



PREPARING YOUTH IN CONFLICT WITH THE LAW FOR SUCCESS

Caribbean Youth Empowerment Program in Saint Lucia: A Case Study

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CARIBBEAN **YOUTH** EMPOWERMENT
A **YOUTH:WORK** PROJECT

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Table of Contents

I	The Challenge	3
II	The Response: The Caribbean Youth Empowerment Program (CYEP)	5
	A. Promoting a Regional Approach	5
	B. New Focus on Youth in Conflict with the Law	5
	C. Who Benefits?	6
	D. Objectives of the Case Study	8
III	Lessons from the Field	9
	A. How Do You Get Started? A Collaborative Approach	9
	B. How Do You Build an Effective Youth Job Training Program for Youth at Risk?	
	Key Elements to Consider	10
	C. How Do You Create an Enabling Environment for Change?	13
IV	Call to Action	15
V	Youth Voices: How CYEP Has Impacted Young Lives	18
VI	Recommended Reading	20

I THE CHALLENGE

The Caribbean is a very “young” region of the world, with 64 percent of its population under the age of 30. While this “youth bulge” continues to strain services and resources in the region, it also offers huge potential opportunities for social progress and economic growth—if young people can obtain the necessary skills, confidence, and support to be successful students, workers, and community leaders.¹ As noted in the 2010 Report of the CARICOM Commission on Youth Development, *Eye on the Future: Investing in Youth Now for Tomorrow's Community*, “youth are a creative asset and a valuable human resource to be developed and not a problem to be solved.”²

Young people in the Caribbean, however, face a host of obstacles as they seek to find a job, build a family, and be productive members of society. High youth unemployment stands out as a significant factor underlying many of these challenges—which include rising violence, teen parenthood, drug-related crime, growing school dropout rates, and domestic abuse. Moreover, many communities lack effective, accessible, youth-friendly social services to address these issues. “The problem is the break-down of the family structure, coupled with poverty—with young people having children, single parents struggling with poverty, young people raising themselves, and young parents not being able to find decent jobs,” explains Yolanda Jules-Louis, Assistant Director at the Department of Probation in Saint Lucia.

Underscoring these multiple challenges is the fact that more than half the region's young people have only a primary education and face limited access to post-secondary education and training. Barriers to employment also include inadequate numbers of job training institutions and outdated curricula and teaching methods. There is also a skills shortage in key sectors of the economy, including IT skills, that has created an ongoing mismatch in the region between current job training programs and the competencies—including life and employability skills—that local employers are seeking in their new hires.

Adding to the social and economic marginalization of Caribbean youth is that they feel shut out from the decision-making process and are not positively engaged in their communities. According to the CARICOM report: “Caribbean adolescents and youth continue to be seen only as the beneficiaries of services and products rather than as strategic partners in policy development and implementation.”³

“We must give youth real choices: to get out of poverty; to remain proud and dignified; to embrace empowerment, enfranchisement, entrepreneurship, and education; and to give back to their communities.”

—The Honorable Dr. Kenny D. Anthony,
Prime Minister of Saint Lucia,
June 2013

1 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Caribbean Human Development Report 2012: Human Development and the Shift to Better Citizen Security*, February 2012, www.regionalcentralac-undp.org/en/hdr-caribbean, 45.

2 Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Commission on Youth Development, *Eye on the Future: Investing in Youth Now for Tomorrow's Future*, January 2010, http://www.caricom.org/jsp/community_organs/cohsod_youth/eye_on_the_future_ccyd_report.pdf.

3 CARICOM Commission on Youth Development, *Eye on the Future*, xviii.

“When I got my [CYEP] certificate, I felt hope in the future for the first time; before nothing mattered. Now I see I can make a difference in society.”

—Alvin, 28, former inmate,
Bordelais Correctional Facility, Saint Lucia

As a result of these various forces, jobless rates among Caribbean youth are among the highest in the world—averaging nearly one in three across the region. In Saint Lucia those figures are even higher, with 46 percent of young women and 37 percent of young males reportedly unable to find work.⁴

One of the direct results of this lack of social and economic opportunities among the region’s younger generation, coupled with deeply entrenched poverty, is the rising level of crime and violence, which is reportedly the number one source of concern among

youth, and the reason that more and more youth are finding themselves behind bars.⁵ Youth are both the primary perpetrators and victims of this violence—at great cost to them and to their communities. Crime and violence is costing the Caribbean between 2.8 percent and 4 percent of GDP annually in terms of direct expenditure on fighting crime and lost revenues due to youth incarceration and declines in tourism revenue.⁶ On the other hand, ensuring young people have the vocational and life skills to find employment and be productive members of society would give a much needed boost to the region’s economy. One study points out that youth who were incarcerated in Saint Lucia every year could have contributed to increasing the country’s income by US\$1.9 million annually.⁷



Over 70 percent of CYEP participants in Saint Lucia are considered poor or extremely poor and nearly 40 percent have dropped out of school.

