

One Hand Can't Clap!

Greetings from the Social partners of the
CIDA-Boys' Town 15-18 Youth Development Programme
Delivered by **Dr. Alison Cross, Executive Dir., Jamaican Foundation for Lifelong Learning**
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“A child is a promise”, “the youth are our future” We have said it so many times, usually from the comfort of our living rooms, a well-appointed ballroom or in the corridors of academia.

The truth is, we need to disambiguate what that means, and however painful, it bears repeating until we can cauterize the situation and put it under control...SO here is the stark reality of Jamaica's promise, our youngsters in whom our future is vested.

According to the National Labour Force Survey (STATIN 2008), approximately 127,000 Jamaican youngsters ages 14-24 are not in school and are either unemployed, or outside of the labour force. (Roughly 50,000 are unemployed, and just under 80,000 are outside the labour force.)

Considering the school leavers who are likely to be unemployed based on average youth unemployment rates among 16 and 17 year olds we have a population of about 127,000 “unattached” youth. Next month many more will be lining up to march in expensive gowns and suits with well-coiffed hairdos, but fail to make the cut in any test of foundation skills.

The national debate about the state of education is raging – we hear it every day...this is good. Democracy, though loud and often messy, is a good thing, so voices must be heard. What is decidedly unhelpful is the passive blame shifting without concerted action – in fact I think it is the most self defeating thing we can do.

Here is the GREAT news, now that we got that tough talk on the table. Jamaica's diversity is a blessing, and all we have to do is get all hands on deck, whether or not we all agree initially.

Famous American Talk Show host and philanthropist Oprah Winfrey hit it squarely on the head when she opined:

“What I know for sure is that behind every catastrophe, there are great lessons to be learned. Among the many that we as a country need to get is that as long as we play the "us and them" game, we don't evolve as people, as a nation, as a planet.”

Right here in our beloved nation we are blessed to have communities like those served by Boys Town that are RIPE with the promise of a good supply of agile minds and bodies.

We have friendly nations like Canada (through CIDA) which have stood by Jamaica since independence and supported every positive initiative.

We have men and women who have come under the direct or indirect influence of the late great Father Hugh Sherlock and his successors in the Methodist and other churches.

There are strong institutions of government at our disposal, and a growing number of bold advocates in civil society which have become our collective conscience.

In short, collectively WE have what it takes to engage our valuable human resources, shake them from a state of limbo and shape them into fulfilled and productive and lives, ultimately engaging them as active partners in national development.

There is much work to do if Jamaica is to achieve the targeted educational goals – work which cannot be undertaken by any single group or agency.

That is why today we stand as ONE implementation team for this exciting project we launch today by ‘inking’ a Memorandum of Understanding. Within the team we have managed to pool an amazing array of core skills and competencies to feed and support the young beneficiaries.

At the end of the day effective governance is about teamwork and partnership and we will be proving that by working together assiduously. In fact, we are convinced that this is a model that should be replicated across Jamaica to fast track social and community development..

Please join us in the spirit of that old Jamaican saying captured in one recent edition of our national pantomime... *‘Let’s tell it to the world that one hand alone can’t clap!’*

Let’s not just tell them, but show them that we WILL do this, and soon the world will be able to join us in one resounding, sustained round of applause.