

The Peace Guardian

Journey to Harmony - Light the Passion, Share the Dream
(Beijing 2008 Olympics)

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VPA RECIPIENT OF THE RJR GLEANER HONOUR AWARD 2019

The Violence Prevention Alliance (VPA) was awarded the 2019 RJRGLEANER Honour Awards for voluntary service. The organisation received the award in February at an awards banquet held at the Jamaica Pegasus Hotel. The VPA was recognised for outstanding work in the area of violence prevention. Some of the initiatives the organisation has worked on over the years include the National Plan of Action Against Child Violence; the establishment of the Jamaica Injury Surveillance System; the successes of the Child Resiliency Programme and Trees for Peace Programme.

"Being nominated for the RJR Gleaner Award is a welcome Christmas/New Year's Gift. We are excited and it helps to support and motivate us to continue working in the prevention of violence, which we are all committed to doing," said Dr. Deanna Ashley, executive director of the VPA.

Professor Elizabeth Ward, chair of the VPA said the award is significant and



VPA Chair, Dr. Elizabeth Ward (left) receives award from RJR Gleaner Representative.

will be used as a platform to reach and inform all Jamaicans that violence is preventable. "We have great people here, we need to make sure that they are living in a peaceful society that allows them to achieve their potential," she said.

Established in 2004, the VPA started after a World Health Organization global report in 2002

kick-started an international campaign for violence prevention. A global VPA was launched in Geneva in January 2004 and then the local affiliate was launched in November that year. The alliance takes a public health approach to addressing violence and partners with governmental, non-governmental and private-sector organisations to address its root causes.



VPA Family posing with award.

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VPA URGES CALM DURING LOCKDOWN/ISOLATION FOR CORONAVIRUS

The VPA is encouraging Jamaicans to remain calm, educate themselves about the novel COVID 19 and how they can protect themselves and refrain from turning to violence. This is as the VPA condemns the reported beating of a 38 year-old farmer from Bethel Town in Westmoreland who was beaten and thrown off a bus after he sneezed multiple times and was accused of carrying the deadly COVID-19.

The VPA said the actions of the passengers on the bus reflect the level of intolerance and fear that the virus has been driving but it was important that while persons are concerned for their health and safety, they also need to show compassion.

Meanwhile, the Alliance also raises concerns that there is a potential risk that the lock down of families or self-isolation to prevent the spread of the virus, could increase

spread of the virus, could increase domestic violence in the homes.

The government has ordered the closure of schools and instructed that only persons working in essential services should report for work while the private sector with remote-access capabilities should direct employees to work from home.

The Alliance however noted that the situation can be breeding ground for domestic violence as the confinement will encourage the abuser to leverage control. The VPA is encouraging friends and family to be on the alert for signs of coercive controlling behaviour during the pandemic and to alert the relevant authorities.

Research shows that violence against women increases during times of stress or anxiety, and experts say the next few months are likely to be particularly acute due to financial insecurity, alcohol consumption and health concerns. It was suggested that persons engage in constructive activities such as gardening.

HANOVER SCHOOLS TOP TREES FOR PEACE COMPETITION

Schools in the parish of Hanover topped the Trees for Peace Competition with Maryland All Age and Upper Rock Spring All Age & Infant Schools declared first place winners of the competition. Pell River Primary School, also in Hanover came in third.

The winners were announced at an awards ceremony held at Maryland All Age School on Peace Day on March 3, which was observed under the theme ***"Peace is the Way for a Better Day"***.

The competition, which is in its second year, was organised by the VPA, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information. More than 60 schools across the country participated in the competition.

"I want to thank the VPA and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information for this great initiative," said Andria Dehaney-Grant, principal of Maryland All Age School.

Grateful at having participated in the competition and emerging as one of the winners, Mrs. Grant also mentioned that the competition provided an avenue for influencing a change of action in her students.

Clare Samuels, environmental teacher at the school said the entire school population and community worked together to create the garden. The garden, which is built around the theme, ***'Let there be Peace on Earth,'*** has a waterfall with fish; a mound with flowers planted around it giving a visual aspect of a hill.

She said aspects of the school curriculum were incorporated in the creation of the garden. These included: Social Studies; elements of Mathematics, with the garden's pentagonal shape



Winning school representatives from Maryland All Age and Infant School (right) and Upper Rock Spring Primary sharing the moment with VPA chair, Dr. Elizabeth Ward (second left).

and the seats designed with different geometrical shapes. For Upper Rock Spring All Age & Infant School, their perseverance and hard work finally paid off. As in the 2018 competition, they emerged the parish of Hanover winners. They however, redoubled their efforts as a team and community to come up with a winning garden.