4 Ibid., 48.

5 Ibid., xvi.

6 UNDP, *Caribbean Human Development Report 2012*, 49.

7 Ibid., 49.

II THE RESPONSE: The Caribbean Youth Empowerment Program (CYEP), a Workforce Development Strategy for Youth At Risk

A. Promoting a Regional Approach

There is growing interest and an urgent need in the Caribbean and globally to specifically target youth with high levels of vulnerability, including those who have been involved in the criminal justice system, for expanded job training programs and additional “second chance” opportunities to turn their lives around. Far from realizing their potential as productive citizens, jobless youth find themselves on the margins of society, with the cost of addressing their needs draining limited public resources. Businesses, too, are denied the talents and contributions of the younger generation. Without coordinated, effective youth development efforts, this downward spiral will only continue.

“Those who have been engaged with the CYEP program have not returned [to jail], they have moved on with their lives and are living as productive citizens. The program is making a difference; it gives them a second chance.”

—Victoria Alcide, Deputy Director,
Bordelais Correctional Facility, Saint Lucia

In response to these dual needs to expand opportunities for the region’s youth and improve the local economy, the International Youth Foundation (IYF) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) launched the Caribbean Youth Empowerment Program (CYEP) in 2008 to address some of the major challenges facing underserved youth in the Caribbean countries of Antigua and Barbuda, Grenada, Jamaica, and Saint Lucia. The program’s original objective was to equip 1,100 youth at risk, ages 17 to 25, who were unemployed or under-employed, with the technical, vocational and life skills needed to develop sustainable livelihoods. In addition to providing job and life skills training and job placement assistance, the program supports youth as positive agents of change in their community. The long-term goal of the program is to strengthen the capacity of youth-serving organizations to address the employability needs of youth at risk as well as meet overall quality standards.

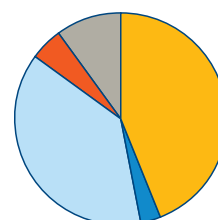
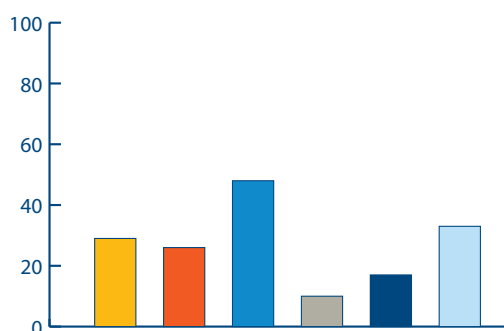
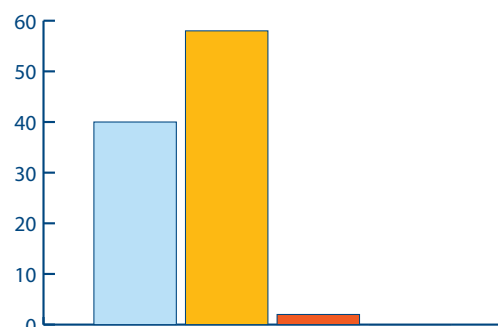
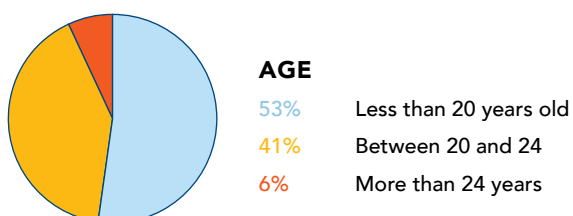
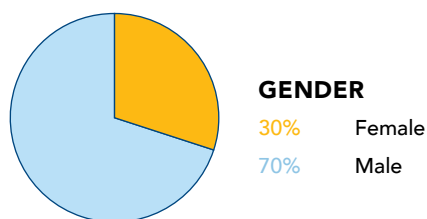
In 2011, IYF received additional funding from USAID to scale up the program through 2013 in Antigua and Barbuda, Grenada, and Saint Lucia. This second phase has focused on expanding the menu of programs to include entrepreneurship and career guidance, reaching an additional 1,100 youth, and strengthening alliances with public and private stakeholders. By the end of the program in December 2013, CYEP expects 2,200 young people to have gained employment training and at least 40% of youth to be placed in quality jobs or in their own business start ups. Other expectations include a 90 percent rate of employer satisfaction with CYEP-trained employees, successful targeting of vulnerable youth, increased capacity of partner organizations, and the establishment of sustainable networks of public, private and NGO stakeholders.

B. New Focus on Youth in Conflict with the Law

In Phase I of its work in Saint Lucia [2010 to 2012], CYEP decided to recruit a small number (10 percent) of youth who were either incarcerated or on probation into its job training and support program, which was being implemented through the National Skills Development Centre (NSDC). In Phase II, starting in 2012, CYEP placed far greater emphasis on expanding job preparation and other opportunities to young people who were considered to be in conflict with the law. For the purposes of our work, CYEP identifies youth in conflict with the law as those who are currently or previously incarcerated, currently or previously on probation, engaged in illegal activity, members of a gang, or have been a ward of a juvenile institution.

C: Who Benefits from CYEP's Phase II Vocational Training Program in Saint Lucia?

OF 197 CYEP YOUTH PARTICIPANTS:



HOME ENVIRONMENT

14%

Head of household

30%

Living with both parents

17%

Living with neither parent

INCOME

72%

Poor or extremely poor

* Some of these statistics overlap so will not add up to 100%



Representatives from the CYEP Consortium award certificates to youth completing the intensive life skills component of the program (above). A CYEP class on life skills includes these tips on how to be a responsible individual (left).

