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JASL's Newsletter Gets A Name!

Meet the Winner of the 'JASL Newsletter Gets A Name!' Competition – Ngala Jones

WHEN THE CALL went out for a name that JASL's newsletter could call its own, there were very few takers. Then the entries began trickling in.

In the dying moments of the competition, Ngala Jones submitted her entry. It was to become the winning entry. With a little tweaking and Ngala's blessings, Decoded became a reality.

The administrative assistant at JASL's head office for the past four years, it was a subdued but no less delighted Ngala that we found when we delivered the news.

"I didn't expect to win. Remember how long it took me to send them [the entries] to you? I wasn't really expecting to win at all," Ngala shared. For her effort, Ngala won a complimentary year pass for two at Jewel Paradise Cove Beach Resorts and Spa plus bragging rights.

Resourceful and reliable, you could call Ngala your go-to girl at JASL.

Always on top of things and calm under pressure, especially during those last minute orders for stationary or for support on a workshop, Ngala is willing and ready to assist wherever she can.

"I'm not always calm under pressure but when I get this job four years ago, it was answered prayer," said Ngala who revealed there are days when she goes awry.



Ngala Jones receives her gift certificate from Project and Communications Coordinator Sheryll White-McDowell for her winning effort in the JASL Newsletter Gets A Name! competition.

During those times, she reminds herself that the job "has an answered prayer and I have to honour this and thank all the people who made it possible".

An advocate in her own right, Ngala, who is devout Christian, says her relationship with God makes it that much easier to work in her current environment.

"I can work anywhere because of my relationship with God and so working at JASL in an organization that manifests its love the same way I do, it's easy, and my Christianity has never been in question."

Her life lesson remains a childhood memory she continues to hold dear. "As a little girl I remember not being able to do something, and my father said you can do it, keep going. Don't fail yourself. You may fall down but just keep going, no matter what's going on."

What's the best thing about working at JASL for Ngala? "It's what we do every day. Every day we're involved in the transformation of someone's life, whether it is learning about your [HIV] status, getting the grant for the provision of food, books for our clients, just being part of something that changes people's lives... that's the best thing!"

JASL 'Walk, Talk and Test' for Safer Sex Week: 'Condoms are Cool'

Schepers Office, Hilda Mar came out to support the JASL Kingston Chapter's Safer Sex Week intervention in Mandala Park on February 16

'Condoms are cool' was the message from Jamaica AIDS Support for Life to Jamaicans during Safer Sex Week this February as its intervention teams took to the streets encouraging persons to engage in safer sex practices year-round, especially during the heady Valentine's period.

Observed from February 11-17, Safer Sex Week recognizes the tendency of individuals to engage in risky sexual behaviours including refusing to use a condom, practices which make them vulnerable for HIV and other STIs.

In a 2012 Knowledge and Activities Survey, 46.9 per cent of persons surveyed said they did not use a condom when they engaged in sexual intercourse with their significant other as they "love" and "trust" their partners.

Kick-starting the week was JASL's Montego Bay team who moved in on the Negritude Centre with a health fair on Sunday. Then it was time for the second City the following day for condom demonstration, sensitisation sessions, HIV testing and a wealth of information on safer sex practices at Sandals Beaches and Montego Bay Community College Friday for a similar activity and rapped with Alpha Boys' School about how cool condoms are.

JASL encourages persons to get tested in order to know their HIV status as the transformation of someone's life for their partners.

Approximately 30,000 Jamaicans are living with HIV however, about 4,500 of those infected do not know they are carrying the virus.

This year, Safer Sex Week activities were funded by partners AIDS Healthcare Foundation.

Press for Gender Equality - Government must pass laws to protect women

JAMAICA HAS COME a long way in recognizing the contributions of women to its development. Indeed, she ranks among some of the highest offices in this land, not the least of which was Prime Minister Portia Simpson Miller in 2006. It is a well known fact, too, that many successful businesses in Jamaica are headed by women.

Today, March 8, Jamaica joins the world and the United Nations to commemorate International Women's Day. "Press for Progress," one of the thematic days, aptly provides an opportunity to celebrate our progress towards recognition of women's rights and gender equality.

