



JAMAICAN NEWSLETTER VIBES

JUNE 2014



Changing Lives through Education JSH Programmes are Making an Impact

Over the past year Jamaicans were faced with a plunging devaluation of their currency, increasing costs for basic goods and services, and shifting global development priorities. Education continued to be a national focus as a means to build the country's capacity, but with few resources many communities continued to struggle. Still, with the support of JSH, three Kingston-based schools and organizations helped change the lives of hundreds of vulnerable and marginalized children and youth.

Building Skills to last a life-time

Olympic Gardens is one of many inner city communities in Kingston, Jamaica that is characterized by intergenerational poverty and high unemployment. Youth, particularly young men, are often seen "hanging out" on street corners – not in school and with no work. As children, many of these youth had little support when faced with difficulties at school or at home, so they dropped out of school. Some joined gangs or found other ways to make money and feel they belong. And some realized they could change their future.

ST. MARGARET'S HUMAN RESOURCES CENTRE is a bustling place in Olympic Gardens with over 200 students – young people who were out on the street before choosing to enrol here. Last September, each new student set out his or her learning goals – some needed to reach Grade 9 literacy levels to go back to high school, others were looking to learn a trade, and others wanted to qualify for more in-depth skills training at HEART, the national training institute. Many struggled with basic reading and writing, and many had a history of behaviour issues or difficulties in structured environments. The teachers knew that for many of the youth, home life was often difficult, so St. Margaret's reached out to parents to help them as well. The Centre used special event days to bring the community together: *National Tree Planting Day*, *Parent Month*, *Black History Month* and *Peace Day*. Over the year, the staff worked hard to address the individual needs of each student and the community as a whole, and as a result, the students saw progress – they improved their reading, they learned a skill and they developed friendships and support networks to help them confidently go on after graduation to find work or continue their education.



Students enjoy skill training at St. Margaret's

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.



Learning to excel



Boys at Tavares Gardens Primary School

The staff at TAVARES GARDENS PRIMARY SCHOOL are incredibly dedicated to their students. Last October, JSH had the pleasure of hosting one of these dedicated staff in Canada. Layton Shaw, the guidance counsellor and drama teacher at the school, told many stories of how drama, sports and music have helped the students at his school to succeed.

Students at Tavares Gardens have very challenging home lives – some face abuse or neglect, others have little to eat, and their parents are overwhelmed with daily needs. As a consequence, the children are disadvantaged even before they come to school. But with the programmes supported by JSH, they gain the confidence and the skills to achieve. As the sports coach, Mr. Hemmings, noted *“once a child demonstrates an interest in anything, whether it might seem easy or hard, he can excel in it.”*

Still, the students need that extra support from staff members to find their interests and to pursue their goals. Last year all the students had phys ed and music classes, and more than half the school participated in sports or performing arts competitions. There were some losses, and many wins – the drama group alone won 10 medals! All the students who took special literacy classes improved over the year. 40% moved from a pre-primer level to a Grade 2 level in just 6 months!

With these successes, and the support and motivation of the school, next year the students will apply themselves even more to their studies, and the school’s reputation for excellence will continue to grow.

The centre of community

S-CORNER COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION is at the centre of the Bennet Lands community. Geographically, the S-Corner building sits on the invisible line between “territories” of different gangs. S-Corner’s presence – its staff, volunteers and programmes bring the community together, across the divisions, to meet, to get support, or to learn. S-Corner is a community centre and it is the centre of the community.

The past year has been a difficult one for the organization – S-Corner lost three strong female community leaders to illness or violence. Like other neighbourhood centres, S-Corner also lost several significant funders. Still, the community stepped up and together with the committed staff, they enabled S-Corner to maintain its presence and successfully carry out its activities, including the youth empowerment programme funded by JSH.

Over the year, upwards of 20 young adults aged 15 to 25 came to the Centre on Waltham Park Road each morning for their daily classes in reading, math, and social studies. Many of these youth had dropped out of school, had been in trouble with the law, or were at risk of becoming part of a gang. Yet they were choosing instead to take classes offered by S-Corner to upgrade their academics so that they could qualify for further education or work. *The students were so motivated that they even requested additional classes on Fridays and Saturdays so they could be better prepared.* In March, participants from the JSH youth awareness trip were placed with this class; it proved to be an excellent experience of learning and sharing between Canadian and Jamaican youth.

In the afternoons, the Waltham Park classroom was filled with neighbourhood children from Grades 4 to 7 who needed help with homework or wanted time to study and prepare for the national exams. Students benefitted from the patient and experienced attention of Ms. Brown, the S-Corner teacher, for both the morning and afternoon classes.

In addition to these classes, S-Corner was busy with other activities – staff helped parents and addressed neighbourhood issues, community volunteers organized food and activities for the elderly; and other S-Corner volunteers offered sports activities for community youth – they even learned how to play lacrosse!



Working after school at S-Corner



Literacy success!

Letters from Jamaican teachers



Keeping an Eye Out for the Students

BY MR. LASCELLE MALCOLM, LITERACY TEACHER

At the beginning of the 2013/2014 school year, I was asked to work with a group of 17 Grade 4 students who were all non-readers. Their sight word vocabulary was so weak that they could not read the Pre-primer materials.

During the first week, I was asked to accommodate six additional students who originated from Grades 1 – 3. This set made the first set look well advanced. Looking back at the progress they all made, I can hardly determine the one on whom I should base my success story. However I will choose Jermaine Walters.

