

Queer x Bodies

RUN 1 - RUN 3

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Foreword

Youth Voices Count (YVC) is a regional network of young lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex individuals in Asia-Pacific working on SRHR, SOGIESC, Youth Empowerment, and Human Rights issues. Established in 2010, YVC engages in community mobilization, national, regional and global advocacy related to young people belonging to diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, and sex characteristics.

Since its early years, YVC has been dedicated in spotlighting the stories and lived experiences of LGBTIQ folx. We believe that spaces, both online and offline, have to be created to be affirming, inclusive, safe, and youth-friendly for all. Spaces that ensure that your voice counts.

QueerXBodies is a series that was conceptualized by YVC and was made possible through the support of UNAIDS Asia-Pacific. For three runs, the series has been a space to share stories of struggle, activism, identity, human rights, perseverance, and best practices. In QueerXBodies, we share stories from the grassroots. This magazine is a culmination of almost two years of working with UNAIDS. This would not have been possible without their partnership and financial support.

With every turn of the page, we hope you enjoy the queerness of Asia-Pacific. In return, we hope that you could count your voice with us!

Justin Francis Bionat
Executive Director,
Youth Voices Count, Inc.

An Intersectional and Feminist Response to Sexual Health, Mental Health, and Community Building

SHRUTI VENKATESH, INDIA



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Shruti Venkatesh (she/her) is an Indian young advocate who is 22 years old. She has a psychology degree and is enthusiastic about mental health issues. In her capacity as Programme Director of the Queer Rights Center, she also works for the queer community. Shruti is a co-founder of One Future Collective (OFC), a virtual LGBTQ mental health support group that can be accessed from anywhere in India. OFC assists gay persons who have been adversely impacted by the COVID-19 epidemic.

OFC has also promoted a conversation around sexual health using Instagram. Because of the prevalent stigma and dehumanization of gay people, being an ally is critical. For allies to become better support systems, the OFC has created guides and guidelines. OFC's usual approach is to have a culture of openness to analyzing and revising their work in response to criticism. OFC also functions as a feminist non-profit organization based in India that focuses on developing compassionate young social leadership.

Since 2018, the LGBT Rights Center has been a community-based intervention aimed at raising



"people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender face prejudice and violence when trying to get health care."

awareness and empowering individuals to advocate for and support the queer rights movement in India. OFC praised the efforts of many Indian groups who banded together to implement COVID-19 assistance programs. OFC has also enabled a dialogue on sustaining sexual health amid the epidemic via Instagram. Because of the severe stigma and dehumanization of LGBT people in India, being an ally is critical. For allies to become better support systems, the OFC has created guides and guidelines.

One of the recommendations published by OFC during the epidemic focused on how educators can be excellent friends. People who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender face prejudice and violence when trying to get health care. Domestic abuse and violence rates have risen as the lockdown has advanced. This guidebook is intended to serve as a starting point for learning how to be a supportive and affirming ally.

One Future Collective and their guides can be found on Instagram (@onefuturecollective).

Spotlighting Queer Lives Through Storytelling and Art, 'The Chinky Homo Project'

KUMAM DAVIDSON, INDIA

"local facilitators and leaders must acknowledge the community's particular requirements in order to ensure that no communities are left behind."



Kumam Davidson, from Manipur, India, is a 30-year-old indigenous activist, researcher, artist, writer, and curator. He studied literature at Delhi University and Jawaharlal Nehru University, putting his academic and advocacy expertise to good use. Kumam's most well-known advocacy project was co-founding The Chinky Homo Project, which attempts to examine LGBTIQ tales from Northeast India through words, images, drawings, paintings, and other forms of expression. The Chinky Homo Project also features visual art and sketches by Indian community members

Kumam has received awards and opportunities for his work, including the SAATHII LGBTQIA Fellow, Zubaan Sasakawa Peace Foundation Fellow, and Mann Mela Mental Health Design Resident Artist.

His writing will appear in "Zubaan's Homebound Anthology" and "Routledge's COVID 19 Assemblages: Queer and Feminist Ethnographies from South Asia," which chronicles a person living with HIV from the 1990s to the current pandemic.

Working online, Kumam adds, has made it simpler for him to diversify and integrate groups in his advocacy work, while also acknowledging the limitations of virtual interactions versus groundwork. When he reflected on certain pivotal events in his career, he concluded that residents in his area were more concerned about their livelihood than the epidemic itself. Kumam sees his "new normal" as an offset to an already difficult "normal," citing a lack of suitable transportation, a lack of schools with online platforms to facilitate distance education, and a lack of adaptive healthcare facilities that allow online service provision as examples. He believes that local facilitators and leaders must acknowledge the community's particular requirements in order to ensure that no communities are left behind.

Kumam's and the Chinky Homo Project's work educates us about new and innovative approaches to community participation that use storytelling and the arts to spread good messages and raise social awareness. This is a critical communication tool in the human rights and sexual health response to promote social change in communities. Kumam's research and creative writing projects give new narrative voices to help people understand the LGBT experience in India and abroad.

The Chinky Homo Project also shares some visual art and sketch pieces from community members from India. Kumam's work, along with other artists, can be found through the Chinky Homo Project's Instagram at @thechinkyhomoproject.



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Bringing to the Forefront the Voices of Youth from the Marshall Islands

**ANFERNEE NENOL KAMINAGA,
THE MARSHALL ISLANDS**



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Anfernee Nenol Kaminaga (also known as Ael Kein Ad, Jolet jen Anij, and Lolelaplap) is a 25-year-old Marshall Islands native who identifies as a pansexual, genderqueer male. He spent the majority of his childhood in Maine, but came back to his native country a few years ago. He is currently employed with the “Youth to Youth in Health” program, which aims to assist teenagers by educating, empowering, and guiding them toward a healthy lifestyle. His work is intersectional, incorporating other young people in various projects to confront social challenges and finding answers. Nenol and his organization have been working together to provide urgent assistance to the afflicted communities.

In the Marshall Islands, he co-founded and led the “Brighten the Rainbow” LGBTIQ youth project, which is widely regarded as the country’s first openly LGBTIQ campaign. He has had the opportunity to represent his country as a UNESCO Youth Ambassador for a UNESCO Youth Summit for Sustainability and as an RMI (Republic of the Marshall Islands) youth delegate for the 1st UN Youth Climate Action Summit. While working for the International Organization for Migration, he had the opportunity to develop young climate leaders as well



"people who are gay, lesbian bisexual, or transgender face prejudice and violence when trying to get health care."

as work on the ‘Do Better’ project, which showcased resiliency in the eyes of the kids.

