



British  
High Commission  
Kingston

**Peace Management  
Initiative/British High  
Commission  
Homeless Youth  
Report**

## **Peace Management Initiative/British High Commission**

### **Homeless Youth Report**

#### **Overview**

The Peace Management Initiative (PMI) was engaged through a series of partnership consultations with various stakeholders including political representatives, JFLAG and the British High Commission to treat with a group of high risk homeless youth who were accused of carrying out several robberies and incidences of public disorder in the New Kingston Community. The PMI was tasked to unearth the real problems affecting the group and start the process of transitioning them out of their current situation.

The group was sensitized to the work of the PMI and what was expected of them before being invited to attend a Residential Workshop. The workshop shed light on issues of identity, broken relationships, anger suffering and abuse, homelessness, sexual dysfunction, fear and the lack of hope experienced by the group. The PMI later embarked on a series of therapeutic workshops to treat with many of these issues. The main challenge faced in dealing with the group was the fact that their living situation was unstable.

The PMI tried to overcome this obstacle by emphasizing to the participants that their life process depended solely on their commitment to the process while providing them with a support network they could trust. Going forward a significant amount of work needs to be done in the medium to long term in treating with the group's psycho-social issues while equipping them with the tools and the opportunities they need to develop themselves and move away from the street.

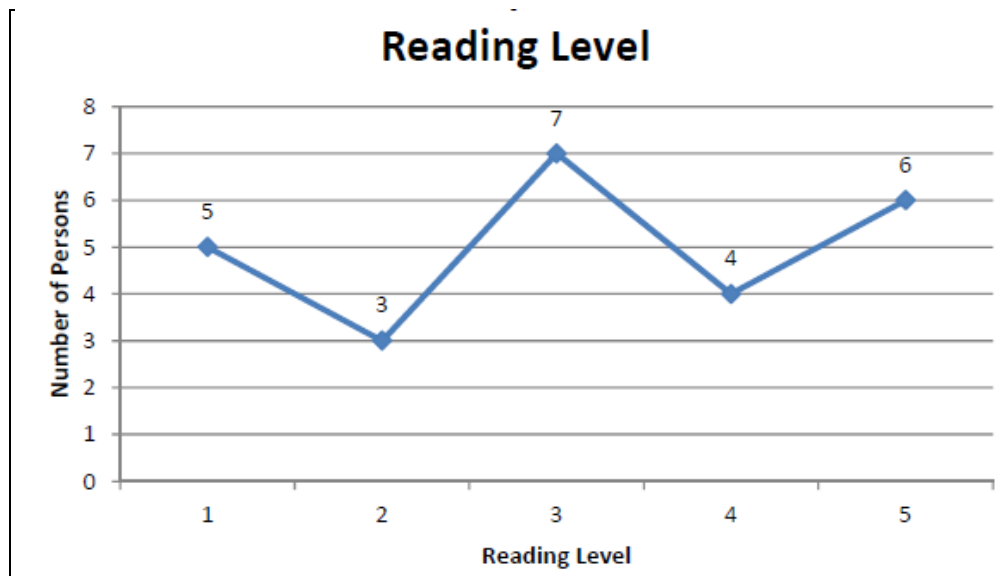
### Programme Outline

Activity	Objective	Outcome
2 Orientation and Sensitization Workshops	To screen and identify participants to be a part of residential workshop. Also to make initial assessment of critical issues affecting the participants and providing them with information on intended programme.	To provide an environment to carry out case interviews with participants.  To assess the behaviour of the participants living together.  To provide life skills training with the participants.
Residential Workshop	To identify the critical areas of long term support needed to transition the participants out of their current situations	Case interviews conducted on the social, educational, psychological and family background on the participants.  Life skills training carried out in the areas of Identity and Self, Stress Management and Coping with Trauma, Conflict Resolution, Relationship Building and Personality Development.
5 Therapeutic and Personality Development Workshops	To focus on establishing transition pathways for each participant.  To provide ongoing therapeutic support and counseling	Group and individual counseling and therapeutic support carried out for approximately 30 participants.  Next steps course of action identified for each participant as part of the transition out of homeless situation.
6 Site Visits and Assessment of living situation.	To be able to map and identify areas and places where participants are currently located.  To provide visit with participants in their living situation is part of hand holding and support process.	Current dwelling areas of participants identified visited.  Treating with living area conflicts  Treating with law enforcement issues related to squatting areas  Treating with shelter and materials  Providing meals and support to

		participants.
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## Group Assessment

