CREATING A
CULTURE
OF PEACE

Photo Credit: Waqas Mahmood

THE CARIBBEAN YOUTH ADVOCACY & ACTION AGENDA ON VIOLENCE PREVENTION

WHEN YOUTH ARE ENGAGED PEACE IS POSSIBLE

This is **The Caribbean Youth Advocacy & Action Agenda on Violence Prevention– The AAA**. It represents what young people across the Caribbean believe it will take to effectively tackle issues of crime and violence in our communities.

For months now, we have been hosting webinars, convening youth dialogues, and engaging one another on social media and through surveys. We have held conversations with youth-serving professionals, educators, clinicians, policymakers, experts, and advocates–*all to create this Advocacy and Action Agenda*.

Through the process, we have asked tough questions, we have argued, and we have debated. *We have done our homework.*

We have also modeled a way for youth and adults to **talk** to each other, **listen** to each other, and **work together** to define the root causes of crime and violence in our communities— not just the way they manifest in our day-to-day lives.

Now that the problems are clear…

It is time for **action**.

THROUGHOUT HISTORY, IT HAS BEEN THE INACTION OF THOSE WHO COULD HAVE ACTED; THE INDIFFERENCE OF THOSE WHO SHOULD HAVE KNOWN BETTER; THE SILENCE OF THE VOICES OF JUSTICE WHEN IT MATTERED MOST; THAT HAS MADE IT POSSIBLE FOR EVIL TO TRIUMPH.

– HAILE SELASSIE I

PREVENT & REDUCE CRIME

Whether it means waking up in communities riddled with gangs, or having to worry about being bullied at school, attacked on the street, or assaulted at home–day-to-day crime and violence is a reality for many Caribbean youth. Fortunately, for some of us, the threat is less acute. Imagine if we can bridge <u>all</u> of our experience and passion with the power of those of you who control access and resources! <u>We will be unstoppable</u>!

FOSTER SOCIAL INCLUSION

Youth are certainly a part of the epidemic of crime and violence facing our countries, but others play a role, too. Parents need more support. Our schools are not equipped to respond to the needs of higher-risk students. And jobs are so few that it is easy for a youth to find themself broke, alone, and on a dangerous path. Too many people feel disempowered and excluded. Blaming young people is easy and fixing these problems feels daunting, <u>but not if we work together.</u>

PROMOTE REINTEGRATION

Too often, when a young person gets in trouble, our societies are quick to categorize them as bad. And, if that young person is also male, well, that reinforces a story we hear all the time. It gives us permission to write them off for good. <u>But that is our failure</u>, not theirs. The evidence is clear that when youth have access to the resources, help, and services they need, <u>change is possible and likely</u>.

WE CAN PREVENT CRIME & END THE EPIDEMIC OF VIOLENCE

FIRST, YOUNG PEOPLE NEED ...

- Organizations, agencies, and communities to offer evidence-informed programming, interventions, and resources that fully address the diversity of youth backgrounds, experiences, identities, and needs. These efforts must build on a positive youth development (PYD) framework.

- Families, schools, and communities working together on controversial issues like in-home and gender-based violence, toxic masculinity, bullying, and corporal punishment.

- A justice system that includes cross-cutting laws and policies based on the premise that young people can be rehabilitated and that youth are fundamentally different from adults, both in terms of levels of development and responsibility.

- Justice system staff to be better trained in terms of how to meet the developmental needs of young people, including helping youth navigate the road from arrest, to incarceration, to preparation for release, and finally reintegration into communities.

BUT ONLY IF WE WORK TOGETHER

THIS MEANS, POLICYMAKERS & DONORS MUST ...

