

## East Kingston Residents Benefit From Peace Interventions

Women in the communities of East Kingston benefitted from a series of peace initiatives that were organised by the Violence Prevention Alliance (VPA) and other partners in observation of International Women's Day, which was celebrated on Monday, March 8.

The interventions included community outreach, which was focused on addressing issues of gun violence and the effects on women and children. The outreach was in observation of Peace Month, which was being celebrated under the theme *'Peace in the Pandemic'*.

"We reached out to women along the Mountain View and Rockfort areas, while observing all COVID-19 protocols and implemented initiatives to address gun control and how we reduce the use of guns and the destruction it cause in our society and how we can work together to shape peace," said Professor Elizabeth Ward, chair of the VPA.

Professor Ward said the initiative involved working with the women to develop positive messages through video



Jonelle Llewellyn (left), research association at the VPA presents Milton Tomlinson, PMI's intervention manager with care packages for distribution to East Kingston communities

skits and artwork and different forms of expression, which will be used as messages to reach the wider community.

She also informed that the outreach included the distribution of care packages to some 75 households. The care packages were supplied to the vulnerable members of the communities such as children, women and the elderly located in Dunkirk, Rockfort and Mountain View in East Kingston.

The packages included toiletries; basic food items such as rice, flour, sugar, mackerel, sar-

dines and crackers; masks and hand sanitizers. The packages were delivered to the communities in collaboration with the Peace Management Initiative (PMI).

Milton Tomlinson, PMI's intervention manager, stated the community were grateful for the packages.

"The community members were thrilled to receive the packages. It has been extremely rough on many families during the pandemic as many are under restrictions such as the elderly who have responsibilities for their household," he pointed out.

The initiative was implemented in collaboration with partners such as: American Friends of Jamaica; Nursing Association of Jamaica; the International Network on Small Arms, Canadian Women's Club of Jamaica and the Council of Voluntary Social Services.

Professor Ward informed said much work needs to be done to address the underlying epidemic of violence with peace building activities.

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## Peace Day Marked By Virtual Peace Concert

Peace Day, which was observed on Tuesday, March 2 was celebrated under the theme *'Let's Shape Peace Together'*. The day was marked with a series of activities organised by the VPA in collaboration with Peace and Love in Society (PALS) and other partners.

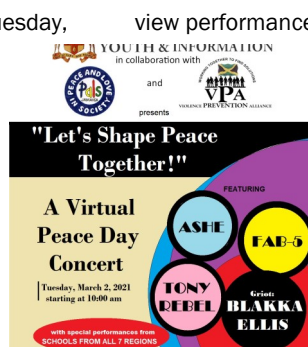
One of the activities was a virtual Peace Day concert organised by PALS in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information and the VPA. More than 45,000 persons logged on the live stream which featured special school performances across the island.

The concert was moderated by story teller, Blakka Ellis. Students were engaged as they

view performances by their peers and learn about peace building skills from messages from peace advocates.

Other activities on the day included a webinar, which was hosted by the St. James Ministers Fraternal, under the theme *'Dealing with the Root of the Tree'*.

The webinar examined the relevant and actionable biblical principles for crime reduction in Jamaica. A midday meditation that was dedicated to peace was aired on Radio Jamaica.



## Richardson-Pious Wants More Coordination to Address Crime and Violence

Claudette Richardson-Pious, executive director of Children First Agency wants a more co-ordinated approach in how change agents work at the community level to address crime and violence.

Mrs. Richardson-Pious made the call while addressing the VPA Steering Committee meeting in January.

"We have in a way become so funder driven that a lot of times 'I'm in my corner and you are in yours' and we are doing the same things and we are not talking to each other. Why can't we come together, develop a comprehensive plan that is really about looking at violence prevention in a real way?" she asked.

She pointed out that if the various stakeholder groups were more coordinated in their efforts, the change would be



*Claudette Richardson-Pious, executive director of Children First Agency*

more effective. The Children First executive director said there should also be a critical assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of each organisation and segmentation of the work.

"We need to learn from each other. The pie is big enough and

it is better if we decide on how we are going to share this pie," she said.

