

VPA to Nurture Greater Peacebuilding Work in 2022

Not daunted by challenges in 2021, the Violence Prevention Alliance (VPA) continues to work towards peacebuilding alongside our dedicated partners in the New Year.

Like other Jamaicans, we worried over the scourge of unabated crime, and violence often against the most vulnerable; the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting impacts on the economy and the livelihoods of many, not to mention the learning losses as many were left behind or lost in the education quagmire.

We fretted and sought solutions with colleagues as we learned of increases in child abuse, and as we collected data, we shared these to contribute towards addressing gaps where these



were identified. We are grateful to the various funding sources that enabled us to celebrate our championing of a number of initiatives alongside our partners. These collaborations gave us hope for greater impact in 2022. The VPA is very proud of our Board Chair, Professor Elizabeth Ward, who was conferred with

the Order of Distinction in the Officer Class on National Heroes Day for her public service in the area of national security and justice.

As we welcome 2022, with our vision for continued peacebuilding, the VPA will continue to share an evidence-based public health approach, using a range of approaches to target the risk factors leading to violence. We continue to promote multi-sectoral cooperation and look forward to collaborating with likeminded new and former partners in the New Year. We wish for everyone a positive and peaceful New Year.

Dr Deanna Ashley
Executive Director of the VPA

Children Offer Solutions On How Peace Can Be Achieved in Their Communities

Several children have offered suggestions on how peace can be achieved in their communities through peace letters that were written in observation of International Peace Day in September

in a competition that was organised by the Violence Prevention Alliance (VPA), the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information and the Early Childhood Commission.

The winners of the competition are: Zorian Douglas from Hollywood Basic School in St. Ann who was placed first; Akaysia Northover of Hillside Primary and Infant School in St Mary who is the second place winner and third place winner, Abby-Gail Gooden of Chalky Hill Primary and Infant School in St Ann. They are winners of the four to five year old category.

Meanwhile, the winners of the six to 12 year old category are: Christopher Laraque of Old Harbour High School in St Catherine, who was placed first; second place winner is Alecia Hall of Sunbury Primary School in Clarendon and Ajanni Grandison who is the third place



Jonelle Llewellyn (left), research associate at the VPA presents Donna Legister Hendricks, principal of the Bishop Gibson High School with a tablet for first place winner, Adesa Smith.

winner at Mineral Heights Christian Preparatory in Clarendon.

The winners of the 13 plus year old category are: Adesa Smith of Bishop Gibson High School in Manchester, who was placed first; second place winner is Javaun Simms of Newell High School in St Elizabeth and

third place winner is Danecia Rumble of Ferncourt High School in St. Ann.

The letters were written on the theme **"Sustaining Communities for a Peaceful Country"**. Adesa Smith's recommendation is that peace can be achieved if law enforcement officers engage in peace initiatives with residents, community activities such as, work days, sporting activities and conflict resolution strategies. "These methods may be used to enhance peace at the community level which in turn will result in a peaceful country," she wrote. Christopher Laraque believes that if proper measures are put in place to deal with crime from the grass root level the cry for a peace will eventually vanish.

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Sistren Theatre Collective Still Making A Difference 44 Years Later

Forty-four years ago since it was established, Sistren Theatre Collective, an independent women's organisation, which uses artistic expression as a means of inciting social change, continues to address issues of gender base violence, gender equality, youth violence prevention and cultural preservation.

Lana Finikin, executive director of Sistren Theatre Collective said that the organisation's latest projects since the pandemic are addressing crime and domestic violence issues in the communities of Portland Cottage and Canaan Heights in Clarendon; Newland, Gregory Park, Portmore Pines and Lakes Pen in St. Catherine; Allman Town, Fletcher's Land and Hannah Town in Kingston



Lana Finikin (centre at front), executive director of Sistren Theatre Collective and members of the team take a group photo.

with community groups leaders in these areas.