Shared Characteristics of Saint Lucia's Youth: A Profile of Unaddressed Needs and Societal Failures

The youth of Saint Lucia who find themselves in trouble with the law are a diverse group, yet their life stories reflect similar elements. Among them: poverty, dysfunctional and often abusive families, dropping out of school, youth unemployment, association with gangs, and early introduction to sex, drugs and alcohol. Research⁸ indicates that among those shared experiences, youth in conflict with the law in Saint Lucia fell into the following categories:

- Were admitted from the Family or Criminal Court without prior medical assessment and/or accompanying medical records
- Had no consistent source of primary health care
- Had problems in school academically and/or behaviorally, often from an early age
- Often lived in single-parent families, or with relatives, friends or siblings other than a parent
- Had one parent (usually the father) in jail or previously in trouble with the law
- Did not have a strong positive role model
- Had personal experience with authority (school, police), violence, physical, emotional and/or sexual abuse
- Often exhibited risky behaviors (early sexual experience and illegal drugs; used or carried weapons)
- Had experienced a pregnancy and/or past abortion
- Reported feeling sad, and/or had contemplated or attempted suicide
- Lacked self-confidence and had no clear vision of a school/career path
- Had never been part of a youth, sports or community group and had no out-of-school interests or hobbies
- Often had previously been in trouble with the law
- Often had no or inadequate legal representation
- Had no or little faith in the social or legal services to protect them

According to experts in the field of youth development, these youth are products of failures in the family and community systems; the education system; the health system; social support and correctional systems; and the media.

⁸ Much of this material was gathered from a 2006 study entitled *Youth Offender or Offended? A Community Child Health Service Qualitative Case Study of youth in care and custody at the Boys Training Center (BTC) and Upton Gardens Girls' center (UGGC); Saint Lucia – 2006*. unpublished.



CYEP trainees working together in a life, employability, and vocational skills training class designed to help them find employment and re-integrate back into their communities.

D. Objectives of the Case Study

Due to the growing interest within the development community to target youth with high levels of vulnerabilities, particularly those caught up in the criminal justice system, IYF decided to produce a case study on CYEP's experience in Saint Lucia. There, expanding employment opportunities for youth in conflict with the law has been a clear priority for its vocational training activities over the past two years.

This report is based in large part on in-depth interviews and focus groups with key stakeholders in the public, private, and NGO sectors, including prison officials, government ministers, incarcerated youth, and youth who have been on parole. We hope that by highlighting best practices and lessons learned in the field we can help guide youth-serving organizations and government ministries interested in working with this particular target group. Ultimately, we want to help make the case for increased investments in not only the broader field of youth at risk but also in comprehensive rehabilitation programs and services for those who have been or currently are in conflict with the law.

What have we learned about how to address the particular needs of youth in conflict with the law? What advice do we have for other NGOs, government agencies, and business leaders interested in expanding opportunities for these young people? What are some key elements of a successful program that targets this population, and what needs to change—including legal reforms—to create an enabling environment that would ensure these youth can find success in the world of work and in society at large?

The study concludes with a “Call to Action” to all sectors of society, with specific recommendations for what needs to be done to expand opportunities for this critical segment of the youth population to move forward in their lives and be successful.

III LESSONS FROM THE FIELD

Preparing youth at risk, particularly those who are in conflict with the law, to be productive and engaged citizens capable of giving back to their communities is an enormously challenging undertaking. IYF's work in Saint Lucia over the past few years, however, has demonstrated that these young people are committed to turning their lives around and are fully capable of learning the skills they need to be successful in the workplace and be full participants in society. This section provides the lessons learned and best practices that were gained as a result of implementing Phase II of CYEP's job and life skills training in Saint Lucia.

“The mismatch between the education system and the world of work threatens youth livelihoods.”

—2010 Report of the CARICOM
Commission on Youth Development

A. How Do You Get Started? A Collaborative Approach

There is strong evidence that bringing together major players from the business, government, and NGO sectors—from the very beginning—is critical to leveraging the necessary resources, support, and expertise needed for sustained success in youth development programs. However, such collaborative strategies are not always the traditional approach.

In Saint Lucia, CYEP works with a consortium of key entities who are involved in the management and implementation of the program, thus maximizing resources and expanding the program's impact. In the first phase of the project, the consortium members were: Centre for Adolescent Renewal and Education (C.A.R.E.), National Skills Development Centre (NSDC), and RISE Saint Lucia Inc. In the second phase, additional members joined, including the James Belgrave Micro Enterprise Development Fund Inc. (BELfund) and the Saint Lucia Chamber of Commerce, Industry, and Agriculture. According to Dr. Jacqueline Bird, Founding Director of RISE Saint Lucia Inc., “While we have worked together with other groups across the sectors to focus on a shared or common goal before, CYEP was the first time we had institutionalized the consortium model in Saint Lucia.”

Multi-stakeholder alliances offer a range of benefits—building on the notion that no one agency, sector or organization can tackle these tough challenges alone, particularly in a resource-constrained environment.