Jermaine is 9 years old. He came to my class from Grade 1. He repeated Grade 1 for two years. *He attended school regularly but it was a challenge to keep him in class.* As soon as the teacher's eyes were off him, he would disappear and would be seen wandering about the school premises. On many occasions he would stealthily make his way home after lunch and return in his "yard clothes".

In my class, he attempted it when an opportune time presented itself, but because his infamous deeds went before him, *an "extra eye" was kept on him and kept him on task.* Jermaine could not recognize even one letter of the alphabet, neither could he count from 1-10. He was unable to form letters in a straight line in his book. He would start on one line and end up two lines above or below. I therefore had to draw

stronger lines in his book to train him to write straight across the page. Jermaine was given focused attention and by the end of the first term he could recognize his name, write it and transcribe from the board. He is now able to read at the Primer level.

Currently, *Jermaine is up for an award at the Prize-Giving in July*, for being the most helpful, the most improved and also for best penmanship. I am pleased to say that I can now move that 'extra eye'.

Examples of Pre-Primer Level Words:

a, and, away, big, blue, can, come, down, find, for, funny, go, help, hers, I, in, is, it, jump, little, look, make, me, my, not, one, play, red, run, said, see, the, three, to, two, up, we, yellow, and you.



Literacy class at Tavares Gardens

High Five for Justin!

BY MS. BROWN, S-CORNER TEACHER

Justin Taylor Cowan is a 12 year boy who attends the *Green Witch All Age School* in Kingston and a student of the *HAPPY programme*. Justin has various issues in school and was suspended for three days for continually fighting. During his suspension he was allowed to spend his days with me at the Waltham Center with the day students. Justin was unable to write in cursive and had problems identifying letters. I began to teach him how to write starting with simple letters such as the common 'a' and 'g'. It was challenging at first but within two days Justin was writing in cursive. He also struggled with reading so whenever he wrote something in cursive, together we sounded out and read the word or sentence. He is now very excited about learning the sounds and tries to read every word or sign he sees around him.

He still has a long way to go but his frustration is getting less the more words he can identify, or when *I give him a high five for his penmanship.*



Ms. Brown, Justin's teacher



Dynamic Teens Make their Mark in the Community

In Peterborough, JSH's 'Youth 4 Global Change' have been shaking things up and finding new ways to approach poverty. Last fall 26 youth and 10 facilitators came together for the *Building a Movement* young activist retreat, where participants were introduced to topics of globalization, anti-oppression and social justice. Since then the youth have focused on the topic of 'poor bashing' and have explored this through theatre, spoken word poetry and diversity workshops. To raise community awareness they held an event in May called 'Art is Activism - Exploring Poor Bashing' at Millennium Park in Peterborough. Y4GC members organized every step of the event from writing a successful grant application, to promoting it through an interview on CHEX TV, to coordinating the logistics.

Realizing that media has such a vital role in shaping community awareness, the Y4GC team facilitated a "make your own media" zine-making workshop at *Global Youth Day* in April, and they are now working on 3 video projects. Things won't be slowing down for these dynamic volunteers; this summer they are growing food at a community garden to deliver fresh produce to local food banks, and they are preparing to send a delegation of youth to the *People's Social Forum* in Ottawa this August.



16-year old Angelique Francis performs

Cultural Extravaganza in Ottawa!

What a celebration in Ottawa on Friday May 23rd! With the efforts of the Ottawa JSH volunteers, an amazing lineup of talented Afro-Caribbean performers as well as special guest speakers *Sheila Sealy-Monteith, Jamaican High Commissioner to Canada*, and *Gina Hargitay, Miss Jamaica World & Miss World Caribbean*, the Ottawa community once again showed its support of JSH programmes –raising over \$1,000! The night featured the rhythmic music of the *Nepean Pan Harmonic Steel Pan*, the insights of spoken word artist *Nth Digri*, the engaging songs of *Neema Mugala*, and the hip tones of *Angelique Francis*. MC *Junior Smith*, host of Reggae in the Fields on

CKCU FM radio, ran a smooth programme, warmly introducing the performers as well as JSH and its work to the audience. Tucker Barton, Chair of the JSH Board of Directors, ended the evening with personal reflections on JSH's impact in Jamaica.

Special thanks to:

Members of the Ottawa Committee:

Uté Gerbrandt, Irvin Stewart, Stephen Hoilette, Debbie Thomas, Amalia Gentles, Renford Thomas, Yvonne Silverman

Evening Volunteers:

Lily Stewart, Ted Thiessen, Yann Miaffo, Barbara Wilson, Joanne Robinson, Joyce Smith, Saida Belas, Ruth Bocreption, and also John Krahn

UPCOMING EVENTS

For details, visit www.jshcanada.org or call the JSH office at (705) 743-1671.

FRIDAY JUNE 20TH

Jamaican Self-Help Annual General Meeting & Volunteer Appreciation

Come and hear about JSH activities and celebrate another successful year. Includes light dinner and social. All welcome! Please RSVP to the JSH office at (705) 743-1671.

5:30-8:30pm, Peterborough Lions Community Centre,
347 Burnham Street, Peterborough.

THURSDAY AUGUST 7TH

Annual Hunter Street Caribbean Festival

Live music, dance, food with a Caribbean flair! Children's activities. Free admission. All are welcome!

4-10pm – Hunter Street, Peterborough.



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