Jamaica has made legally binding commitments to several gender-related international instruments, such as the Beijing Platform for Action, International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention C087, C098 and C189 and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). But Jamaica has much work to do to protect and preserve the basic rights of its women and create an enabling environment where every woman realizes her full potential.

The connection between violence against women, poverty and HIV are well documented.

In 2016, 24 women were killed in Jamaica, up from 15 the previous year. Nearly half of the women killed were murdered in December alone.

Jamaica AIDS Support for Life as a key service provider to women who experience rape, sexual assault and those who are HIV positive encounter women who have been left visually impaired, suffered deformities and left incapacitated as a result of the actions of their violent partners.

If we as a country fail to address poverty, particularly amongst women and children, we only perpetuate the cycle of poverty, inequality, sexual abuse and domestic violence.

Women in violent situations are at increased risk of contracting HIV as it is difficult, and in some cases, impossible for them to negotiate condom use, despite the terms under which they engage in sexual intercourse or with whom they engage the act.

Urgent Revision

The authorities must act now and send a strong message to those who continue to harm our women and girls that it will not be business as usual. We call for the urgent revision and passing of the Sexual Offences Act and other related laws, namely, the Domestic Violence Act, Offences Against the Person Act, and the Child Care and Protection Act. We call for an urgent revision of the Employment (Equal Pay for Men and Women) Act, which in its current state is ineffective in addressing wage disparity. We also call for the urgent passing of the Sexual Harassment Bill to not only address workplace sexual discrimination, but also to shun normalizing the sexualizing of our women and girls.

This International Women's Day, we press for laws that allow for social inclusion and punish those who continue to harm our women. We press for laws that create an environment that create independence for our women disabled or otherwise. We press for progress to end all forms of violence against our women if we seriously intend to put a dent in the nearly 3,000 cases of HIV/AIDS on the island.

This article was first published in The Gleaner on March 8 in observance of International Women's Day.

Decoded

JASL: Providing services since 1991

- HIV Testing and Risk Reduction Counseling
- Screening for other Sexually Transmitted Infections
- Clinic Sessions with a Doctor or Nurse
- Treatment Literacy Sessions
- Adherence Counselling
- Nutritional Counselling & Support
- Psychological Counselling
- Support Groups
- Home and Hospital Visits
- Violence Prevention and Response
- Pap Smears
- Referrals

We focus on:

- HIV education, prevention and linkage to care
- Treatment, care and support
- Advocacy for and enabling environment
- Strategic research
- Social enterprise

Save the Date...

April

- 7 – World Health Day
- 28 – World Day for Health and Safety at Work

May

- 17 – International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia

June

- 2 – Sex Workers Day
- 5 – International Day of the Girl Child
- 12 – World Day Against Child Labour
- 15 – World Elder Abuse Day
- 27 – National HIV Testing Day

HIV 101

1. What are the four modes of HIV transmission?
2. What year did JASL begin operating?
3. What is the name of the drug that is administered to prevent HIV infection after a suspected exposure?
4. When does one attain viral suppression?
5. What is the name of the drug that is taken by persons considered at high risk for contracting HIV?

True or False?

6. Twenty per cent of persons infected with HIV in Jamaica do not know they are carrying the virus
7. HIV is a gay man's virus
8. The Caribbean has the second largest number of persons living with HIV
9. 50% People living with HIV receive care, love, care and support.

ANSWERS IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF DECODED

Can you guess who is this JASL staff?

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We are social:

Love. Action. Support.

Executive Director's Message



Dear Readers,

With the new year on its earnest, by now we should all have settled into delivering on the commitments of 2018!

A new year brings new beginnings; new promises and new developments. But it also comes with a whole new set of challenges, the kinds that will require a collective, certain and resolute response to HIV & AIDS.

A year that promises much for our sector, already it is shaping up to be a busy one for us all. It is an opportunity for us to refocus our energies and strengthen our resolve to tackle the issues that demand our attention. It is our only hope if we are to bring about real change for those whom we serve and create an enabling environment where respect for human rights and dignity are the hallmarks.

