

(re)Presenting and Redressing LGBT Homelessness in Jamaica: Towards a Multifaceted Approach to Addressing Anti-Gay Related Displacement

J-FLAG | JULY 2014

In memory of 16 year-old Dwayne Jones who became homeless at age 12 and was murdered on July 22, 2013 in St. James.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) identity in Jamaica is shaped and coloured by displacement. Whether physically or mentally, displacement from family, community and sometimes country is a defining marker of the lived experiences of LGBT people.

Over the years, landlords, families, neighbours and/or other community members have forced many LGBT Jamaicans to leave their homes and communities. Between 2009 and 2012, LGBT persons made fifty-three (53) reports of displacement to J-FLAG. In 2012, there were twelve (12) reports, all involving males under 18 years. In 2013, there were eight (8) such reports and the organisation provided some form of housing assistance to fourteen persons.

Most persons who are forced to leave their homes and communities eventually find safe accommodation elsewhere. With the support of NGOs, relatives and friends, some even return to their homes and live on tenterhooks. Fearing continued harassment and violence, others leave Jamaica to seek refuge in countries such as Canada, England, the Netherlands and the USA. However, a significant number are forced to live and work on the street. This is especially common among those from the lowest socio-economic stratum.

Homelessness among the LGBT community has become increasingly visible. Many of those who become homeless seek refuge on the streets of New Kingston, one of the capital's primary business districts. This continues to generate media attention both locally and internationally. Displaced LGBT people have also sought refuge in abandoned homes and buildings.

The National Committee on Homelessness-Jamaica¹, which was established under the Board of Supervision (for the Relief of the Poor in Jamaica) reports that there are over 1000 homeless Jamaicans. The Committee notes, "homelessness is everyone's business". However, this is generally not reflected in the institutional response to appeals for assistance, nor in the attitudes and behaviours of the average Jamaican towards the homeless.

An individual is considered homeless if he or she resides "in places not meant for human habitation - cars, parks, sidewalks, abandoned buildings and on the street" (National Committee for the Homeless Report, 2012).ⁱ This also includes individuals in transitional houses such as infirmaries and shelters.

This brief is intended to guide policy and programmatic discussions regarding homelessness among LGBT people in Jamaica. It highlights the crucial role of the Government of Jamaica in ensuring that homeless and displaced LGBT persons have access to the necessary social safety nets. This brief recommends that the Ministry of Local Government and Community Development address this issue in the proposed Homeless Policy, which should be inclusive and non-discriminatory.

In addition to providing shelter, the government should also introduce developmental programmes for psychosocial rehabilitation and civic rights and responsibilities training. These initiatives will help displaced LGBT people reintegrate into society. Ultimately, the provision of more shelters, transitional housing and social safety nets should cater to all homeless citizens, while ensuring that they are LGBT-friendly.

¹ The National Homeless Committee examines the circumstance of Homelessness throughout Jamaica. It also will plan, organise and develop programmes, projects and regulations, and make recommendations for their implementations of providing housing accommodation, funding programmes and projects, coordinating services, raising awareness among stakeholders and the public and improving the care and protection of the homeless.

J-FLAG is therefore urging the government to implement an inclusive, non-discriminatory programme for *all* persons who are homeless including LGBT. J-FLAG has tried numerous interventions to assist displaced members of the LGBT community. These include helping to reintegrate homeless persons into their families and communities, assisting with temporary shelter and providing other psychosocial services. However, J-FLAG has limited capacity to provide for the number of displaced within the community. JASL has also provided extensive services to homeless LGBT persons. An NCDCA programme entitled 'Tek it to Dem' has provided services in the form of HIV and AIDS treatment for homeless persons, including LGBT people.

Recent Commitment for Homeless LGBT

In a newspaper article published June 13, 2014, Member of Parliament for South East St. Andrew and State Minister in the Ministry of Science, Technology, Energy and Mining, Hon. Julian Robinson said there was a need to help homeless gays in his constituency as they have gained national and international attention.

The Government of Jamaica has increased its budgetary support for homeless programmes for all local authorities from \$16 million to \$21 million^v. This increase in funding could be used to implement programmes targeted at homeless LGBT people, as this is a matter of urgency. J-FLAG implores Minister Julian Robinson and local authorities to use this funding to develop programmes that will address this issue in his constituency, where a large number of homeless LGBT persons have taken refuge.

J-FLAG recommends that

1. *Research* be conducted to ascertain the homeless population in Jamaica.
2. A *Drop-in Centre* be established for persons who are homeless. This would provide rehabilitation, personal hygiene care, food and access to healthcare services.
3. A *Night Shelter* should be created. This would provide a place to sleep at night and shelter in times of natural disasters such as a hurricane.
4. *Housing* in the form of a shelter for persons who are homeless be created; this would provide individuals with a place to reside.
5. The Government develops a *non-discriminatory policy* for the management of all forms of shelter provided by the State.
6. The government introduce *developmental programmes* for psychosocial rehabilitation and civic rights and responsibilities training for persons who are homeless.

ⁱ National Committee on the Homeless Report (2012) Prepared by Ministry of Local Government and Community Service

ⁱⁱ National Committee on the Homeless Report (2012) Prepared by Ministry of Local Government and Community Service

ⁱⁱⁱ 'Don't come back here' - Maxfield residents warn gay man after publicised eviction. <http://jamaica-star.com/thestar/20130705/news/news2.html>

^{iv} Jamaica Observer June 14, 2014 MP Wants help for New Kingston Homeless Gays. http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/news/MP-wants-help-for-New-Kingston-homeless-gays_16879080

^v Jamaica Observer June 27, 2014. More Gov't Funding to Assist the Homeless. <http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/news/More-govt-funding-to-assist-the-homeless-17025680>



J-FLAG is the foremost organisation in Jamaica advocating for the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people, in an effort to build a Jamaican society that respects and protects the rights of everyone.

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