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JASL Jamaica AIDS
Support For Life
Love. Action. Support.

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- *The final curtain call for outstanding former JASL director, Aston Cooke, and his contribution to the landscape*
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JASL: CREATING LIVELIHOODS FOR WOMEN LIVING WITH HIV & AIDS

HIV & AIDS can intensify the vulnerabilities for an individual where there are already meager resources to manage the condition.

For women and children, those vulnerabilities are further elevated where the woman has no job and is dependent on her partner to provide for her.

Inability to adhere to treatment regimen, intimate partner violence and child abuse are just a few of the challenges that are known to arise, and which Jamaica AIDS Support For Life has sought to respond.

Through a project, titled, 'Building Women's Capacity to Secure Economic Livelihoods to Reduce Vulnerability to Violence in the context

of HIV & AIDS', funded by UN Women, 14 women living with HIV (WLHIV), who have experienced gender-based violence, were recently given a chance to start their own businesses.

The women who were selected from a cohort of 22, received training in entrepreneurship and mentorship over an eight week period, before being awarded grants to assist them in their small businesses.

Project Assistant Nicola Sybliss, at a session earlier this year, encouraged the women to seek ways to achieve success in their businesses

Turn to Women Entrepreneurs on Page 3



Project Assistant of the women's entrepreneurship programme, Nicola Sybliss, guides participants through their commitments at a recent certificate handover session at Jamaica AIDS Support For Life's newly renovated wellness centre in Kingston. The project, titled 'Building Women's Capacity to Secure Economic Livelihoods to Reduce Vulnerability to Violence in the context of HIV & AIDS', is funded by UN Women.



Jamaica AIDS Support For Life

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Jamaica AIDS Support for Life (JASL) is the largest and longest-serving HIV-focused NGO in Jamaica. The contents of the newsletter are the responsibility of JASL and do not necessarily reflect the views of donor agencies supporting the organisation.

LEGAL SUPPORT UNIT SECURES JUSTICE FOR PLHIV, RESTORES DIGNITY

A YEAR AGO, Lennox Johnston* was ready to give up on life after single a rumour at his workplace nearly cost him his job and his sanity.

It all started after Lennox began to lose weight and show signs of ill-health. A female security guard, determining Lennox had to be HIV-positive, started spreading rumours he did.

She and other members of staff began discriminating against Lennox, wiping areas he'd touched within the workplace and taunting him daily with a string of derogatory names. She also warned others to stay away from Lennox because of his perceived HIV status.

Repeated complaints by Lennox to his human resources manager only made matters worse for the 40-something year-old, who was given a letter of warning for misconduct.

Lennox, a JASL client of ten years, filed a complaint with its legal unit, which provided him with the necessary support.

During that time, Lennox's work environment had become hostile, to the point where he dreaded going to work.

An official complaint by JASL to the woman's employer saw her returning to work with more venom, and so the derogatory names and taunts grew worse.

"I wasn't sleeping. I came off the medication totally. The doctor had to change it after. Because of the stress I was going through, mi just seh 'better me dead and done.'"

By now Lennox was now showing signs of stress. He was unable to eat or stay focused on the job. He had stopped taking his medication, which caused his health to deteriorate. His CD4 had dropped precipitously and he was barely sleeping at nights.

"I wasn't sleeping. I came off the medication totally. The doctor had to change it after. Because of the stress I was going through, mi just seh 'better me dead and done'," Lennox revealed.

But "the treatment team, Marilyn and Patrick and the doctor encouraged me. Mr. Lalor advised me not to quit my job. ... Marilyn call me actually every day: 'Stay focused, Lennox, I know it's hard, but try not to be stressed out because it will



only make you sick', shi tell me," Lennox said.

After several attempts at getting justice for Lennox, the offending party was eventually removed from the company in one of two undertakings arrived at by JASL and Lennox's workplace—sever the contract with the security company to which the offending party is employed or have her re-assigned to another organisation.

"Today, Lennox, who is "100 per cent better" has regained weight, his CD4 is under control and he is back to his old self.

