

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN OFFENDER TREATMENT: COUNTRY REPORT – JAMAICA

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I. INTRODUCTION

Jamaica, like many developing countries, is faced with its own challenges. Noted among them are high unemployment, a weak economy and high incidences of crime. However, violent crimes have become one of the most pressing concerns for Jamaicans. It has had a negative impact on all spheres of society and has been cited as a significant factor in the low levels of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) recorded by Jamaica over the years. (Vision 2030 Jamaica/National Development Plan, p. 99) The tentacles of crime, which claw their way into every community, negatively affect every individual, either directly or indirectly, and present a valid argument in support of community involvement in the treatment of offenders.

Jamaica's National Development Plan gives consideration to the multiplicity of complex issues surrounding national security, particularly the relationship between law enforcement agencies and communities. The strategies outlined in the plan propose to reform and modernize the law enforcement system, and to strengthen the capacity of communities to participate in creating a safe and secure environment. The aim is to foster greater collaboration among civil society, the private sector and government in implementing and financing the strategies (Extract, Vision 2030).

This paper will: present a brief overview of the Department of Correctional Services and prisons in Jamaica; attempt to explain the current situation of community involvement in offender treatment; outline the possible field of services in which the community can be involved; and propose realistic measures which can be utilized to increase community involvement in the treatment of offenders.

II. DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONAL SERVICES

The Department of Correctional Services (Jamaica) is an arm of the Ministry of National Security and was born out of the amalgamation of the prison services, juvenile facilities and probation unit in 1975. The Department is headed by a Commissioner, whose responsibility is to ensure that government's policy directions for convicted offenders are effectively carried out. He is assisted by a Deputy Commissioner for Custodial Services and a Deputy Commissioner for Human Resource/Community Services. The Mission Statement of the department is a key reminder of the tasks to be accomplished and reads thus: "To contribute to the safety and protection of society by keeping offenders secure and facilitating their rehabilitation and reintegration as law abiding citizens, while developing a professional and committed staff."

The Department of Correctional Services is guided by: The Corrections Act, The Child Care and Protection Act, The Parole Act, and the amended Criminal Justice (Reform) Act which gives legal powers to courts for Community Sentencing. There are 16 probation offices, eight adult institutions and four juvenile facilities in Jamaica. Correctional facilities are classified according security level: maximum, medium and low. The present prison population averages approximately 4,560 inmates daily, with only a small number of females incarcerated.

A review of prison conditions in Jamaica will reveal excessive overcrowding, a large number of inmates who are uneducated and unskilled, limited educational and vocational training programmes for inmates, old

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and deteriorating physical structures, staff shortages and dwindling financial resources.

As custodians of offenders, custodial managers are cognizant that most, if not all, inmates in correctional facilities will one day return to open society. Therefore, it is important that the bond between correctional institutions and the community remains strong and unbroken for the successful rehabilitation and eventual reintegration of inmates into open society.

III. CURRENT SITUATION OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN OFFENDER TREATMENT

Community involvement in Jamaica during the past was usually limited to contributions of cash and kind which supported the welfare needs of inmates and the provision of vocational and educational training. However, in recent years there has been an increase in the number of organizations and individuals who are volunteering their time and skills towards the treatment of offenders.

Community contributions can be classified into three broad areas: educational/vocational training, welfare needs, and purposeful activities. The main contributors who support the government's effort towards the treatment of offenders are the private sector and nongovernmental organizations, international organizations, religious and faith-based groups, individual volunteers and family members of convicted inmates.

A. Family Units Providing Emotional and Physical Support

The family unit is recognized as one of the strongest pillars of the support system in penal facilities, and cannot be overlooked, because of the emotional and physical support it provides for the treatment of offenders. Family visits are regular and are significantly increased during holiday seasons. Although no research has been carried out in our penal facilities, it is noted that inmates who receive consistent family support generally show improved behaviour and are the least likely to reoffend.