"We are also working with the Community Safety Branch that is at the 100 man police station (in St. Catherine) so when they come upon domestic violence

dispute cases the police would contact the organisation and get them involved in the process," she informed at a Violence Prevention Alliance (VPA) Steering Committee meeting where she was the guest speaker in November. Ms Finikin said that the organisation

has also been working with local councillors, churches, Woman Inc Jamaica and other stakeholders in the communities through the distribution of care packages to community members who are in need and assisting the

elderly persons to get their medication, taking them to the doctor and picking up groceries for them. She disclosed that the organisation was now in training of Groots Jamaica members to equip them with the counselling skills and information on women's health, sexual and reproductive rights and public safety so that when they go into these communities they can make meaningful impact. Sistren Theatre Collective over the years has consistently used the creative arts as a tool of analysis and action to interrogate and implement its work nationally, regional and internationally. The group has used approaches including workshops, film, the performing and visual arts, as well as psychological rehabilitation in inner-city communities across Jamaica.

Proper Housing Solutions Can Stem Crime – Says HAJ Executive

Nakia McMorris, senior manager for the Community Development and Corporate Communications arm of the Housing Agency of Jamaica Limited (HAJ) is encouraging an investment into housing and supportive services for vulnerable communities, which she said in the long run are two factors that can contribute to addressing the issue of crime and violence in some of these communities.

"When I think of how much money Jamaica loses in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) due to crime every year, if only that level of funding could have been invested into comprehensively addressing the needs of the communities prior to the loss, there could have been such a difference, over the long-

-term. So the question is, do we start setting aside some money to cauterize the problem? At this stage, unfortunately, the loss of the GDP and spend to incrementally address the problem would have to occur simultaneously," she said.

Ms McMorris made the statement while addressing the VPA Steering Committee meeting where she was the guest speaker in September.

She asserts that providing proper housing solutions along with the



Nakia McMorris, senior manager at HAJ

requisite support to persons living in vulnerable communities was one of many critical components to combating the country's violent crime problem as she pointed out that there was no quick fix to the problem. She distinguishes

violent crime because there are crimes occurring in affluent communities it's just that it does not get the same attention, nevertheless, just as destructive.

She made reference to the success of the United States' 'Choice Neighbourhoods Programme', which employs housing, people and neighbourhood development strategies to address blighted areas with dilapidated housing to transform the spaces into sustainable communities. She also cited that another success programme in Brazil, the 'My House, My Life' programme, which works to increase the production and acquisition of new housing units for low-income population in Brazil.

She suggested that some of these strategies could be applied to Jamaica.

Child Resiliency Programme Trains 30 in Peacebuilding, Resiliency and Wellness

For the academic year, which commenced in September 2021, the Child Resiliency Programme expanded its objectives to include the provision of training in building peace, resiliency and wellness to university students at the International University of the Caribbean (IUC) and to those persons involved in providing care for children “at risk” or emerging from trauma.

Fifteen members of the executive leadership of Swallowfield Chapel and 15 case managers from the Ministry of National Security completed the eight week Peace Building Resiliency and Wellness Training Course online, culminating with the final session and certification at Alhambra Inn.

Initial evaluation revealed 95% of participants found the training material and content to be “very helpful” to themselves, as



Participants in a training session

individuals, and to their ability to deliver their work more effectively. Ninety five per cent reported

That the objectives as being “clearly met”.



A participant accepts her training certificate

Child Resiliency Programme Fetes Students and Parents at Christmas Treat

Several children enrolled in the Child Resiliency Programme and their parents were feted during the Christmas term after a successful period. The school term started in September with a cohort of 60 referred children ages 10-11 years –old who were identified to be “at risk” from Denham Town Primary, Trench Town Primary, Boys Town, St Albans Primary, St Annies and Red Hills Primary. The programme provided literacy support, life skills training (including spiritual development) for the cohort.

It also facilitated creative and sporting activities that reinforce life skills training. The parents of these children also benefitted from training, counseling and home visits.

The Child Resiliency Programme began in 2006 as an outreach programme of the



Hope United Church, under the umbrella of the Hope Counseling and Wellness Centre. It seeks to meet the needs of pre-adolescents and build on their competencies as the most effective strategy for preventing multiple problems. It also aims to focus on promoting physical, social, cognitive, vocational and moral competence.