Stressful situations such as those brought on by stigma and discrimination can make it difficult for people living with HIV to adhere to their treatment regimen.

This can have life-altering repercussions for their health outcomes and could even lead to death.

"There's still rumour, but I don't care," says Lennox, who has received justice and had his dignity restored. He believes JASL's intervention is responsible for the change he has seen in his manager, whom he says, now talks freely with him and has even asked him for water to drink on a number of occasions.

Lennox has some advice for employees and employers alike who discriminate against persons living with HIV & AIDS.

"Don't try to scorn them or beat them

touching a gate or something that they touch.

HIV, the virus that leads to AIDS, is contracted through body fluids during sexual intercourse, blood transfusion, the sharing of needles and breast milk.

The National Workplace Policy on HIV & AIDS sets out to address issues such as stigma and discrimination before and during employment. With the policy, however, remaining voluntary, only a handful of organisations have signed on some twenty years after it was developed.

"The treatment team, Marilyn and Patrick and the doctor encouraged me. Mr. Lalor advised me not to quit my job... Marilyn call me actually every day: 'Stay focused, Lennox, I know its hard, but try not be stressed out because it will only make you sick.'"

At a 2016 high-level meeting on ending AIDS, Jamaica, along with its counterparts, pledged to strengthen and endorse the employment of the Workplace Policy on HIV & AIDS.

That meeting called for employers and trade unions to take measures to eliminate stigma and discrimination, promote human rights and facilitate access to essential HIV treatment, prevention and support♦



DATA PROTECTION ACT A REAL CONCERN FOR HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS

WITH THE ENACTMENT of the Data Protection Act high on the government's agenda, Jamaica AIDS Support for Life (JASL), earlier this year, hosted a multi-stakeholder consultation with healthcare professionals to examine the implications of the Act on the health sector and put forward recommendations for how the sector should operate once the Bill becomes law.

The consultation which had representation from several of the island's major healthcare bodies including regional health authorities and civil society partners, revealed a number of issues that require urgent action.

Among the concerns was the general lack of public education on the Bill and how it is intended to work. Some of those recommendations were published in an editorial <https://bit.ly/2XMTtcQ> in The Sunday Gleaner by JASL Executive Director Kandasí Levermore. Meanwhile, legal support officer at JASL, Nattecia Bohardsingh, encouraged healthcare professionals to familiarize themselves with the Bill in order to be ready for when the Data Protection Act becomes law.

Women Entrepreneurs cont'd from page 1

as they signed their commitment forms and set out on their new venture.

"I want you to view this as an opportunity. Don't just look at it as a training but rather, an opportunity to elevate yourself from your circumstances, and to do so, you must put in work," Sybliss told the women.

The project forms part of JASL's programmatic work aimed at improving the health and economic outcomes for WLHIV and reduce the vulnerabilities of key populations.

Forty six year-old mother of three, Marjorie Jebbinson*, whose chicken rearing business has already begun to see improvements, says the programme has given her business a real boost. "The programme give me that extra push," she explained, as she recalled some of the challenges she encountered in the early stages of the training and in getting her business up and running.

The training engaged the women in vision boarding, identifying entrepreneurial characteristics, generating business ideas including preparing their SWOT analyses.

Marjorie, who had previously benefitted from a similar training elsewhere, said she was grateful "even if I didn't get the grant" as she now knows things about running a business she had not known before.

"Normally when mi buy, mi nuh buy pon credit because mi nuh waan nobadi come call mi," said Marjorie, who

now admits it is OK to buy goods on credit. Nowadays, she takes stock of her goods by maintaining proper inventory practices, which she says help with the re-ordering process.

And for that, the rural St. Catherine resident is today in a "better position".

"I never normally take out a ting for myself. I know that I sell and mek back [a profit]... So now mi know how to mek and tek out profit and structure mi business."

"I never normally take out a ting for myself, I know that I sell and mek back [a profit]...So now mi know how to mek and tek out profit and structure mi business," a confident Majorie shared.