Increased family involvement is encouraged through the hosting of bi-annual '*Family Days*' on the grounds of some institutions. This provides the opportunity for incarcerated inmates to interact and bond with their children, a situation which otherwise would not be allowed.

Research by: Hairston (1988: 1991), Dowden and Andrews (1999), Slaght (1999), have pointed to the importance of family support and its positive impact on individuals, during and after incarceration. According to Harriston (2001), questions are being raised about the impact of imprisonment on children and families and the extent to which families might be resources and assets, rather than liabilities, in promoting safer, resourceful communities.

B. Private Sector and Non-governmental Organizations' Involvement

Members of private sector organizations give much needed, but limited, contributions towards treatment of offenders. Many correctional institutions are located in urban areas in the midst of big businesses, where needs are quite visible. However, only a few private sector organizations contribute in any meaningful way to the treatment of offenders. The level of contributions from the private sector may be influenced by the high incidences of violent crimes committed by offenders and its adverse effects on society.

Total contributions from external stakeholders in 2007 was valued at JA\$32,791,525. Donations are usually of kind, such as food items, hygiene kits, computer equipment and bedding.

1. Inmates' Public Work Programme

One area of community involvement that receives some support from the private sector is the Inmates' Public Work Programme, dubbed '*Highway 2000*'. The programme utilizes the skills of inmates to maintain the aesthetic appeal of public spaces. Teams of inmates are tasked with maintaining one of the country's major highways, and the National Heroes Park, where the remains of some of Jamaica's national heroes and former Prime Ministers are laid to rest. Due to the success of the programme it was extended in 2007 to five of the country's fourteen parishes.

The inmates' work programme not only provides meaningful activities for inmates, but it also creates an opportunity for them to give back to the community. While a vacuum exists for greater contribution from the

private sector, the support for the programme is viewed as a step in the right direction.

2. Food for the Poor – Donations, and Provision of Housing and Welfare

Contributions from non-governmental organizations towards offender treatment are significant. Of the JA\$32,791,525 mentioned above, JA\$29,274,178 was donated by the non-profit organization, Food for the Poor (DCS Annual Report, 2007). It is to be noted that the overall amount indicated above does not capture the total assistance provided by Food for the Poor.

In addition, Food for the Poor provides assistance to ex-prisoners to assist in their reintegration. Assistance is given in the form of housing structures, tools and equipment. Except for rehabilitation grants provided by government, which will be mentioned later, Food for the Poor is the only organization which provides welfare support to ex-offenders.

3. Athletes – Sports as a Vehicle for Change

The use of cricket to help disadvantaged children turn away from a life of crime was first conceived by Mr. Mikey Thompson, a Jamaican cricket coach who grew up in North London. It was introduced into the prisons by the Courtney Walsh Foundation in 2009. Courtney Walsh was a successful fast bowler on the West Indies Cricket Team and is one of cricket's stalwarts. He and his team conduct coaching clinics for inmates at the Tower Street Adult Correctional Centre. Certificates are issued to inmates who successfully complete the programme, and those who have excelled have been recruited by cricket clubs upon their release.

4. Students Expressing Truth – Capacity Building

Students Expressing Truth (SET) is the brainchild of Mr. Kevin Wallen, a motivational speaker. The concept is geared towards channelling inmates' capacity and leadership skills into purposeful activities, while moulding them into becoming responsible citizens. It was first introduced at the Tower Street Adult Correctional Centre and has since been expanded to the Fort Augusta and St. Catherine Adult Correctional Centres and Rio Cobre Juvenile Facility.

The SET programme involves a group of inmates who are selected from among their peers to be role models for the wider prison population. The group is closely supervised by correctional officers and a coordinator who provides guidance and support. A Board is appointed and committees formed to manage the group's activities. A popular committee established at all institutions is the Sports Committee which organizes competitions such as domino, netball and in-house football. SET members meet once monthly and at each session a topical issue is discussed. Members are given training in peer counselling, mediation and conflict resolution.