We don't expect it will be a walk in the park, but it is by no means insurmountable! With YOU – our team of workers and volunteers on the ground, partners in civil society the media and elsewhere, it is possible. We continue to work to strengthen the institutions that serve our key populations and advocate for legislative changes that lend support to our work.

We thank you for sharing in Decoded, our newest publication highlighting JASL's work to end HIV & AIDS.

- **Kandusi Levermore**

Outstanding Young Entrepreneur among 15 Women to Start Businesses – EU Continues to Support Programme



Visually impaired beneficiary Sandrean Bailey receives her certificate from Senator Danion Crawford, shadow minister on culture, gender, entertainment & sports and EU Ambassador Malgorzata Wasilewska as her first step toward empowerment. Bailey was among a group of 30 women living with disabilities (WLD) and women living with HIV to benefit from training in entrepreneurship under the project, "Reducing Gender-based Violence Against Women within the Context of HIV & AIDS." WLD are vulnerable to gender-based violence which puts them at risk for HIV.

SANDREAN BAILEY HAD always wanted to take control of her life. So when the opportunity presented itself last November for the 33-year-old to turn things around, she wasted no time in doing so.

That opportunity was training in entrepreneurship for a group of 30 women living with disability and women living with HIV.

Sandrean has been living with a disability ever since a domestic dispute caused her to partially lose her sight nine years ago.

The entrepreneurship training was made possible through the project: "Reducing Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence Against Women within the context of HIV & AIDS".

Funded by the European Union, the 18-month project seeks to among other things empower and equip women at risk for HIV & AIDS with skills they can use to become economically independent.

That independence has meant a lot to Sandrean, who distinguished herself from very early in the training through consistent participation and engagement with the course.

"Trust mi, JASL has done so much for me, I don't even know where to begin. JASL a di family weh mi never have. Unnu a di family weh mi always want," said Sandrean who has suffered abuse at the hands of her family.

Sandrean is one of 15 women selected to receive grants to set up their businesses. The women will also benefit from 12 months' mentoring and monitoring.

"I have a new name for JASL – Jehovah's Angels Sent with Love. JASL has empowered me in so many ways."

Already an entrepreneur, Sandrean wrote her business plan around her pig-rearing business, which she hopes to expand to a jerk shop in her rural St. Andrew community.

Grateful for the opportunity provided by JASL, Sandrean said it has given her control over her life.

"It give me more control. It mek mi cyan be myself I don't have to pretend. Mi did a live up to people's expectation. Now mi can just be me."

Sandrean is now employed as a Peer Link to the project, which sees her networking with the disabled community to access psychosocial and other services offered at JASL.

"I have a new name for JASL – Jehovah's Angels Sent with Love. JASL has empowered me in so many ways. JASL has taught me to manage my business better," said the resilient young woman as she outlined some of the cost-saving measures she has implemented since starting the project.

Voices From The Chapters - Clients give JASL high marks for support

For Many, An HIV diagnosis can only mean one thing: "I'm going to die!"

Shock, anger and a sea of other emotions surface almost as quickly as despair sets in. Then the tough questions begin to emerge: "Who can I trust to help?" "Who can I turn to for support?"

Those were some of the questions Blessings Bingham asked herself when she returned a positive test for HIV after a JASL intervention at her workplace.

"How mi a go manage? Wah ago happen to mi children?" Blessings, who works in the hotel sector began asking herself.

Blessings received the news like many others. "I blacked out. I cried. I was so shocked I didn't start thinking about anything at the time," Blessings who is a client at JASL's Montego Bay Chapter said.

That was more than a year and a half ago.

Today, Blessings credits JASL's Montego Bay team with helping her pull herself together and getting her to focus on her children and the future.

After several months of psychosocial support Blessings was ready to accept her status. Today, the mother of two girls – 5 and 7 – who is so empowered she would not have minded her identity being revealed, lends her support to the JASL team on interventions similar to the one it carried out at her workplace.

Like Blessings, 28 year-old Jason James had high praises for the love, action and support he has received from JASL.