She observed that because of these silos, it appears as if it is a competition among social agents

spective, and in so doing opined, that "We have been studying this thing (crime) for a long time, but when are we going to come together in a real way? This is our Jamaica," she said.

The social advocate said there is still the dire need to revisit what worked previously, and how to fuse them with more modern efforts, for example exploring a village again raising a child/children.

"The peace has to begin with us, each and every one of us. We have to look at how we encourage the families and how do we help them. What are we doing in terms of educating? And it is not just about Math and English, it is about Life Skills and it is not ok when two brothers or cousins have a dis-agreement and then in the process a four-year-old child is shot and killed," she said.

and that this defeats the purpose.

Meanwhile, turning to the issue of crime in the country, she sought to explore with the audience what is being done from a national per-

## COVID-19 Pandemic Has Created New Social Problems— Says PMI

Damian Hutchinson, executive director of PMI said that the COVID-19 pandemic has created new social issues and has exacerbated the existing situations and derailed social intervention programmes that were reaping successes prior to the pandemic.

"With COVID-19, these young men 14 to 17 years, now at home, with all these other negative factors that they were up against and have now taken full hold of them and so we have seen and we won't know this probably until later this year that a significant amount of young men have dropped out of school," he informed.

"It is also affecting the girls. We know of young girls who have got pregnant and are doing online classes but the schools

do not know that they are pregnant," he informed.

Mr Hutchinson made the assertions while addressing the Violence Prevention Alliance (VPA) Steering Committee meeting in February.

He stated, young men who have dropped out of school because of the pandemic were being recruited into gang related activities across the country. He however noted that the problems are fixable.



*Damian Hutchinson, executive director of PMI*

"When we do the case management work of these young men, the profiles are the same, they are school dropouts, poor literacy level, poor family support, subject to violence,

among other things. But these can be fixed if detected early and we keep them in school," he said pointing out that young men dropping out of schools are the biggest risk factors that will influence them to join gangs. He said the social intervention

programmes can be addressed at different levels such as: a combination of treating with the low level of community development and using law enforcement decisively to limit the environment in which criminals operate.

The PMI executive director noted that accompanying this should be deployment of initiatives in the medium to long term, targeting of those who are being recruited in these criminal activities and who are already in violence producing activities. "There is a view that it is hard for persons who get involved into gang activities to leave this lifestyle behind. However, we see it differently, there are young men who want a positive change but they need the support mechanism to make it possible," he said.



## Child Resiliency Programme Pivots in the Pandemic

Dr Kim Scott, programme director of the Child Resiliency Programme disclosed that the commencement of the face-to-face intervention in September last year while all schools still remained closed and overcoming the apprehension to delivering the small group activities in the context of COVID-19, has been a big success.

“There has been improved quality of engagement in the activities of all the high-risk children in attendance including the sporting, life skills training and literacy activities delivered according to the planned curriculum, despite many challenges,” said Dr Scott.

She said the continued partnership with the police was very helpful in alleviating fears of parents to send out their



*Participants in the programme play a game of football*

children in the context of extreme flairs of violence in the surrounding communities and in assisting with transporting children in the difficult times.

Due to the increased COVID-19 numbers and the government restrictions, the programme

pivoted back to its virtual delivery process on March 15 for the final two weeks of the Easter Term and Sports Day scheduled for March 25 was cancelled.

Meanwhile, Dr. Scott said additional computer tablets were purchased to help facilitate the online delivery of the programme along with the purchasing of data plans for all facilitators as the programme continued to engage, support the children and parents via

direct and WhatsApp videos, calls, voice recordings and home visits.



*Training of members of staff at Boys Town*

in maintaining their own resiliency and wellness has been a priority this year.

The Child Resiliency Programme has begun a partnership with the International University of the Caribbean (IUC) to train and engage undergraduate and post graduate students in the building of Peace, Resilience and Wellness as well as the training of members of staff in community development. The community leadership certification is scheduled to begin in May.

## Drum Therapy Project Expands to More Children's Homes

The success of the Drum Therapy Project, which was initially initiated in six children's home, managed by the Child Protection and Family Services Agency (CPFSA) has been expanded to include more homes.