Securing grants for programs on teen pregnancy prevention and substance addiction awareness are just a few of the things they’ve been working on. They’re also collaborating on an initiative with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Marshall Islands’ National Disaster Management Office to spread media and raise awareness of COVID-19 prevention and practices. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic prevention and quarantine measures, the Marshall Islands and the critical people living there face similar barriers to sexual health care. Nenol’s organization is aware of the pre-existing stigma suffered by critical groups and LGBTIQ communities, and is aware that these people are hesitant to seek sexual healthcare. To address these difficulties and prevent further discrimination, they enlisted the help of medical professionals to deliver HIV testing and other sexual health-related issues in a safe and discreet manner.

Some of Kaminaga’s involvement (such as Youth to Youth in Health) can be found through Facebook here: <https://www.facebook.com/rmiy2y/>.



Taking it forward - PLHIV and LGBTIQ communities lead the COVID-19 response in South Korea

SUNG-UK SO (SO-JU), SOUTH KOREA

In response to COVID-19, several activists have increased their lobbying and activism to support human rights. So (So-ju), a South Korean activist actively immersed in LGBTIQ activism, is one among these activists, working relentlessly during the pandemic's upheavals. So-ju works at CommunityR, a safe haven where young people living with HIV (PLHIV) can discuss their fears and wounds while also receiving support. CommunityR works to advance the human rights of HIV-positive people and members of the LGBTIQ community.

So-ju reveals that the spread of COVID-19 in his home nation of South Korea has been closely linked to and blamed on the LGBTIQ community. Online threats

"Healthcare settings should be stigma-free places that help HIV-positive patients and critical demographics stay healthy"

and harassment against LGBTIQ people, particularly homosexual men, have increased dramatically in South Korea. In response, HIV and AIDS human rights organizations as well as sexual minority human rights organizations in South Korea formed the QUEER Action Against COVID-19. So-ju and his organization were only one of many who came forward to combat the public's hatred.

A project team has been formed to improve transgender people's access to services such as hormone therapy, mental health care, and health services to treat and alleviate body dysmorphia. "Healthcare settings should be stigma-free places that help HIV-positive patients and critical demographics stay healthy," So-ju says.

Individuals and groups are also organizing comparable efforts as part of the Rainbow Movement Against Sexual Minority Discrimination. Several organizations come together on a regular basis to campaign for equality and non-discrimination for LGBTIQ people, in solidarity with the rest of the gay Korean community. One particular and crucial conclusion, according to So-ju, was the need of providing opportunities for people to meet one other in a safe and non-discriminatory environment. He explains that it is critical to continually picture the distinct lives of people and the difficulties they encounter in order to ensure that no communities are left behind.

Finally, when it comes to the term 'new normal,' So-ju says, "I don't think this is the new normal. This pandemic has brought to light and uncovered many problems and inequities. Alternatives and actions for overcoming and resolving these challenges and injustices should serve as a stepping stone to the new normal."

Join So-ju and the rest of his team advocate for HIV & AIDS awareness through Community R's Facebook page here: <https://www.facebook.com/R.YPLWHA/>.



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Building Strategic Partnerships between Civil Society and Key Stakeholders for an Effective COVID-19 response in Kiribati

LeVITA Levi, KIRIBATI



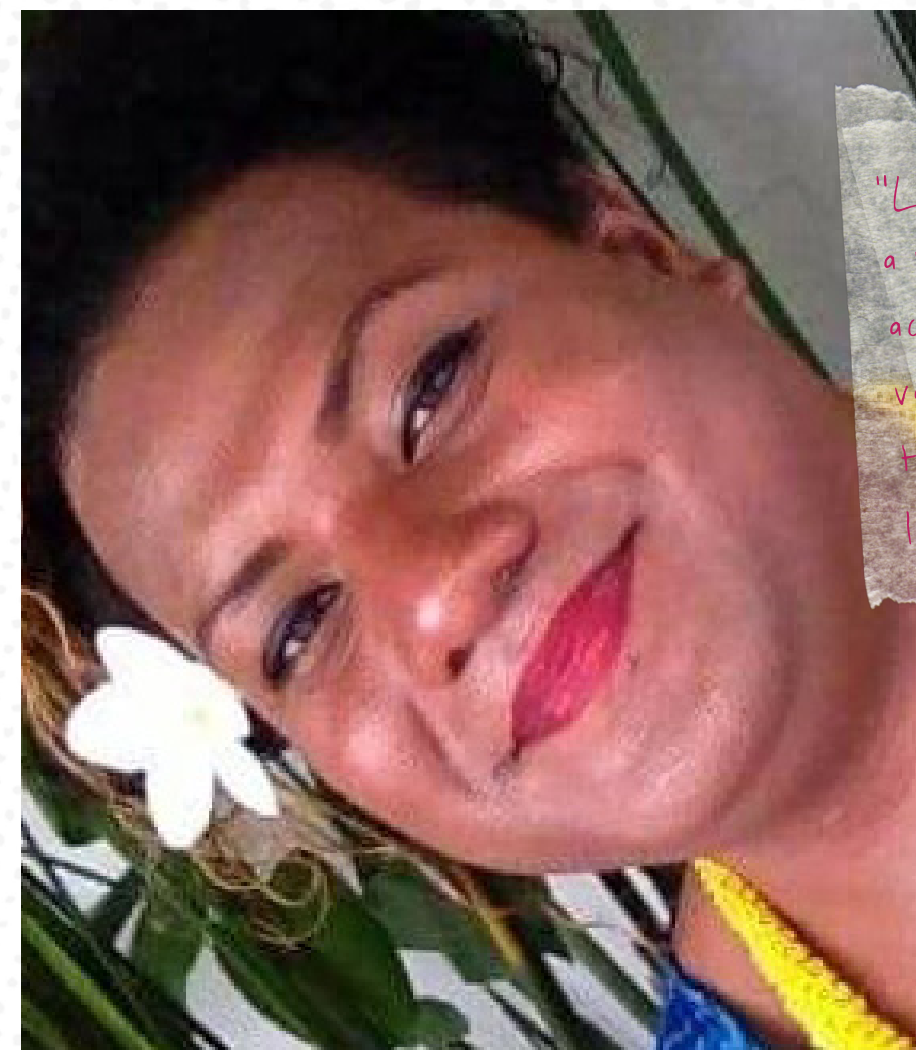
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LGBTIQ persons face a variety of challenges across the board in various nations, and they are frequently left behind and mistreated. While these are trying times for the LGBTIQ community, activists and leaders have been working relentlessly to solve these issues.

Kiribati is an independent island nation in the central Pacific Ocean. It is the only country in the world to be located in all four hemispheres, with 32 atolls and one coral-raised island dotting the Pacific Ocean like pearls with a population of just over 110,000.

Levita is a member of BIMBA, a non-governmental organization dedicated to increasing the visibility of Kiribati's binabinaine population.