Benefits of the Consortium Model:

- **Mobilizes additional resources**—both financial and in kind—that can be leveraged to support greater impact and coordination of a particular program or set of services.
- **Ensures more effective implementation of projects** through expanded management capacity. Bringing key stakeholders to the table enables and encourages joint decision making at both the programmatic and management levels and results in greater sustainability on the ground.
- **Brings together organizations with different assets, knowledge, and experience**, thus boosting opportunities for innovative approaches to tackle tough social and economic problems. The consortium model also offers members opportunities to share those good ideas and best practices among themselves and with the broader development community.
- **Builds the capacity of local organizations** to serve youth through expanded interaction among each other and with leaders in the public and private sectors.

- **Gives members the confidence to say, “we can do this!”** Bringing key organizations together helps to expand existing networks of organizations, agencies and individuals who are working constructively—and in coordination —on core issues.
- **Creates a stronger public platform** to advocate for greater investments in youth development within the public, private, and NGO communities.

Lessons Learned:

- For organizations used to working independently, it can be challenging to become members of a consortium. Collaboration requires greater levels of consultation and involvement as well as shared decision-making. Hence, from inception, it is important to **define and clarify roles and responsibilities**.
- **Learning to hold each other accountable** for results takes time and patience. While such efforts can be frustrating, they are critical to success.
- **The leadership has to set the tone.** Leaders and staff must be truly committed to promoting youth and youth issues and to do so in a comprehensive, coordinated, and collaborative way.
- Working together to pool resources and deciding together how to allocate those resources means **negotiating and building trust**. Time taken to reach this goal is well worth the effort.
- Ensuring that **collaboration takes place at all staffing levels**—particularly for those working to implement the program—is critical for good results.
- **Expansion of the consortium requires more than just adding new members.** Integrating them into the existing structure requires concerted efforts. Sharing leadership roles among a growing number of people can also be challenging. It is important to review systems and mechanisms to facilitate this growth and to integrate new staff and update and change them if necessary.

B. How Do You Build An Effective Job Training Program for Youth At Risk? Key Elements to Consider

Every job training program that seeks to effectively serve youth at risk is responding to different needs, conditions, and levels of support required. There are, however, a number of general findings that should be considered when designing and implementing such a program. The following section includes the major building blocks that CYEP believes are necessary for an effective job training effort for youth at risk, in general. The next section focuses on additional set of supports and services that may be needed for youth in conflict with the law.

1. A Model Integrated, Comprehensive Job Training Package for Youth at Risk

- **Life skills training is critically important** for youth at risk to help them address the difficult social and economic challenges they face. The curriculum should emphasize such skills as self-confidence, anger management, conflict resolution, life planning, and gender issues. Employers are also looking for potential employees with a positive work ethic, good time management, teamwork, problem solving, and respect and tolerance toward others.
- **Vocational and technical training** that is designed to respond to the demands of the local labor market and address the employment needs of local businesses is essential, as is the engagement of the private sector in the design of these trainings.
- **IT skills training** needs to part of a comprehensive job training program to ensure youth are prepared to succeed in the 21st century workplace.

- **Remedial training** may be necessary due to low literacy rates. For most job training programs, the ability to read manuals, instructions, and other educational material is mandatory. Yet a number of the CYEP instructors said they spend extra time after class trying to tutor their trainees in basic literacy.
- **Psycho-social support services** are essential for youth at risk. Their struggles with poverty, drugs, abandonment, and domestic and other kinds of violence and abuse have inflicted deep psychological harm that must be addressed. Life skills training alone may not be sufficient. Trainees need strong family interventions and dedicated therapists, mentors, and counselors.
- **Internships** offer program participants valuable on-the-job experience and the chance to apply what they have learned in their classes to real-world situations. Regular follow up during internships should be scheduled to ensure youth understand and meet their responsibilities. Case workers also need to keep in regular communication with employers to get their feedback and to respond to any questions or issues that may arise.
- **Job placement services** are a key component of a successful job training program. Program staff need to reach out to potential employers to identify their future recruitment needs, nurture those relationships, and work with them once they have hired a trainee. Staff also need to support youth in their efforts to conduct job searches through coaching, mentoring, and other support.
- **Career guidance** offers important opportunities for youth to think about the future, assess their interests and aptitudes, and develop a plan to reach their employment and life goals. These services are particularly important in times of limited job opportunities in the private sector.
- **Support for food, transportation, and where applicable, childcare**, help youth more regularly attend classes. Other valuable support services include “dress for success” boutiques, where youth going on job interviews or working as interns can find donated appropriate business attire.
- **Extra-curricular activities**, such as sports days, skills expos, and debate competitions, have been found to improve trainees’ self confidence, team spirit, and leadership skills.