Nancy Brown*, 45, who sells ground provisions in the busy Coronation Market has watched her business grow in the weeks since she has been with the UN women's entrepreneurship training.

Nancy who purchases in bulk directly from the wharf, says the next step is buying a motor vehicle to transport her produce to her growing market. Already the mother of three has a few businesses she supplies and is now eyeing other markets in Kingston.

Women in violent relationships are at increased risk for contracting HIV. HIV-positive women are less likely to disclose their status to their partners for fear of further violence. Like economic hardships, violence affects an individual's ability to adhere to their treatment●

*Name changed to protect the individuals' identity

Renovated Wellness Centre Brings Improved Service

SINCE MOVING OUT of cramped locations into its newly renovated wellness centre at the end of last year, Jamaica AIDS Support For Life (JASL), has improved its capacity to serve, and clients and visitors alike are welcoming the change. The wellness centre, which comes retrofitted with a laboratory and a pharmacy that will open soon, will allow clients to access all their medical needs in a single location. The centre also boasts private offices for the treatment team, affording clients increased privacy for their psychological, nutritional and adherence counseling sessions as well as visits with the social worker.

Turn to Improved Service on Page 8

SNAPSHOTS

International Women's Day



JASL's leading ladies Pauline Flemmings Okeke (head office), Yanique Williams, Michelle Getten and Hanna-Lisa Morgan-Williams of the Kingston chapter are the epitome of strength as they signal the need for gender balance on International Women's Day.



#BalanceForBetter

LET THE INTERVENTION BEGIN!



The intervention trio of Kempton Myrie, Naomi Graham and Simone Phillips from the Montego Bay chapter are all set to go.



Peer Navigator Princess Brown of the St. Ann chapter does pre-counseling ahead of administering an HIV test at a recent intervention in the parish.

Safer Sex Week February 11-17



Valentine pixie Naomi Graham is on a high in the safe hands of Cyril Frater at the Montego Bay chapter.



These smiles say the St. Ann intervention team had a great pep talk with students at Carron Hall High School.

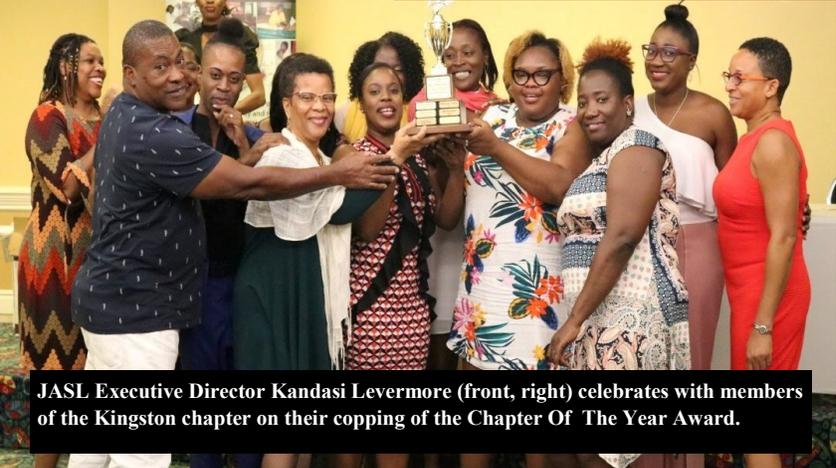


Hanna-Lisa Morgan-Williams and Xavier Biggs with Dr. Mario Evons on CVM TV.



Marilyn Thompson and Robyn Miller with Emprezz Golding on TVJ.

AND THE WINNERS ARE...



JASL Executive Director Kandasi Levermore (front, right) celebrates with members of the Kingston chapter on their copping of the Chapter Of The Year Award.



The team of Richard Plummer and Afrya Cox of Jamaica Network of Sero-positives and JASL's Patrick Lalor and Keva Reid beam after walking away with the first place prize at the TCS Technical Working Group Debate.

