

An Introduction to Operation Save Jamaica

Bruce A. Fletcher

Operation Save Jamaica

Operation Save Jamaica (OSJ) is on a mission to bring about transformation to communities and holds the perspective that, in order for Jamaica to realize its 2030 vision; to be the place of choice to live, work, raise a family, do business, and retire, our under-resourced communities, especially those that are called “garrison” communities, must be transformed.

At the end of 2019, Jamaica had 389 criminal gangs in operation, 250 active and the rest dormant. Of the criminal gangs in operation, 323 or 83% were classified as first-generation gangs. The other 66 gangs, or 17%, were classified as second-generation gangs (Scott, 2020).

Jamaica has over 100 vulnerable and volatile communities, some of which are political strongholds rife with crime and violence. The community residents often live in fear as many of their relatives have been fatal victims of violence. In addition, the victims’ families frequently retaliate in the short-term or long-term, perpetuating the cycle of violence in the community.

Our Approach

OSJ is a collaborative entity that inspires and supports existing organizations, creates new ones where necessary, mobilizes and networks with other institutions, builds strategic partnerships, facilitates targeted interventions, advocates, and

provides spiritual and resource enablement to address fundamental issues in communities.

Strategic Partnerships

Building strategic partnerships is critical for transforming communities (see Figure 1). OSJ recognizes that various societal sectors possess specific values and strengths that increase effectiveness and efficiency, reducing the timeframe for accomplishing community transformation. Therefore, OSJ works through multi-sectoral partnerships, such as the public and private sectors, educational institutions, non-governmental organizations, and the diaspora. We have partnered with PIOJ’s Community Renewal Programme (CRP), and they facilitated the brokering of peace in the Majesty Gardens community by engaging a violence interruption organization (Peace Management Initiative, PMI), when we brought to their attention the urgency of the situation there. A few men (about 1-1/2 years later) at our Majesty Gardens men’s breakfast meeting, referred to that intervention and stated that it helped them to transition from a negative to a positive lifestyle.

We have also partnered with the PIOJ in seminars and workshops for churches as they have recognized the vital role churches can play in transforming our communities.

OSJ partnered with Ascension Trust out of the UK, introduced Street Pastors into Jamaica in 2014, and have since patrolled the streets in Half-Way-Tree and later August Town, an inner-city community, in 2016. OSJ's goal is to spread Street Pastors across the 14 parishes and to introduce School Pastors in schools. Street Pastors UK helps to reduce anti-social behaviour, and as a result, different boroughs in the UK have seen a reduction in crime, and thus OSJ expects to see similar results in Jamaican communities and schools.

OSJ has partnered with other stakeholders, and the School of Education at the UWI Mona Campus continues to be another. Together we have conducted training for teachers at Operation Restoration Christian School, an inner-city school; hosted a 2-day symposium in 2013 on *Changing the Landscape of Education in Urban Schools and Communities*; and a 2-day conference in March 2021 entitled "Moving research beyond academics: Transforming our societies through collaboration and action". Social and emotional learning is also provided to schools through the INSIGHTS Programme of the School of Education, at the UWI Mona Campus.

The Church

From OSJ's perspective, one of the major stakeholders for this work in Jamaica is the Church. The Church is one of the primary change agents, given its continual service to community residents and high levels of trust. As a prominent volunteer organization, the Church brings a unique mixture of faith and morals, while providing relevant and tangible solutions to personal and social community issues. The Church is in every community, even the most violent ones, and is generally permanently based in the community, which can facilitate ongoing interventions. In addition, churches usually have buildings where members of the community are able to meet.

