

# Adolescent Development and Participation Programme

For every child  
Health, Education, Equality, Protection  
**ADVANCE HUMANITY**

**unicef**   
Jamaica Country Office



# OVERVIEW

**I**ncreasing attention is being paid to adolescents, both in Jamaica and globally. This phase of life is generally considered a time of critical opportunities for growth and development when many of the skills necessary to lead a productive life and overcome adverse situations are acquired. In the life-cycle approach adopted throughout the current Country Programme, the guiding principle of the Adolescent Development and Participation Programme (ADP) is to ensure adolescents a safe passage to adulthood.

Many Jamaican adolescents do not have the opportunity to become healthy and productive adults, nor to enjoy to the fullest this unique stage of development. More than any other group, adolescents, who comprise 16.8 per cent of Jamaica's population, are at risk of contracting HIV/AIDS. Among the many problems affecting the Jamaican adolescent are high levels of teenage pregnancy, lack of knowledge in relation to their own reproductive health, pronounced patterns of violence, aggression, depression, suicide, truancy, recklessness and the use and abuse of drugs.

Rather than focusing solely on the problems, there is a growing consensus on the need for stronger policy development and co-ordination around adolescent development and participation. In addition to efforts being made by the Government of Jamaica through various institutions, more agencies and NGOs are expanding their efforts to promote and embrace a more holistic focus on adolescent development and participation. The Adolescent Development and Participation Programme assists these organizations to address the specific needs of adolescents in the areas of education, health and skills building, through schools, health clinics and vocational training centers.

The overall objective of the Adolescent Development and Participation Programme is to foster and enhance a caring, supportive and participatory environment for the development of well-adjusted healthy, responsible and empowered adolescents (ages nine to 18 years), who are capable of contributing to the development of themselves and their nation.

## OBJECTIVES

- To promote the development of policy, planning and programming environments that effectively address adolescent development and participation
- To strengthen the capacities of families, communities, NGOs, civil society and other institutions to more effectively

tively provide caring and supportive environments for adolescents

- To promote and support the development of spaces, opportunities and capacities for meaningful participation

## STRATEGIES

The ADP Programme seeks to promote continued advocacy for adolescents to ensure the creation of an adolescent-friendly policy and programme environment. This ensures that issues relating to adolescents are placed high on the agenda at all levels of national development and that adequate laws and policies are created for their protection and development. Appropriate monitoring activities and research are undertaken to ensure that the rights of adolescents are being met.

In order to strengthen family, community and institutional capacities to meet the needs of adolescents, the ADP Programme facilitates the preparation and dissemination of appropriate information, education and communication materials. Support is given to peer-to-peer facilitators to increase knowledge around reproductive health and HIV/AIDS prevention. Parenting workshops and seminars help to strengthen parenting skills and capacities. The training and promotion of attitudinal changes among service providers and improvement in quality and standards is an ongoing concern in order to encourage adolescents to make use of available services.

A major thrust of the programme is enhancing adolescent participation by providing this age group with spaces and opportunities to express their views and opinions at all levels of decision-making. The programme works innovatively with adolescents to enhance their capacity to participate in a range of activities including programme planning and implementation, advocacy and research.

## EXPECTED RESULTS

At the end of the Country Programme, the Adolescent Development and Participation Programme expects to achieve the following results:

- Adolescent issues are mainstreamed, actions co-ordinated and resources mobilized
- Increased capacity of duty bearers to provide care and support for adolescent development
- Adolescents empowered to participate meaningfully in family, community and national life

## PROGRAMME BUDGET

The budget for the 2002-2006 period is projected at approximately US\$2.67 million.

Regular Resources: \$ 549,000.00  
Other Resources: \$2,130,000.00

## SOME ACHIEVEMENTS IN ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT

- Research in “Meeting Adolescent Development and Participation Rights”
- Support to the revision of the National Youth Policy
- Skills building and peer support programme for adolescents on HIV/AIDS issues
- Development of educational materials on HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention for adolescents with cognitive disabilities
- Assistance in the establishment of Youth Information Centres
- Participation Action Research by adolescents – “What Every Adolescent Has A Right To Know” HIV/AIDS Project
- Technical assistance and equipment to the Ministry of Education to strengthen delivery of HIV/AIDS education and prevention in the formal school sector

## MAIN PARTNERS

Ministry of Education, Youth & Culture  
Ministry of Health  
National Centre for Youth Development  
Children First  
St. James Health Department  
WESTHELP  
National AIDS Committee  
Portland AIDS Committee Youth Arm  
Jamaica AIDS Support  
3D Projects  
National Family Planning Board  
Coalition for Better Parenting  
Parish Inter-agency Parent Support Advisory Teams  
Jamaica Foundation for Children  
Hope Worldwide Jamaica