"The psychologist is very, very, very, good," stressed Jason who says he has been most impressed with the level of confidentiality at JASL.

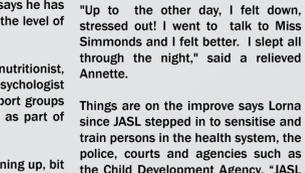
Jason sees the doctor, nutritionist, adherence counselor and psychologist and also takes part in support groups at JASL's Kingston chapter as part of his treatment.

Reserved at first about opening up, but by Jason, who has sex with other men, began to let go as he soon realized the staff was "willing to stand with you".

"I've gotten invitations to names support groups," he says, and to others a few, "but none is as strong and as supportive as JASL." The articulate administrator says he has learnt not to get caught up with the mental aspects of his situation but rather, focus on the way forward.

JASL provides support for key groups of persons affected by or at risk for HIV. These include sex workers; men who have sex with men; lesbians, bi-sexuals and transgender; and women living with disabilities. It also does prevention work with the general population.

*Names changed to protect the individuals' identity.



Christina Gordon, case manager in the Kingston Chapter, conducts a blood testing exercise during a clinic session.

Having lost her sight in 1982, Lorna knows first-hand what discrimination feels like after experiencing it in the public health system.

It's why she and other disabled persons such as the deaf prefer to come to JASL's clinic. Here, the deaf are provided with an interpreter and patience is exercised in dealing with the disabled community.

"The truth of the matter," the outspoken mother of two adult children said is "I benefit from everything at JASL – the psychologist, doctor visits, they help with bus fare. JASL teach you how to love. They're mannersable. There's so much that you guys do that you should get awards".

Forty seven year old *Annette whose diagnosis came three years ago after an opportunistic brain infection associated with HIV left her unable to walk was ready to throw in the towel. That was until she met psychologist Deborah Simmonds-Delapenha and Targeted Interventions Officer Niifia Hazel at JASL's St. Ann's Bay chapter. "From that day on I'm on my feet," said Annette.

"Up to the other day, I felt down, stressed out! I went to talk to Miss Simmonds and I felt better. I slept all through the night," said a relieved Annette.

Things are on the improve says Lorna since JASL stepped in to sensitise and train persons in the health system, the police, courts and agencies such as the Child Development Agency. "JASL has opened my eyes," says Lorna.

Blessings, Jason and Annette are among 297 of the 633 clients JASL serves who are now virally suppressed.

Viral suppression means the antiretroviral drugs have brought the HIV virus under control to the point where the virus is undetectable.

Through the support of JASL Blessings is on her way to being certified in cosmetology.

Meanwhile, Annette and Lorna are about to open their small businesses: Annette's Grocery & Charcoal and Lorna's Grocery & Chemicals, thanks to a recent EU grant which also equipped them with entrepreneurship training.

90-90-90 Not Just A Dream

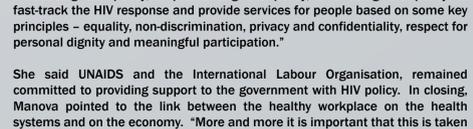
The January to March quarter was a proud one for JASL and follows well on the achievements of 2017. We are active of the work of our team as well as our partners who have helped us realize our targets.

At 90-94-56, JASL's treatment cascade is an indication that the 90-90-90 is not just a dream. Though the figures represent only a fraction of the national population, it reminds us that the target is attainable. At the same time it tells us that more work needs to be done.

Having 90 per cent of those diagnosed know their status, 90 per cent on treatment and 90 per cent virally suppressed must remain our focus, even as stigma and discrimination, unsustainable public education and the lack of strict adherence remain major concerns.

In 2017, JASL held true to its mandate to provide Love, Care and Support for its key populations by constantly exploring ways to improve our reach and impact and taking a holistic approach to the HIV & AIDS response.

Among those we serve is the disabled (hearing impaired, deaf, visually impaired, blind and physically challenged). Our work also focuses on key groups of women who experience violence within the context of HIV, sex workers, persons of trans experience and orphan and vulnerable children. Not to be left out of that equation is the general population as this group forms a critical mass of persons at risk for HIV & AIDS.