- **Pass laws which provide funding for crime and violence prevention programs that are comprehensive, culturally responsive, and inclusive. Funding must incentivize programs designed within communities and with youth engagement throughout the process.**

- **Expand funding for evidence-informed programs that are helping reintegrate young people into their families and communities once they have disengaged from the justice system, while helping prevent youth from getting in trouble again.**

- **Convince governments to also support youth entrepreneurship and youth employment and help ensure us the opportunity to fully engage in our national economies.**

- **Address inequities in our educational systems and ensure support for teacher training, in-school counseling and prevention programs, vocational skills training, as well as targeted social-emotional development curricula for toddlers, preteens, and adolescents; and comprehensive parenting programs in higher-risk communities.**

- **Ensure governments provide adequate resourcing when it comes to creating fair and equitable educational opportunities for all youth, not just those in "good schools."**

CREATING A CULTURE OF PEACE
#CARIBBEANPEACE

In developing **The Caribbean Youth Advocacy & Action Agenda on Violence Prevention**, it has been our intention to create an inclusive, culturally-appropriate, youth-centered, and forward-looking plan—a plan that highlights the amazing work that Caribbean youth are already doing and **provides a strong case for promoting and supporting the scaling-up of innovative, evidence-informed, best and promising programs and practices. Programs that are anchored in positive youth development.**

We know that some of this has been talked about before, <u>but that is the problem</u>—it has been mostly just talk. **We need more action and less talk.**

In fact, we are used to policymakers and donors bringing us to the table and later celebrating "youth-input" when sharing their latest report or defending a particular policy. Too often, though, that input did not represent real engagement. **<u>It did not go far enough</u>**.

Young people need to be at the table when problems are defined, programs are conceived, strategies are implemented, and results are measured.

"Young people need to be engaged all the way through."

— Asha-Gaye Cowell, LYNCS Steering Committee Co-Chair

In their landmark 2017 report, *Restoring Paradise in the Caribbean: Combatting Violence with Numbers,* the IDB explains the scope of the Caribbean's crime and violence problem:

Despite inter-regional variation, the defining characteristic of crime in the Caribbean is the uniquely high level of violent crime, including homicides, assaults, and threats, often with the use of firearms.

RESTORING PARADISE IN THE CARIBBEAN
COMBATTING VIOLENCE WITH NUMBERS
Editors: Heather Sutton and Inder Ruprah

"This type of crime is higher in the Caribbean than in any other region. Moreover, Caribbean residents are living a collective trauma from years of violence."

"Nearly 1 in 3 reported having lost someone close to violence and/or having witnessed a violent attack ending in injury or death in his or her lifetime."
— Inter-American Development Bank (IDB)

"Life has become cheap,"

says Dr. David Allen, a psychiatrist who studies crime in the Bahamas.

Though many of us have experienced the terrible, personal impacts of violence and can feel helpless at times, it can also be traumatizing to feel as though our countries are being defined by this violence. It makes us both sad and angry. Despite Dr. Allen's viewpoint, we know that

the Caribbean is not a war zone

and most of us are not afraid to walk down the street.

We refuse to be defined as a violent culture, even as we work every day to reduce and prevent crime and violence.

This is why we have created **The AAA**. It focuses on what is already being done to address the issues, as well as the actions we believe are necessary and achievable. We are ambitious, but we are also realistic.

The average rate of victimization by homicide, assault, and threat in the Caribbean is 6.8% – higher than in any other region in the world.

– IDB, 2017

We understand that we will not achieve anything with a recycled laundry list of resource-intensive demands. There are more than enough formal reports from high-profile, regional and international bodies. In fact, many of us have been involved in drafting those important documents.

With The AAA, however, we are taking a different approach—still a serious and disciplined approach—but one which truly centers the experiences of young people and offers our insights into where it makes sense to replicate and scale-up programs that are really working.

In order to get to this point, we have had many provocative conversations, made some difficult choices, and prioritized a set of actions that we believe are both consistent with building a

#cultureofpeace and which connect easily to regional and global efforts already underway.

In fact, our framework builds upon three of the pillars outlined in CARICOM's Social Development and Crime Prevention Action Plan (SDCP), which was approved by Heads of Government as the overarching regional framework to guide prevention and the reduction in levels of violence and crime in member states.

We believe that the recommendations in The AAA offer a new level of insight as it relates to those three pillars and that those insights will spark powerful, authentic engagement by more young people and the policymakers and donors who represent us.

When that happens, we believe that bold and tangible action—**real change**—will be the result.

