



# Connekt

The newsletter of the Youth Network for Drug Abuse Prevention

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## Training Workshop on Needs Assessment and Programme Planning for the Caribbean 21-24 January, Bridgetown, Barbados

The last of our regional workshops on needs assessment and programme planning was held in Barbados earlier this year. This workshop marked the end of the first training phase of the Global Youth Network project. We have now trained over 100 youth and youth workers in the participatory techniques of needs assessment and programme planning across South Asia (New Delhi), Central and Eastern Europe (Sigulda, Latvia), South-east Asia (Bangkok) and Eastern Africa (Nairobi).

The training was broadly based on the module developed for us by Dr. Harinder Sethi from India. This particular training module included a visit to Deacons Farm, a poor community near Bridgetown, to try out some assess-



ment techniques and to develop and present fictitious project proposals. Youth groups from 12 countries were represented, including Anguilla, Barbados, Antigua, Belize, Dominica, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Montserrat, St Kitts, St Lucia, and Trinidad and Tobago. Giovanna Campello, coordinator of the UNODC/WHO global initiative on primary prevention, and I conducted the workshop, and Ms. Rania Karam of UNODC in Barbados coordinated the event. CARICOM and the National Council on Substance Abuse were cosponsors for this meeting and were represented by Dr. Heather Johnson and Ms. Paulavette Atkinson, respectively.

What did we do? Well, as usual, we covered various techniques of needs assessment, like role-plays, interviews, focus group discussions and observation, and we practiced developing a project proposal and presenting it effectively.

Highlights of the five-day meeting included two remarkable presentations, one from Ms. Victoria Beecher, clinical director of the Verdun House treatment and rehabilitation facility in Barbados, and the other from Mr. Richard Carter, director of Youth Affairs, Government of Barbados. Victoria spoke about the methods used in their programme to reach out and help addicts according to their individual needs. She spoke about her life and how it led to the creation of this facility and to its very philosophy. Richard gave a talk on the subject of youth culture, particularly music and the links with violence, crime and drugs. He played some popular songs from the Caribbean, and for the not-so-young in the audience, he translated the patois into English. While most of us thinking people do acknowledge the violent content of mainstream "artists" like Eminem, I, at least, was completely taken aback at the violence of the lyrics when I really listened to them.



The shared common culture and heritage of all the youth participants proved to be a great source of cohesion, allowing the group work to go smoothly.

As one of the follow-up activities, it was proposed that under the stewardship of Dr. Heather Johnson, we would find ways to attain regional consensus on using the training module for youth and youth workers across sectors.

On a personal note, conducting these trainings has been a rewarding experience for me. I have learned so much from working with the youth participants and trying to adapt the training materials to the specific needs of each region, often to comical effect! I would like to say Thank You to all of you who participated in the trainings,

and I hope we will meet again sometime.

Gautam Babbar, UNODC

# VERDUN HOUSE – *A place of healing from addiction*

Often when we try to talk about “harm reduction” with prevention and treatment activists, we encounter what we think is a misunderstanding about what it implies for us at Verdun House. In this commentary, I shall try and clarify our position and show how the continuum of care we provide for substance abusers in our communities relates and combines with some of the harm reduction strategies.

The multidisciplinary treatment team at Verdun House provide a supportive environment where over 40 men and women can build a foundation for their recovery efforts and integrate the necessary behavioural changes to work towards the goal of long-term abstinence from substance abuse and other maladaptive behaviours.

Since every individual is unique, each person is encouraged to engage in an individualized therapeutic 12-week process followed by an extended period in our halfway house to accomplish the transition to a sober lifestyle.

Among other things, group therapy, lectures, peer interaction, individual counselling, treatment planning, relapse prevention and a new vocational skills training program provide much of the basis for spiritual awakening, growth and guidance to assist each individual. Attention is given to HIV/AIDS education, parenting guidance and life skills.

## What is harm reduction – and how does it relate to Verdun House?

“Harm reduction is a public health approach to dealing with drug-related issues that places first priority on reducing the negative consequences of drug use”. (US Harm Reduction Coalition).

Developed in response to the emergence of AIDS, linked to drug use through sharing of needles, countries

believed that the dangers of the spread of AIDS among drug users and from drug users into the general population posed a greater threat to health than the dangers of drug use itself. Harm reduction then emerged as an alternative approach to abstinence-based programmes that were unavailable to the majority of substance abusing individuals.

Almost any policy or programme designed along the continuum of care to address the impact of the use of substances can be deemed as harm reduction.

- However, the strategies of European and US based harm reduction tend to focus on reducing the adverse consequences among persons who cannot be expected to cease their use of drugs at that moment in time. The majority of harm reduction strategies were implemented for individuals primarily using heroin – very different approaches are needed for crack cocaine, the drug of choice in the Caribbean.



Serenity prayer in garden

*Harm reduction approaches are often the first step towards the eventual cessation of drug use.*

Fundamental harm reduction advocates do not believe or wish to focus on this aspect, but we in the Caribbean have the ability to shape our own future. It has been proven that if we elongate the span of professional-to-client contact, we increase the chances of eventual abstinence.