She has been assisting with the preparation of the Kiribati National COVID-19 Response Plan, among other things. She's also aiding the Kiribati government and several non-governmental organizations with public awareness campaigns to keep communities informed about the current global pandemic. She has also participated in simulation exercises on handling and preventing COVID-19 cases, which were supervised by the Ministry of Health and the Airport Authority.



"LGBTIQ persons face a variety of challenges across the board in various nations, and they are frequently left behind and mistreated."

The government of Kiribati is finalizing its reaction to the COVID-19 outbreak, which will be presented to the Cabinet for approval.

The issues originate from a lack of public compliance with required health regulations, a scarcity of personal protective equipment, and service constraints. Health, Communication, Transportation, Finance, Education, Nationals Stranded Outside Kiribati, and Public Servants are among the eight task forces. Levita collaborated on the National Covid 19 Preparedness Plan, which promotes inclusivity and provides assistance for the LGBTIQ community. She makes it a point to include them in decision-making processes as part of her job. Levita says they are still unprepared for the new normal because most of their basic requirements, such as medication, food, and fuel, are imported from other nations.

Learn more about the binabinaine population along with Kiribati's response to COVID-19 through BIMBA's Facebook that can be found here: <https://www.facebook.com/bimbakiribati/>

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Interview with Acep Gates

EPISODE 1



In Indonesia, many LGBTIQ+ face public scrutiny and discrimination due to the country's religious nature. Affecting this is the stigma surrounding HIV and misinformation towards HIV, HIV-positive people towards the majority Muslim nation.

Acep Gates is a 25-year-old Indonesian digital content creator, queer activist, and influencer who mostly uploads vlogs on YouTube and expands his content on Instagram. He describes himself as an openly gay Muslim who also happens to be HIV-positive. In October 2018, he narrated that he was diagnosed with HIV through his vlog. Ever since then, he has continuously been creating videos that promote sex positivity and HIV education. His work serves as an inspiration to LGBTIQ and Muslim LGBTIQ individuals, as well as HIV-positive individuals.

He reveals that the decision to open up about his HIV status on YouTube came from the idea that Indonesia still faces a lot of stigma surrounding the country's citizens creating fear and misunderstandings towards HIV positive individuals. With sharing his personal experiences, he believes that the stigma can be reduced by letting people in his world and convincing them that regardless of status, HIV positive people are not limited to their own diagnosis and are still able to live personal satisfactory lives.

With this idea in mind, he has made it his personal goal to take HIV education along with sex education further than his own platform to hopefully normalize conversations about sexual health and HIV status.

"He also advocates for and hopes for improved sexual education curricula for educators and students in public and private schools; especially in rural areas where online access may be limited."

Gates also shares despite his efforts of going online; personal experiences of HIV can only do so much compared to the virus itself - its transmission, long-term effects and treatment. As online platforms should be utilized to the greatest extent possible, he also believes that offline opportunities should be emphasized in light of the accessibility of these platforms. He also advocates for and hopes for improved sexual education curricula for educators and students in public and private schools; especially in rural areas where online access may be limited.

Acep continues to post about sexual health and his personal experiences on YouTube (as Acep Gates) and Instagram (@acepgates).

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Interview with Catherine Harry

EPISODE 2



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Catherine Harry is a Cambodian feminist vlogger and the founder of A Dose of Cath, a feminist-focused channel that covers sex education, gender equality, and cultural issues. Her advocacy for feminism started when she was exposed to YouTuber Laci Green, who also creates similar content on sexual health, culture, and feminism. Realizing the need to share her own experiences to an online platform, she founded her YouTube channel in an effort to educate fellow Cambodian youth on sexual health and liberty. Apart from Laci Green, a huge part of inspiration comes from the second-wave feminism movement; which highlights sexual liberty and freedom.

Catherine also takes pride in being a writer and journalist for The Washington Post.

Being a woman in a conservative country & society, she emphasizes that her drive to create vlogs is to prevent the next generation from experiencing the current woes of this generation. To her, change within marginalized sectors, particularly women, is essential for these groups to grow and feel empowered.

She also shares the struggle in her initiatives coming from an Asian society, criticizing its mostly patriarchal roots, revealing misogynistic and discriminatory backlash towards her.

Catherine also notes her difficulty in pointing out the need for change due to several stagnant opinions that promote tradition over progression. She explains and emphasizes that culture, nevertheless, may be diverse,

"change within marginalized sectors,
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but scrutinizes the danger in humanity if it oppresses or harms a certain sector of society - especially women.

Despite her struggle in her advocacy to promote feminism, she capitalizes the support garnered from fellow women, queer folk and marginalized people who identify with her; seeking validation and assurance with a voice that is able to speak certain thoughts that are taboo to say out loud. She believes the support and her voice can open up conversations and spark possible changes that can better progress Cambodian society. Other than her online platform, she highlights that solidarity and camaraderie is as essential to make waves believing that while there is no one way to spark change, the dire need to speak your voice out matters more.

Catherine's channel, A Dose of Cath, has more than 100,000 subscribers and pursues to speak more about sexual health right here:
<https://www.youtube.com/c/CatherineVHarry>.

QueerXBodies Interview with Zola Genta

EPISODE 3

Zolanski Genta, also known as Zola, is a bisexual genderqueer LGBTIQ+ activist & influencer from Indonesia. They began their activism through social media and microblogging sites such as ask.FM and Instagram, talking about sex education, safe-sex and related issues.

Zola also involved themselves in the non-profit organization Support Group and Resource Center on Sexuality Studies (SGRC), highlighting sexual studies and gender-related issues. They believe that they, along with SGRC, have contributed to opening discussions toward LGBTIQ+ issues combining the framework of education and academic study. Aiming to provide scientific and academic reason towards issues, they hope to provide more logical and level headed discussions that can create better conversations leading to progressions.

To further amplify their platform, they decided to turn to social media for a more accessible means to educate and create conversations without the need to be part of the group; turning to social media also means a better accessibility towards their circle of friends as well where their friends can ask questions and be involved. Zola highlights the value of creating safe spaces where anyone can talk about these topics without the need to feel discriminated against or judged.

They brought their need to create spaces in university by creating the organization where students can freely get together, learn, and talk about these issues. Zola emphasizes that the economic world pays no mind



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towards socio-political-cultural topics, encouraging the need for students to learn more about their SOGIE.

According to them, their personal experiences gave them the motivation to create these “spaces” for discussion. Zola shares that growing up in a heteronormative environment (growing up with straight friends) instilled doubt and fear within themselves discouraging themselves to learn more about themselves. They believe these questions require proper answers to learning about themselves, hence creating online platforms.

Like many other conservative Asian nations, Zola and their organization faces scrutiny due to traditional upbringing and misguided points of view. However, Zola stresses the importance of “home”, and community, where banding together as a group of individuals with the same cause can create a better space for like-minded queer folk to express themselves and ask questions bravely; eventually opening up an opportunity to speak up and make changes.