"The United States Government's commitment to supporting a prosperous, stable, and safe Caribbean community, through an inclusive and sustainable approach, is centered on the belief that young people are an integral part of the process and must be fully engaged at all levels. In supporting the development of this Action Agenda, we encourage inter-generational problem solving to reduce crime and violence while sparking action from Caribbean governments as they ensure the security of their citizens," said Christopher Cushing, Mission Director of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Eastern and Southern Caribbean.

PREVENT & REDUCE CRIME
IT STARTS WITH MEN AND BOYS

BIG PICTURE. LONG-TERM.

- Organizations, agencies, and communities must offer evidence-informed programming, interventions, and resources that fully address the diversity of youth backgrounds, experiences, identities, and needs. These efforts must build on a positive youth development framework.

- Families, schools, and communities must work together to address controversial issues like in-home and gender-based violence, toxic masculinity, bullying, and corporal punishment.

- We must pass laws which provide funding for crime and violence prevention programs that are comprehensive, culturally responsive, and inclusive. This funding must incentivize programs that are designed within communities and with youth engagement throughout their life cycle.

Over and over again, in conversations leading up to the creation of The AAA, we heard concerns about toxic masculinity—**messed up notions of what it means to be a man**—as the primary driver of crime and violence in our countries.

"Overwhelmingly, males are both the perpetrators and victims of violence," said Professor Julie Meeks-Gardner, a professor of child development at the University of the West Indies and a critical voice in the development of The AAA.

TOXIC MASCULINITY

is a narrow and repressive description of manhood, defined by violence, sex, status, and aggression. It is a cultural ideal of manliness, where strength is everything and emotions are a weakness; where sex and brutality are yardsticks by which men are measured, while supposedly "feminine" traits—which can range from emotional vulnerability to simply not being hypersexual—are the means by which your status as a "man" can be taken away.

– Adapted from "The Good Men Project"

According to the IDB report referenced earlier, "most offenders, as well as victims of crimes, are young males between the ages of 15-30."

We need men and boys to tell us more about when and from whom they are taught it is ok to beat children and abuse women and girls.

What has led to the influence of gangs and the prevalence of guns among so many young men? What is missing from their lives that causes them to become violent?

These are not easy questions and we do not have all the answers. We do know, however, that it is one more reason why we need more research, more data, and more evidence-informed, positive youth development (PYD) programming and interventions.

Bullying and gender-based violence (GBV), for example, can both stem from issues in the home. Youth—especially boys—who are mistreated or ignored often feel insecure, inferior, and inadequate, causing them to lash out at those they perceive as weak and giving themselves an illusion of power and control.

Young men join gangs for many reasons, including that sense of power. They also join because gangs offer a feeling of family, especially if they are not getting love, support, or attention at home. Some join looking for a father figure. Some even join to feel safe.

Amílcar Sanatan, a well-known poet, activist, and scholar in Trinidad and Tobago believes that **"violent notions of masculinity are a key aspect of small arms crises nationally and regionally.** Therefore, transforming social norms, gender beliefs and structures that exclude men is critical to building cultures of peace and justice and addressing human insecurity."

HERE IS WHERE WE BEGIN

- Replicate and scale-up programs like these that have a clear theory of change and are based on a positive youth development (PYD) framework:
    - The IRIE Classroom Intervention Toolbox—a Caribbean-specific set of tools based on "The Incredible Years" model, and which has resources for parents, teachers, and young children.
    - A PMI/UNICEF Violence Interruption Program focusing on 16-25 year-old gang-involved boys in Jamaica.
    - RISE's community-based Safe Spaces program that addresses inequality and focuses on building social cohesion.
- With so much of this violence occurring with boys and young men, we must design widespread community-level programming targeting archaic gender stereotypes.
- We need to educate parents and educators that the use of corporal punishment carries a high risk of causing aggressive behavior in children—behavior that can become violent over time.

DWAYNE

For some young men across the Caribbean, joining a gang can represent escape from a bad situation. For others, it is about independence.

