



Jamaican Vibes

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ST. PETER CLAVER CHILDREN'S ENSEMBLE SHARING MUSIC BETWEEN COMMUNITIES

by Heather Kenny

Earlier this year, Jamaican Self-Help (JSH) was excited to bring members of the St. Peter Claver Children's Ensemble to Canada. Hosted by families in Peterborough and Ottawa, 15 students and 3 teachers enjoyed 10 days learning about Canada, sharing Jamaican culture and experiencing daily life in Ontario.

Varying in age from 8 to 12 years, the ten girls and five boys were chosen as representatives of the 45-member Children's Ensemble based at St. Peter Claver Primary School in Kingston, Jamaica. The school of approximately 950 students is located in inner city Kingston, in a community faced with many challenges, including poverty and sporadic violence.

Along with several other programs supported by JSH, participation in the Ensemble encourages students to attend school regularly and to build the social and personal skills necessary to achieve academically. For many of the students, this Tour to Canada was the first time they had been away from their homes, their parents, their friends, their community and their country. For their families in Jamaica, this first separation was a challenging yet exciting one. We heard from many mothers concerned for their children, checking up on them in the way only mothers can! We were pleased to relay messages of encouragement, excitement and hope, knowing that when the Jamaican children returned to their community, the positive impact of the experience would spread to their families and their classmates at school.

JSH worked closely with two Peterborough schools: St. Anne Catholic Elementary School and Prince of Wales Public School, where dedicated

teachers hosted the children in five classrooms. Fellow classmates had the opportunity to learn about Jamaican culture and daily life.

From these two schools, families volunteered to billet the Jamaican students. These families gained an insight into another culture through the eyes of their children and the Jamaican children they graciously allowed into their homes. Strong bonds formed and many families continue to stay in touch. Heather Ballarin, who was involved in a previous Ensemble visit, helped with many aspects of the 2010 Tour, assisting new host families, greeting the members of the Ensemble at the airport and volunteering at the many events during the Tour. It is lasting impacts such as these that continue to make the organization of this event such a rewarding experience.

While in both Peterborough and Ottawa, the Jamaicans were exposed to Canadian culture through personal interactions, visits to museums and sightseeing. They even



The Boys of the Ensemble

learned square-dancing with their host families! The Jamaican teachers enjoyed the opportunity to meet Canadian teachers and to share teaching styles and methods. They also shared drumming skills and techniques with music teacher Jeffrey Biggar during a visit to Trinity College School in Port Hope.

Public concerts were held in both Peterborough and Ottawa to standing-room-only crowds, eager to see and hear the Children's Ensemble. Through a combination of song, dance and drumming, audiences were able to see a glimpse of Jamaican tradition. In Ottawa, there were also many Jamaican-Canadians who could even sing along! Music is a defining aspect of culture and national pride and the ability to share music between communities is a gift. Through successful outreach such as these public concerts, JSH continues to bring opportunities for global education and sharing cross-cultural values to communities in Ontario.

On the last day of their visit, after the exchange of contact information and goodbye hugs, the Jamaicans boarded the bus for the airport. The heartfelt expression from both Jamaicans and Canadians: *"That was so much fun! When will we do it again?"*

We were fortunate to be a host family the last time the St. Peter Claver choir toured in Peterborough in 2006. These kids had such talent and were so full of energy, full of life. It was a great experience for us and from our ongoing communication with Calvin (our Jamaican billet) it seems to have had a significant impact on his life as well. This is just one of the many great projects that Jamaican Self Help sponsors and we're lucky to have such a wonderful grass roots organization home grown in Peterborough.

– Heather Ballarin



Square dancing in Peterborough

Jamaican Self-Help Programme at St. Peter Claver Primary School Education for all – Developing the Whole Person

- Literacy & Numeracy Program for Grade 4 and 5 students
- Performing Arts Ensemble – singing, dance, drums, guitar, keyboard, poetry
- Team Sports – cricket, football, basketball, netball
- Clubs – brownies & cubs, arts & crafts, builder's club, appreciation club
- Parenting Workshops & Volunteer Involvement
- Staff Training

St. Peter Claver Primary School Mission:

"To provide quality education by nurturing and motivating individuals spiritually, intellectually, culturally and socially so as to develop healthy self-worth and identity, and to prepare students for secondary education and the wider society."



St. Peter Claver Primary School Students

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Jamaican Self-Help
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