The initiative, a partnership between the VPA and the CPFSA was conceptualised following the discovery of the first case of the Coronavirus in the island in March of last year, which led to schools being closed and restrictions being placed on gathering and movement. Some six homes across the island were the first to benefit.

Jonelle Llewellyn, research associate at the VPA said the children reported that the sessions were uplifting; the caregivers said it was beneficial for the wards, and they have even used drumming as an academic teaching tool.

Doreen Haye, caregiver of the Homestead Place of Safety in Stony Hill, St. Andrew said the Drum Therapy Project has been very therapeutic for the girls at that home.

“They are excited and thrilled about beating the drums. Many of them wake up in the morn-



*Caregivers in training*

ings with excitement and asked if I was ready to start the drumming lessons,” she said exuding with excitement.

The success of that phase Llewellyn said is what has led to the plans for a second phase this time to involve an additional seven homes. Llewellyn said the implementation of the sec-

ond phase has been affected by the community spread of the COVID-19 across the island. She said they however

programme will be sustained after implementation.

Meanwhile, the VPA North East Chapter has been using the initiative at the community level where persons have been trained in Steer Town in St. Ann with the intention of a full roll out later on in that community.

In the meantime approximately \$3,000 CAD was raised through a GoFundMe account launched for phase one of the programme.

“We hope this time we can step up to maybe \$7,500 CAD,” Llewellyn disclosed. She said approximately \$2 million in funding was received from the Culture, Health, Arts, Sports and Education Fund (CHASE).

Llewellyn said persons can contribute to the project through the GoFundMe account at <https://www.gofundme.com/f/vpa-amp-cpfsa039s-drum-therapy-project-in-jamaica>

## One-on-One with PMI's Violence Interrupters



**Camille Jackson Bailey, violence interrupter, PMI.**

**What do you enjoy about your job?**

"I enjoy when communities work together in unity. It is rewarding when you see because of your intervention, warring communities can put aside differences and work together in peace"



**Sonia Whyte, violence interrupter, PMI**

**. Tell me about your job?**

"My job involves conflict resolution and working with the community to minimize reprisals. What I enjoy most is when I see good change happening, which emanated from the work I have done with a person or a community."

## Old Harbour Ministers Fraternal to Roll out Initiative to Rescue Young Men from Crime

The Old Harbour's Ministers Fraternal and the Citizens Action against Crime (CAAC) have designed a programme that will rescue young men in Old Harbour, St. Catherine from a life of crime.

Randy Finnikin, convener of the CAAC and executive member of the Old Harbour Ministers Fraternal said that the initiative involves the implementation, and sustainability of the church's violence prevention outreach, targeting men, specifically boys and families.

"This latest initiative will implement a targeted approach to reach out to men, women, children within the communities. We would engage the males primarily whilst ensuring that the children are not ignored and they



**Randy Finnikin, convener of the CAAC**

too are facilitated and engaged," he said.

Mr Finnikin made the disclosure of the initiative while addressing the VPA Steering Committee meeting in March.

The executive member of the Old Harbour Ministers Fraternal suggested that the

Initiative will be focused on rebuilding the community. He said the strategic location of the churches across Old Harbour provides an opportunity to target and engage in a holistic way and perhaps not ever done before.

He stated that the initiative is a collaborative effort between the CAAC, the Old Harbour Ministers Fraternal, the Old Harbour Development Committee and other stakeholders.

Mr Finnikin pointed out that the strategic location of Old Harbour between May Pen and Spanish Town makes it susceptible to crime.

We do have a crime issue, not burgeoning issue where

Crime has taken over Old Harbour. We still enjoy some amount of peace and we are still able to enjoy our community spaces," he pointed out.

He however noted that there are issues such as praedial larceny and family feuds.

"Together this project can be a success story. This issue of crime is a blemish to our good name, to our country. Too many of our loved ones and people have died, we must do something about it," he said.

According to the UN Population Report and the PIOJ data, Old Harbour is one of the fastest growing urban centres in Jamaica. He voiced that if urban blight is allowed to set in it will be difficult to address.

Mr Finnikin said a multipronged public order initiative was developed to address some of these issues.