



Transforming Inner-City Communities in Jamaica

When Jamaica's murder rate soared in the early 2000's, Grants Pen stood out as one of the most dangerous districts of Kingston in Jamaica. Stigmatized and marginalized, this densely populated inner-city zone, home to just over 7,000, was characterized by sharp turf boundaries, gang rivalry, and violence. The situation worsened due to the tense relationships between residents and the police. As hostility increased daily, Grants Pen's reputation plummeted, and the citizens languished in an existence of terror, neglect, and despair.

The first breakthrough in Grants Pen came in the form of a community sports day which was held with USAID's help. This activity brought together over 500 Grants Pen residents and fostered intra-community interaction with residents from Morgan's Lane, another area noted for violence. The day was incident free, without the presence of police or security personnel. This success generated interest in organizing more sporting events such as football, cricket and netball competitions.

Working with diverse partners - including the Jamaica Constabulary Force, the Dispute Resolution Foundation, several educational facilities, the private sector, churches and community groups - residents learned to defuse violence through mediation and community activities such as the sports day. Moreover, through activities such as police and resident training programs, public education, relationship-building exercises and police bike patrols, the police and residents combined forces to take back the community from criminals.



Photo: Rev. Ian Muirhead/ Upper Room Church
Sports brought members of the warring factions in Grants Pen together.

USAID funded the three-year inner-city development project, and a community policing project, which has changed Grants Pen for the better. Moreover, the community police project broke new ground for USAID around the world by securing permission from the U.S. Congress to work directly with the police to improve community relationships - previously U.S. law did not allow USAID to work directly with host-country police.

The inner-city project also empowers residents with the necessary skills to find jobs, and start up or improve their businesses through a number of training programs. Since a majority of the residents were illiterate, special courses were also developed to enhance literacy in Grants Pen. Specialized training programs were developed for the residents to enhance professional skills such as computer skills, catering, plumbing, electronics, auto mechanics, and cosmetology. Residents were coached for job interviews including how to dress and prepare for answering questions.

“I saw the USAID program as a godsend. What USAID has done is to give us an avenue to help heal the community and to help our children.”

- Reverent Ian Muirhead

The journey has been a learning process for all involved - the ministers, the coaches, parents, participants, and many others living and working in Grants Pen. The wider business community is now investing heavily in Grants Pen. For example, the National Commercial Bank of Jamaica (NCB) invested approximately \$834,000 toward the construction of a multi-purpose service building, which will include a model police station for the community.

“You would not believe the response we are getting,” says Norris Jackson, a community leader and resident. “Before this program, people were very skeptical, now they are beginning to believe. There is a lot more to do, but we are seeing change everyday and people are now living in hope. What is most important is that the community is coming together to determine its future.”

Success Story