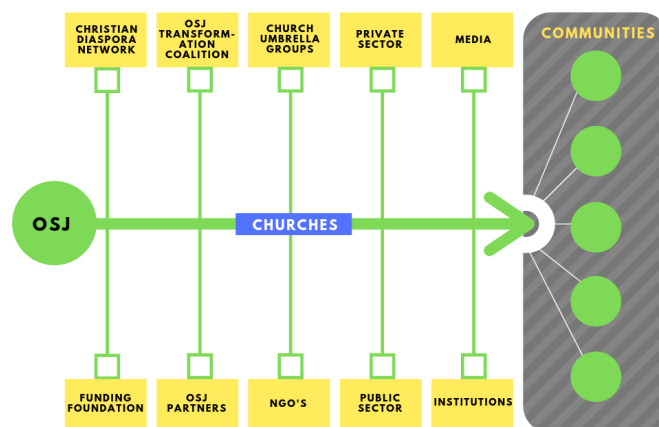
Historically, the Jamaican Church has addressed national issues such as aiding emancipation, the development of free villages post-emancipation, as well as education and

homeownership. OSJ has partnered with different church bodies, but plans to widen the network of churches so that the Church becomes very involved in community transformation.

One of OSJ's partner denominations is the New Testament Church of God. They are in 43 of the 100 violent communities. OSJ intends to work with this and other denominations and churches where violence exists to bring about positive change in these communities. Notwithstanding, OSJ's mission stands, to encourage churches to work towards transformation for all the vulnerable communities in which they are located, as it is fairly evident that under-resourced communities in Jamaica are at risk of becoming violent.

