



JAMAICAN NEWSLETTER VIBES

DECEMBER 2011



“If you don’t find them in clubs, you find them in music.”

Karen Reynolds, the principal of St. Peter Claver Primary School is explaining the importance of arts and culture to the success of students at her school. *“They love it and get the exposure. It builds their self confidence. They are able to go out and perform.”*

According to a Canadian Commission for UNESCO report, *“When young people engage in art they are transformed. It involves identifying with others and fosters a feeling of oneness and a sense of togetherness. No other form of engagement does this as well. Many individuals in our society feel disconnected, and... arts education can be a solution to this alienation.”*



Performance by students of St. Peter Claver Primary School.

Alienation is a huge challenge for children living in poverty and in inner-city communities. In addition to meeting basic needs, interventions are needed to build a sense of community and hopefulness that there are options for the future. Children living in these circumstances are in great need of building a sense of self-esteem and self-worth, and arts education is one avenue to address this need.

Jamaican Self-Help supports arts programmes for students in inner-city communities – instrumental and vocal music, dance, drama and other performance arts – as an effective way to develop social and academic skills, and as a chance for children to have fun!

Students participating in these programmes show their talents at school and community functions and also participate in regional and national competitions. The children develop pride in themselves, and help to give their school and community a positive image in the broader Jamaican society.



Youth performer at St. Anne’s Primary School.

Jamaican Self-Help is an organization of Canadians working in solidarity to foster the development of healthy Jamaican communities through partnership based on mutual respect, understanding and a shared vision of self-determination; and to foster an understanding of global forces (North and South) and their interconnectedness.





The Tavares Gardens Primary School recorder group.

One student explains that *“In this community... we are in the ghetto. And some people might think because we are in the ghetto, we don’t learn that much, but we think that we can do better than the prep schools. When we entered the contest, we were the only primary school.”* Another student adds, *“And we didn’t have much time to prepare. But we beat them.”*

Mrs. Reynolds notes that teachers use students’ interest in these activities to help with discipline and academic motivation for the children. *“It’s real and there are times when we use it, let’s say we have a boy who is giving trouble, we find out what he likes, we ask do you like music? If they like music, we encourage them, put them in... so we use it to help with the behaviour and I think if we improve the behaviour, we improve the academics.”* The teachers focus on the academics but also on students being well-rounded and involved. The focus is on cooperative learning and so they encourage students and parents to be involved in the child’s learning through arts and culture activities.

The U.S. Department of Education has also studied the importance of arts in education. *“In addition to studying the arts for their own sake, experiencing and making works of art benefits students in their intellectual, personal, and social development, and can be particularly beneficial for students from economically disadvantaged circumstances and those who are at risk of not succeeding in school. Research studies point to strong relationships between learning in the arts and fundamental cognitive skills and capacities used to master other core subjects, including reading, writing, and mathematics.”*

At Tavares Gardens Primary School, the music programme initiated with support from Jamaican Self-Help is also succeeding. Teachers report that learning to read music helps the students with their reading and it builds their self-confidence. *“They take part in festival competitions... and it takes away shyness.”* Teachers believe these programs are effective in three ways: they encourage students to be cooperative, there is less fighting, and attendance is improving.

Parents in the communities also recognize the value of these programmes – for their children, the school and the community. They find that the extra curricular activities are helpful in keeping the students engaged and focused. It is also good for the school, because when the school places well in competitions, parents recognize the value of the school and are more likely to enroll their children. This is particularly important as funding from the government is based on the number of students enrolled at the school.

But it is the students themselves who can best articulate why these programmes are important: *“It teaches you different things and makes you feel good about yourself.” “It keeps us out of trouble.” “We enjoy ourselves and have fun.” “It makes you feel confident that you can do something”.*

For all these reasons, Jamaican Self-Help is proud to support arts programmes in Jamaican schools.

Excerpts from interviews conducted in June 2011 by JSH School Study team members. Cathy Bruce & Leanne Taylor.



The bright colours of the St. Anne’s dance group.



Did you know the importance of arts in Education?