"Some of them youth, they don't have a home. Some of them come from a broken home. They are abused in the home," said Dwayne, a former gang member. "They are looking for somewhere to get some safe refuge. Somewhere they feel some sense of belonging. Most of them don't know what they're getting into," he added.

"When they get there, they have no money. There is nothing to eat. They don't even have shoes. Then someone starts looking after them," Dwayne said. And that's when it starts to get serious. "If I'm giving away something, you have to give something in return. This is how the gang retain their hands. 'I am looking after you, so you owe me.'"

"Mind you there are dudes that come from good homes," he said. "They just need that attention. They have money, they just want to belong somewhere. They don't want to be under the rules of their families."

Regardless of how a young man came to join, getting out is not easy. "Sometimes they want to get out but because of pride, because of fear, they can't," said Dwayne.

We believe that by investing more in programs that are evidence-informed and built on a foundation of PYD, policymakers and donors will jumpstart a new level of community and youth engagement around reducing crime and violence.

We must stop wasting money and time on barely-tested strategies or politically-motivated interventions (increased policing, for example) that make for a good soundbite, but never get to the root causes of these problems. "Crime is a public health problem. That means it cannot be solved just by law enforcement," said Dr. David Allen. We have proven and effective programs which we should scale-up.

A Violence Interruption Program supported by the **Peace Management Initiative** and **UNICEF** is a great example of a positive youth development model that takes gang-involved 16-25 year-old boys out of their communities for residential retreat experiences and **has resulted in a reduction in murder rates in some Jamaican communities by 30%!**

During the retreat, participants discuss topics including identity development, the effects of trauma, maintaining good mental health, leaving the gang behind, substance abuse prevention and management, and sexual and reproductive health.

Another consistent theme that emerged through our conversations was **the need to eliminate corporal punishment at school and in the home**. Many of the evidence-informed programs you will read about herein are based on research that not only suggests corporal punishment does not work, but that it can actually lead to increasingly aggressive behavior.

In Jamaica, the Minister of Education, Youth and Information Senator Ruel Reid has called for the elimination of corporal punishment in Jamaica and the wider Caribbean. "Corporal punishment is so entrenched in our culture and interwoven in our society that it has been accepted as a norm for many families and at a point in time in our schools. **I join the Prime Minister, the National Parenting Support Commission [NPSC] and, of course, the International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN) in calling for a shift in culture and discontinuing the practice of corporal punishment in our region.**"

POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT (PYD)

engages youth along with their families, communities, and/or governments so that youth are empowered to reach their full potential. PYD approaches build skills, assets and competencies; foster healthy relationships; strengthen the environment; and transform systems.

– USAID's Youth Power

FOSTER SOCIAL INCLUSION
BEYOND ACCESS, IT IS ABOUT JUSTICE

BIG PICTURE. LONG-TERM.

- **We need governments that support youth entrepreneurship and youth employment and help to ensure us the opportunity to fully engage in our national economies.**

- **We also need to address inequities in our educational systems and ensure support for teacher training, in-school counseling and prevention programs, vocational skills training, as well as targeted social-emotional development curricula for toddlers, preteens, and adolescents; and comprehensive parenting programs in higher-risk communities.**

- **We need governments that are willing to provide adequate resourcing when it comes to creating fair and equitable educational opportunities.**

Everywhere in the world, there are groups of people who must learn to navigate systems and structures that prevent them from fully participating in the life of a country. These groups are excluded because of stereotypes, stigma, and fear. In the Caribbean, people are often excluded because of age, gender or gender identity, ethnicity, race, language, literacy, class, sexual orientation, disability status, and even conflict with the law.

These feelings of exclusion often have very real consequences—preventing members of these groups from enjoying a sense of dignity, security, and the opportunity to lead a better life. This means we must talk about issues of diversity, equity, and social justice. It is up to us to ensure that everyone is treated fairly under the law and in our communities.

In the context of crime and violence, **this means dismantling systems that benefit some while excluding others**—particularly those who suffer from harmful stereotypes or the lasting impacts of prior poor decision-making.

We need to replace these biased, unfair systems with new models, better strategies, and targeted programs.