REMEMBERING OUR OUTSTANDING ASTON



ANOTHER CHAPTER WAS closed in the 27-year history of Jamaica AIDS Support For Life (JASL) when, on Saturday, March 30, the organisation said goodbye to its outstanding former board member, Aston Cooke.

Cooke, who passed away on February 22, had served on the board of directors of JASL since 2005.

The thanksgiving service, which was held at Cooke's alma mater, Wolmer's Boys' School, was attended by Cooke's immediate and JASL families, the theatre fraternity, cultural interests and a host of well-wishers.

Glowing tributes poured in at the three-hour long thanksgiving service, which took on a celebratory tone. Among those paying tribute were Cooke's childhood friend Barrington Burke Green, Miss Jamaica World 2015 Dr. Sanetta Myrie, theatre stalwarts Deon Silvera, Michael Nicholson, Ann-Marie Fuller and her husband Silburn Townsend, and a host of others.

In his reflections, chairman of the board of directors at JASL, Reverend Canon Garth Minoff, described Cooke as a generous and talented man who gave selflessly to JASL. He went on to chronicle Cooke's contribution to JASL and his impact on the organisation.

"Aston was as much our storm as he was our calm at Jamaica AIDS Support For Life. ... Aston made things happen at JASL and for JASL," he

told the gathering.

Cooke was remembered as one of the early persons to shine the spotlight on HIV & AIDS in Jamaica and bring attention to the issue of stigma and discrimination of persons living with the condition.

"...Aston became a voice for the disenfranchised. His lasting legacy remains JASL's 'Stand United' campaign of the early 2000s, a public education and awareness effort that still has relevance nearly 20 years later and which JASL today uses in its public service announcement currently being aired on TVJ and CVM. Aston wanted persons to know that it is OK to support someone living with HIV & AIDS, and he was intent on bringing the message in a way that everyone could understand it."

In a heartfelt tribute that ended with tears around the auditorium, Jamaica Youth Theatre, which Cooke founded in 2004, drummed and chanted about what he meant to the members of the group.

Things reached fever pitch after the group was joined onstage by Cooke's friends and family members in a hand-holding moment.

Aston Cooke, gone but not forgotten ♦

JASL GOES 'HEALING IN THE DANCE'

IT'S 1:49 IN in the morning and the Jamaica AIDS Support For Life (JASL) crew is at Uptown Mondays on the plazas along Constant Spring Road. In the distance, sound systems clash for air space on either side of the road.

"Yuh can do yuh AIDS test outside!" the selector screams into the microphone.

"Yuh seh him a married man, him have ring pan him finga, soh you nuh have nutten fi worry bout?" comes his next round of urgings. "Yuh can do yuh HIV test outside," he said, getting the HIV part right this time.

A steady stream of decked out patrons, some from as far as Japan, Germany and the US stroll into the dance.

Through a collaboration with JAHJAH Foundation the JASL Intervention team has been making the yearly stop at the Healing In The Dance set up.

The partnership which has been running for the past three years, aims to arrest the spread of HIV in the dancehall, a space where drugs, alcohol and sex are known to thrive.

"We realize that a lot of persons after they leave the dancehall, they go home and sleep, so they're not seeing the doctor in the morning," says JAHJAH Foundation's founder and CEO Dr. Trevor A. Dixon. The initiative to bring the doctor into the dancehall is a preventative measure. People go partying, they get drunk and they grab a girl. We know the AIDS thing high, so we bring the condoms," he said.

JASL positioned at the entrance, the team of doctors and volunteers from JAHJAH Foundation work the grounds inside offering phone cards as incentives for persons to do their HIV tests, blood pressure, blood sugar and general doctors' consultations.

JAHJAH, or Jamaicans Abroad Helping Jamaicans At Home – is non-profit medical mission that provides screening, testing and other services in rural communities and in the dancehall.

Uptown Mondays bartender, Karen Shields, has made it a habit of getting her HIV test done when JASL and JAHJAH Foundation come healing in

"HIV test suppose to be important to everybody. All when mi nah have no sex, mi a do mi HIV test," she said, revealing she had gone celibate for an entire year but continued to do her HIV tests.