## FAST FACTS: ADOLESCENCE

- Population, age 10-24 28%
- Youth, 10-14 years, who have had sexual intercourse: females 12% males 54%
- Females, 15-19 years, who report having been forced to have sex 26%
- 15-19 year olds who had planned births 13%
- Percentage of girls who become pregnant: primary school 17% ninth grade 34%
- HIV/AIDS cases ages 10-19 (1982-2001) 79 females 28 males
- Students, 10-18 years, who carry a weapon to school 15%
- 15-19 years who are heads of household 4%
- 12-18 year olds not enrolled in school one out of 5
- Percentage of male in out-of-school population 61.5%
- Percentage of poor in out-of-school population 60.7%
- Percentage of poorest quintile not enrolled 36%
- Percentage of adolescents attempting suicide once 11%
- Percentage of adolescents using alcohol before grade 7 29%





# HELPING TEENS TO HELP THEMSELVES

By David Goodman

**J**hnell Reid pauses outside the solitary colonial house atop a hill overlooking Montego Bay. The setting sun forms a brilliant crimson backdrop as the 17-year old girl ponders whether she has the strength to venture inside with the other teens. This is the Hope Hospice, home to 18 men, women and children who are terminally ill. Just as she considers returning to the car, Jhnell catches a smile from a weak 6-year old girl. Jhnell summons up her courage and marches up the steps to greet her.

Jhnell Reid is a member of WESTHELP, a UNICEF-supported teen peer-counselling group in Montego Bay. Each week, a group of up to 40 teens ventures into the poor and working class sections of this storied tourist town to deliver life-saving messages on safer sex, AIDS prevention, and conflict resolution. And then there are days like this one, where Jhnell and her peers simply try to cheer up the most vulnerable members of their community. The work is tough, real, rewarding and empowering.

Jhnell grasps the soft, withered hand of the small girl who is dying of AIDS. The shy child flashes a sweet smile and revels in the attention from the tall, attractive young women. "Lean on me sister,"



DAVID GOODMAN

Jhnell Reid of WESTHELP comforts a child with AIDS.

sings Jhnell softly, as the small child looks up at her new friend with rapture.

As she wanders off later, Jhnell sighs deeply. "That's the most difficult thing I've ever done," she says, shaking her head. "I feel remorse and regret for the people who are there. I was afraid for them."

While WESTHELP aims to help the local community, it is also an important vehicle for empowering its youth volunteers. Jhnell reflects, "Interacting with somebody who has HIV will change attitudes. You will be touched by them."

Later that evening, the group of teens gathers to talk and hang out at the local health clinic, where WESTHELP is based. With a spirited group of teenagers laughing and playing around him, Christopher Kerr, a health education officer with the St. James Health Department and the coordinator of WESTHELP, explains that the 40 group members, who

range in age from 14 to 24, learn "how to approach their peers and get them to talk so you know what the problem is." The peer counsellors work in conjunction with school guidance counsellors, but the teens also offer a vital alternative. "Guidance counsellors might see 10 young people, but there might be 25 more who don't talk because of fears about confidentiality," he asserts.

WESTHELP is fulfilling the urgent need to reach young people with lifesaving messages. Two-thirds of people aged 16 to 18 are sexually active, but even with the reality of HIV/AIDS, 53 per cent of adolescents report that they never use condoms. Poverty, violence and disease have had a profound impact on youth: 11 percent of Jamaican teens have attempted suicide, and half say they worry about the violence in their communities.

WESTHELP began in 1998 when concerned local officials grappled with why adolescents were not utilising the health services. Health workers decided to offer separate teen services at night. The youth clinic quickly morphed into a lively social gathering place. As if to underscore this point, the din of the young people threatens to drown out our conver-

*"There's nothing that gives me more joy than helping someone."*



*The young volunteers of WESTHELP, a peer counselling group in Montego Bay.*

DAVID GOODMAN

sation. WESTHELP also offers workshops and clinics for the youths, and a week-long “Teens are Terrific” summer camp.

WESTHELP also serves another role for its members. “It keeps them from wasting time, which could lead to unwanted sexual involvement,” says Kerr. “And it helps them raise their goals.”

