

ZOSO Should be Positioned as a Force for Economic Development – Says VPA

The Violence Prevention Alliance (VPA) is recommending that the Zones of Special Operations (ZOSO) be positioned as a force for economic development.

The VPA made the recommendation while making a submission to the Joint Select Committee of Parliament in review of the Law Reform Act, recently.

“We want to emphasize that sustainable development should be the priority of the ZOSO and that it is backed by the security interventions and the benefit of this is that when communities know that this effort is one to develop the community, you are going to have greater citizens activism,” said Kaodi McGaw, a representative of the VPA and one of three persons who presented on behalf of the Alliance.

“When I say sustainable interventions, I mean they are interventions that are co-owned and developed by the communities themselves,” she said.

Ms McGaw noted that one way of inter-



Kaodi McGaw presenting to the Joint Select Committee of Parliament

-vening in a community in crisis is to apply a community transformation model, which involves interrupting the community violence either through engagement and mediation; therapeutic camps, counselling and peace treaties.

“The next step has to be healing and reconciliation and this involves persons in the violence. Under this we look at improving literacy to improve cognitive abilities; we look at small income earning projects to divert persons from unlawful methods. We encourage sports and arts and the renovation of green spaces, so that those green

spaces can be re-occupied by the community,” she said.

Another recommendation put forward by the VPA was that there should be some measuring and standards for success. This she said included greater details in defining the stages of the ZOSO framework; established criteria in exiting ZOSO communities and transparent and easily understood measures of success.

Thirdly, Ms McGaw said the VPA would like to see more robustness of the Act where specific tools or methods will be utilized to suppress and interrupt and prevent violence. Ms McGaw noted that there should be an oversight mechanisms as a point of reference for citizens seeking compensation. Another recommendation to the Act that she highlighted that the VPA is lobbying for is that there should be no broad brush for suppression, but that different approaches should be applied to different communities. The VPA is further recommending that the Planning Institute of Jamaica be given the license to guide the deployment process.

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August Town Peace Builders Work to Restore Peace

While concerned by the recent flare up of violence in the community, The August Town Peace Builders continue to work relentlessly to restore calm to the community in collaboration with the security forces.

The community is looking forward to replicate what happened in 2016 when history was created as it reported no murder for that year.

Kenneth Wilson, chairman of the August Town Peace Builders said that one such initiative that the organisation has implemented is the Safe Community Competition, which was designed by the Violence Prevention Alliance (VPA) and the Peace Management Initiative (PMI) and implemented in 2010 in August Town.

“The competition is based on the safe community ladder criteria which included: dispute resolution; reports of no violence; good community governance with establishment of corner committees, youth clubs and sports club; good police community relationship; education and health and community development,” he explained recently at the VPA Steering Committee where he made a presentation on the initiative. Mr Wilson said the competition, which was named in honour of the late Professor Barry Chevannes, has continued and over the last three years the African Gardens community has won the competition. The 2021 staging of the competition will run from January 1 to December 31.
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Child Resiliency Programme Pressed On During Pandemic

Despite the challenges caused from the COVID-19 restrictions, the Child Resiliency Programme administered by the VPA, engaged some 48 children and parents during the academic year 2020-21, both virtually and face to face.

Dr. Kim Scott, director of the programme said that children were supported virtually via direct phone calls. In addition lessons were completed by using Whatsapp, a free application which facilitates its users to do video calling and voice recordings. Home visits were also done in collaboration with the police, following the COVID-19 protocols.

"The children have increased their literacy levels (including computer literacy) and have fostered an increased love for learning, particularly reading.



Participants pose for a group photo during the closing ceremony.

Their mental health was supported through dance, football, circle time and counseling in small groups with all COVID-19 protective protocols in place," she said.

The director revealed that children were guided through a

series of 30 life skills themes throughout the year. Parents in turn participated in monthly parent training workshops and par-

experiences and to increase their ability to find alternate discipline strategies apart from the old traditional beating method. Additionally, they were guided to set clear rules and boundaries for their children. The programme closed off for this academic year at the end of June, with children performing in singing, dancing and skits demonstrating some of the themes taught throughout the year. Dr Scott communicated that all children received gift bags of a novel, treats, crayons and writing material at the programme leaving exercise. In addition, behavioural prizes were awarded to the top 12 performing children every five weeks.

ent Whatsapp support groups. They were supported to increase strategies for conflict resolution, to continue to be more collaborative in the child's virtual learning

The winning houses were taken on a field trip to Hope Gardens at the end of each term. Meanwhile, all programme staff were engaged in resiliency and wellness coaching throughout the year in light of the pandemic.

