



JAMAICA DIASPORA EDUCATION TASK FORCE

IN THE BEGINNING...

Following the 5th Biennial Diaspora Conference held in Montego Bay, Jamaica in June 2013, Jamaicans and friends of Jamaica in the Diaspora from the USA, Canada and UK, under the leadership of the Diaspora Advisory Board Member in the West/Midwest USA, met to discuss using their resources and expertise to support the education system in Jamaica. Thus was born the Jamaica Diaspora Education Task Force (JDETF).

The JDETF, the subsequent nomenclature of the Diaspora delegation and their supporters throughout the Diaspora regions, benefitted from the support, participation and leadership of organizations such as the Union of Jamaican Alumni Associations (UJAA), Jamaica Impact, Inc. (JAMPACT), Jamaica Awareness Association of California, (JAAC), and Sam Sharpe Teachers' College (SSTC).

FIRST STEPS...

Immediately following that first conference call on Sunday, August 11, 2013, the half dozen Diasporans on the call determined that partnership and collaboration with stakeholders in Jamaica must be included in their plans and mission towards contributing to *VISION 2030*. Led by Leo Gilling, the then Advisory Board Member for the West/Mid-West USA, several stakeholders were approached to participate in hosting The Advancement in Education Summit 2014 in Jamaica from February 18 to 21.

SUMMIT 2014...

The Summit was planned essentially as a fact finding mission aimed at listening and learning more about the current state of the education landscape in Jamaica. Under the theme: "Advancing Education Initiative - A Strategic Alliance with the Jamaica Diaspora", the Summit attracted close to 500 attendees, with a wide cross section of the audience from Jamaica and the Diaspora regions around the world. The audience was comprised of:

- Principals - Teachers - Administrators - Counselors - Parents - Students -
- Student Council Executives - Parent Teachers Associations – Guidedance Counselors
- members of the Diaspora.

The primary stakeholders were the Jamaica Teachers' Association (JTA), The Ministry of Education (MoE), The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade (MFAFT), Victoria Mutual Building Society (VMBS).

The end result of the Summit produced the 6-Year Plan to advance education by investing in the future of schools, teachers and students.

THE 6-YEAR PLAN...

ADVANCEMENT IN EDUCATION SUMMIT 2014 SIX YEAR PLAN: The overall purpose of the Education Summit in Jamaica in February 2014 was for the Jamaica Diaspora Education Task Force to acquire sufficient information to develop a 6-year Plan of Action. The plan is focused on improving and supporting educational offerings, thereby ensuring that students and teachers at all levels have the tools to compete in an increasingly globalized community.

GOALS/OBJECTIVES:

- * Encourage the support of education initiatives in Jamaica from private and public commitment in Jamaica and the Diaspora.
- * Provide bursaries/scholarships for students and teachers at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels.
- * Strengthen relationships/linkages with other Diaspora communities - in Canada, the UK and other regions in the USA.
- * Fortify relationships with Friends of the Diaspora in Canada, the UK and other regions of the USA to garner support for the advancement of education in Jamaica.
- * Support Jamaica Association of Guidance Counsellors in Education (JAGCE) with the participation of members of the Diaspora and friends of the Diaspora in workshops and conferences.
- * Introduce programs to educate Diaspora Communities. (With assistance from the necessary government ministries).
- * Facilitate and provide support for Teacher Empowerment programs between JTA and overseas Universities (e.g. Loma Linda University)
- * Raise US\$20 million in Global Fundraiser Projects. (Establish ground work and transparent process)
- * Develop mutual relationships with Tertiary Education Institutions by providing continuing education for principals, teachers and school administrators with emphasis on Leadership
- * Seek professionals/human resources from the Diaspora and friends of the Diaspora to promote the advancement of education in Jamaica.
- * Pursue the administering of USAID Camp Summer Plus Program in collaboration with the Ministry of Education.
- * Assist the appropriate entities in Jamaica to build, repair and enhance schools.
- * Promote among members of the Diaspora the policies for sending educational material/supplies to Jamaica.
- * Foster relationship with the Ministry of Education, Jamaica Teachers' Association and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade in Jamaica in hosting the Biennial Education Summit.

2014 to 2015...SO FAR...

Immediately following Summit 2014, the DETF and the JTA formed an agreement to advance education for students and teachers - engage Diaspora organizations as well as organizations in Jamaica to support the Education Task Force in their commitment to make a difference across the education landscape in Jamaica and provide a forum for empowering teachers in Jamaica.

ExSeed Program Exchange: ExSEED is an innovative and collaborative program designed to enhance integrated STEM education in K-12 schools. The goal is to collaboratively support and empower K-12 educators in teaching STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) disciplines.