Norman + Victoria Beecher

In the Caribbean, we must focus on harm reduction strategies that simply allow us to engage with individuals early enough to reduce the harm that drugs cause. The effort is to offer long-term sobriety as an eventual priority, and ensure adequate health when that decision is made. Also, that the harm these individuals have caused others is kept to an absolute minimum.

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- Any strategy targeting high-risk groups is a harm reduction approach where the immediate focus is not on abstinence but on engaging their awareness.
- Street outreach programmes are a classic and intrinsic part of the continuum of care vital to all of our communities as the focus is on meeting the needs of the drug abusers where they are, – a core focus of harm reduction strategies.
- Relapse prevention programmes offer strategies to reduce the risk of extreme crisis caused by prolonged returns to chaotic drug use.

**Where do we go from here?**

We at Verdun House intend to work towards abstinence from all mood altering chemicals and an improved quality of life for the individuals we serve. We are currently:

- Developing a vocational skills training project
- Strengthening all residential levels of care
- Redesigning our programmes for women
- Embarking upon the delivery of a counsellor training programme
- Gaining accreditation for our programme

We anticipate in the very near future to:

- Network to provide street outreach services
- Liaise with the judiciary to provide drug treatment court services
- Provide residential care for females and their infant children

Verdun House is already recognized as a pioneer in this region. Addicts are amongst the most marginalized group in the community and attract very little support and sympathy.

**Victoria Beecher**  
**ICADC**

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Staff in front of plantation house



Clients at play



The primary care building



Farming



Utilization of horses for equine therapy

# Socialization of Jamaica's Young Men

## Drugs and Guns

"Me nuh press button, me press trigger." Boys can be seen riding the rhythm of these famous dub lyrics as they make their way through the squalor, zinc fences, shacks and dirt bowls that reflect the poverty of their societies and the depravation of their landscape.

As a Jamaican postgraduate researcher studying at the University of Hong Kong, I had the opportunity to spend four months with 20 young boys between the ages of 10 and 17 in a depressed Kingston community. I was interested in exploring the daily features of a young boy's life to see how his identity and his notion of becoming a man took shape. More interestingly, I wanted to see how he made the transition into involvement with violence and guns, which are the tools of the global drug trade.

Youth are confronted with a lack of adequate resources and proper health care; and minimal education, poor family relations and absentee mothers and fathers.

Adolescent boys growing up in the inner city communities of Kingston are exposed on a daily basis to harsh economic and social conditions. This environment also involves early exposure to crime and violence. Boys must deal with a lack of adequate resources and proper health care, minimal education, poor family relations and absentee parents. In addition, they have to learn rules, codes and games of survival to reside in communities where guns and drugs dominate the landscape.

In this environment, some boys make their way into a life of crime, acquiring from it a sense of identity, power and economic security. They may first affiliate with a "crew" that can eventually develop into a gang. If allowed to progress, members can become "shottas" or contract killers linked to organized crime.

Understanding the evolution of boy to man, and the process from crew, to gang, to *shotta*, to organized crime syndicate, is an important part of defining the context in which an adolescent boy's identity is shaped. Not every boy in the inner city makes his way through this transition, and movement from crew to gang is also not a certainty. Crews can dissolve as the boys grow older, mature and find meaningful direction to their lives. However, as the need to sustain a type of life-style sets in, crews can evolve into gangs.

It is far easier to ride this tide to economic power, which is strongly tied to gaining manhood.

It is a fact that a large proportion of Jamaica's criminals are youths. These young men are often unemployed and have dropped out of school as early as 13.

The socialization of these young men comes at the hands of their peer groups and other area leaders who often include *shottas*. When asked, "Where do you get your idea of what a man is?", the 20 adolescent boys of my study in Kingston's inner city often answered, "Follow what other man do a road", or "I follow what other men do on the road".

Experts from Jamaica's Organized Crime Unit (OCU) suggest that violent gangs result from too many boys on the streets without positive direction. According to OCU, the boys who escape crime do so because they have fathers who are involved in their lives. Those without proper guidance are often left with the rites of passage provided by the inner city, which include gun toting, gang rapes and contract killing. The adolescent boy is offered very little from his community in the way of viable options. According to my 14-year-old informants, gaining respect is an important pathway to manhood, and this respect is often contingent on violence and the willingness to kill.

From my time spent in the inner city and from discussions with young boys, their parents and other community residents, young men involved in crime in Kingston's inner city have been unable to negotiate a healthy transition into manhood. They have had their identity constructed very early around violence. Possessing no skills, little education



and a low self-esteem, these youths only find it possible to be economically successful and gain a sense of manhood by becoming shottas and/or narco-traffickers, often before age 30, which is also the end of their lifespan for many as a consequence of gun warfare and HIV/AIDS.

As social scientists and criminologists, we have to look at the transition into manhood more seriously. One way of doing this it to use qualitative data gathered through anthropological and ethnographic methods to find solutions to the growing crime problem in which young men are choosing violence as a way to achieve a sense of identity, social acceptance and economic stability.