The SET programme at the Tower Street Adult Correctional Centre also operates the FREE FM (Fostering Rehabilitation, Education and Entertainment) Radio Station which is aired within the confines of the institution, but can be heard on the worldwide web. The radio station disseminates useful information and provides healthy and responsible entertainment for the general population.

5. Religious Volunteers

The chaplaincy unit was established as a support service in the Department of Correctional Services and as a means of broadening its scope to achieve a more effective and efficient rehabilitation programme. In addition to the provision of counselling and spiritual nurturing, chaplains assist custodial managers to coordinate activities of church groups and other faith-based organizations.

Religious volunteers give significant contribution to the treatment of offenders through spiritual counselling and provision of welfare items to the neediest of inmates. Regular religious services are conducted by local church groups, and in 2007, 65 inmates from five institutions responded to the (Christian) Gospel through water baptism.

C. International Cooperation

1. Multi-faceted Approach by the Department for Individual Development, the UK

The Department for International Development (DFID), a department of the UK government, has taken a multi-faceted approach to offender treatment and is currently facilitating developmental training courses

and seminars for persons working in the department.

Beneficiaries of the courses include Administrators from the department's head office, Probation Aftercare Officers and Senior Correctional Officers. One of the main areas of training is the International Standards for the Treatment of Prisoners to which Jamaica is a signatory at the United Nations Convention. In addition to developmental courses, the organization is improving the infrastructural capacity of the department to make it more effective.

DFID also funded repairs to buildings. Correctional personnel benefited from a refurbished staff college with an improved environment more conducive to learning. Skill areas for inmates were expanded and retooled, the hostel, which is a halfway home for inmates was refurbished, and a visitors' waiting area was built at the Tower Street Adult Correctional Centre.

2. 'Hush the Gun' - Combining Literacy with Skills Training

'*Hush the Gun*' is a behaviour modification programme sponsored by The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). It is aimed at quieting the guns in violent communities and was introduced at the Tower Street Adult Correctional Centre in 2007. The programme targets illiterate and unskilled inmates and combines literacy and skill training to equip inmates for the job market upon their release. The programme is being supplemented by Springboard, a component of DFID.

D. Volunteerism Helping to Improve Accountability

A team of volunteers from a wide cross section of society offers their services in time and effort aimed at ensuring transparency and accountability in correctional institutions. These volunteers are appointed to committees referred to as the *Board of Visitors* and are legislated by the *Corrections (Board of Visitors) Regulations, 1991* to inspect correctional facilities (juvenile/adult), and to hear and intervene into complaints made by inmates. Annual reports are then submitted to the Minister of National Security.

Judges and magistrates are also encouraged to make at least one yearly visit to penal facilities, but this rarely happens.

E. Consultative Approach in Decision Making

The community services unit within the Department of Correctional Services deals expressly with community corrections. The unit supervises offenders who are given non-custodial sentences to reduce reoffending, thereby assisting offenders' integration into society. Parole Aftercare Officers attached to the unit investigate and prepare Social Enquiry Reports for Courts and Parole Board, prior to a sentencing hearing or parole consideration.

Community responses form an integral part of Social Enquiry Reports and require community participation in a consultative capacity. Information supplied by the community includes: victim's views about the crime committed and feelings toward the offender, attitude and behaviour of offender prior to incarceration, and likelihood of the offender reoffending if he returns to society. Participation of community members in this decision-making process can also be a means of encouraging community members to exert social pressure to encourage ex-offenders to conform to acceptable standards.

Figures taken from the Department of Corrections Annual Report, 2008 shows a total of 8,451 reports completed in 2008, a 9.2% increase over the previous year.

F. Community Service Order

Community Service Orders (CSO) given to non-violent offenders provide an alternative to custodial sentencing and require fewer resources. The cost to government is significantly lower to maintain non-custodial clients when compared to custodial clients. With already dwindling financial resources, savings can be diverted towards rehabilitation programmes. Figures show that in the year 2008 to 2009 it cost the government approximately JA\$776,723 less per annum to maintain *each* non-custodial client (DCS Annual Report, 2008 p. 15).

