

PROFILE ON THE POSSIBILITY PROGRAMME

The Possibility Programme, under The Office of the Prime Minister, identified the issue of street boys as requiring renewed national attention. The programme was implemented in 2001, as one of the interventions through the Programme Coordination and Monitoring Unit (PCMU) of the OPM, the unit with responsibility then for coordinating and monitoring the implementation of the National Poverty Eradication Programme. However, commencing April 2008, implementation of the Programme was transferred to the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture.

The Possibility Programme takes a multidimensional approach:

- (a) Care Centre - addresses the social/emotional needs of the young men
- (b) Skill Centre – addresses their skill/employment
- (c) A Behaviour Modification Centre located at New Castle - addresses the behavioural problem
- (d) A Hostel – provides some living accommodation

Overview of Program

The program caters to boys who are classified as 'at risk boys' mainly because they have dropped out of or been expelled from the formal school system for myriad reasons, such as poor social skills, inappropriate behaviour, mental and learning disabilities. As a result they get involved in commercial activities (hustling) and or other questionable activities. At times these activities lead them to spend extended time on the streets. The program also caters to boys who have lost one or both parents to violence and crime, and others who because of environmental reasons may not be able to attend school in their areas. They are admitted to the program to facilitate rehabilitation and reintegration into the formal society and as best as possible an appropriate home environment.

Activities at the Care Centre

All the services of the Centre, operated by the St Andrew Parish Church, are offered at no cost to the boys.

- Basic care: Two meals – breakfast and lunch. (Mondays to Fridays)
- In-house remedial education: Subjects include: language, reading, mathematics, health science, general knowledge, social studies and computer classes (this is now suspended)
- Building spiritual need: With the aid of daily devotions.
- Life coping skills training
- Individual and group counselling
- Support services to the parents or legal guardians
- Organized sports – cricket and football
- Christmas Treats - The Office of the Prime Minister usually hosts this event.

Boys receive scheduled sessions in life coping skills. These training sessions are presented weekly by the social worker. Boys are exposed to a range of topics that address issues/challenges young males have to deal with daily. Boys are being empowered to make choices that will benefit themselves and others. The boys are also able to express themselves and release their feelings through the use of art and craft, music and drama. These sessions bring out pertinent themes or

topical issues. The sessions also provide a receptive environment where they could genuinely express their feelings and thoughts and receive feedback in a caring and non-judgmental manner. This offers them the opportunity to develop and grow. Boys also discover talents that they never knew they had. Their self-esteem and self-confidence are boosted.

As soon as clients' academic standard is improved they are assisted to move on to the general school system. They are given the opportunity to sit the Grade Nine Achievement Test (GNAT) so that they may go on to regular high school. Clients are helped to rejoin the main school system. Simultaneously, several boys may be referred to the Child Guidance Clinic for psychological assessments, long term counselling and treatment. Similarly, others are assisted to receive medical care. Other referrals are made to agencies which could better serve their needs.

Activities at the Hostel

Children/youths that live in violent communities or face difficult home situations are housed at this facility. The hostel has a capacity to intake 32 boys between the ages of 10 and 18 years. A registration process is required before applicants are considered, which the Hostel Board signs off on. An entrepreneurial component has been introduced at the Hostel, which includes chicken rearing, ornamental fish breeding, and the development of a vegetable garden. This will aid in sustaining the Hostel as well as providing skills for the young men who reside there. The Hostel functions as a family home and each resident must attend school or a training programme daily. They are provided with meals.

Activities at the Skills Training & Empowerment Centre

Located at 4 Hope Road, HEART/NTA is a key partner in this segment. Here youths (ages 15-18) are currently being trained in shoe repair, shoe making, general leather care, remedial education, life skills, conflict resolution, customer service and civic responsibilities. Clients who are unable to rejoin the general school system are referred to the Skills Training and Employment Centre. There they continue to receive remedial education and they are taught a skill. Upon graduation from this programme they are placed into apprenticeship programmes or they are registered in a HEART/NTA programme of their choice. They may also be trained and offered jobs by private sector entities.

The Re-socialization Camp

This aspect of the programme is conducted in partnership with the Jamaica Defence Force (JDF) and is held at their New Castle facility. The Camp provides specific programmes to assist the youths in coming to grips with and controlling anti-social behaviours so that they may be better able to maximize their potential, while effectively contributing to the society. Participants are also encouraged to take part in sporting activities to help in fostering better social skills.