The author is a past programme officer of UNODC's Caribbean Regional Office and is currently pursuing post-graduate studies at the University of Hong Kong, Centre For Criminology, specializing in gang violence in Jamaica.

Dianne McIntosh

## Shelter Don Bosco, Mumbai, India

Behind every child who lives on the street is a story. And most often, it is a story of desperate flight from physical and/or mental abuse, and indeed, from hopeless circumstances. Every street child has a reason for being on the streets. While some are lured by the promise of excitement and freedom, the majority are pushed onto the street by desperation and a realization that they have nowhere else to go. What is obvious is that street children are poverty-stricken and their problems arise from wanting to meet basic needs for survival.

The street has its own security, unwritten norms and survival modes. A street child is vulnerable to a complex array of influences: physical, social, relational and environmental. In his vulnerability, he makes a variety of attempts at survival, using a variety of coping strategies, usually those that are detrimental to his well-being, such as gambling, promiscuity, and drug use.

Drug consumption is not a physiological necessity, but a survival strategy. A street child's drug consumption is not a marginalizing element among his peers, neither is it problematic. Rather, it is something that brings him acceptance and initiates him into mainstream street culture.

Shelter Don Bosco, an NGO under the Salesians of Don Bosco, Mumbai, has been working for roofless and rootless street children since 1987. Over these years, various projects including, an open house for children, a residential home, a street community college, pavement 'khelwadis' (playschools), monthly 'melas' (fairs), outreach programmes (i.e. regular scouting for street children at stations and other common hangouts, counselling, etc.), a drop-in centre and an HIV/AIDS prevention programme have been initiated. Each of these activities emerged in response to a need expressed by the children.



One area or need, however, that has remained unaddressed is services for street children/youth who were victims of drug addiction. Mr. Russel Rozario (social worker, Shelter Don Bosco Therapeutic Community) observes, "eight out of 10 children on the street fall victim to drugs". In response, Shelter Don Bosco planned a new intervention to rehabilitate street addicts in a holistic manner keeping in mind their needs and potentials.

Thus began the Drug Rehabilitation Project following a non-institutional, therapeutic community approach. The essence of this programme is that its primary aim is not just to get the street addict "off drugs", but rather, more holistically, to get him "off the streets", from dependence to independence and responsibility, from self-worthlessness and hopelessness to self-worth and a bright future. The programme believes in building the street child's self-esteem and confidence.

The programme tries to follow five connected steps or phases, each of which is participatory in nature. It is the motivation on the part of the individual that is the key to the entire programme.

The approach has its individual as well as collective dimensions. Individuals are encouraged to move to socially acceptable patterns of living through their personal resolve and potential within a peer environment that is supportive and collectively growing.

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[www.youthspeaks.org](http://www.youthspeaks.org). Youth Speaks is the premier youth poetry, spoken word and creative writing web site in the US. Youth Speaks has set a new standard for young people and the word.

[www.drugscope.org.uk](http://www.drugscope.org.uk). This site provides quality drug information, promotes effective responses to drug taking, undertakes research at local, national and international levels, advises on policy-making, encourages informed debate and speaks for member organizations working on the ground.

[www.drugprevent.org.uk](http://www.drugprevent.org.uk). The National Drug Prevention Alliance (NDPA) promotes effective policies, using all the means available to its members, including prevention, education, intervention, treatment and legal processes.

**DISCLAIMER** Highlighting non-UN events and web sites in this newsletter does not imply endorsement by UNODC. These sites are provided here as a resource for young people and youth workers. The views expressed in these sites are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the policies or views of UNODC.

# EVENTS

## 4th International Information Communication Technologies in Education, 3 July 2003, Samos Island, Greece.

The conference will offer keynote and plenary sessions, and workshops with internationally recognized educators and researchers in the theoretical and practical applications of technology in education. ICICTE 2003 will be an integrated event offering collaborative opportunities to educators, administrators, IT specialists and others from all levels of education, from primary through post secondary.

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## The International Essay Contest for Young People.

Organized by the Goi Peace Foundation on the following theme: "My vision for the future."

What are your hopes and dreams for your future and the future of our world? Young people around the world are invited to submit their creative ideas on this theme by 30 June 2003.

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## Africa-Canada Youth Symposium for Leadership in Development, 22-27 July 2003, St. Francis Xavier University, Antigonish, Nova Scotia, Canada.

The Africa-Canada Youth Symposium for Leadership in Development will bring together 70 African and Canadian youth leaders committed to building effective, youth-friendly strategies to tackle issues that youths are facing throughout the world—issues such as HIV/AIDS, the environment, peacebuilding and economic development.

The symposium will provide youths with skills to build their capacities as effective leaders in development, as well as opportunities to share best practices, strengthen their understanding of the development context and foster a deeper personal commitment to a just society.

This is your newsletter. Tell us how we can improve it and what you would like to read about. Send us your comments and suggestions at the address given above.

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