Making sure that young people are in the mix when these questions are debated and these programs are designed will help ensure the new systems are more fair and the new programs more useful.

Youth have much to offer when it comes to engaging our peers, and this authentic connection has real value in helping change negative behavior.

SOCIAL INCLUSION
is the process of improving the terms on which individuals and groups take part in society—improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of those disadvantaged on the basis of their identity.
– The World Bank Group

SOCIAL JUSTICE
demands equal access to wealth, opportunities, and privileges within a society.
– The Pachamama Alliance

ANNETTE

My father started abusing me when I was 5 and others in my family continued to abuse me until I was 14. People in my community knew what was happening, but they never tried to help. No one helped me. I didn't know anything about sex and by 15 I had my first child with two more kids coming soon after. I was trying to find love in other persons. Because of the kids and money problems, I did not finish school and after my third child, my mom threatened to kick me out. A women's NGO finally helped me, though my family still does not talk about the abuse. I wish someone would have stepped in when I was little. Maybe life would have been different. Today I'm going to make sure my kids know how to protect themselves from abuse and that they never hurt anyone.

HERE IS WHERE WE BEGIN

- Support model programs that work on three levels:
  - Enhance the juvenile justice system (separate youth from adults, for example; and focus on rehabilitation);
  - Provide effective psycho-social support to youth offenders using a case management approach to help facilitate reintegration of young offenders within their families and communities. This will require a much greater level of financial investment than currently exists; and
  - Foster the economic empowerment/ independence of young people through entrepreneurial activities and innovation (including job skills training and entrepreneurship seed funding).
- Prioritize more vocational training opportunities for justice-involved youth.
- Prioritize youth socialization programs.

One example of an innovative program that is working in the area of social inclusion is the Organization for American States (OAS) Orchestra Program in the Caribbean—**OASIS Caribbean**—which was designed to help reduce the risk factors that result in violent behavior among youth.

Their mission is to "redirect children and youths' spare time to an activity that takes advantage of their inherent strengths and talents via a systematic orchestral and choral training program."

Based on a very successful model program in Venezuela (which has engaged two million youth!), OASIS Caribbean operates in Haiti, Jamaica, and Saint Lucia and has already achieved impressive results:

• In its first 18 months, the program increased students' educational aspirations and the skills needed to succeed in the academic world. This includes the ability to suspend distractions that would derail them from getting and improving their ability to complete projects on time.

• The program increased students' self-confidence in being able to concentrate while doing homework and in being able to stay out of fights. In Jamaica, OASIS students reported using less alcohol and marijuana than non-OASIS participants.

• In Haiti, OASIS students improved their relationships with parents and guardians. These participants were also more likely to practice sports than non-OASIS students.

• **OASIS students also reported fewer incidences of becoming angry, reduced aggressive behaviors, and less involvement with delinquent peers.**

"After playing [in the orchestra] for a couple of weeks my life was finally looking up, not only had my grades increased but I was making new friends who were also in the program. Currently, I am improving my playing skill and it is steadily increasing day by day. To keep playing is my main goal in life, and to do so as long as I can, or as long as I live."
— OASIS Student, Saint Lucia

PROMOTE REINTEGRATION
RESTORATIVE JUSTICE WORKS

> **BIG PICTURE. LONG-TERM.**
>
> - **We must have justice systems that include cross-cutting laws and policies based on the premise that young people can be rehabilitated and that youth are fundamentally different from adults, both in terms of levels of development and responsibility.**
>
> - **Justice system staff need to be better trained in terms of how to meet the developmental needs of young people, including helping youth navigate the road from arrest, to incarceration, to preparation for release, and finally reintegration into their communities.**
>
> - **Expand funding for evidence-informed programs that are helping to reintegrate young people into their families and communities once they have disengaged from the justice system, and helping to prevent youth from getting in trouble again.**

In theory, the concept of restorative justice makes a lot of sense, but what does it mean in practice? Does it work in our countries?

Yes it does, according to Dr. Dacia Leslie, a Research Fellow at the Sir Arthur Lewis Institute of Social and Economic Studies at the University of The West Indies (UWI).