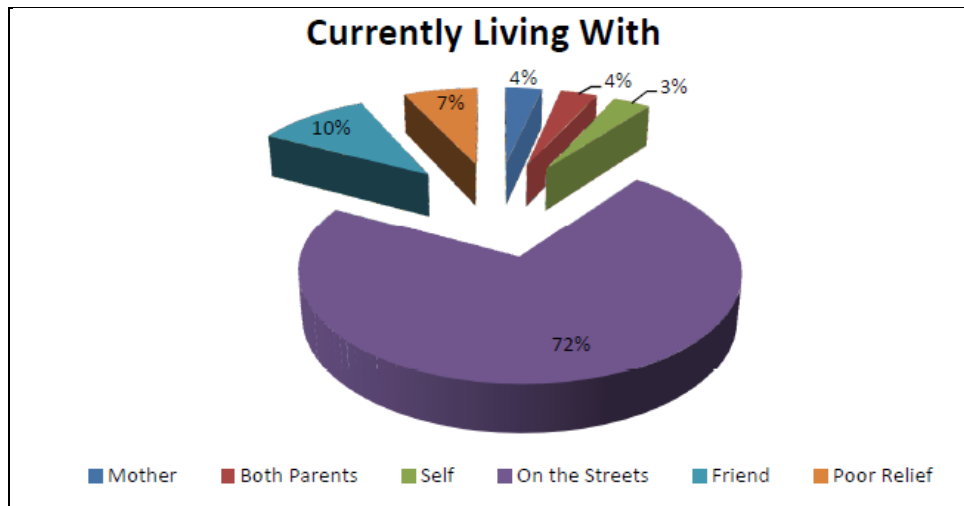
### Education



Reading level 4 indicates that the participants can read without assistance. Reading level is ranked with level 1 being the lowest functioning and level 5 being the highest. Four of the participants did not indicate a reading level.

Most of the participants dropped out of school and are unable to read beyond grade 3 level. Their educational level is similar to that of the most at risk youth living in the vulnerable most communities. That said it should be noted that more than 90% grew up in these same communities before going on the streets. The main reasons for them dropping out of school were financial challenges, behavioral problems (fighting) and going to live on the streets. Most of the behavioral issues and fighting experienced while going to school was done in defense of their identity and who they were as many of them were bullied and ostracized for the way they looked and behaved. Leaving school voluntarily or involuntarily was a cross roads in the lives of many of the participants as at this time many of them also chose to leave home and go on the streets.

### Homelessness (Living Environment)



Most of the participants are from the inner city and still have family there. Some have been chased out while others choose to live in the street in a “community” that is more accepting of them and their lifestyle choice. For a few they “sofa surf” (sleeping on a friend’s couch and/or floor for a few nights) depending on how long they can stay. Many others who group together and seek to rent a space are often times evicted as a result of neighbours ostracizing them or based on bad behaviour. The result is squatting which see them living a communal nomadic type of lifestyle in abandoned buildings and properties in the golden triangle of Kingston and the Downtown Waterfront and Market areas.