Zola continues to speak to a bigger platform on Instagram through their Instagram @sourmimosa.

" banding together as a group of individuals with the same cause can create a better space for like-minded queer folk to express themselves and ask questions bravely; eventually opening up an opportunity to speak up and make changes "

QueerXBodies Interview with Cai Antonio

EPISODE 4

Cai Antonio is an illuminating activist for inclusive sex education, feminist media, and LGBTIQ+ equality from Manila, Philippines. She co-founded an alternative sex education platform on social media called Now Open PH that brings together different queer influencers and sexual education experts to talk about sexual health, queer stories and related LGBTIQ+ issues.

Initially starting in a microblogging platform, Now Open PH tackles certain topics that binds relationships and sexuality such as BDSM or monogamy. Later on, Cai shares that they've expanded their efforts in discussing women's sexuality and other hot topics that would be deemed as taboo in the Philippine context. To reach a bigger audience, Now Open PH expanded itself to different social platforms and also partakes in podcasts.

Now Open PH provides a platform for not only Cai, but several queer and sex-positive individuals to share and educate certain topics that are still currently stigmatized and feared in the majority-Catholic country. She believes that despite the strides of the young generation to create waves, a bigger platform is still needed for marginalized sectors as people with higher power create decisions that are still ignorant to the needs of women, LGBTIQ+ folk and several marginalized sectors who feel like they have no voice.

Despite the backlash in the organization for its progressive nature, she strongly affirms the nature of the platform promoting that education for sexual health and gender conversation is for people to create informed



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"a bigger platform is still needed for marginalized sectors as people with higher power create decisions that are still ignorant to the needs of women, LGBTIQ+ folk and several marginalized sectors who feel like they have no voice."

choices. She clarifies that the organization is not meant to follow an agenda, but to spread information that would reveal certain truths about stigmatized topics - which would further push individuals to create free choices that would better shape their worldview.

Cai alludes to self-healing and self-development as one of her motivations in the organization. She emphasizes that freedom in these informed choices create raw, deep conversations that people should be willing to talk about with the intention to open their minds and find their own answer through these choices and pieces of information. With the need of information being spread, she also believes that it's fellow queer folk's obligation to further spread this information and strike a balance between protest and pride through these platforms.

Now Open PH can primarily be found on <https://www.facebook.com/NowOpenPH> and <https://twitter.com/NowOpenPH>, continuously open to providing sexual education anyone may need. They also have a podcast on Spotify found here, featuring sex educators and queer guests: <https://open.spotify.com/show/0B0EVNhHflpQ45lO4DVY1b>

QueerXBodies

Interview with Parkers Argasnom

EPISODE 5



Parkers Argasnom is an online activist from Bangkok, Thailand. They identify as aromantic / asexual and non-binary. As part of Parkers' advocacies, they campaign for aromantic / asexual visibility through their Facebook page "Aromantic / Asexual Exist." They are also an active member in the online organization "Nonbinary TH", which campaigns for nonbinary visibility and education.

An important reason why Parkers involves themselves in visibility advocacies and campaigns is mainly for letting people feel a sense of comfort with their own identity in contrast to the societal norm. With a lack of community support, knowledge, and acknowledgment from their own queer peer groups, they feel a certain sense of isolation from being represented thus causing stigmas and a lack of conversation from not just cisgendered groups but towards fellow LGBTIQ+ groups as well. They share that in order for these groups to have a more inclusive environment, groups where Parkers involves themselves should feel as represented.

They also advocate for gender equality and inclusivity towards a cisgendered society. Parkers emphasizes the worldview of the cisgendered society as still a binary-centric society and pushes forward for a society that makes known all kinds of genders and identities while campaigning for equal rights among all genders.

As a Thai person, Parkers notes the current political climate of Thailand towards its pro-democracy movement and rallies. However, they criticize the movement with its lack of inclusivity towards LGBTIQ+ folk and the support of

"The world
is more
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diverse"

human rights. They state that for democracies to function, it must involve all kinds of people and campaigns that need to make everyone feel involved before moving towards a common democratic goal.

Parkers also notes that their parents also are active supporters in Parker's advocacy and campaigns. They stress that family should be a safe space for children to express their own ideas and identities. The lack of family support would create a lack of support and comfort for LGBTIQ+ kids who are in need of such at a time where love, support and care are needed the most.

"The world is more beautiful with it a little more diverse."

Join Parkers and their colleagues for a more inclusive Thailand online on Facebook here: <https://www.facebook.com/nonbinaryTH>.

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Activism and social media during the pandemic through raising awareness

PUREVDULAM BALDANDORJ, MONGOLIA



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Purevdulam Baldandorj, also known as Duluunaa, is a Mongolian LGBT activist who is 30 years old. She is currently employed at the Youth for Health Centre, a non-governmental organization dedicated to solving HIV and AIDS concerns affecting homosexual, bisexual, and transgender men and women. Duluunaa assisted in the planning of an event commemorating International Coming Out Day, which is held every October 11th. Lockdowns and limitations cause stress and worry among LGBTIQ+ kids. They also believe that living at home has taken away their freedom of expression.

Duluunaa is also a member of the Youth LEAD Mongolia (or Youth Lead MNG) network and volunteers at The LGBT Centre, where she helps with communications, operations, and administrative work. Youth LEAD (Youth Leadership, Education, Advocacy, and Development) is a developing network of young leaders from Asia's most vulnerable populations. It aims to reduce human rights violations by increasing access to high-quality health care and enabling young people to lead the HIV response. Youth LEAD MNG collaborates with multi-stakeholder organizations to coordinate efforts to raise HIV and SRHR awareness and support youth-led HIV prevention programs.



"Because of societal conventions and stigma many LGBT people are unable to come out."

Because of societal conventions and stigma, many LGBT people are unable to come out. Duluunaa has been working on a website called test4UB.org with the help of the Youth for Health Centre and the Asia Pacific Coalition on Male Sexual Health (APCOM). Duluunaa established internet services to aid interaction with community members when the Mongolian authorities imposed a rigorous lockdown. The website test4UB.org provides user-friendly and non-stigmatizing HIV information, as well as a collection of mangas and comic books that employ creative storytelling and art to address themes of self-acceptance and queer relationships. According to her, the epidemic made her realize how unappreciative we are of our daily encounters with other people. She claims that meeting new people has improved her mental health, and that now that this aspect has been removed from the equation, people must find new strategies to cope with the loss of human interaction and support for their mental and sexual health.

Youth Lead MNG and The LGBT Centre remain active in providing information through their Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/youthleadmng>; as well as <https://www.facebook.com/LGBTtuv> reaching out to queer folk in need of an online safe space.