"In my research work I define effective reintegration as the leading of crime-free and productive lives within the community following detention," she said. "It relies on working with offenders, not managing them."

"There is a reasonable amount of international evidence on what works effectively to reintegrate young persons. What we seem to lack in the Caribbean region is effective implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of [those] proposed strategies," added Dr. Leslie.

For us, perhaps the most important take-away from this idea is that every person has worth and value and that our communities can only

> **RESTORATIVE JUSTICE**
> **A theory of justice that emphasizes repairing the harm caused by criminal behaviour. It is best accomplished through cooperative processes that include all stakeholders. This can lead to transformation of people, relationships, and communities.**
> **– The Centre for Justice and Reconciliation**

truly heal from the impacts of crime and violence when we find ways to **reintegrate those who have caused the harm back into their families and communities**.

This is especially true for youth, who according to USAID's **Youth Power**, experience a wide variety of needs dependent on their age, gender, and developmental stage, as well as cultural, socio-economic, and environmental factors."

Young people think differently. We have different needs. Most importantly, with help, we can change our behaviors and values.

The problem is that in order for reintegration to be effective, we need a multi-agency approach that begins at the time of arrest (not release) and that post-release success requires a community-based, continuous care approach. This is not our current reality.

"Jail is not built for people like us. We have skills. Give us a second chance."
— *Michel Nicholas, Young Inmate, Her Majesty's Prison, Basseterre, Saint Kitts and Nevis*

HERE IS WHERE WE BEGIN

- **We need to pass a legislative agenda that defines and protects juveniles, mandates juvenile justice improvements at every level, utilizes a case management approach with youth, seals and expunges juvenile records, and creates appropriate opportunities for diversion programs and judicial discretion when it comes to case disposition.**

- **We should adopt juvenile court practices that are youth-centered, non-adversarial, private, and accelerated.**

- **We need to invest more in diversion programs and alternatives to incarceration —*and not just for youth under 18*.**

- **We need to provide youth with access to social workers *in their communities*.**

Unfortunately, most reintegration programs that exist are woefully under-funded with many of them failing to see the useful role youth can play in the reintegration process with our peers. **Too often as young people, we are still seen only for our needs and not as potential problem-solvers.**

Yet, we know better than anyone that young people who come into conflict with the law are likely to end up in trouble again if they cannot find positive peers, a supportive family, or a welcoming community.

"Most young people that join gangs have low educational attainment. They either did bad in high school or dropped out. They want good paying jobs, but don't have the qualifications, so they are marginalized and society don't consider them to be beneficial. They need to earn some kind of skill to obtain gainful employment. If they can't work legally, they will make money illegally."

– Elrick Francis, Youth, Saint Kitts and Nevis

"We need a much greater focus on the socialization needs of young people than we do on policing them, and significantly more resources invested in partnerships and activities that support reintegration," said Dwayne Gutzmer, the CEO of the Institute of Law and Economics in Jamaica.

We need to "replicate programs like the juvenile justice reform project in St. Kitts and Nevis, in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Saint Lucia; as well as the juvenile court project in Trinidad and Tobago and community, family and youth resilience programs in St. Kitts, Saint Lucia, and Guyana," he added, referring to the range of regional USAID-

ASHTON

When he was 17, Ashton killed another boy during a fight and spent years in a maximum security prison. Hoping to turn his life around, he was a model prisoner, which resulted in his early release. "I went in a child and came out a man," he said.

Today, Ashton believes that society needs to do a lot more for ex-inmates. "I did a crime. I did my dues. That's history. I deserve to be treated as a human, with respect. I give respect. I hope that it will be reciprocated. That would be really helpful," he said. "Prison helped me to understand what's really important, what matters, what creates real happiness and joy. In prison, my values changed."

As a young agriculturalist today, Ashton is working to get his business off the ground. Even now though, he thinks about how people in his community feel about him. "Believe me bro. It's tough," he said. "At least agriculture gives me a way to be away from all of that. I try to protect my space and avoid being placed in an embarrassing situation or in a place where I would be treated in a disrespectful manner."