Accompanied by the Jamaica Teachers' Association's President and President Elect at that time, five teachers travelled to Loma Linda University in California in the summer of 2014 to take part in a one-week STEM training to learn the methodology of using tablets to teach science in the classrooms of Jamaica. The teachers would return to Jamaica and apply a customised version of the program to their schools learning environment, essentially customizing the program for Jamaica. This exchange program was supported by the Diaspora Education Task Force, the JTA and Dr. Hansel Fletcher, the Assistant Dean of Graduate Student Affairs, Professor and Vice Chairman, Department of Basic Science in the School of Medicine at Loma Linda University. Those teachers are now networked with several teachers and lecturers across the United States, having acquired new skills and competencies.

JTA Labor Day Project: Several organizations and individuals supported this project with financial contributions towards physical upliftments and appliances to Paisley All Age School on the border of St. Andrew and St. Mary, Walkerswood All Age School in St. Ann, Ferguson Basic School in Mandeville and Refuge Primary School in Falmouth.

Food For The Poor: Several meetings and discussions were held in 2014 to engage FFTP as a partner in the Diaspora's intentions to assist in building schools and supporting other projects to be undertaken jointly. They were supportive in the re-building of the Liberty Hill Primary School in St. Ann in 2014.

Jamaica Association of Guidance Counsellors in Jamaica (JAGCE): The DETF participated in several meetings during the planning of their Annual Conference in December 2014. Contact was made and shared with the faculty of Social Work at the Sacramento State University and other universities across the USA. Areas discussed included Self Care, Best Practices, Trauma, among other areas of professional development.

USAID's Camp Summer Plus was started in Jamaica In 2011 by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in collaboration with the Ministry of Education. The program's success led to further support in 2012 and 2013. However, it was on the verge of being cancelled because of a lack of funding when the Diaspora Education Task Force was introduced to Camp Summer Plus during the planning of the Diaspora Education Summit in late 2013.

The Diaspora Education Task Force saw this as an opportunity to provide assistance in their mission to advance education in Jamaica. After making their presentation to and meeting with representatives of USAID/Jamaica, \$250K was assigned to administer and run CSP in 2015 with the Ministry of Education in partnership.

This project is a joint initiative of the Governments of Jamaica and the United States of America monitored by the Ministry of Education and United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The goal of Camp Summer Plus is to improve literacy and numeracy skills among students in the early Grades (1 - 3) as they return to school after the long summer vacation. The promoted Grade 3 students in recent times have performed poorly overall in the Grade Four Literacy Test. Hence, USAID introduced this program to assist those at-risk students.

For five weeks during the summer of 2015, July 6 to August 7, almost 400 Grade 3 students and parents from across 3 camps – Sam Sharpe Teachers’ College in Montego Bay, College of Agriculture, Science and Education (CASE) in Port Antonio, and Cedar Grove Academy in Portmore participated. As part of the education platform to help students achieve goals, careful thought was given to holistic learning. Concepts taught in the academic program were reinforced through enrichment activities in drama, dance, visual arts, physical education, music, and information technology. The selection process began in January 2015 to identify approximately 500 students across the island.

Several individuals and organizations in the Diaspora played a key supportive role in Camp Summer Plus 2015. The Issa Trust, the Organization of International Development, Food For The Poor, and Broward Alliance of Caribbean Educators were key supporters as well, contributing supplies to the health and nutrition components.

The DETF is working towards making CSP an annual program and making it a major part of the goals of their broad plans.

6TH Biennial Jamaica Diaspora Conference Day of Service: Conference 2015 culminated after three days of meetings, with a Diaspora Day of Service, serving communities across the island through a wide variety of projects. Jamaicans around the globe were invited to develop projects and share their skills, time and resources in community projects of their own choosing, anywhere in Jamaica. It was billed as an opportunity where “you can play a role in the positive change you want to see in the lives and circumstances of your fellow Jamaicans.”

The DETF chose to focus on early childhood development: *“Strengthening Capacities for Improved Learning Outcomes”* Presenting partners were the Early Childhood Commission (ECC), JAMPACT, JTA, SSTC and the UJAA

Their service took the form of Early Childhood workshops and student teacher role activity hosted by Sam Sharpe Teachers’ College. Participants from Diaspora organizations presented projects and shared best practices. Also present and participating were school administrators, basic school principals who were our main focus as we needed to hear from them- hear their thoughts and issues thus providing the groundwork and opportunity to create and maintain long lasting relationships so we can work together to build a better Jamaica... starting with our youngest citizens in Jamaica.

We are working with the ECC to include them in the Diaspora Education Task Force 6-Year Plan and including them as another key stakeholder in the collaborations in education.

FUNDRAISING...

The DETF has turned their attention to fundraising when they thought the timing was opportune. This item on the 6-Year Plan is critical to the execution. The hope is to reach out to businesses in and friends of Jamaica and the Diaspora to participate in the advancement of education, to invest in the future of education, and to join the ever growing population of Jamaicans wanting an opportunity to give back.

To date, commitments have not borne fruit as expected. The stakeholders in Jamaica and the Diaspora who were mentioned earlier continue to stand committed to using their resources in support. Nevertheless, the Force continues to discuss ideas and means and to formulate the groundwork of legality, legitimacy and transparency to indicate seriousness, professionalism and commitment to advancing education in Jamaica.

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