NOTE: *As part of this comprehensive vocational training and services model, some programs offer an introduction to entrepreneurship to gauge whether starting up a small enterprise is an area that the trainee would like to pursue. If so, and where available, they can be directed to enroll in an entrepreneurship training program. Unfortunately, these higher level entrepreneurship programs tend to target the better educated and often older segment of the population rather than underserved youth.*

2. Additional Services and Strategies Needed to Support Youth in Conflict with the Law

In addition to the above comprehensive job training package for youth at risk, youth in conflict with the law may need additional or enhanced services and support systems that take into consideration the particularly high hurdles they need to overcome while spending time in prison and other youth facilities and institutions, being on parole, and then finding jobs and integrating back into their communities. In some cases, programs can integrate these additional supports into their existing programs. In other instances, programs may need to channel their job training participants to services already available in the community. These recommendations were developed through CYEP’s experience dealing with greater numbers of youth in conflict with the law who are now benefiting from the program.

- **Extended classroom time for training and remedial support.** Time and again, CYEP trainers reported they needed more classroom time to cover the material. Incarcerated youth or those on parole can have significant emotional and psychological challenges that make it more difficult, at times, to settle down and stay focused. In

AN EMPLOYER'S PERSPECTIVE: "They deserve a second chance"

Martin Travis, who runs the Ocean Club at Rodney Bay Marina in Saint Lucia, is on a mission. While he admits times are tough, he believes that local businesses have a social responsibility to support young people in his community. He also thinks that doing so will help improve the region's economic prospects.

"Tourism is down, restaurants are closing, and we've cut back at our club," he says. Those conditions, however, have not discouraged Mr. Travis from hiring a number of CYEP trainees and other youth at risk for jobs over the past two years. "Yes, some have challenging backgrounds, and not all of them were successful here," he admits, "but they deserve a second chance." Why? Mr. Travis worked in a company in the United States that was committed to expanding opportunities for troubled youth. "I saw a lot of success stories there with young people who had come from abused families, who lived on the street, who were running with gangs," he said. So when CYEP staff approached him in Saint Lucia with the idea of hiring some of their trainees, he was very open to the idea. "For me, working with CYEP graduates and other at risk youth is my mission. I know it can be difficult. I know it's often easier for them to hustle on the street, steal, or get into drugs. But I tell them, 'If you do a good job, if you work hard, we will help, we will value you, we'll be there for you.'"

While he knows that there is no quick fix to boost the region's economic growth, Mr. Travis argues that hiring and supporting underserved youth makes sense for many reasons. When talking to other business owners in Saint Lucia, he tells them about two CYEP graduates—a bartender and a young man who helps prepare food at the Ocean Club—who are good workers and are well liked. They are contributing to his business, he says. "Another real benefit of CYEP is that they provide the right kind of job training for these young people—tailored to specific skills like bartending and waitressing—at no cost to us. That's definitely an advantage."

His final argument to his fellow business leaders is more personal. "You have a social responsibility beyond running your business," he says. "What is the point if that's not what we do? Think about it. By hiring one of them, you may have saved a life, or broken a downward cycle of one of these young people."

Phase II of CYEP, additional classroom hours were provided for both the life skills training and remedial support.

- **More intensive psycho-social support services** may also be necessary. It is important for incarcerated youth, for example, to get the psychological support they need to address these deeper emotional issues that may well have contributed to their incarceration in the first place.
- **Direct medical services** (preventive as well as therapeutic) are necessary for those who have been severely disconnected from the public health care services, and are in need of, for example, STD counseling, treatment for chronic illnesses such as HIV/AIDS, and drug use counseling.
- **Residential facilities** are desperately in demand for young girls and boys in trouble with the law as well as those coming out of prison. Half-way houses can help keep them safe and away from negative influences so that they can get back on their feet and progressively reconnect with their communities. The fact that many of the youth interviewed for this study said they did not want to return to their neighborhoods underscores the importance of these residential facilities.
- **Access to quality and affordable drug rehabilitation programs is urgently needed.** Drug use and drug trafficking are significant factors in bringing young people into the criminal justice process. Ongoing drug abuse also hinders young people's efforts to integrate back into society and become employed after they leave prison.
- **Sensitizing employers.** It should be acknowledged that certain kinds of jobs are not readily available to youth who have been incarcerated or have a criminal record. Programs must ensure this target group receives training in areas where there is the greatest likelihood for getting a job.
- **Appropriate job placement.** Having a criminal record may preclude some youth from holding certain jobs or working in particular facilities. It is important to work with potential employers to make sure they know a particular young person has a criminal record. However, some employers will hire such youth, with full knowledge of his or her record, because they see potential in a particular individual and are committed to providing him or her a second chance.
- **When recruiting incarcerated youth** for job training programs, it is important to target those to be released

within a relative short time after they graduate as they then would be in a position to seek employment in areas where their technical skills would still be relevant for the current labor market.

- **Creating opportunities for youth who are still in prison** to hone the skills they have gained in their job training programs is important for a range of reasons. Such opportunities (e.g. the chance to prepare food in the kitchen or contribute to general maintenance) have shown to have a positive impact on young people's attitude, behavior, and sense of hope in the future.
- We have found that **mixing youth in the classroom who are incarcerated or on parole with those who are not** has been beneficial. Among other reasons, for those in prison, such inclusion takes away the stigma of being branded as a criminal and marks the beginning of the reintegration process. It also gives them a better sense of the "real world" when they get out of prison and need to deal with new challenges. However, such mixed groupings in the training process need to be closely monitored.