Improving access to healthcare, rights and well-being through a collective force

MAHFUZ AL GALIB, BANGLADESH

Mahfuz Al Galib, a Bangladeshi youth activist, has looked at effective ways to use digital spaces to reach out to young and adult trans individuals around the country. The HIM Star Project is a UNICEF-funded youth platform that promotes HIV and STI testing, counseling, sexual and healthcare, and legal help to young people of all genders, particularly those aged 15 to 24.

Mahfuz has been working as a Youth Link Associate with the Bandhu Social Welfare Society, a non-governmental organization, on the HIM Star Project. Since 1996, the Bandhu Social Welfare Society has worked to improve the sexual and reproductive health, rights, and well-being of all people, regardless of gender or sexuality.

"We must always consider the emotional well-being of both recipients and ourselves when working during the epidemic so that it does not negatively influence all of our lives."

Throughout the epidemic, Mahfuz saw that transgender people struggled to get food and livelihood, as well as having difficulty accessing health services to receive hormone therapy. To address the problem, Mahfuz collaborated with SHKS to reach out to various government officials in order to mobilize resources to distribute dry rations, primary health care, gloves, masks, and hand sanitizers to individuals in need.

To provide mental health support, counseling, and other emergency health services, Mahfuz and his team had to come up with creative alternatives. Most employment security and social protection programmes were severely harmed as a result of the pandemic. Despite the fact that HIV prevention services were disrupted during the pandemic, Mahfuz's organization provided HIV and STI testing awareness training.

"We must always consider the emotional well-being of both recipients and ourselves when working during the epidemic so that it does not negatively influence all of our lives," Mahfuz said.

The names, phone numbers, and other personal information of clients who used SHKS' healthcare services were securely saved, and each person was given an ID with a reference number instead of their names. They further claim that every month on Facebook Messenger, they have an Adda (Bangladeshi name for an informal assembly) with two beneficiaries to determine the current community's wants and necessities. The Bandhu Social Welfare Society is also approachable and can be found right here: <https://www.facebook.com/bandhubsws/>.



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Breaking down the patriarchy: Creating safe spaces for transgender communities in India

SATVIK SHARMA, INDIA



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Concerns over gender identification can be particularly serious in a patriarchal society, since cultural and colonial implications operate as a barrier to self-identity and acceptance.

Satvik Sharma is an activist in India who strives to increase transgender men's visibility and rights. He argues that the lack of attention paid to transmen is a significant impediment to intersectional equality across the board. Satvik is a co-founder of the Transmen Collective, which offers safe locations for trans men to network, gather information, and receive transition help. Their work revolves around trans people's well-being, including their education, medical treatment, legal status, and cultural and social advancement. The collective is a collaborative effort of several accumulative concepts and philosophies to bring people together and bring attention to LGBTIQ minorities' challenges, as well as support their empowerment.

The Indian government has launched a collaborative project (called Garimah Greh) to create shelter homes for transgender people in India. Satvik is expected to take over the management of a Mumbai shelter home by the end of May 2021. For persons experiencing domestic



"Concerns over gender identification can be particularly serious in a patriarchal society since cultural and colonial implications operate as a barrier to self-identity and acceptance."

issues or fleeing their homes, the refuge provides food and a safe haven. They also provide assistance for persons in distress, such as mental health support and counseling. Trans people who travel to Delhi for medical treatment often find safety in this shelter home.

In India, the COVID-19 vaccine scarcity is wreaking havoc on the community's mental and physical well-being. Satvik consults endocrinologists to answer questions regarding the vaccine, hormone therapy, and other health issues.

Satvik is dedicated to bringing the voices of the unheard and marginalized into the spotlight. His advocacy on behalf of transgender guys and the injustice they experience inspires other trans activists to come forward and speak out. He urges people to reject tokenistic techniques in favor of fair and healthy depictions. Satvik has been an outspoken advocate for LGBTQ rights for over four years and continues to struggle to create a society that is inclusive and equitable for all.

The Transmen Collective continues to share their safe spaces online through their Instagram @thetransmencollective.

Intersectionality, youth empowerment and leadership

MX ALEXANDER BERNAL, PHILIPPINES



"Our diversity can help us grow as individuals and as a team."

MX Alex Bernal is a 19-year-old genderqueer Filipino. ASRHR, peer education, climate action, equality and human rights are among the issues addressed by Youth for YOUTH, a non-profit organization founded by local youth campaigners. The group is currently focusing on HIV/AIDS concerns in Abra and the Cordillera region of the Philippines. With the National Anti-Poverty Commission (NAPC), they have been exploring approaches to improve adolescent health, particularly HIV-related difficulties, and to aid PLHIV persons living below the poverty line.

During the epidemic, their initial effort was to educate and deliver hygiene kits to children aged 3 to 15. IstorWASH is a mashup of "istoria" (story) and WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene).

Project Bullalayaw, an online peer-education session on SOGIESC and HIV awareness, was also introduced. As part of the project, Y-PEER Pilipinas and the Philippine Dental Association-Abra Chapter enhanced youth awareness about SOGIESC and HIV.

Signal and internet availability, especially in rural regions, is a significant impediment to reaching and educating young people digitally. Moreover, the cost of cellular data is rising, creating another barrier for low-income families who cannot afford internet service. To alleviate this strain, Alex and their team provided a limited data allotment to all participants in webinars and online instructional events. They also emphasize the importance of online safety rules to prevent cyberbullying and exploitation.

They aim to build a space where people can learn from each other, share skills, and empower adolescents from all backgrounds, including indigenous youth, LGBTIQ+, disabled youth, women, and girls. "Our diversity can help us grow as individuals and as a team," adds Alex.

Alex mentioned the lack of access to contraception, especially for young and LGBTIQ persons. When young people seek medical care, they are often met with stigma and discrimination. Regardless, people are banding together to overcome these challenges. Alex regarded the volunteers' eagerness to serve their cause as an important occasion. Due to the pandemic, many members could not engage in their tasks. Nonetheless, the number of volunteers eager to step forward and help out with their activities gave them hope in humanity and how solidarity can help overcome issues.

Learn more about Alex's efforts in the Philippines and involvement in HIV/AIDS education through the Facebook page Y-PEER Pilipinas <https://www.facebook.com/ypeerpilipinas>.



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Allies of the LGBTQ+ movement. Here to support, not here for the spotlight.

LINH NGUYEN, VIET NAM



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Linh Nguyen (also known as Moc) is a Vietnamese LGBTQ+ ally and activist who is straight and cisgender. Linh is a co-founder of UniGEN, an organization that raises awareness about LGBTQ+ problems and strives to improve gender-diverse populations' visibility. Many marginalized and under-represented communities are being left behind during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many LGBTQ+ groups are still difficult to contact and are frequently ignored in humanitarian efforts. UniGEN is learning to adapt and ensure that the material, training, and information offered through their platforms is beneficial to the LGBTQ+ community.