He hopes that the public can change how it feels about ex-inmates. "As a young man growing up doing wrong things, I still never believed that prison could be a part of my reality; and I think that's probably true for most people in Trinidad and Tobago," Ashton said. "At least in prison, people saw my potential," he added.

funded programs. "Too often, governments see young people only as perpetrators or victims," said Henry Charles, International Youth Development Specialist, Policy, and Strategy Advisor. Attitudes like these "rob the state of benefitting from the productive capacity of young people–youth who have been identified as being critical to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)," he added.

T&T Juvenile Court Project

Trinidad and Tobago is the first Caribbean country to offer a comprehensive child justice system that integrates a child rights approach for children in conflict with the law. The Children's Court, established under the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID) Juvenile Court Project (JCP), enables children in conflict with the law under 18 years old to access services centered on a restorative and rehabilitative justice approach.

"The JCP has allowed for the revision of laws that direct a rehabilitative approach to child justice and has supported the inclusion of peer resolution," said the U.S. Embassy in Trinidad and Tobago Chargé d'Affaires, John McIntyre. "The investment in the infrastructure of new courts to address the unique needs of children and families speaks to the child-centered approach of the project. As a result of lessons learned from the JCP, better data-driven and problem-solving justice systems will continue to be designed in the Caribbean throughout the years to come," he concluded.

WE ARE MAKING PROGRESS
CARIBBEAN PROGRAMS THAT WORK

IRIE Classroom Toolbox

The IRIE Classroom Toolbox builds upon a set of globally recognized, evidence-informed, early childhood interventions. **The program has been designed to prevent the development of serious anti-social behaviour in children, while promoting their social skills and academic achievement.** Great care has been taken to ensure that the interventions were appropriately adapted to meet cultural norms and has been designed, pilot-tested and proven to work in Jamaican classroom settings.

"We decided that we needed to focus on the early years if we wanted to prevent aggression and its development, since by age 11 [boys] were already well into their aggressive behavior," says Dr. Julie Meeks, a UWI professor of child development and an architect of the program.

365 children from the original study schools were assessed in Grade 1 of primary school. Compared to children from control schools, children from schools using the interventions showed:

- **Better academic achievement across multiple domains including reading, writing, math, and language.**
- **Better executive function (planning, time management, and organization skills).**
- **Better school attendance.**
- **Better friendship skills at home and at school.**
- **Improvements to child conduct problems and social skills at school.**

The program focuses on improving the quality of the classroom environment by training teachers and by providing in-class support in behavior management skills and strategies for reducing the use of corporal punishment.

RISE Safe Spaces

RISE in Saint Lucia, has partnered with the LUCELEC Foundation, SSDF, and the Ministry of Education to pilot a ground-breaking Safe Spaces program to build a more peaceful and productive society—one that is on a sustainable path to healthy community development.

RISE believes that "safe spaces in every community are important for the nurturing and normal development of children, for fostering business, and for improving the quality of life."

"Safe Spaces is grounded in the belief that peace-building, and the creation of safe communities, is ultimately the responsibility of each community." It is fundamentally about leadership in schools and communities.

Safe Spaces builds upon several evidence-informed strategies and leverages these important elements of positive youth (and community) development:

- **Communities taking ownership is absolutely critical.**
- **A driving motivation for young people is the need to belong, to feel supported.**
- **Sports, arts, music, drama, and technology all have the power to change behavior.**
- **Activities that offer "pro-social, social capital" can counteract negative influences. In other words, when youth engage in positive behavior and that behavior is recognized and rewarded in their social networks, it becomes a powerful motivator.**

"After the 10 years that RISE has been wrestling with the [violence] problem, we appreciated that ad hoc interventions can't work," said Dr. Stephen King, the Director of RISE. "We felt communities taking ownership … of the initiative and leading the process was the way to go. That meant that we had to build capacity in communities so we designed … Safe Spaces … to allow us to pilot [our approach] in the community [of Ciceron]."

RISK & PROTECTIVE FACTORS
IT CAN BE EASIER, OR IT CAN BE HARD

Why do youth become violent?

How can we prevent it?

As our understanding of youth crime and violence grows through research and data collection unique to the Caribbean, we can draw upon a wealth of global research which proves these are complicated issues with no easy answers. Still, we do know a lot about the factors that can influence and contribute to the decision-making processes of young people who end up engaging in violence, *and those who do not*.

Risk factors increase the propensity of a youth to become violent or engage in criminal activity, or, on the other side, become a victim of crime or violence. Protective factors lessen those chances.

These factors can change over time and each young person's situation is unique. And while these factors alone will not tell us with certainty whether a young person may become violent or be victimized, understanding them can help us design intervention strategies (and laws and policies) that can help prevent a young person from ending up on that path.

One of our key partners—USAID's **Community, Family and Youth Resilience (CFYR)** Program is currently doing primary research into youth risk levels by looking at the accumulation of nine specific risk factors related to crime and violence. By measuring these factors, it becomes possible to determine a youth's specific level of risk and better calibrate interventions, programs, and services. While CFYR is looking at the specific risk factors in the box to the right, there are any number of factors we can consider.

Dr. Leslie believes that "there is a need to go beyond problem identification to understanding the protective factors—conditions in individuals, families, communities, and the larger society which, when present, help to mitigate or eliminate the risk of offending."

There are just as many potential protective factors, including, among many others: good mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional health, success at school, parental supervision, community engagement, problem-solving skills, and positive adult role models, coaches, and mentors.

CFYR Risk Factor Analysis

- **Anti-Social Tendencies**
- **Weak Parental Supervision**
- **Critical Life Events**
- **Impulsive Risk Tendencies**
- **Guilt Neutralization**
- **Negative Peer Influence**
- **Peer Delinquency**
- **Delinquency Associated with Substance Abuse**
- **Family Gang Influence**

Regardless of whether we focus on minimizing risk factors or strengthening protective ones (or a combination), this approach creates opportunities for interventions at the individual level, with families, schools, and communities, and at the societal level. In order to design the right approach, again we make the point that **more research and quality data is necessary for us to use evidence-informed strategies effectively**—strategies that attack the <u>root causes</u> of crime and violence.

PRIORITIZE EVIDENCE & DATA
AND MAKE STRATEGIC INVESTMENTS

One of the biggest problems with getting to the bottom of why crime and violence have become so prevalent across the Caribbean is **a lack of credible research and quality data**. We are not the first to argue this point, and we stand together with many of our partners in demanding that our governments **commit more resources to research**, rather than short-term fixes like increased policing, targeted community crackdowns, and simply locking-up more young people.

We are fully committed to the idea that laws, policies, and programming should actually help solve problems. And though in many cases we believe our national security priorities need to change in order to free up critical funding, we also understand that resources are limited. This is why we need more research and more data collection and analysis.

Evidence-informed strategies use data and evidence to identify the potential benefits, drawbacks, and costs of an intervention, *while acknowledging that what works in one context may not be appropriate or feasible in another*. **It creates space for cultural values, conventional wisdom, and common sense considerations.**

We need BOLD investments in evidence-informed strategies.

Young people have been leading social movements in the Caribbean and around the world for many years. We fight everyday to make our world a better place.

We are resilient, we are thoughtful, and we deserve policymakers and donors who will work with us to build societies in which all youth are valued, respected, and treated with dignity.

This Caribbean Youth Advocacy & Action Agenda on Violence Prevention is a blueprint for how policymakers and donors can align your work with ours; and how, *together*, **we can create a culture of peace now and for future generations.**
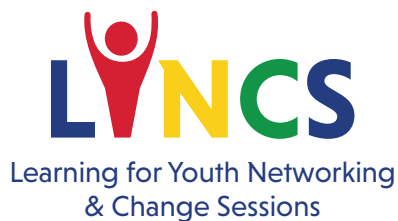
THANK YOU!
OUR PARTNERS ARE AWESOME

**We Are Very Grateful to All of Our Partners
Whose Support Has Helped Make The AAA Possible!**