

St. Pius X: Small Centre Has Big Impact

by Marisa Kaczmarczyk

Twelve years ago, St. Pius X Training Centre opened as a small community-based skills training centre in the heart of the capital city of Jamaica, Kingston.

Challenges Faced by the Community

The neighbourhoods in this area are very poor. Many of the 12,000 residents live without proper housing, electricity, plumbing and infrastructure. Most people have limited education and social skills and struggle with a sense of hopelessness exacerbated by crime and violence in the community. One of the communities, "White Wing", originated as a squatters' settlement. Every year more rooms were precariously added to existing zinc housing, creating a maze of substandard homes with communal showers and toilets located in the centre of the community. Situated right next door, the St. Pius X Training Centre plays an important role for young women and men who are looking for ways to improve their lives.

Developing Skills

Each year, the Training Centre offers courses in three skill areas to approximately 30-40 students. With an early emphasis on helping young women in the community, the courses offered are catering, cosmetology and clothing and textiles. In more recent years the Centre is pleased to have several young men also participate in the programme.

Sister Sophia Langi is the Manager of the Centre: "When the new school term begins every year, the young ladies <and gentlemen> flock in to register in the Skills Training program, and very keenly follow the timetable and program, bringing what they need for their classes, proudly dressed in their uniforms..."

Each course is taught by an experienced and dedicated teacher. Courses cover both theory (such as chemical composition in hair dyes or nutritional value of food) and practical aspects. In addition to vocational skills training, the Centre has expanded its mandate to include literacy upgrading as well as life skills coaching and short-term placements for its students in local businesses. The catering students feature their skills by providing food and service to international visitors and church functions. The cosmetology students have clients from the local community and take turns working at a local beauty salon on weekends. The Clothing and Textile students purchase their own material and earn money from selling their finished products; for example an outfit may cost \$800J (\$12 Cdn) in materials and

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will sell for \$1,200J (\$17 Cdn). In these ways the students gain practical exposure outside the classroom.



The Centre is currently aligning its curriculum towards accreditation with HEART, the national training institute. This will ensure a high standard of training is maintained, and students who graduate will more easily access further HEART training or have certification that is more readily recognized by potential employers.

Determined to Succeed

The success of the students is possible through both the determination of the student and the support of the staff.

Sister Sophia: "Even when students come to share certain problems that interfere with their schooling, we staff encourage those students to see and value what they have achieved so far, and it's only a short distance to reach their goal that they aimed at from the beginning."



Photos by Christine Post



but dreamed of running her own business. She became an outstanding student in the clothing and textile class, winning a gold medal in design from an outside panel of sewing experts. With her new skills and self-confidence, Juliette started her own business after graduation. She was also able to find a job at the Garmex Factory. With these 2 jobs, she is able to provide for herself and her children.

A Chance for a Better Life

The key to success for those at St. Pius X Training Centre is the deep conviction of all involved that the students can achieve their goals, and that each individual who enters the Centre is a valuable human being who deserves a chance at a better life.

Success Stories

Despite numerous personal or situational challenges, many students are successful once they have graduated from the course. Paula enrolled in the cosmetology class and through the programme worked at a salon on Fridays. After graduation, she was hired at that salon. Later, Paula decided to start her own business; she rented a room for her salon and now has a clientele of her own.

Like Paula, all the students who graduate from the Training Centre have developed both the job skills and the self-confidence to increase their capacity to earn and provide for their families.

Odino was doing gardening work and odd jobs for a family but wanted to find stable employment, so he enrolled in the catering programme. After completing the one-year course, Odino was hired by a local fast food restaurant, and because of his training at St. Pius X quickly moved to the position of supervisor. His employer has remarked on Odino's pleasant manner with both customers and fellow workers.

Juliette, a mother of two children, had basic sewing skills

“Those students whom we knew had problems from the beginning of the course, and had made special efforts to keep trying to the end - even with the ups and downs in classes - those students have been challenged and even discouraged, but they rose and took courage to the end to see their success and became proud of themselves for their great achievements.”

St. Pius X Skills Training Centre offers both job skills training and life skills coaching. It provides short-term placements in local businesses which help develop self-confidence among participants. The staff at St. Pius X works hard to help young Jamaican women and men reach their potential. JSH is proud to support the following programmes:

- Vocational skills training in Clothing & Textiles, Catering and Cosmetology: 30 to 40 students enrol each year.
- Literacy upgrading for all students.

For more information contact JSH.

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