3. Further General Learnings

- **A rigorous recruitment process** is essential to ensure youth who have the right profile and who meet the criteria are recruited. The criteria should include those who are motivated to be successful and have a positive attitude. It is important to establish a multi-disciplinary selection committee to recruit and select program participants. When selecting incarcerated youth, close coordination with correctional facility personnel is required.
- **Youth-centered teaching.** To work effectively with youth at risk, instructors need to be familiar with youth-centered methodologies and experiential, interactive learning strategies. It is not enough to be qualified in their subject matter. Instructors also need to understand the challenges facing these youth and have a passion for positively engaging them in the learning process.
- **Peer-to-peer learning** has been shown to be particularly effective with this target group—who for justifiable reasons may not trust many of the adults in their lives. A greater emphasis on creating opportunities for peer-to-peer activities should be considered.
- **Community follow-up** and outreach efforts are particularly important to support youth after they graduate or are released from prison. Community organizers and volunteers can play a critical role in this process, both in terms of finding out whether youth have found employment or gone back to school—and providing a warning system if they are facing real challenges. In addition, maintaining contact with program staff and instructors who have been mentors and supporters can be very helpful to keep youth feeling connected and on track.
- **A strong monitoring and evaluation system** must be in place to track progress and identify gaps so programs can be strengthened and impact improved through evidence-based data.
- **A dedicated, qualified, and well coordinated team is needed** to ensure all the activities are effectively carried out and trainees have the support they require.

C. How Do You Create An Enabling Environment for Change?

- **Insist on a multi-stakeholder approach.** Representatives from all sectors need to be at the table, including those from the prison system, social services, ministries of education, health, youth, economic development, human services, and gender relations, as well as the NGO and civil society community, business leaders, faith-based organizations, and youth. Together, they can leverage greater support for a comprehensive and integrated approach to benefit youth at risk.
- **Promote a strong legal reform agenda.** The criminal justice system—including laws relating to probation, parole, and sentencing—should be reviewed for major reforms that expand positive and practical alternatives

IV CALL TO ACTION

Efforts to address the needs and aspirations of underserved youth, particularly those who are in conflict with the law, are urgently required. To ensure they have the opportunities to build their own futures and contribute to the social and economic life in their communities, we need a multi-stakeholder strategy that can elevate adolescent and youth empowerment to the top of every country's agenda. While this call to action is relevant to securing additional support and attention to youth in conflict with the law, it includes strategies to support youth at risk in every community.

Government Leaders and Policy Makers

- **Ensure high quality and standards-based secondary school education**, with an emphasis on literacy, math, and skills that help support the school-to-work transition. “The mismatch between the education system and the world of work threatens youth livelihoods,” according to the *2010 Report of the CARICOM Commission on Youth Development*. Low literacy rates add to the risk factors for youth in general and provide real challenges for those enrolled in job training programs. Extra-curricular activities, such as after-school programs, also help build a strong foundation for learning.
- **Reform the criminal justice system in ways that would strengthen** programs that offer offenders viable non-custodial alternatives to criminal behavior. These reforms would include developing mechanisms to minimize delays and backlogs that keep young people behind bars for years before they even go to trial.
- **Work with partners in the private and NGO sectors to design and implement government job training** activities that target youth in conflict with the law and other vulnerable youth, and also meet current job market needs and quality standards.
- **Provide youth at risk access to a range of support services**, social service programs, and family interventions, including affordable drug rehabilitation programs, psycho-social support, and halfway residential facilities.
- **Create or expand funds designated to support young entrepreneurs** who have expressed interest in starting up their own businesses, with particular attention to youth who have dropped out of school, are from the lower socio-economic population, or who have been incarcerated. Develop policies that facilitate youth-run businesses and reduce bureaucratic barriers to those efforts.

“The power of a job, the power of starting a company, the power of creation, the power of decent work is the choice that our young people must have.”

—Honorable Dr. Kenny D. Anthony,
Prime Minister of Saint Lucia

“You don’t want to see young people wasting away in prison. When I hear people making negative comments about youth who are in prison, I say to them, listen to their stories first before you judge them. Most people want to change their lives, but they need help in order to do so and we have a responsibility to assist them.”

—Victoria Alcide, Deputy Director,
Bordelais Correctional Facility, Saint Lucia

Prison Officials

- To reduce recidivism rates, **expand access to job training and life skills programs** both inside and outside the prisons to better prepare incarcerated youth for successful re-entry into society and to secure employment. Correctional facilities need to be flexible enough to offer these opportunities—but in ways that still work for the prison staff. Moreover, it has been shown that the coping skills that youth gain through the life skills training have led to decreased prison violence —another example of how these programs add value.
- **Provide young inmates with adequate psycho-social and counseling support** to address their psychological and emotional needs and better prepare them for success on the outside. If youth do not address these underlying causes while in prison, the likelihood of their returning to prison grows greater.
- **Make working with incarcerated youth a priority**, so that they have the opportunities they need to improve their prospects for success when released from prison. Your cooperation, commitment, and willingness to help support these training programs will make a significant difference in the lives of these youth.

“The costs associated with negative youth behaviors have an indirect cost on the country’s productivity... By reducing youth unemployment to the adult levels, the Saint Lucian economy would grow by 2.5 percent of GDP.”