"I began to think about my privilege and role in society when I became more conscious of how patriarchy affects both women and the LGBTQ+ community. I realized that if I wanted to fight for equality, I needed to gain a greater understanding of marginalized people's daily realities and experiences," Linh remarked.

UniGEN also built a virtual learning portal with access to knowledge on sexual orientation, gender identities and expressions (SOGIE) throughout the epidemic to provide LGBTIQ adolescents with information on self-stigmatization, violence and discrimination, mental health and well-being. The learning center connects people who are interested in learning more about SOGIE, as well as making them aware of various forms of gender inequality and guiding them to take proactive steps to address those



"I began to think about my privilege and role in society when I became more conscious of how patriarchy affects both women and the LGBTQ+ community."

inequities. The learning center is also a platform that encourages self-acceptance and self-love by providing information on psychology and social understanding. Open-nights with talks, conversations, and live streams on delicate issues such as prejudice, stigma, discriminatory behavior, coercion, bullying, violence, and assault are held on a regular basis on the site.

Linh and the UniGEN team assisted with the organization of a Vietnamese drag culture exhibition in late 2020, an art form that has a long history in Vietnamese culture. During the pandemic, UniGEN collaborated with MAI:tri Viet Nam to hold group art therapy sessions for its members as a creative way to enable individuals to open up about their problems via art. UniGEN has empowered a diverse group of young LGBT people by providing them with safe venues and skills to advocate for their rights and community. Gender-based and domestic violence, as well as access to health and HIV treatments, including hormone therapy for trans people, have all been exposed and exacerbated by inequalities. This means that more needs to be done to ensure that no one is left behind in the LGBTQ+ community.

Stay updated with UNIGEN's advocacy to promote sexual health, LGBTQ+ education at <https://unigen.vn/kylanbiettuot/> and they are also present on Facebook at <https://facebook.com/unigen.lgbtiq/>

QueerXBodies Interview with Shane Bhatla

SEASON 2, EPISODE 1



Shane Bhatla is a 27-year-old independent activist based in Bangkok. As a trans man, he advocates for initiatives that aim to highlight trans rights, particularly trans visibility for trans men. He highlights how Bangkok pays more attention towards trans women (given its cultural and socio-cultural impact) and wants to recognize identities that are usually left behind in a particular space.

Part of Shane's initiatives in trans activism is Student Empowerment Equality Network (SEEN). It is a network of students from multiple international schools that come together and create an educational environment that is as inclusive and freeing as possible. He shares that this network comes up with projects, advocacies and solutions to include a more inclusive space for people like Shane. These projects also include student-friendly initiatives such as advocating for unisex uniforms and an awareness for using gender-inclusive language.

Being considered as a person of color, Shane puts emphasis on the need for these kinds of activism run by trans men. A lot of causes get lost in translation and evolve to fit the convenience of cisgendered Caucasian men, which breaks the purpose of these causes.

One important thing about Shane is that he also identifies as neurodivergent. Individuals who identify as neurodivergent mean their brains process and learn information differently than individuals who learn it

" Bangkok pays more attention towards trans women (given its cultural and socio-cultural impact) and wants to recognize identities that are usually left behind in a particular space .. "

typically - more commonly known as neurotypical. As neurodivergence is not a commonly known concept towards neurotypical people, Shane finds it in his best interests to also shed light to understanding neurodivergent diversity and visibility. Creating means and ways to understand how these individuals work will also help create a better and safer environment for people like Shane.

Shane and the other students of SEEN continue to fight for visibility of other SOGIE identities through their online voice on Facebook here: <https://www.facebook.com/deservetobeseen>.

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QueerXBodies Interview with Amahl Azwar

SEASON 2, EPISODE 2

Amahl is a writer and content creator from Indonesia known for running the website Menjadi Positif built in 2019. Menjadi Positif is a collection of personal essays, writings, along with artworks and podcasts that talk about Amahl's personal experiences as a person living with HIV (PLHIV).

His initiative began in 2013 when he was diagnosed with HIV. While Amahl initially thought he had sufficient knowledge on HIV, he later realized he felt unprepared and suffered personal struggles later. A year later, one of his essays for International AIDS Day was published in a local magazine so he decided to write more about this topic. To Amahl, the passion to write served as a form of self-healing and development for him to write down his personal experiences to not just educate readers, but to serve as a way for him to express his own feelings and validate his own experiences through the form of writing.

One thing in particular he hopes to open a conversation towards is sexual health, particularly PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) and HIV testing. He believes that Indonesians still look down towards these medical options despite its accessibility and benefits.

Part of the struggles he faces in sexual health education (towards PrEP and HIV) is a dogmatic attitude towards the idea of these alternatives. While he continues to advocate for a safe sex positive environment, several organizations still continue to scrutinize and stigmatize HIV and PrEP.



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Despite these, he remains hopeful in opening these conversations to properly discuss and destigmatize HIV. He notes and stays optimistic towards the accessibility of sexual education. Amahl believes that one simple voice can continue to bring forward more voices who need representation and more education through online platforms. However, Amahl warns that despite the accessibility of information through online platforms, readers are also prone to misinformation as well.

Menjadi Positif continues to stay online to comfort and to educate interested readers about PLHIV right here: <https://menjadipositif.com/>

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QueerXBodies Interview with Maxie Andreison

SEASON 2, EPISODE 3

"As a drag queen, I want to educate myself and teach everybody in this country how to deal with that."

Maxie Andreison is a 21-year-old drag queen from Manila, Philippines. Known as "Maxie", she started doing drag when she was 14 years old. Starting out by wearing feminine dresses, Maxie first explored the art by performing with an aspiration to become a pop star. Eventually, Maxie took her dreams and talents as she evolved her craft to become a bona fide drag queen.

By expressing herself, Maxie believes drag is a platform for individuals to speak up and be a voice for marginalized communities (particularly the LGBTIQ+ community) through different aspects of drag. Through drag, Maxie, along with other drag queens, learns how to bend the rules of gender norms and twist different perspectives on binary and non-binary identities through creative expression. Thus, Maxie believes this paves the way for drag queens to be pioneers of conversation.

Maxie highlights the inclusivity of drag as an art form as a way to highlight freedom of expression. By being an open space where anyone can freely express themselves, it highlights a community where anyone is free to be who they want to be.

Part of Maxie's advocacies in her art form is promoting sexual health by practicing safe sex. Regardless of being in drag or not, Maxie emphasizes the dangers of the lack



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"drag is a platform for individuals to speak up and be a voice for marginalized communities (particularly the LGBTIQ+ community) through different aspects of drag."

of sexual education and unsafe sex possibly risking one's life or their partner's. In the Philippines, HIV/AIDS is a rising problem and as cases continue to grow due to the lack of sexual education and initiative, Filipinos remain ignorant and unaware of the dangers of unsafe sex. She believes that teaching people how to prepare, and how to deal with the dangers, can be a big help.