While their residential status is unstable, within their living space they share the basic amenities with each other such as the property, light and water when available. They are however quite protective of their own money, food and personal items and seek out support for themselves through donations from organizations and/or concerned citizens, sponsors and friends. It should be noted however that some external agencies also provide intermittent assistance, especially in assisting them with food. Money acquired is sometimes put in a group fund to secure a room at a cheap motel for the luxury of not being exposed to the elements. Communal cooking is

prevalent (“run-a-boat”) among the group as money acquired is collected and food purchased to facilitate a hot meal. Currently there are groupings of them living in abandoned and private lots in upscale areas of Kingston. This area provides a sense of security as residents are less likely to attack them which enables them to inhabit the space for longer periods. The space once occupied is akin to communal living with groups within groups. That is, many of them while living in the same space do not get along with each other and they form cliques which are often times in conflicts. Many of these conflicts are started as a result of relationship issues (cheating on their partners with other persons in the living area) or protecting personal possessions. Some conflicts are also started when some members of the group draw attention to the group by the way they dress or by going out and committing crimes which leads the police back to the group. The New Kingston group was forcibly removed from an area they once inhabited. This area was the base for much of their hustling. Now relocated, many of them frequent the malls and other areas in Half Way Tree.

#### *Residential Workshop*

The residential workshop provided key insights into the challenges of providing general group housing for homeless gay men. The PMI was able to manage the behaviour of the participants over the three day period by providing the group with clear ground rules, incentives and repercussions for bad behaviour. The group in general was well behaved, attended the sessions as required and participated in all activities. The main challenge in dealing with the group was related to disputes which arose between persons who were in a relationship with each other. It came to our attention that many of the homeless gay men are actually in a relationship with each other. This is also the case on the street and many of the men in these relationships are abusive and physically violent towards each other. The level of promiscuity (sleeping around) within this community is according to the participants extremely high and this is partly responsible for a lot of the jealousy and the fights among them. At the residential workshop several conflicts arose from persons being jealous about their partner having another roommate, this created several arguments and caused conflicts. Any future move to provide housing for this group must seek to address and treat with these issues. The PMI as part of our therapeutic work with the group has provided relationship counseling to 2 of the couples who were always in conflict with each other.

### **Economic Survival**

A significant number of the homeless youth generate income through prostitution, support from friends and family (especially their mothers or sisters with whom they have a good relationship) and informal hustling (selling cigarettes toiletries, snacks and small quantities of marijuana) and petty robberies. It should be noted that those participants that have the least support are those involved in prostitution. Only two (2) of the thirty (30) participants were unwilling to desist from carrying out robberies. Those who were previously involved made some commitment to stop. While a few of the participants went on the street to carry out their prostitution activity many of them had partners who would occasionally sleep with them for money. Some of them would leave Kingston and go to Ocho Rios or Montego Bay to get involved with transactional sexual activities.



The spirit of entrepreneurship is however very strong within the group and the PMI has started a process of identifying areas of business some of the participants could readily pursue. There is a strong interest among the participants in the areas of farming, entertainment promotion, catering and buying and selling. Of the 30 participants 11 indicated a willingness to start their own business while 13 wanted to go back to school or enter some sort of training programme. The others are interested in getting a steady job.

### **Identity, Self and Group Interactions**

For many of the participants, being on the street is a statement of who they are, it is part of, as they say, “being out”. When referring to the amount of time spent on the street they often share that they have been “out” for 6 years or whatever the time period may be. They have become hardened by their lifestyle on the street but also emboldened in showing to society who they are. This goes to the core of their flamboyance and their defiance of what society says they can and cannot do. Many of the participants feel that they can only be themselves on the street or if they acquire a visa and travel overseas to Canada, United States or England.