Table 1

Inmates	\$863,786.50 per annum
Juveniles	\$764,286.68 per annum
Remandees	\$570,323.52 per annum
Non Custodial Clients	\$87,063.77 per annum

Cost of Maintaining Custodial and Non-Custodial Clients: 2008 – 2009

“Many offenders, including those who are drug addicted, may be dealt with in a more efficient, humane and economic manner” (Day, 2007). A CSO is multi-faceted as it holds offenders accountable for the harm they have caused to the community; provides communities with human resources that can improve the quality of life in public environments; and helps offenders develop new skills through supervised work activities. CSOs assist the ‘at-risk’ juvenile population into becoming productive citizens and living a more meaningful life. It is also well suited in preventing first time offenders from being admitted to correctional institutions and coming into contact with so-called ‘hardened’ criminals, as well as the reduction of recidivism.

In 2007, 793 Community Service Orders were issued by the courts in Jamaica (DCS Annual Report, 2007).

IV. POSSIBILITIES AND OBSTACLES

A. Possible Fields of Services in which the Community can be Involved

1. Introduction of Advisory Committees

A number of jurisdictions, including Australia and Canada, introduced advisory and consultative committees to develop and foster links with the local community on a range of matters, or to build community links and address public concerns with respect to prison security and prison management. (Record of the 20th APCCA). It was reported that this approach reaped success; therefore it could be further examined by the Jamaican government with a view to having retired senior managers from DCS volunteering their services on the board. Former employees of the Department are recommended because of their wealth of experience and as a means of exercising quality control.

2. Extending Social Agencies Assistance

The successful reintegration of offenders into society is sometimes hampered by lack of social support systems. As a means of social investment, social welfare organizations should extend the benefits of the National Health Fund and PATH Programme to offenders upon the first six months of their release.

3. Certification of Training Programmes

A large number of incarcerated inmates are from a low socio-economic background, uneducated and unskilled. Programmes of rehabilitation in confined environments must be geared towards assisting offenders in improving their social status in life. Using a popular adage, “*teach a man to fish, and feed him for life – give him a fish, and feed him for a day*”.

Educational programmes and skills training offered in the institution include, but are not limited to, computer courses, carpentry, welding and woodwork. The certification of candidates upon successful completion of the courses will improve the effectiveness and efficiency of these training programmes. Certification, though not an end in itself, offers that important link to improving offenders’ marketability, thereby increasing their chances in the job market. Collaboration between DCS and the Human Education and Resource Training/National Training Academy (HEART/NTA) provides such an opportunity.

4. The Role of the Media

The role of the media is critical to information sharing and should be harnessed as a partner in the rehabilitation process, and in helping to change public perception. However, managers of Correctional Services must also develop marketing strategies that can assist in changing public attitudes towards offenders.

B. Obstacles to Community Involvement

1. High Level of Fear and Stigma

Several factors impinge on government’s effort at mobilizing community support in the treatment of offenders. Of significance are the stigmas attached to the high level of fear of offenders in society, and a general lack of trust in rehabilitated inmates. Despite the majority of offenders not returning to prison, many persons remain skeptical of reformed inmates.

The steady increase in the incidences of violent crime in the country has heightened this fear. In 2008, of a total of 1,849 inmates admitted to penal facilities, 515 were reoffenders. The rate of recidivism in 2008 stood at 28%, an increase of 7% over the previous year (See Tables 2 and 3 below).

(i) Recidivism

The Department of Correctional Services currently measures recidivism based on the number of times that an offender re-enters its care and custody having been brought before the court and sentenced to a correctional facility. Aware of the need to be consistent with international practice, a review is underway to redefine the indicators. The review will take into consideration, among other things, a time frame during which an offender is considered to have reoffended.