“It inspires us to aspire for excellence,” pipes up Jhnell. She has been involved with the group for three years, and says she plans to become a social worker in the future. “I like to help other people,” she asserts. “There’s nothing that gives me more joy than helping someone. I can sing, and I like to do that. I just want to help with everything I have.”



# RESEARCH INTO ACTION: THE RIGHT TO KNOW PROJECT

By David Goodman

A warm breeze blows through an open-air classroom in Spanish Town as a group of young people cluster around a large map of their community. “Dat shop — da lady she scold me f’askin,” says a young man. Damian Brown, a peer educator, whips out a coloured marker and responds by placing a black mark on one of the street corners.

The young people are creating a map of their community with unusual highlights: it indicates the location of “youth-friendly” shops where they can buy condoms, and also notes where the youths have encountered disapproving store owners.

“These kids are smart,” says Brown, who works with Children First, a Jamaican organisation that assists children who work, live on the street, or are otherwise at risk. “They know how to get around. And they don’t believe they should be hassled for getting condoms.”

The mapping exercise, undertaken in collaboration with UNICEF, is the “participatory action research” phase in the development of an information package, “What Every Adolescent Has a Right to Know.” This information will be conveyed in a variety of creative ways in an effort to get engage hard-to-reach teens. In 2002, Jamaica became one of 14 countries selected to pilot the new program that informs young people of the basic facts about HIV/AIDS (see box at right).

The importance of informing young people about HIV/AIDS stems from sobering facts: In Jamaica, the number of reported new HIV infections in adolescents has doubled each year since 1995. Around the world, over 6,000 adolescents are infected with HIV daily. Many of these youths never had a chance to protect themselves: they have no access to accurate information, life skills or even health services. The Right to Know project is tackling this problem at its root — mobilising youth and replacing ignorance with practical knowledge.

In 2002, 30 Jamaican adolescents between 14 and 18 years of age drawn from eight organizations and co-ordinated by Children First, were trained by UNICEF in “participatory action research” methodologies. Since its start in July 2002,

this project has involved over 120 young people. Project participants have learned to research problems and have amassed a broad knowledge of the issues facing their peers. Children First has undertaken a variety of innovative research projects, including condom mapping, and moulding dough to illustrate some of the problems that young people encounter daily.

“We asked them ‘who in your community is having sex with children?’ And they would mould it,” explains Brown. “Sometimes they were very emotional because they were the victims. We would stop, and do counselling with them. This research is a way to find out what is happening to children in their community.”

*“I learned things I never knew about how to get my friends to communicate and participate”*

The research phase of the Right to Know project is followed up by meetings with small groups of youths who share information. In the final phase participants assess the efficacy of the interventions they have tried.

Natalie Patterson, 18, was trained as a facilitator in the project. She reflects, “It was good to just share information with other teenagers, and to feel like we were participating in the process.”

Lisa Mills, 14, adds, “I learned things I never knew about how to get my friends to communicate and participate.”

The youth’s research has led Children First to advocate for changes in Spanish Town. A new wellness centre now offers condoms to youths who request them, and discussions are underway about installing condom vending machines in the community. Young facilitators from Children First have counselled store owners and health care providers on how to deliver youth-friendly services. In several cases, the group has notified parents and the police about cases of sexual abuse that they have learned about from their work with young people.

“Right to Know has helped us to realise that there are many ways to get information from young people about what is going on in their lives,” says Brown. “It also helps us teach people and share lifesaving information with each other.”

## PROVIDING YOUTH-FRIENDLY SPACES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE



Imagine a brightly coloured building furnished with simply decorated seating, spaced for comfort and privacy. With a ramp in place, the building is open and accessible to all youth, regardless of physical ability. There are young people everywhere. In one corner, three persons engage in lively debate. In the other room, another group participates in a motivational session. A small room provides privacy to the in-house counsellor. The Cyber Café is a buzz as persons are on the Internet, checking their mail and conducting research in preparation for college and exams. This is the Youth Information Centre – where young people can “be” themselves.

The creation of an island-wide network of Youth Information Centres where adolescents can feel comfortable discussing and accessing information on issues concerning them is among a number of initiatives being implemented by the Government of Jamaica in the drive to empower the nation’s youth.