Lastly, Maxie believes that her art form serves as a voice for the greater good. She affirms that art is a form of power and trusts in honing these skills and talents to further inspire individuals and artists to do the same. While she mentions the struggle of feeling insecure and comparing herself, she believes that every person's skill is unique, just as she believes her drag's voice is as unique.

Maxie continues to break gender roles through her creative drag on Instagram @maxie.andreison.

Providing safe spaces for the community - online and offline

DHARINI PRISCILLA, SRI LANKA



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Dharini Priscilla is a human rights campaigner from Sri Lanka, the Indian Ocean's "pearl." She is a 25-year-old youth activist who fights cyberbullying, digital violence, and the creation of safe spaces online. Dharini was also the editor of bakamoono.lk (in Tamil), an online education platform that provides scientific and current information on HIV, sexual health, gender and relationships, and violence prevention (2016-2021).

Dharini is currently a Gender Consultant and Researcher with The Grassrooted Trust, an organization that promotes sexual and reproductive health and rights. She was previously the Program Manager of The Grassrooted Trust. Dharini has largely worked with young people, schools, media outlets, corporations, and research institutions. She has run youth training programs on digital safety and online security since the epidemic, when the prevalence and manifestations of cyber violence skyrocketed.

Dharini, like many other activists who have struggled to combine their job from home and their mental health, has had her share of difficulties. She has had to vent her feelings through creative activities such as writing, which she says has benefited her tremendously over the previous two years. She might, however, strategically prioritize her mental health by lowering her workload and



"using an intersectional approach to ensure we comprehend the difficult nature of interconnected identities"

developing stress coping techniques.

She has also held awareness training for business organizations to instruct their employees on how to transition from a physical to a digital working environment by emphasizing digital etiquette and cyber safety, which she says has facilitated the transfer.

The Association for Progressive Communications awarded Dharini a minor funding in 2020 to continue her content creation and study on online violence. Dharini emphasizes the significance of using an intersectional approach to ensure we comprehend the difficult nature of interconnected identities as a Tamil queer woman. When it came to LGBT campaigning, for example, she largely worked with queer populations outside of Colombo, particularly in Tamil-speaking areas. She has also expressed an interest in working more closely with Muslim women in order to gain a better understanding of their issues and experiences.

Dharini was also the editor of bakamoono.lk (in Tamil), a comprehensive online education platform that offers scientific and updated information on HIV, sexual health, gender and relationships, and violence prevention.



Living Out the Faith, Lending a Hand to the Wider Community

BEN MARASIGAN, PHILIPPINES

JB is a 26-year-old Filipino who serves as the National Chairperson for Christian Education and Nurture for the Christian Youth Fellowship, the youth branch of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP). Christian Education and Nurture; Evangelism and Church Development; Justice, Peace and Human Rights; and Community Ministries are the four programs that make up this ministry, and HIV and AIDS is one of them.

JB is also a National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP) and Culture and Arts Managers in the Philippines-certified Community-Based Screening Motivator and Peer Educator (CAMP). After completing mandatory training

"We cannot be advocates on our own; we must organize as members of the LGBTIQ+ community and enlist the support of additional allies in order to make our calls for gender justice more powerful."

and client-centered community-based Case Managers Training in October 2021, he was also accredited as CBS Motivator of HIV and AIDS Support House (HASH), a non-government organization for HIV and AIDS activism.

He had various problems while working during the pandemic, the most difficult of which was addressing the needs of communities when resources become scarce. Despite these challenges, he continues to be involved in humanitarian efforts inside the church, such as aid distribution and overseeing the church's community pantry. He was also active in humanitarian response capabilities training, such as Psychosocial First Aid, First Responder Training, and Community Health Worker Training.

As a result of the difficulty in getting testing materials during the pandemic, he joined the HIV & AIDS Support House, Inc. (HASH) in July 2021 - an online support group dedicated to sexual health and information.

He also directs his clients to appropriate Social Hygiene Clinics and Treatment Hubs, in addition to working on HIV awareness, prevention, and treatment programs for the community. During the COVID19 pandemic, JB learned the necessity of protecting healthcare systems and has been fighting to ensure community access to HIV services. He believes that we cannot be advocates on our own; we must organize as members of the LGBTIQ+ community and enlist the support of additional allies in order to make our calls for gender justice more powerful.

HASH continues to protect and educate Filipinos on HIV/AIDS through their Facebook page right here: <https://www.facebook.com/HASHPilipinas/>.



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Protecting transgender and sex workers' health through digital advocacy in Thailand

