



In his free time, Israel raises awareness among young people in his community about HIV prevention and zero discrimination towards people living with and most affected by HIV.



On Sundays, 24 teams of male and female Kuna youth play in the park. Coaches take the opportunity to teach the young indigenous footballers about respect for others, non-discrimination and how to prevent HIV.



Israel speaks to young people every week about HIV prevention and distributes condoms and leaflets.

Raising HIV awareness among indigenous young people in Panama

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Israel is an indigenous community leader living in Veracruz, Panama City. He was diagnosed with HIV 7 years ago, when he was 24. At that time, Israel had no knowledge of HIV. “I thought I would die soon after and I wouldn’t see my children grow up,” he said.

Israel looked for support and started to get involved with local civil society organizations advocating for improved sexual and reproductive health for young people and promoting the human rights of key populations. He became an active member of Genesis+ Panama, bringing to the organization the voice of indigenous people.

“Indigenous youth continue to encounter significant barriers in accessing comprehensive sexuality education and services in our language and according to our own practices and model of well-being,” Israel said. “This is a missed opportunity, since

our communities can contribute to the HIV response and the development of our society.”

HIV among indigenous populations is an emerging public health concern, as data show that indigenous people are particularly vulnerable to HIV. The government reports that indigenous people have little knowledge of how HIV is transmitted, negative attitudes towards people living with HIV and low HIV testing rates. Reporting on indigenous people’s rights, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean found that more indigenous girls initiate sexual activity before the age of 15 than their non-indigenous peers. The rate of teenage pregnancies is more than twice as high for indigenous girls. Another matter of concern is that violence against women, which has links to HIV infection, is prevalent among indigenous populations in Panama.

Israel works hard to change the situation in his community. He organizes meetings with indigenous young people and teenagers, either at a home or the beach, to discuss health and other important topics. “I want to give my children and other young people access to information and tools to prevent HIV,” he said.

Israel also coordinates a football team of young indigenous women. Each weekend the team participates in local leagues. Before the games start, Israel and the other coaches provide the players with training related to HIV prevention. He said, “There are many young people at risk in my community and I feel that by leveraging the power of football we are creating opportunities to improve their well-being and strengthen social capital.”

Israel also dedicates his time to raising awareness about respect and solidarity towards key populations and people living with HIV. “In indigenous communities, myths still persist around HIV,” he said. “The fear of being excluded or rejected prevents people from taking an HIV test or going to health facilities.”

Reflecting on what he has learned since his diagnosis, Israel said, “HIV has not limited me. It opened my eyes to social justice and motivated me to become the person I am today.”