The Canadian study conducted in 2005 by Learning through the Arts (LTTA) demonstrated that teaching the arts does not hinder learning in other areas of the curriculum; in fact it enhances student learning in mathematics. It showed that children with learning disabilities do well and are transformed by their arts programs. It also has an impact on teachers' awareness of the arts. The most important theme that came out of this study, which reviewed a three-year program, was that the arts are about engagement, involving the whole person.



The St. Peter Claver ensemble during a practice.

THE VALUE OF ARTS EDUCATION - PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC:

- engenders self-esteem, self-awareness and confidence;
- improves our ability to think and work creatively;
- gives a voice to those who do not have a public voice;
- expands our understanding of ourselves and others;
- helps students do better in schools;
- provides a cultural background to understand the past, and creates a sense of belonging;
- teaches us ways and skills that help us to resolve conflicts and reconcile our differences;
- helps develop a sense of social justice;
- helps society articulate and share its values;
- helps us to tell our stories and thus to define who we are;
- can help young people and adults learn about our collective histories;
- is a tool for social change because it educates people about important issues;
- keeps certain students from dropping out of the school system;
- provides skills like creativity, flexibility, problem-solving, transferability and collaboration that are highly prized by organizations in our society.

From: Learning to Live, Living to Learn – Perspectives on Arts Education in Canada - Report of the Canadian Commission for UNESCO, August 2005.

JSH SUPPORTS THESE PRIMARY SCHOOL ARTS & CULTURE PROGRAMMES:

St. Peter Claver Primary School

- Ensemble – vocal & instrumental music, and spoken word for 35 students
- Dance troupe for 15 students

Tavares Gardens Primary School

- Music classes for all 250 students
- Recorder group/instrumental music for 20 students

St. Anne's Primary School

- After School Dance & Culture programme for 35 students



Students at St. Peter Claver Primary School.



Building peace through the arts

S-Corner Community Development Organization is located just down the street from St. Peter Claver Primary School in Kingston. The community surrounding S-Corner is marked by intergenerational poverty, and sporadic gang violence. To build peace in the community and hope for the future, S-Corner focuses much of its work on youth – through afterschool homework programmes, vocational training and high school upgrading for young adults, and through cultural and recreational activities for youth. Community activities for youth are organized to create opportunities for youth associated with different gangs or different ‘factions’ to come together on friendly terms and learn new ways to interact and resolve differences. S-Corner has used different activities to entice young people to come together – soccer tournaments, health fairs and community “bashments” (or parties).



The S-Corner performers.

A JSH Team was present during one such community bashment that had the additional goal of educating residents about the importance of a clean environment. Members of the St. Peter Claver Ensemble performed, as well as local and national performers. Because of the music and performance, many young people, including some gang members, came together despite their differences to listen and watch, and were exposed to the messages around keeping the community clean. Building peace in the community – another reason for JSH to support arts programmes in Jamaica!

Don't forget to check out the Gift Guide we sent in our last mailing! You can also visit our website to get more great ideas for unique gifts for that special person.



UPCOMING EVENTS

For more information, please contact JSH
705-743-1671 • www.jshcanada.org.

FEBRUARY 4, 2012

One World Dinner

The World's Largest International Vegetarian Potluck Dinner.

**Saturday February 4, 2012,
6:00pm; St. Paul's Presbyterian
Church, Peterborough.**

Entertainment, dance and dessert auction. Proceeds to JSH, WUSC, Kawartha World Issues Centre, and the New Canadians' Centre.
A family-friendly event.

FEBRUARY 2012

JSH Black History Month Programme

Jamaican Self-Help will be hosting Teri-Lynn Brown, teacher and Vice-Principal of St. Anne's Primary School in Kingston, Jamaica, to be part of a special Black History Month schools programme in early February.

If you are interested in inviting Teri-Lynn to your class, please contact JSH for more information.

APRIL 22, 2012

Annual JSH Brunch and Auction

Mark your calendar early!

**Sunday April 22, 2012;
Princess Gardens Atrium,
Peterborough.**

Doors open at 11:30am.
Silent & Live Auction, Great Food, Good Company. All proceeds to Jamaican Self-Help.



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