent handbook for IAPA that they could use for their community teaching sessions. The booklet is question-based, covering the frequently asked questions of the teens particularly about disease prevention and spread. We recognized that it was not only taboo to speak about their HIV status, but it was also difficult to discuss sexual practices, health, and orientation. IAPA and its community outreach provide a safe, open forum for these HIV positive children and adolescents to ask their questions and learn about their health status. We were grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this endeavor during our clinical rotation abroad.

*Thank you to AMWA members and donors for your generous support of my clinical rotation abroad. It was certainly one of the highlights of my pediatric training. For more information about the IAPA NGO in Chennai, India, please visit [IAPAids.org](http://IAPAids.org).*



**Photo taken at the International Alliance for the Prevention of AIDS (IAPA) NGO in Chennai, India (Feb. 2018).**

**From left to right:** Arulraj Louis (India Project Director); Sheila Chang, MD (UCLA Pediatric Resident); Christine Thang, MD (UCLA Pediatric Resident); Sheema Gopi (India Field Officer).