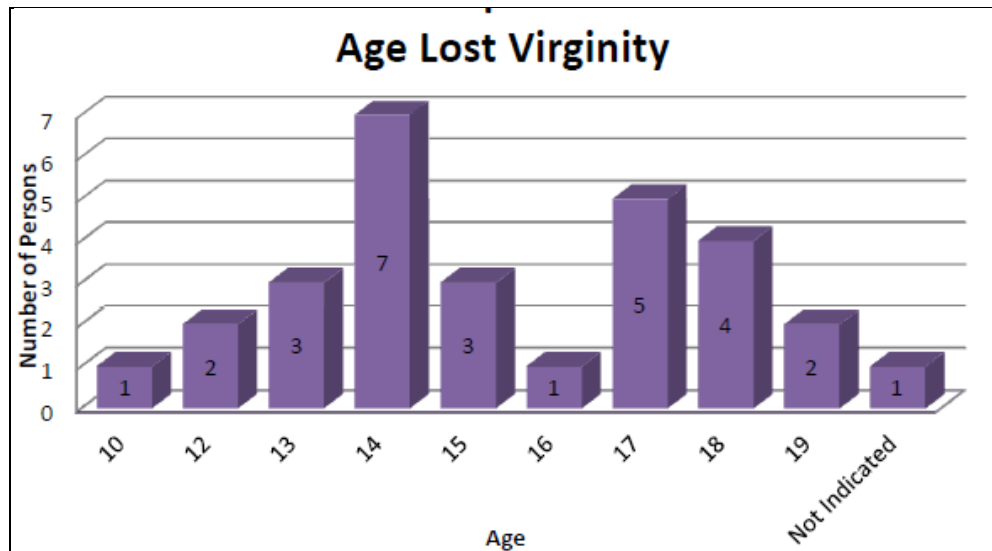
Many of the participants are uncompromising in this regard and for this reason are often in conflict with other members of the gay homeless community. Some persons in this community believe that the group should dress more like men and behave like men in order to avoid being stereotyped or targetted on the street. The PMI in its approach realized that this strong declaration of their sexuality can impact positively or negatively on their transition away from the street. On one hand their determination can be harnessed and focused on developing opportunities for themselves in areas where they have a natural interest. On the other hand the need to define oneself based solely sexuality is a negative trait which can hold back their progress. A main theme emphasized by the PMI throughout our sessions with the group was “I am more than my sexuality”. We shared the idea with the participants that they are much more than being gay. In one session a participant was asked “who are you?” He indicated in his response that he is a “batty man” from New Kingston”. When asked the same question after 5 sessions the participant indicated that he is bright, strong, kind and determined to be a journalist. These are only words but the mental transition needed to remove the labels they have placed on themselves is a real challenge faced by the PMI and it takes time to change.

### **Psychological**

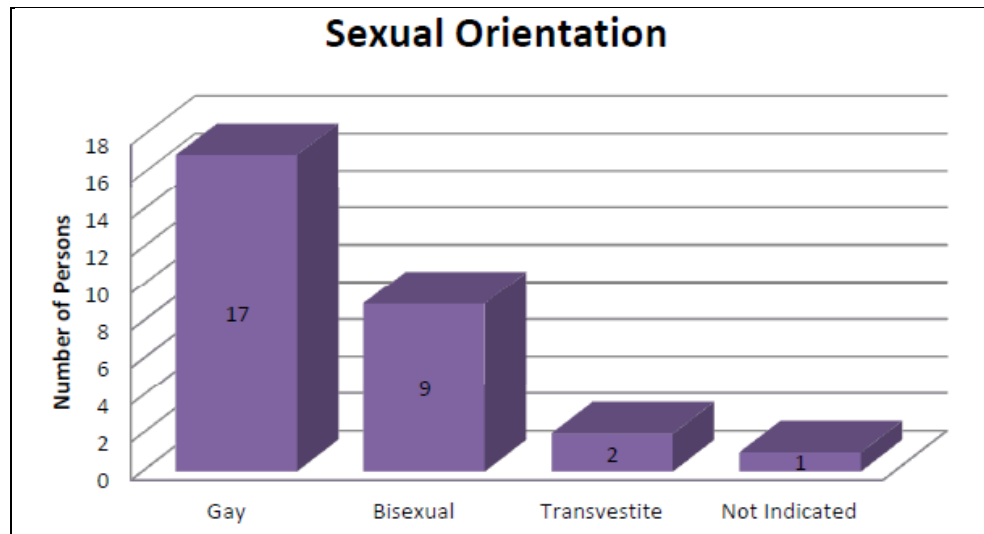
The participants are emotionally fragile. They move from a stable emotional state of mind to anger and then to acting on the anger very quickly. They seem very territorial of their relationships and space. The relationships among them are fiercely passionate. Almost all have experienced gay “bashing”, some have been beaten, stabbed and or chopped. Most of them have horrifying stories of being mobbed or of individuals luring them into danger under false



pretenses. Some tell stories of being forced into the lifestyle through being molested by persons known or unknown to them. For some of them sexual molestation started as young as 7 years old with instances of co-ersion, blackmailing and being drugged. Many of the participants who indicated that they were forced into the lifestyle or abused identify themselves as being bisexual. Is there a correlation?