In 2014 the programme began operating out of the Violence Prevention Alliance.



Students and parents enjoy the Christmas treat

Gov't Opens Second Shelter for Battered Women

Minister of Culture, Gender, Entertainment and Sport, Olivia Grange recently opened the second Government-run shelter for victims of domestic abuse, saying she is happy it has become a reality. The minister cut the ribbon, symbolising the opening of the facility, in the presence of the high commissioner of Canada, as well as representatives of the European Union Delegation to Jamaica, the UNFPA and UN Women who have been assisting the ministry to establish safe spaces for women. Minister Grange said this latest shelter

— the second of three to be opened — “is ready to accept women and their children who have had abusive situations and need to move from that kind of situation into a shelter where they get protection”. The minister said this second shelter, located in a remote location, would focus on housing “very high-risk victims”. However, she said any woman who needs the shelter should call the



National Helpline on **876-553-0372**. The opening and tour of the new facility took place on Human Rights Day (December 10) at the end of the 16 Days of Activism towards eliminating violence against women. “We are celebrating 16 days of activism against violence against women and I scheduled this tour so that I could demonstrate that we are doing something about protecting our women and that we have facilities that are ready to be occupied. So here we have additional facilities. This facility can house approximately 13 persons. It's a comfortable facility. What we have been able to do is to say to the public that we are ensuring that our women are protected — that we create safe spaces for them,” said Minister Grange. Women who go to government shelters will receive counselling in an environment free from violence or judgement.

Master Class Training Video Developed for Drum Therapy Project

The Drum Therapy Project, which was initiated in children's home managed by the government, as form of music therapy on the onset of the pandemic, has produced a holistic Master-Class Training Video which will work in tandem with the on-site training.

Jonelle Llewellyn, coordinator of the project said that the video was developed because the training modality shifted from grouped sessions with the caregivers from all child care facilities of Phase 1, along with the trainer, primarily due to concerns at the Government of Jamaica's mandate for gathering control.

“The intention is that once the caregivers have mastered, or acquired the basic drumming practices – along with learning the various Afro-Caribbean sequences – would then revert to using the video for follow-up practices,” she explained.

The video was directed by videographer consultant, Angela Thames at the Edna Manley College for the Performing Arts with instructional delivery by Jesse Golding, trainer. The



Jesse Golding from the Edna Manley College

training video is accessible via a private link.

The core purpose of the training is to introduce caregivers to the concept of drum therapy and to sensitize them to its therapeutic properties. It is hoped that at the end of the training, the trainees would better appreciate that drum therapy provides an avenue for individuals to release inner trauma through physical movement and meditative rhythms. Drum training was delivered by a certified Afro-Caribe drummer, Jesse Golding, identified from the Edna Manley College of the Visual and Performing Arts.

VPA's Jonelle Llewellyn Represents Jamaica at Biennale Of Luanda

Jonelle Llewellyn, Research Associate at the VPA was Jamaica's representative at the Biennale of Luanda: Pan-African Forum for the Culture of Peace, which

was organised in partnership between UNESCO, the Government of Angola and the African Union.

The Biennale of Luanda aimed to promote the prevention of violence and the resolution of conflicts, by encouraging cultural exchanges in Africa focusing on the dialogue between generations and the promotion of gender equality.

The event was conducted from 27 November to December 2, 2021; the intergenerational dialogue with the theme “Cultural and Heritage Diversity of Africa and its Diasporas: Fire-side of Conflicts or Ground of Peace?” enabled young people to interact with the Heads of state and policy makers to voice their concerns for the sustain-



-able development and social cohesion in Africa.

Jamaica's representative, Jonelle Llewellyn,

was selected to join the focus of participation on theme four: **‘Harnessing the Potential of the Oceans for Sustainable Development and Peace’**.

The opportunity saw the group identifying emerging issues in the Ocean Economy and exploration of possible solutions and strategies to generate greater social impact. Personal contributions included desk research, participation in workshops and training sessions, activities and impromptu discussions on Discord and Whatsapp, collaborating of Google Documents and team-work in Team meetings.