The garden comprised several flora and fauna, a gazebo for relaxation, a resolution wall and water feature with fish. "The benefits derived from the Peace Garden are countless. We have built a stronger relationship between the school and the community; assisted in resolving conflicts; helped to relieve stress and increase a

sense of wellness. The garden has become a sustainable space that students not only care for but are brought into contact with the cycles of nature," said Nikhesia Pearce, a teacher at the school. Janiel Jones, teacher of the Pell River Primary said her school faced many challenges in trying to create the Peace Garden, but they tackled it with love and worked in peace. She said the garden allowed the school community to bond together as they worked towards a common goal.

Meanwhile, Professor Elizabeth Ward, chairman of the VPA commended the schools for their hard work. She said the concept of the competition is to encourage children to resolve conflicts and hoped that eventually the initiative would become a movement.

GEORGE HEADLEY PRIMARY SCHOOL CELEBRATES SECOND PLACE WIN IN TREES FOR PEACE

These are happy times at the St. Andrew based George Headley Primary School as they continue to bask in their second place award in the 2019 Trees for Peace Competition, organised by the VPA.

The euphoria that permeates the school can be attributed to the unexpectedness of the second place win as well as the fact that, the creation of the peace garden has brought a positive change in both the lives of students and teachers. Recalling the journey to the create the garden, which is named ***Peace of Paradise***, Ms. Hart said that although she was called miserable at times and also got discouraged given the late start and lack of funds, she said it was all worth it in the end, given the way it had impacted



George Headley Primary representatives posing with their second place trophy.

positively on the students and also teachers. Once embarking on designing the garden, it became obvious that they had to be creative, so the decision was made to go the recyclable way. This meant that the school used whatever material that could be found on the compound and surrounding community of Duhaney Park, to get the garden off the ground. "We went around the commu-

nity to find things we could use. Things that we designed were made from plastic bottles, old tyres and other things to line the walkway. We didn't spend any money, only to get the gravel and stuff like that. Everything else we recycled," Ms. Hart said, adding that the Principal, Aretha Willie, also chipped in and bought the gravel, pesticide and foliar spray. Construction of the garden was both a school family and community affair, which included residents, auxiliary staff, security guards, the canteen manager, students and teachers. Ms. Hart had high praise for a special student Glendon Whyte, who was involved in every aspect of the creation of the garden.

CHILD RESILIENCY PROGRAMME TRANSFORMING 'AT RISK CHILDREN'

The Child Resiliency Programme, which is administered by the VPA continues to transform children who are deemed "at risk" and have been referred to the programme for intervention.

Dr. Kim Scott, programme director of the Child Resiliency Programme shared the successes of the programme at VPA forum entitled, **"Pathways to the Prevention of Violence: Examining the Evidence"** in January.

"After one year in the intervention, we have found that we had a 14 per cent decrease in the number of children who were reading at grade two level and below, and a 17 per cent increase in the number of children reading at grades four and five level," she said. "But more importantly we had



Dr. Kim Scott

a 75 per cent increase in the number of children, who have demonstrated that they love to learn and read, and that is invaluable data because we have been able to inspire students, who attend the programme after school," she informed. She said that these are children who are often labelled as "dunce, rude, out-of-order" have

an opportunity to become "at promise" rather than "at risk". She noted that having been engaged in something that they enjoy such as sports and cultural activities, which include football, boxing and dance, along with a caring adult mentor, these children were more receptive to learning and behaviour change.

The programme also offers life skills training, including anger management, politeness, respect for others and appropriate behaviour. Dr Scott said the report in that area was also encouraging with the data showing a 77 per cent increase in children demonstrating increased resilience

attributes and pro social skills and that there was a significant reduction in fighting and cursing. There was evidence of an increased ability in handling conflicts in most of the students, those who would normally be prone to fighting, being better able to walk away. There was also improvement in self-confidence and teamwork, with 85 per cent of these children identifying new and additional persons, who care for them and with whom they can talk to for support.

In terms of the parents of these children, the report indicated that these parents were now more involved in their children's lives. These parents were now supervising homework more and they had an increased understanding of the difference between appropriate discipline and corporal punishment.

VPA RECOMMENDS EARLY INTERVENTION TO STEM VIOLENCE

Executive director of the VPA, Dr Deanna Ashley is suggesting that focused intervention programmes on children in the early childhood years, should be a preventative strategy that is employed to address the country's crime problem.

We know the Jamaican saying 'prevention is better than cure'. We need to focus our interventions on our children beginning in the early years. We need to focus on helping the parents to provide that positive support to the development of our children," she said.

Dr Ashley made the observation after presenting data on effects of violence on children at a VPA forum on **"Pathways to the Prevention of Violence: Examining the Evidence"**.

She also noted that there should be a change in the approach of teaching and providing more support to teachers as well as engaging more social workers in the schools.