TITAYA PUNYARATABANDHU

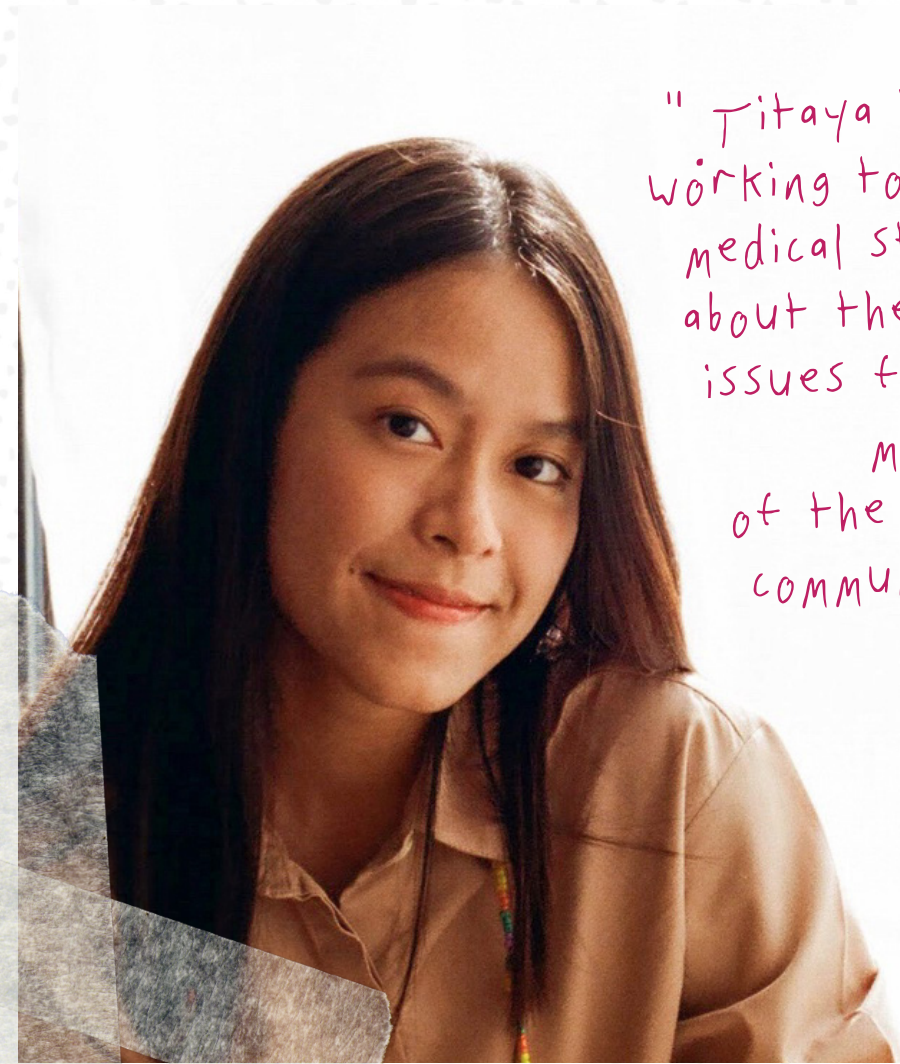


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Titaya is a third year medical student at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok. She joined the Standing Committee of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights including HIV and AIDS (SCORA) Thailand. During the pandemic, she established a webinar series to promote sexual and reproductive health and rights, a topic that was largely disregarded. She started at the local level and quickly rose through the ranks to become the Regional Assistant for SCORA Asia-Pacific.

Her university also has a transgender and LGBTQ+friendly clinic for the community. Titaya's work focuses on sex workers and gender-based abuse. The pandemic in Thailand may harm many sex workers. Due to the lack of financial and social support from the government, Titaya has been working to improve access to HIV/AIDS and STI services. Titaya has been working to educate medical students about the unique issues faced by members of the LGBTIQ+ community.

Titaya is an activist. The epidemic has curtailed her social connections and engagements with her team colleagues, but she understands the benefits of increasing social media participation. She has been using webinars and intensive online use to reach the Thai audience.



"Titaya has been working to educate medical students about the unique issues faced by members of the LGBTIQ+ community."

With all the positives, she also highlights the danger of cyberbullying, especially when discussing contentious topics like safe abortion and the LGBTIQ+ community. She and her colleagues have developed a crisis management plan on how to respond to online hostility and whom to consult.

Due to the pandemic's effects, Titaya stated that healthcare providers had difficulty accessing patients to continue HIV medicines, STI checks, hormone treatments, and general healthcare. Her instructors and she founded a clinic called SWING to help sex workers get the care they need. Male, transgender, and female sex workers, as well as males having sex with men, are all targets of SWING's work in Bangkok and Pattaya. Over time, SWING has expanded its reach to include the MSM community as a whole, as well as female sex workers. Because sex workers operate largely at night, she says it's crucial to treat their needs holistically.

SCORA Thailand continues to campaign for HIV & AIDS awareness, accessibility, and services through social media at <https://www.facebook.com/SCORATHailand/> and @scora.thailand on Instagram.



Educating communities towards adopting to a developing future

THENU RANKETH, SRI LANKA

Thenu Ranketh is a committed transgender activist who has long worked to advance transgender rights and development in Sri Lanka. He is the director of Venasa Transgender Network, a non-profit organization situated in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Since the pandemic began, Thenu has continued to serve the LGBT community, particularly the transgender population. To help identify transgender people's needs and areas of support, the Venasa Transgender Network has been contacting members of the community to create a research study that would help identify their needs and areas for support. The study revealed a need for peer/professional counseling, financial assistance

"Most community members lack access to cellphones as well as knowledge and abilities to use technology for communication."

for food and medicine (including hormones), hygiene goods, transport, and rent. Some community members needed temporary housing, so Thenu collaborated with other groups, benefactors, and donors to support these endeavors.

Thenu, like most people, had to work from home, despite the task being mostly manual. Even while the organization tried to provide as many services online as possible, it was difficult to avoid certain tasks, such as locating housing for community members. For example, Thenu was able to get safe housing with the support of Venasa Transgender Network while adhering to all WHO and health requirements.

One of Thenu's main issues was a lack of digital understanding. Most community members lack access to cellphones, as well as knowledge and abilities to use technology for communication. To address this obstacle, he organized a few community forums to teach people how to use smartphones. He says online technology saves money and allows users to interact with more people safely; but Thenu also understands the pitfalls of technical faults and how reliance on technology may lead to inefficiency.

During the epidemic, Thenu was struck by the thought that "we are not ready and have no plan to function in this kind of crisis." Many demands for help and support left them "feeling helpless," he says. So the organization processed immediately to establish a community welfare fund to help fund hormone therapies and other health services for the community.

The Venasa Transgender Network continues to protect and network with other transgender individuals in need of a safe space and community here: <https://www.facebook.com/VENASA.TN/>.



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QueerXBodies Interview with Emery Fung

SEASON 3, EPISODE 1



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Emery Fung is an LGBTIQ+ activist and podcaster based in Hong Kong. Prior to staying in Hong Kong, he stayed in the United Kingdom for 13 years as a student and athlete. Advocating for trans visibility and for breaking down gender roles and norms, he hosts a podcast that shares his personal experiences as a trans man.

He mostly plays football and hockey. As sports involved in binary-based and gender conforming rules and norms, Emery was inspired to tackle the subject of gender norms in sports based on the challenges he experienced as a student athlete. With uniforms and the stigma on selective playing (based on sports), he takes this initiative to campaign for a more gender-inclusive sports environment. Part of his struggles in playing sports are these boundaries that stop him from finding a safe space to express himself and his camaraderie in sports.

Despite the struggle to go beyond gender in sports, Emery shares his passion to continue in sports as a way to continue motivating himself in the field. He emphasizes his need to involve himself as a means to slowly but surely provide a safe space for athletes to express themselves and feel part of the conversation. With athletes like Emery to create conversation in a stereotypically masculine and stigmatized field, conversation can provide different perspectives to bringing different kinds of people into sports.

He shares that the need to involve himself is as important

"to create conversation in a stereotypically masculine and stigmatized field conversation can provide different perspectives to bringing different kinds of people into sports."

as conversation. While language and conversation normally provide a space to talk about ideas, he shares that sports provides another avenue for people to connect physically through another language.

Emery believes in the subtle art of inclusivity by sharing his personal experiences in his podcast Awkward Turtle at Work, where he shares excerpts of his daily life as a trans man with guests from different LGBTIQ+ groups and experiences. Putting out whatever story, online or to friends, would inspire people to feel a sense of inclusivity and likeness, and for Emery, this serves as a sense of comfort, and as a means to not feel isolated.

Emery continues to speak about his experiences on LinkedIn as Emery Fung and The Awkward Turtle remains active and available on Spotify.



Queer x Bodies