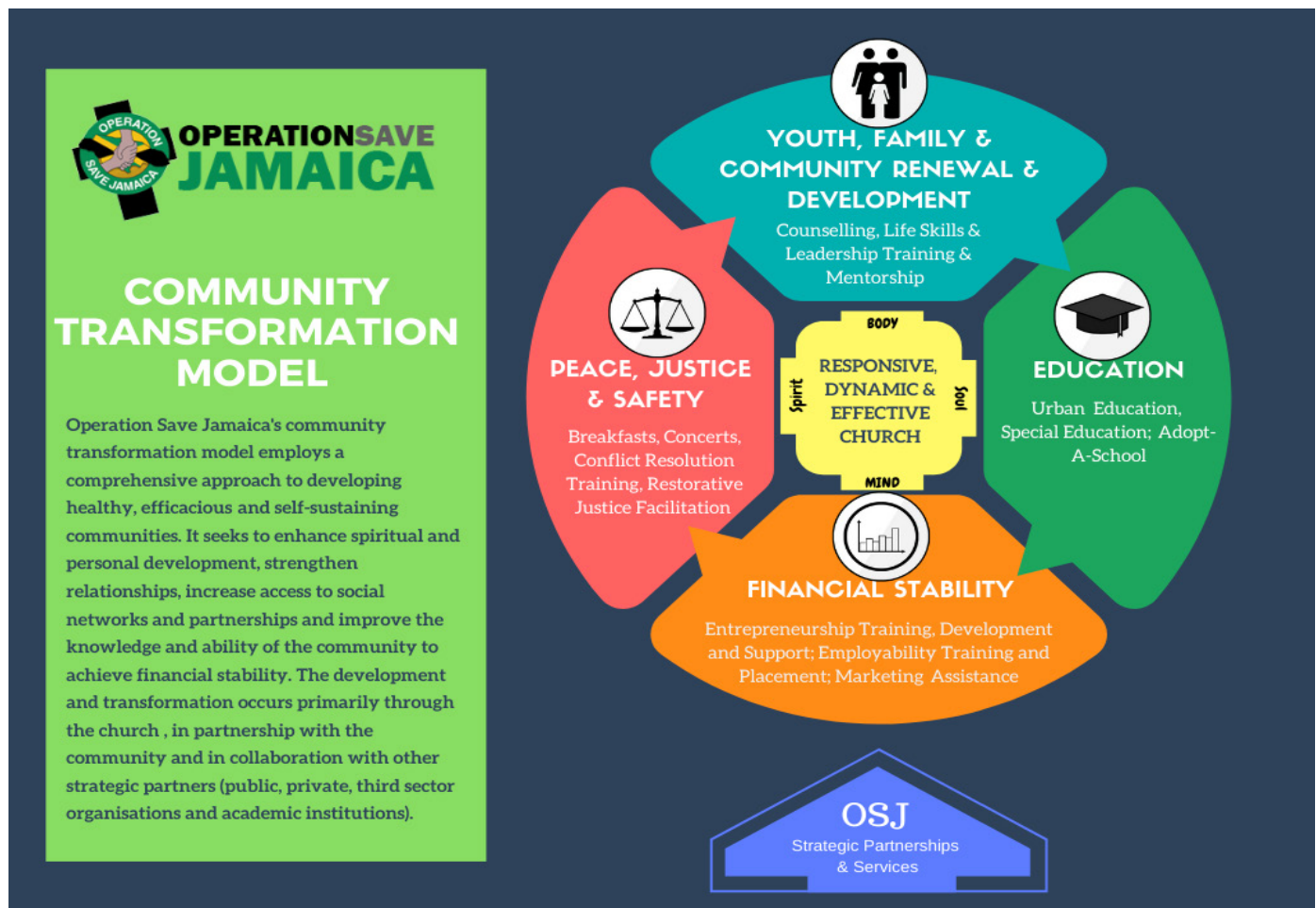
Figure 1

OSJ Strategic Partnerships



Community Transformation Model

Based on many years of experience, OSJ has concluded that a comprehensive and collaborative approach is required and has established a prototype community transformation model (see Figure 2). Our model closely aligns with the Community Renewal Programme (CRP) of the Planning Institute of Jamaica's (PIOJ) goals for transforming vulnerable and volatile communities.

Figure 2*OSJ Community Transformation Model*

Although varying aspects of the OSJ Community Transformation Model have begun, OSJ looks forward to greater engagement among churches in their communities, whilst working with other stakeholders, both private and public. In one community where OSJ has been actively involved, the lives of a number of teenaged young men were transformed through the church and its message. OSJ helped to address educational and career needs, exposing

them to other cultures in the Caribbean and beyond. They also received mentorship from various male figures, and 15 years later most of them are committed to their families and are mentoring others, continually increasing their earning potential with honest work. These are presently empowered leaders working for the transformation of their communities, including supporting the elderly, increasing in entrepreneurship and exposing and attracting young men to become agents of change.

The various components of the Community Transformation Model were implemented and are still in progress at different points in time:

- 2000–2024: Peace, Justice and Safety
- 2003–2024: Education
- 2002–2024: Financial Stability
- 2019–2024: Youth, Family and Community Renewal and Development

This has been implemented to varying degrees in the following communities – Trench Town, Maxfield Avenue, Majesty Gardens, August Town, and Payneland.

References

Scott, R. (2020, 20 May). 389 Gangs identified in Jamaica, 250 Active. *Jamaica Gleaner*. <https://jamaica-gleaner.com/article/news/20200520/389-gangs-identified-jamaica-250-active>

Bruce Arthur Fletcher graduated with a BSc in Civil Engineering (Honours) from The University of the West Indies (UWI) St. Augustine Trinidad and Tobago in 1981. Upon graduation from UWI Bruce served as the junior engineer representative at the Jamaica Institute of Engineers. In the early years following university he worked at the Urban Development Corporation where he was involved in varying projects such as the Fisherman Point development in Ohio Rios, Seabed Carpark downtown Kingston and in the development of Hellshire. From as early as high school Bruce has been involved in leadership roles within the Christian fraternity. Firstly, at Jamaica College and then later at UWI St. Augustine Campus in Trinidad where he served as the president and vice-president of the Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship. In the late 1990s Bruce's passion for Jamaica became stronger and he founded Operation Save Jamaica (OSJ) which was officially established in 1999 with the support of persons from CLF and other churches.

OSJ, with the by-line "working together for national revival, reformation and transformation" is an organization called to play a catalytic role in Jamaica to mobilize the church and others, both locally and abroad, into strategic action in order to bring transformation to individuals, communities and the nation. His involvement in communities and the nation has led to him playing key roles in the establishment of a number of organizations and ministries, Pastoral Fraternal in Trench Town, Prayer 2000, Xtreme Impact, and the Jamaica Coalition for a Healthy Society, National Association for the Family, in Jamaica, Street Pastors in the UK which now has 13,000 Street Pastors as well as Street Pastors in Jamaica.