Unrealistic Expectations That Social Intervention Programmes Alone Will Curb Crime

Dr Deanna Ashley, Executive Director of the VPA says it is unrealistic to expect that social intervention programmes should, by themselves, have a major impact in curbing violent crime in Jamaica. She was responding to the findings of the research conducted by the Caribbean Policy Research Institute (CAPRI) entitled **"Testing, Testing: Challenges to Measuring Social Programmes for At-Risk Youth"** and comments made by University of the West Indies Professor Anthony Clayton, on the opening statement of the report that indicated that despite investment of billions of dollars over decades on a plethora of social interventions there has been no noticeable changes in murders and shootings, nor have the interventions produced evidence that suggest that they are "working".

Dr Ashley, said the findings of the CAPRI research were narrow and took a simplistic approach to assessing social interventions, thus the pesky question of credibility. "Social

intervention is only one component that is needed to address the major problem of crime in the country. They (social intervention programmes) in themselves cannot change the violent crimes at the community or national levels as they are targeting individuals and therefore the expected outcome should be a meaningful



Dr Deanna Ashley, Executive Director of the VPA

change in the behaviour and life trajectory of these high-risk youths who are participants to these interventions," she said.

The VPA Executive Director

noted that many other environmental factors must also be considered. "Access to good education and skills training, better access to child guidance and mental health services, availability of safe and clean environment, and better crime management at the community level are all critical components

that will enable the reduction in violent crimes," she pointed out.

Dr Ashley said that what is useful in determining the effectiveness of social interventions would be to track individuals one to five years after participating in a social intervention programme.

This will better determine the effect that it had on the recipients' life. Such studies would also better answer the question of the cost benefit of the social interventions.

Dr Ashley noted that studies locally and internationally have clearly demonstrated that the earlier in life that social interventions are implemented, the better and longer lasting are the effects.

240 Parents Benefit From Parenting Seminar

"Is true! Sometimes we jump to conclusions and don't listen to wi pickney dem!" This was an "aha" moment expressed by one of the more than 240 parents and caregivers from Dupont Primary School and the Cockburn Gardens Primary school in Kingston that recently benefited from a series of parenting sessions organised by the Ministry of National Security and facilitated by the VPA and Parenting Partners Caribbean (PPC).

Dr Deanna Ashley, Executive Director of the VPA noted that the initiative was timely, as the series of rap-sessions and participatory workshops allowed parents to learn and share, especially as it related to their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Linda Craigie-Brown, president of PPC agreed, stating



Sharon Gilzene, social worker conducts a session.

that many parents today are feeling isolated and the sessions offered an opportunity to share and support each other, guided by experienced parenting facilitators.

The parents of children from each school spent two hours per week and were engaged in discussions and interactive

activities focused on stages of child development, effective communication and healthy self-esteem. Tamara White, a parent who participated in the workshops said, "I feel more appreciative of the importance of parent and child communication and I know that my healthy self-esteem is very important for my child's development."

Parents were encouraged to seek the positives in themselves and in their children and were 'crowned' with donated Burger King crowns as they expressed their own self-worth.

Renee Steele, Senior Policy Director in the Crime Prevention and Community Safety branch of the Ministry of National Security, said that despite the many challenges parents were facing,

their feedback on the parent sessions had been very positive. "They were committed to attending each week, and many parents showed great insight and knowledge about the topics," she said.

Mrs Craigie-Brown was particularly pleased to see the eagerness the parents showed in supporting each other, especially those experiencing personal trauma or emotional challenges. "Many parents offered very useful advice and counsel during the sessions, even exchanging numbers afterwards. The parents themselves developed a 'Parent Pledge' which they shared within their various WhatsApp groups," she said noting that many asked for the sessions to be continued.

The parenting programme was a component of the Ministry's 2020 "Liv Gud" summer school.

August Town Peace Builders Work to Restore Peace

"The period was selected because crime tends to escalate during that period and that it was a form of method to curb the violence," he said noting that the initiative contributed in the past to reduce crime and violence in the community which started trending downwards until it hit the historic mark of no murder in 2016.

