



Dear GYCA -

It is an honor to introduce myself to you today as the incoming program director for GYCA. For those of you who will be at GYCA's members meeting on Sunday, August 3, at the International AIDS Conference in Mexico, I look forward to meeting you in person! But in the meantime I wanted to share a few quick words with you about my background and what I hope to achieve during my time with GYCA.

I spent the first few years of my life in a small town in Arkansas, before moving to Austin, Texas, where I started working on social justice and sexual and reproductive health issues. My work on these issues includes direct service work at a women's health clinic in my home state; working with a statewide political and legal advocacy organization for pregnant teenagers, also in Texas; and most recently, two years in the Women's Rights Division of Human Rights Watch where I worked on a number of HIV/AIDS projects, including drafting Congressional testimony on abstinence-only education and researching women's access to treatment in Zambia. While I greatly enjoyed my position at HRW, I could not pass up the opportunity to work with my peers once again and on an issue that I am as deeply passionate about as HIV/AIDS.

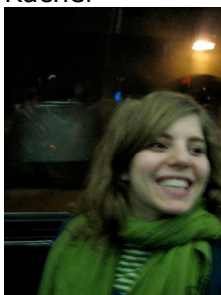
Looking from the outside in at GYCA, I was surprised immediately to see how much has been accomplished in such a short period of time. It seemed almost unbelievable. But since I've started communicating with some GYCA members and reading people's TIG profiles, I have seen their (your) dedication, compassion, and intelligence, and now I understand completely why and how GYCA has and continues to accomplish so much.

I'm very excited to start working with you all now to make GYCA as strong as it can be. Some of the goals I have set for myself during my time at GYCA include both growing our membership and improving the resources available for and attention given to our members. Specifically, I hope to work with GYCA staff and members to increase the number of our e-courses offered and introduce new courses to the current rotation; to expand the new small grants program to offer more and bigger grants to a larger number of e-course graduates; and to strengthen our research and reporting capacity for the youth shadow reports. Also, I'm interested in working on new and innovative ways to expand our reach to young people who do not have regular access to the internet. Finally, I hope, especially, to be in touch with as many of you as possible as often as possible.

As you all know full well, HIV/AIDS is a global problem and it requires a global solution. It requires us to work through language and cultural barriers, to fight against social injustices that feed the epidemic, and, most importantly, to tap into the great well of strength and compassion within each of us. I am honored and humbled to begin this work with you now.

Yours sincerely,

Rachel



<http://profiles.takingitglobal.org/racheljake>