Table 2 Recidivism by Age and Institution – January to December 2008

	TOWER STREET A.C.C					ST. CATHERINE A.C.C					FORT AUGUSTA A.C.C					GRAND TOTAL
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	Total	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	Total	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	Total	
Under 17	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
17 – 20	4	0	0	0	4	8	0	0	0	8	0	0	0	0	0	12
21 – 25	16	3	0	0	19	36	6	1	0	43	0	0	0	0	0	62
26 – 30	16	4	0	1	21	28	10	9	2	49	0	2	0	0	2	72
31 – 35	6	6	3	7	22	37	16	17	1	71	1	0	1	1	3	96
36 – 40	15	8	2	6	31	37	10	19	5	71	0	0	0	0	0	102
41 – 45	2	2	2	5	11	21	13	24	7	65	8	0	1	0	9	85
46 & Over	4	2	2	5	13	29	15	19	8	71	2	0	0	0	2	86
TOTAL	63	25	9	24	121	196	70	89	23	378	11	2	2	1	16	515

Table 3

SEX	REOFFENDERS ADMITTED TO ADULT				
	INSITUTIONS BY SEX 2004 - 2008				
	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
MALE	628	437	487	371	499
FEMALE	5	8	9	11	16
TOTAL	633	445	496	382	515
Reoffending Rate	29%	24%	24%	21%	28%

Five hundred and fifteen (515) reoffenders were admitted in 2008, an increase of 133 or 35% more than 2007 (382). The age cohort 21–45 accounted for 332 or 64% reoffenders.

The reoffending rate has increased from 21% in 2007 to 28% in 2008.

2. Public Image

A poor public image of prisons and prisoners remains one of the greatest challenges in the ability to attract community support. This image is often encouraged by a media slanted towards sensationalism, which often neglects to highlight positive aspects of incarceration. Media coverage of activities in prison is usually limited to escapes, riots, violent deaths or controversial situations. Negative media coverage does very little to promote community involvement.

3. Competitive Environment

The challenges are further heightened in a competitive environment where community involvement in the treatment of offenders must compete with more attractive causes such as children, the elderly, and physical and mentally challenged groups.

In a country where unemployment is high, employers become even more reluctant to engage the services of ex-convicts. The situation for the offender is further worsened in a recession, where resources are negatively impacted.

V. MEASURES TO ENHANCE COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN THE TREATMENT OF OFFENDERS

A. Increasing Public Awareness through 'Corrections Week'

The Department in its effort to improve its public image and strengthen the link between institutions and community has dedicated the last week of October each year as '*Corrections Week*'.

Activities are conducted throughout the week help to increase public awareness and minimize negative perceptions held by the public, while providing a platform to encourage and foster greater community involvement. Highlights of the week include: a church service, panel discussion, debate competition, sports day, award function and an exposition which showcases a wide variety of items produced by inmates. Items are sold to the public and proceeds used to support rehabilitation programmes.

But, more significantly to the display and selling of items, is the unconscious, but emotional link which it forges between the producers and buyers with heightened interest between inmates and the wider community.

B. Rehabilitation Grants

The government, in recognizing the difficulties inmates experience in reintegrating into their communities, provides welfare assistance in the form of rehabilitation grants. These are given to inmates who are released from prison and have exhibited interest and the necessary skills required to become self-sufficient.

C. Restorative Justice

Global trends are pointing towards the concept of Restorative Justice as a useful strategy for increasing community involvement, while reducing the level of crime. Managers of Correctional Services must consider the value and benefits of this new strategy, as the way forward.

VI. CONCLUSION

Community involvement has long been recognized by the government of Jamaica as an important element for the prevention of crime, and the successful rehabilitation and integration of offenders.

The challenge however, though not insurmountable, is to identify, motivate and harness the commitment of stakeholders to contribute their time, resources and efforts into assisting offenders to lead productive lives. According to Marcus Day, 2007 "...the fight against crime is not just a matter for professionals employed by the state, but also for elected politicians, local authorities and the voluntary sector".

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