



Grant Report from Duston United Reformed Church Boys' Brigade

Over the last 12 months, young people from Duston United Reformed Church in Northampton have undertaken an ambitious project to raise over £30,000 in order to travel to Jamaica to work on a small school in Ocho Rios. Whilst there the group helped to improve the school's facilities including improving the safety of the site, ensuring a safe area for the children to cook & eat and investing in additional educational materials.

The group, made up of young people aged 16-18, from the church's Boys' Brigade group, travelled with their Boys' Brigade friends from the local Methodist Church, to Jamaica in August 2018. This joint project was a first for Duston United Reformed Church and was therefore something both the Boys' Brigade and the Church members were particularly encouraged and excited by.

When the group arrived in Jamaica, they first took a trip to the school site. On arrival many of the young people were shocked to see the difference between this school and the schools they go to in the UK. Exchange Basic School, consists of one wooden building the size of just an average classroom in the UK.



Parts of the school building and the adjacent kitchen /dining room area were rotten away, with holes in the walls and the wood falling apart. On walking around the site and the playground area, they were also shocked to see a large amount of broken glass, rusty pieces of metal and even some needles lying around the school grounds. This was therefore a priority for our young people and they straight away started clearing the site. Each piece of broken glass they found, the more determined they were to find every last piece and make the site as safe as possible.

Upon our first visit, we also found out that the school had recently been shut down for a few months, due to the fact the school inspector felt the site was not safe without a proper secure fence all the way around the site. This therefore became our number one priority on the project.

Over the following two weeks, our young people worked tirelessly to erect a secure fence around the school, they also helped local tradesmen to brick up the kitchen / dining areas to ensure that this building was futureproofed and that no rats or pests could get into this area. This work ensured that the school could remain open going forwards and it also opened up additional funding for the school from the Government in Jamaica. In the final few days, time was then spent painting the school bright colours and leaving paintings of cartoon characters around the site which the school pupils had chosen. This made the site feel a lot more like a school where children come to learn and be happy.

Whilst working on the project, in 33c heat, members of the group learnt new skills such as mixing cermet by hand, erecting and fixing fence posts and painting walls.

Whilst in Jamaica the group also had some down time to enjoy some of Jamaica's natural beauty including a visit to Dunns River Falls. They also managed to visit the High Commissioner and interview him about his role on the island and learn about Jamaica.

To sum up the Jamaican experience in just a few words in this article would be near on impossible. The group went with the intention to give as much of themselves as they could, yet came home having received far more in return than they ever could have imagined.



In the space of a short two week, the young people who went on the trip learnt so much about the world around them and the difficulties some people face. Whilst the group were incredibly proud of all that they achieve, each young person wished they could have done more. Whilst that wasn't possible, they departed Jamaica confident that they have left the school more secure, safer & brighter than when they first arrived - helping to encourage children to learn and grow.