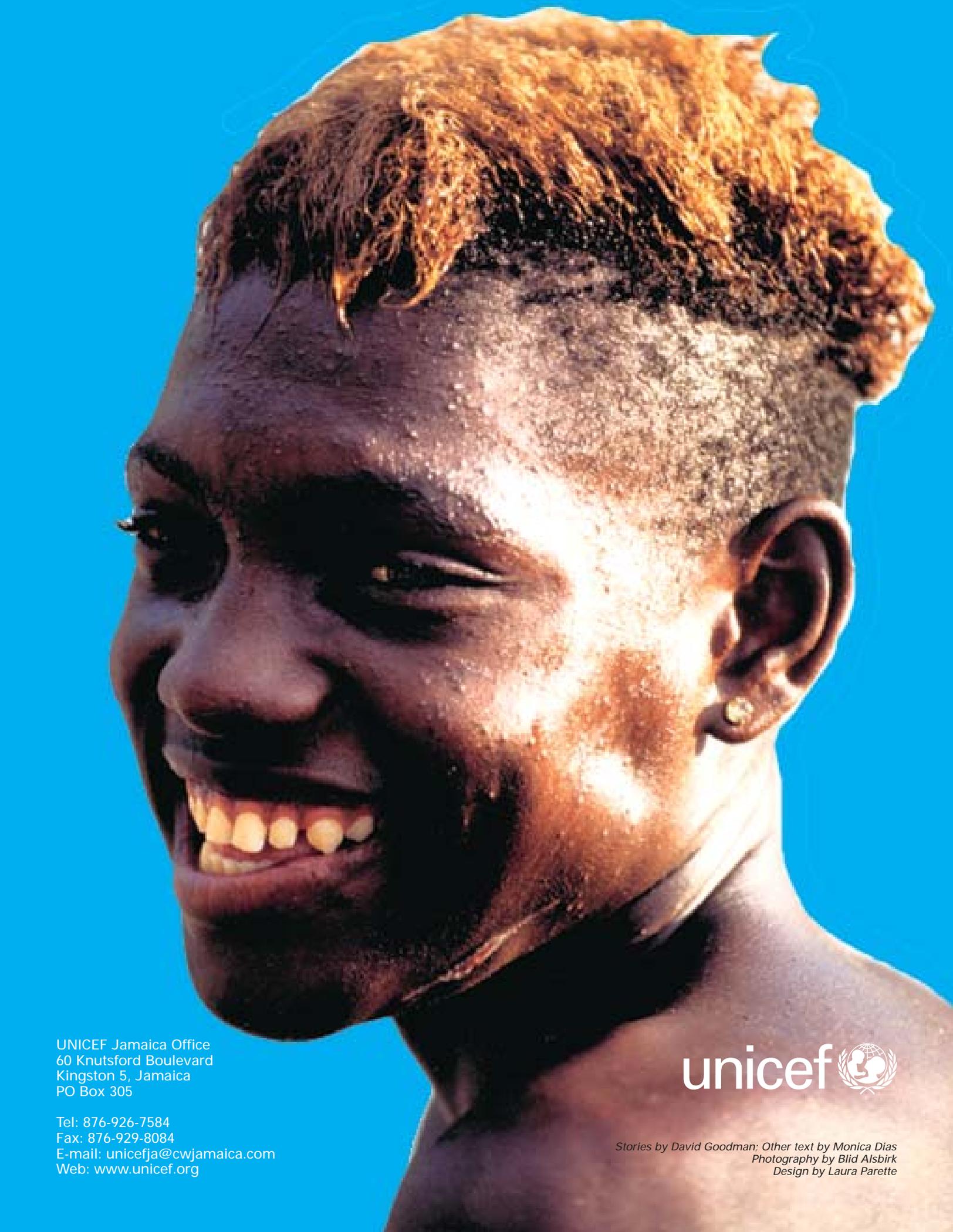
Operated by the National Centre for Youth Development, Ministry of Education, Youth and Culture, the Youth Information Centres (YICS) are youth-friendly spaces where young people 10-24 and sometimes as young as eight years old can discuss and access information on issues concerning them. Concerns range from drug use, sex, AIDS, available jobs

to personal advancement. Up-to-date information is displayed in an adolescent and youth-friendly manner.

The YICS not only serve as a forum for the exchange of ideas and information, but also provides training for adolescents and community members in building their knowledge base and life skills. It is from this location that the Youth Empowerment Officers, conceptualize and launch activities to meet the overall goal of empowering youth to actively participate in the shaping of their environment and to form strong and sustainable linkages. Parish Youth Associations being fostered by the National Centre for Youth Development, will establish relations not only locally but also at the national level with the YICS serving as the hub for activities.

With the assistance of UNICEF-funded Adolescent Development Programme, the National Centre for Youth Development intends to establish a Youth Information Centre in each parish in Jamaica. The YIC based in Kingston, the capital of Jamaica, is used over 400 times per month with approximately 100 new users each month.





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