*2010 CARICOM Commission
on Youth Development*

Business Leaders

As the primary job creators and employers, local businesses need to be involved in helping to scale up high-quality, successfully piloted employment training programs for youth with a history of being in conflict with the law. These training efforts contribute to the creation of a skilled workforce that is needed for the business community to grow and thrive. There is also growing evidence that this targeted group—with the right skills and commitment—have proved to be significant assets to the companies that hire them. The following recommendations are designed to encourage the private sector to contribute to these efforts.

- **Offer internships** to trainees so they can acquire “real world” experience and become part of a more skilled labor force. **Offer employment** opportunities to training graduates who have the skills and the positive attitude you require.
- **Engage your employees as mentors** of trainees and program graduates and provide motivational speakers and instructors for job training initiatives.
- **Provide input into training curricula** to ensure the content and the skills being taught meet the needs of your company or industry.
- **Support and scale up** successful and tested youth training programs.
- **Champion the cause** within the business community. If you have successfully hired youth with a history of incarceration or parole or other underserved youth, then become a positive voice among your peers to promote such programs.

NGOs and Civil Society Organizations

- **Identify and implement best-practice programs** for youth at risk and work in collaboration with government and private sector entities to scale them up.

- **Track results of your community-based youth programs** and coordinate their activities to improve the quality of the programs and identify gaps in services that need to be addressed.
- **Invite young people to participate in the design** of youth-focused programs. They are well equipped to ensure your efforts are relevant and interesting to their peers. Find ways to solicit their input and get them engaged in these issues in a meaningful way. Facilitate the process of having incarcerated youth or those on parole speak at public meetings about their success finding employment and re-integrating back into society once released.
- **Recruit employers who have had success hiring program graduates** as champions for your initiative. Invite them to tell their stories at conferences and graduation ceremonies. They can be your most valuable advocates.
- **Enlist recognized leaders and committed mentors in the community** to take an active role in supporting these youth on a personal level. Such one-on-one efforts make a significant difference in young people's motivation to stay on track and keep working hard.
- **Form a multi-sector alliance** to move the youth development agenda forward and to keep criminal justice and youth development issues at the top of the agendas of both the government and the community. Such a multi-stakeholder alliance can speak in one voice and thus have more power to advocate for serious reforms and greater investments in these programs. In Saint Lucia, IYF worked with the Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture to set up the Saint Lucia Youth Advocacy Alliance (YAA) to advocate for reforms and innovations in justice system as well as in the broader youth development arena.

“We spend millions of dollars a year to house inmates at the local prison—when that investment could be used far more wisely to improve social services, job training programs, and education reform efforts that together would keep young people from going to jail in the first place.”

*Mr. Marcellus Joseph, General Manager,
BELfund, Saint Lucia*

Youth

- **Advocate for your own needs and aspirations** as trainees, members of your communities, and workers. Even if you have made some mistakes in your life, you can shape your own futures. But know that there are mentors, counselors, and others who want to support you. Take advantage of those opportunities.
- **Seek out job training and other learning opportunities** that can help you be productive and engaged citizens. Finding a job is not easy, so again, seize the moment and be determined to succeed.
- **Be part of the design and implementation of programs** that impact your lives. You have much to offer, and your suggestions can help these programs and services be more effective, more relevant, and more attractive to your peers.
- **Be role models in your communities.** You have overcome many challenges and are in a particularly strong position to share your experiences and your advice with other youth. They will take you seriously because you speak with authority from your own experiences and have learned from them.
- **Be committed and dedicated** to turning your life around. Job training programs can only take you so far, by giving you skills training and other support services. In the end, to really change your life, you need to make it happen!

V YOUTH VOICES: How CYEP has impacted young lives

I grew up in a ghetto community in the city of Castries with my mother and three sisters.

Ever since I was in primary school, I loved track and field. After seeing me race one day, a coach saw I had potential and invited me to train as a member of the Saint Lucia Road Busters, an elite running team. I raced in the regional junior

“The program taught me to stay out of trouble.”

—Michael, 25, CYEP Graduate, Saint Lucia

championships in Mexico and placed in the Barbados 10K a year later. My career seemed limitless, but my life was catching up with me. The community where I was growing up was a rough place because of drugs and dealing firearms. I was out of the house a lot, and I began to hang out with older guys. I wanted to be part of the fast world and get fast money. I started dealing drugs even while I was in school. In

Saint Lucia, young people get into trouble by following bad company. They become young mothers, get caught in gang warfare, and end up in prison, the hospital, or six feet under.

I was serving a sentence in the Bordelais Correctional Facility when I heard about the Caribbean Youth Empowerment Program (CYEP). For the CYEP training, I chose massage therapy. Because I was already into sports, I felt it would be a good skill and would prepare me to work at sports clubs. One of the sessions I remember most was about work ethics, which is about working well with people in the workplace. I also learned about conflict management. The program also taught me to stay out of trouble and focus on my sporting activities.