The VPA executive director in-

formed that children in Jamaica are exposed to a significant amount of violence as victims, as well as, witnesses to vio-

"We need to use the data from our research, monitor and evaluate it to assess the effectiveness and impact;

risk and protective factors; to discuss the benefits and limitations of social interventions in the prevention of violence; and to make recommendations for scaling up what works.



(L-R) Dr. Elizabeth Ward, chair of the VPA; Dr. Kim Scott, CRP; Dr. Deanna Ashley, executive director, VPA and Professor Susan Walker, director of the CAIHR.

lence. She noted that the violence occurs in all forms such as: physical, emotional, verbal abuse as well as neglect. Intra-family abuse and violence, she added, affected children, leading to the development of inter-generational cycles of violence.

scale up and sustain the interventions that work and are cost effective," she said. The objectives of the forum were to share data that examine magnitude of violence in Jamaica and some of the underlying

Meanwhile, David Osbourne, Country Representative of the UK Department for International Development (DFID) commended the VPA for organising the forum and praised the organisation for its pioneering work.

"We see how the VPA has been at the forefront of efforts to bring best practices and data evidence into the drive to eliminate violence in Jamaica," he said, noting that the organisation brought enlightenment in terms of violence being a disease, a public health problem, which is predictable and can be treated.

"I think the time has come for us to introduce new ideas and evidence ... and the VPA has done a fantastic job in moving this discussion forward and we are proud to have them as a partner," he said.

TWENTY TRAINED IN SCHOOL BASED VIOLENCE PREVENTION PROGRAMME

Twenty senior members of staff at the Early Childhood Commission have been trained in the IRIE Classroom Toolbox to implement a school based violence prevention programme in early childhood institutions. Professor Susan Walker, director of the Caribbean Institute for Health Research (CAIHR) made this disclosure when highlighting early social interventions that were working at a VPA FO.

forum entitled: **'Pathways to the Prevention of Violence: Examining the Evidence'**.

Professor Walker said the initiative was being implemented in collaboration with the Early Childhood Commission, UNICEF and CAIHR. The programme is aimed at reducing violence towards children, addressing behavioural problems among children in addition to increasing social-emotional competence.

"The content of the programme involves building positive relationships; how to promote good



Professor Susan Walker

behaviour and reduce misbehaviour exhibited by their children. The Toolbox was developed by members of staff at CAIHR using the results of an efficacy trial and ongoing documentation of training Jamaican preschool teachers. The goal of the intervention, she expounded, is to support development before and during preschool so that when children enter primary school,

they not only have the learning skills but also, the social, friendship skills and appropriate behaviour skills, which will allow them to succeed in school.

Meanwhile, she also noted that another social intervention programme, Reach Up, was also being implemented simultaneously with the Ministry of Health and Wellness. The Reach Up programme is based on the Jamaica

Home Visit intervention which has substantial evidence of impact for children's development and longer term benefits. The intervention is guided by core principles that include building a positive relationship with parents and their skills, self-esteem and enjoyment in helping their children play and learn. This, involves using interactive approaches of demonstration and modelling.

LOCAL RESEARCH REVEALS CHILDREN VIEW CORPORAL PUNISHMENT AS INEFFECTIVE

The findings of a qualitative research study showed that children view corporal punishment as an ineffective form of discipline but instead want parents to talk it over with them; listen to them and administer counselling. The research, entitled a **Social Norms Baseline Study**, examined pro violence social norms among children and young people and was conducted by the VPA on behalf of the Citizens Security and Justice Programme (CSJP).

Jennifer Jones, sociologist and the lead investigator, released the findings of the research at VPA forum on **'Pathways to the Prevention of Violence: Examining the Evidence'**.

"Beating is ineffective and only results in anger and resentment



Jennifer Jones, sociologist

or depression and self-harming ideation. They want parents to talk it over, listen to their side of the story and counsel them," said Jones who was presenting on the topic **'Socio-cultural Factors that Facilitate Interpersonal Violence in Children and Adolescents'** at the forum. Jones said two grade eight boys during a focus group suggested: "Siddung wid yuh child and get fi know wha a

gwaan inna dem life and know the problem wha dem a guh through."

The sociologist said that every single student that was interviewed for the research said they hated the cursing, which they pointed out was humiliating and disrespectful.

"Seeing their father or another man beating their mother provokes very deep and violent responses in children. Students say the children feel like killing the perpetrator. They cannot concentrate at school," she added. She also noted that the source of much of the anger and defiance in children and young adults was rooted in family experiences. For many of the interviewees, corporal punishment was severe, compounded with extreme and daily cursing.

VPA AT THE 'UK IN JAMAICA FAIR' IN FEBRUARY