Ronan's heightened awareness of HIV is not by chance. His father had told him about HIV & AIDS before he and Ronan's mother died from AIDS-related complications some years ago.



(L-R) The intervention team of Yanique Williams, treatment care coordinator/nurse; Hanna-Lisa Morgan-Williams, targeted intervention officer and Dwayne Boreland, peer navigator in the Kingston chapter, huddle for a photo after a night of Healing In The Dance, Uptown Mondays, earlier this year.

Twenty eight year-old Ronan Johnson is a regular at Uptown Mondays.

He was one of many who came to our bus for his HIV test. "Mi always do mi test a Slipe Pen Road [lab]," he declares.



JASL's Social Media Officer Chad Morgan and JAHJAH Foundation's Dr. Phillip Coombs at Healing In The Dance.

"Him used to tell me to protec miself," he said before recalling his passing. "A lot a bumps come out pon him skin and him hair get curly. Him get wax and canan, him skin start to get dry, him toenail start to get brown. Him pass fast," shared the 28 year-old man who describes himself as a hustler.

Although Ronan knows the dangers of having unprotected sex, he admits he still takes chances. "Mi like have sex. Mi nuh always use the condom. Me is a skin-to-skin man. When mi have on condom it kill the vibes," he told me.

A total of 43 persons were tested for HIV in the dance that night.

It's after 5 and a steady drizzle sends patrons pouring out of the dance. JASL and JAHJAH Foundation decide to call it a night on healing in the dance 🍀

Can you guess who is this JASL staff?



Figured out who our little tot was in the last issue?

She is Nicola Carpenter, Procurement Officer at JASL's head office



Dr. Clive Lai, president of the Medical Association of Jamaica, participates in a group discussion at the JASL-led consultation on the Data Protection Act, held at Courtleigh Hotel & Suites earlier this year.

IMPROVED SERVICE cont'd from Page 3

"I like the idea that when I come to Yanique [JASL's nurse] I can speak with her in privacy. Before now, the room was shared with another person. Now I can do my vitals in private. The customer service was good, but now it's even better. The colours and ergonomics of the room change the way you think about yourself," John Barnes*, a client of over a year, said.

Nearly 350 JASL clients and over 1000 others from the general public will now have access to HIV prevention, treatment, and support services in the modern and spacious environment.

Funding of JASL's renovated wellness centre came from the government of Japan, USAID/COMET II, MACAIDS Fund, AIDS Healthcare Foundation and the Ministry of Health

*Name changed to protect the individuals' identity



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HIV 101

Rewind to questions in our last issue

1. Which community among Key Populations has the lowest HIV prevalence?
2. Is oral sex considered low risk or high risk for HIV?
3. How can persons with HIV maintain good health?
4. Globally, how many persons are living with HIV?
5. What is the rate of mother-to-child transmission of HIV in Jamaica?
6. List five services provided by JASL at its treatment sites.

Answers

1. Sex workers
2. Low risk
3. Proper diet, exercise and adhering to treatment
4. 40 million
5. Less than 2 per cent
6. Clinic sessions, nutritional counseling, pap smears, adherence counseling, support groups

Now, let's see you try these:

1. What is stigma and discrimination?
2. How does stigma and discrimination affect a PLHIV ability to stick to their treatment regimen (medication)?
3. What are the four modes of transmission for HIV?
4. How many persons in Jamaica are living with HIV?
5. What are the 90-90-90 targets all about?

On The Calendar

April

- 1-30—STI Awareness Month
- 7— World Health Day
- 28—World Day for Safety & Health at Work

May

- 17—International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia

June

- 2—Sex Workers Day
- 5—World Environment Day
- 12—World Day Against Child Labour
- 15—World Elder Abuse Day
- 27—National HIV Testing Day

Quote of the Quarter

When you give
Give of yourself

- Anonymous

Please send your comments, suggestions and contributions for the next issue to:

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We are social:

