



FIRST PERSON Deaf Jamaicans Get a Second Chance

Deaf adults are becoming teachers of deaf children



Photo: GDC

Dewdney Scott, right, prepares for Literature Circle Discussion with other students in the Fast Track Program in Kingston, Jamaica.

“The deaf education system here did not teach me how to read, write, or think critically,” says Dewdney Scott, a deaf Jamaican who has joined a USAID-sponsored program to improve education for deaf children in Jamaica.

Dewdney Scott has always dreamed of teaching film and drama to deaf children. This is an ambitious goal, especially since Dewdney himself is deaf. In order to get into teachers’ college, he needed to pass Jamaica’s standard college entrance exams. Dewdney took the exams each year for ten years, but failed each time. But he was not alone — many deaf people have had trouble passing Jamaica’s college entrance exams, leaving them with limited career opportunities. “The deaf education system here did not teach me how to read, write, or think critically,” he said. Frustrated and discouraged, he feared that he would never become a teacher.

Then, he enrolled in the USAID-sponsored Fast Track Program. A joint effort between the Global Deaf Connection, the Jamaica Association for the Deaf and USAID, the year-long program launched in 2006 helps deaf adults achieve the qualifications needed to enter teachers’ college. After passing the college entrance exams and earning their degree, graduates of the program will be able to teach deaf children any subject they qualify for.

The Fast Track Program also seeks to improve Jamaica’s deaf education system so that other children do not have the same problems that Dewdney faced when trying to pass the college entrance exams. “All we learned in the classroom was copying sentences from the blackboard. We were told to identify the subject, verb and object in sentences that we never could make sense of... I never liked reading,” he says. The program is showing teachers of deaf students new techniques to make difficult subjects like grammar and reading easier. It is also training more sign language interpreters, which will make it less difficult for deaf students to communicate with others.

Dewdney is now optimistic about his future. For two years he has been a teacher’s aide at the Danny Williams School for the Deaf in Kingston. In 2006, he started working with a Fast Track literacy specialist with the goal of passing the entrance exams and entering college in 2008. He has even starting enjoying reading. With a lot of hard work and a little help, Dewdney has become an example for many deaf Jamaicans, especially his students.