Many of these participants indicate that they are confused about their sexual preference. For many of these young men, the transition away from the street of these young men will be a long process as they have to overcome and or cope with multiple traumatic experiences. The result has made them less tolerant of expected norms and values of the society and impatient with help being offered in a systematic way. Some are struggling with chronic illnesses which compound their socio-economic situation. At least a third of the participants are HIV Positive. This speaks to the challenge of encouraging participants to commit to a process of change in attitude and values when most of them are operating in basic survival mode.



Discussions with the participants indicate that despite the challenges of living on the street many they are happy with their lifestyle. They refer to themselves in feminine connotations with female names given to some. Some display more of a female characteristic than others and most see themselves as ladies being quite feminine and refer to themselves as such. Their main contention is being “bashed” from the “straight” crowd which has caused deep seated hurt and fear.

This is compounded by rejections from family and friends based on moral and societal expectations and in some instances pressure from the community. In conversations with the participants as a whole and individually, the common trend is the fear for their lives. They revealed the constant need to be alert and mindful of where they go. The participants who are more feminine in their mannerisms express that they are more likely to get attacked because they are easier to be identified as gay. This raised the question: “How can I change behaviour that is natural to me?” The fear they express is underlined with anger, depression, feelings of isolation and frustration.

### *Anger*

The anger is directed at the society, family, friends, organizations and the government for not doing enough. They argue that not enough is being done to protect and provide them with the support necessary to be a productive member of society.

### *Depression*

The constant emotional turmoil has worn them down psychologically. Being homeless, feeling unloved, unwanted and the pressure of surviving has had a tremendous impact on how they perceive themselves and the role they play in the society.

### *Isolation*

The participants expressed feelings of being society's outcast. This has led them to speak to unrealistic ideals such as "why can't the government give us a community for ourselves so people can leave us alone?" The reference of "us" and "we" against "them" is a common thread that underlines most conversations.

### *Frustration*

The frustration they emphasize come from feeling stuck. They also refer to help previously offered by organizations as being intermittent and unsustainable.

## **Recommendations**

<b>Prescribed Activity</b>	<b>Objective</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Expected Outcome</b>
Ongoing preparatory work with participants to be part of temporary housing solutions being developed and facilitated by other agencies such as JFLAG	To continue the ground work needed to prepare participants to be part of future temporary housing solutions.	Temporary housing for each participant should be not less than 12 months but not more than 18 months.	Participants involved in 2 – 5 Day and 1 – 7 Day Residential Workshops in preparation to be referred for temporary housing.
Ongoing therapeutic support needed for each participant	To improve the mental health of the participants. Provide the necessary care and support needed to prepare the participants for life beyond the street.	6 -12 months depending on the issues affecting each participant	Participants receive treatment in anger management and conflict resolution. Forty hours mediation training. Individual and group counseling focused on treating with trauma and managing depression.

Personality Development Workshops	To help the participants in their mental transition from being a defiant gay man on the street to being focused on fulfilling his potential and maximizing his ability as a person	3 to 6 months	To have participants come to the understanding that they are not defined by their sexuality. To secure their progress to achieving the life and career goals they set for themselves
Literacy and Remedial Training	Provide and facilitate remedial training for participants below grade 3 reading level	12 months	Participants achieve and being able to take qualifying entrance test for skills training programmes.
Entrepreneurship, Business Development and Job Readiness Training	Equip participants with the knowledge, skills and tools needed to prepare them to start their own businesses.	6 – 12 months	Participants equip with the information needed to manage a business and assigned to a period of apprenticeship of 6 months in a business area of their interest.