In the early years of the programme a police officer was assigned to each of the five communities (Hermitage, Gold Smith Villa, Bedward Gardens, African Gardens and August Town) that made up the Greater August Town area so if there was an issue, they were able to inform the police who would intervene before it escalates.

"We were able to use the competition as a violence prevention tool to mitigate against violence in our community. This competition has helped us," he said.

In addition, Mr Wilson informed that there is a Safe Corner competition, which involves restorative justice where every 'corner' is assigned a Restorative Justice Committee, which mediates when there is any conflict. He said the approach is to build a network that will address conflicts as they arise in the community.

The community also has an initiative called the August Town Children Development Programme where children who have lost parents to violence are provided with emotional and financial support. Some 50 children are in the programme. Mr Wilson said that the aim is to show these children love and discourage the reprisal culture in the community.

He is hoping to rally further outside support for the initiatives. "It has been gaining more traction but I think if we had more publicity at the national level it will have more impact and is a formula to address crime and violence in the community," he stated.

Seven Year Old Publishes Book

Seven year-old, Eden Emmanuel Williams, a grade two student at St. George's Girls Primary and Infant School has written her first book entitled, 'The Little Girls and The Cave'. It is the first in a trilogy which she came up with at six years old. Highly influenced by the

lead roles taken on by the women in her family, girl-power is the central theme in most of Eden's stories. According to her mother, Chantal Boothe, a VPA volunteer, the book is a story of bravery, girl-power and team work to inspire other children of colour.

She said the story book is great for young readers and comes inclusive of bonus activities (drawing, coloring, search word puzzle and a maze) to support cognitive development. The book is available on Amazon.



‘Mother Roye’ Making an Impact in Effortville, Clarendon

Seventy-eight year-old Myrtle Roye, affectionately called ‘Mother Roye’ has only given birth to two biological children but she has nurtured many others.

The retired teacher who is now a violence interrupter in Effortville, Clarendon has mentored many children who she taught while as a teacher at Cross Primary and Junior High School in the parish. In fact at the time of this interview, some of her former students stopped by her house to wish her happy Teachers’ Day on Wednesday, May 5.

Besides her biological children, she has raised another five children who are unrelated to her and three grandchildren. Her greatest joy of being a mother to these children is that they have turned out well and are contributing positively to society. “At the time, there was a lot of violence in the community and these children – all boys were on the road so I eventually took them in and assumed responsibility for them. I saw to it that they all went to school. After leaving school, some went to HEART to learn a skill. They are all now employed and are doing well,” she said proudly.

For her biological children, both successfully completed university with one being employed as an auditor. Her other child passed away leaving behind three children which she is now caring for.

“There are so many joys of being a mother but when you see your children progress in life, for me that is one of the greatest accomplishments. I always encourage them to excel and to not fall below five in placement in their classes.

When I saw that my children were doing well academically, I felt proud,” she said.

Mrs Roye however noted that it was not an easy task in raising these children but underscored that parents have to be a strong and set good example for their children to follow.

“You can’t be stealing and be telling your child not to steal. You have to set an example. You have to constantly pray for them and let them know that God should be an important part in their life,” she shared.

She has instilled good values in her children with one of those values of being satisfied with what they have and never watch what others have. She said that advice was passed on to her by her parents who gave her tangible lessons of this throughout her childhood.

The former vice principal said key to raising responsible children is developing a good rapport with them and making them feel com-

fortable to share information with you.

“As a family, you sit and discuss things with your children. Always include them in your decision making, you don’t make the decision alone,” she said.

As a violence interrupter, she applied her listening skills when doing her job in the community. She shows compassion, empathizes and then direct them on the right path.

“The young men who are in trouble, you can’t just write them off because when they see that someone cares and talk with them, you can redirect their lives,” she said pointing out that many of them need employment to keep them occupied and away from a life of crime.

Her advice to other mothers is to spend time with their children and make sacrifices to ensure that they have a good education.



Mother Roye, Violence Interrupter

VPA and Operational Help the People Gift Home



Krysann Reid (left), project lead, Operation Help the People and Jonelle Llewellyn (right), research associate at the Violence Prevention Alliance present brochures, seedlings and books to Shernette Harrison, manager of the Strathmore Gardens Children’s Home. The seedlings were planted during a tree planting exercise at the home recently.