Today, at 25, I am a steward at a local restaurant and bar. I would like to find work in massage therapy, but it's hard here because the tourism season is slow right now. I have a kid now, and I need to provide for him. One of the CYEP instructors has contacts with the hotels in the area, and sometimes they call me to do massage treatments. I want to use my message therapy training to someday obtain a degree in kinesiology. With this education, I hope I can become a track coach. Look for me out on the track ... I'll be back!

One of 10 children, Sathia, now 25, grew up in a rural community in Saint Lucia where she had to walk down long dusty roads to get to school every day. But those challenges did not deter her from finishing secondary school, doing well in her studies, or finding a job teaching young children. After three years of teaching, however, Sathia realized she wanted more out of life. “I wanted to go out into the world and prove myself,” she said.

Sathia had always loved cooking and had studied nutrition in school. But it was not until she enrolled in the

“If not for this program, I would not have gotten this job.”

—Sathia, 25, CYEP Graduate, Saint Lucia

Caribbean Youth Empowerment Program (CYEP) job training program in 2011 that she was able to bring those two interests together and move forward in her life. Through the program, Sathia said she learned a number of valuable life and employability skills beyond strengthening her talents in the kitchen. She also was exposed to computers and received remedial reading

help. Particularly important to her was learning how to control her emotions and better communicate with others. “I was very shy,” she said, “and I learned how to open up myself.”

In addition to the culinary arts training and life skills, the CYEP program offered an opportunity to contribute through community service. Sathia volunteered at Saint Lucia's Victoria Hospital, working in the kitchen. Not long afterward, she received a call that someone on the kitchen staff was going on vacation, and would she be available to step in and

take her place? Sathia jumped at the chance. “They hired me for two months, then three months, then six months—and now I have a year-long contract,” she beamed. “I’ve very happy now, because I like to cook, and I’ve learned that the food not only has to be good, you have to make it presentable or the patients just won’t eat it!”

She’s grateful for her life skills training. “I realized how much I learned about dealing with clients’ needs, about teamwork, and coming in on time. My parents think it’s a good job—helping people—and that’s important to me too,” she explains. While proud of her own independence, she is aware that most of her peers, including her 18-year-old brother, can’t find jobs. “I tell them to come to this program. If not for this program, I would not have gotten this job. I tell them, get some counseling, try to motivate yourself. Leave the street and do something else.”

In addition to helping her mother, Sathia is raising three young children and is currently their sole support. She remains highly motivated however and has ambitious plans for her future. “Five years from now, I want to be nutritionist,” she says, acknowledging that will mean going back to school at the local college for more training. “I want to return to my community where I grew up, where a lot of people don’t eat right, so there’s a lot of hypertension and diabetes. They need a balanced diet so they don’t get sick. I want to help them be healthy.”

Alvin clears off his space in the kitchen and brings over the makings of a big salad. His hair is neatly combed back, he’s wearing his uniform and, after taking a quick look out the window at the sparkling blue waters below, he gets to work. But Alvin, age 28, is not working in a restaurant catering to tourists. He is an inmate at the Bordelais Correcitonal Facility in Saint Lucia and his clients are the more than 560 prisoners who live in cement buildings surrounded by high fences topped with double rolls of razor wire.

Alvin, who is serving five years for armed robbery, was one of eight children. Abandoned by his father early on, he had to help his single mother feed and support her growing family. He dropped out after primary school and began to hang out with his friends. “I never liked school, to be honest,” he says. “Life was more interesting on the streets.” He made good money selling drugs, which enabled him to buy new clothes and expensive jewelry as well as help support his family. To Alvin, drug dealing was his only chance to get ahead. “I never looked for a job, because I thought that since I’m from the ghetto, no one would hire me.”

Yet in some ways, Alvin says prison saved him. “I don’t regret being ‘inside,’ I’ve learned so much.” He describes the life skills training he received last year from the CYEP program that helped him control his own outbursts of anger, break up conflicts among his fellow inmates, and begin to make plans for the future. “For the first time in my life, I’ve learned to be patient...very patient.” Alvin also enrolled in the program’s culinary arts job training course. Because of his positive attitude and eagerness to practice what he’s learned, he is allowed to help out in the prison’s kitchen—an activity he clearly enjoys.

“This program taught me to believe in myself, to tell myself, ‘Don’t ever say you can’t accomplish something.’ This was a very new feeling for me; before, nothing really mattered.” Alvin is proud of what he’s learned. “I had never worked, and I could see I had some skills, that I had something special in me. To be honest, this is the only school I ever took seriously in my life.” Alvin walked out of prison on September 25, 2013. Looking back, he says: “If I had known myself better, and had these kinds of chances, a lot of things in my life would be different today.”

“To be honest, this was the only school I ever took seriously in my life.”

—Alvin, 28, CYEP Graduate, Saint Lucia

VI RECOMMENDED READING

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Respect, Reality
Initiative, Industry
Social Health, Society Building, Service
Education, Enterprise





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The International Youth Foundation (IYF) invests in the extraordinary potential of young people. Founded in 1990, IYF builds and maintains a worldwide community of businesses, governments, and civil society organizations committed to empowering youth to be healthy, productive, and engaged citizens. IYF programs are catalysts of change that help young people obtain a quality education, gain employability skills, make healthy choices, and improve their communities. To learn more, visit www.iyfnet.org.