JASL Forum puts OSHA on the Agenda

Jamaica AIDS Support for Life put the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) back on the national agenda with the hosting of a forum to assess the impact of the OSHA legislation and its proposed on the National Workplace Policy on HIV & AIDS.



Senior Director, Occupational Safety & Health Department in the Ministry of Health, Robert Chung delivering the keynote address on behalf of Minister of Labour Shantine Robinson at the OSHA forum in St. Andrew on February 1.

Held on February 1 at the Terra Nova All-Suite Hotel in St. Andrew, the forum saw a strong gathering of civil society partners as well as accessible representation from government and the private sector.

Delivering the main address on behalf of Minister of Labour and Social Security Hon. Shantine Robinson, advisor in the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, Robert Chung, underscored the importance of the legislation and his Ministry's commitment to having the Workplace Policy on HIV & AIDS implemented to complement the Act.

"Di AIDS people dem come...mi nuh waan go inna dah room de, so try yuh best get somebadi else!"

Chung said that despite the Ministry's best efforts at implementing the policy over some twenty years, stigma and discrimination, cultural norms and a general lack of knowledge about HIV & AIDS were major barriers to the Act being enacted.

"Dispelling the stigma, I believe, was the hardest and I wanted to abandon it... getting into the organisations was the hardest. Nobody wanted us to come into their business. Everybody said HIV is not here," Chung told the gathering of the Ministry's early attempts to carry out its educational programmes within the hotel sector.



Civil Society leaders at the Multi-stakeholder Forum to assess the OSHA legislation at Terra Nova All-Suite Hotel, St. Andrew on February 1.

Citing anecdotal evidence to some of the challenges faced, Chung recalled one of his first outings to the hotel sector.

"Di AIDS people dem come...mi nuh waan go inna dah room de, so try yuh best get somebadi else!" remarked a female employee to the receptionist.

"Di AIDS people deh yah. Bi-works a dem nuh look sick!" the woman was later heard telling another of her co-workers.

With a voluntary compliance programme in place, the Ministry of Labour in 2017, tabled the OSHA bill in Parliament, signalling some progress for the long-awaited Act.

In addition to matters dealing with health, the Act is "far reaching providing the framework for issues that impact the world of work in a holistic way. Issues such as HIV/AIDS and their impact must be mitigated in order to ensure that working environments are accommodating and conducive to the physical, mental and psychosocial dimension of work so that the nation can achieve its 2030 agenda – Jamaica the place of choice to live, work, and raise families and do business," Chung said.

He said the Act required that HIV be put into context by "building an enabling environment".

For her part, Manoela Manova, UNAIDS country director reminded the gathering of the commitment of governments at the 2016 high-level meeting on AIDS to strengthen and endorse the employment of an HIV policy in the workplace. At that meeting a call was made 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".

She said further if Jamaica is to benefit from a comprehensive response to HIV & AIDS, government must lead the process in the same way UNAIDS had done.

"Without the leadership of the employers, without the leadership of the Ministry of Labour, social policy of the economy, of the government, we cannot move on introducing the policy, implementing the policy, and using the policy to fast-track the HIV response and provide services for people based on some key principles – equality, non-discrimination, privacy and confidentiality, respect for personal dignity and meaningful participation."

She said UNAIDS and the International Labour Organisation, remained committed to providing support to the government with HIV policy. In closing, Manova pointed to the link between the healthy workplace on the health systems and on the economy. "More and more it is important that this is taken into consideration," she said.

Highlights

JASL representatives meet with Justice Minister Doreen Chook (centre) EU ambassador Malgorzata Wasilewska (left) and Monitoring and Evaluation Officer Chad Morgan (in cap) are all present at the launch of the project, "Reducing Gender-based Violence Against Women within the Context of HIV & AIDS." The project aims to reduce violence against women. Thirty women living with disabilities (WLD) and women living with HIV received certificates in their entrepreneurship at the launch which was held at the Knutsford Court Hotel on February 6.

And a little child shall lead them: Even the children endorse JASL's message to end violence against women.

