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UPLIFTING ADOLESCENTS PROJECT

Retaining 12 to 14 Year Old Boys in School

An Operations Research Project

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Commissioned by the YMCA, Kingston**

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RATIONALE

The Base-Line Study of the Uplifting Adolescents Project found that one of the strong desires of at-risk youths, who had dropped out of school, was that of continuing their education. The study found that it was mainly family circumstances and not the desires of youths that accounted for the latter being out of school. The majority of youths who had dropped out of school were boys.

The YMCA Youth Development Programme has been successful in delivering remedial and continuing education to at-risk boys who have dropped out of school. What is particularly remarkable about this two-year programme is the very low dropout rate and very high rate of completion among these very boys who had dropped out of the formal school system. The clear implication is that the YMCA Programme has been able to address the needs and aspiration of these 12-14 year-old boys in ways that the schools had not done. However, the YMCA Youth Development Programme has been unable to cope with the number of requests from boys and their parents for admission.

At the invitation of the YMCA, and with funding from the Upliftment of Adolescent Project, an action research study was undertaken with the overall goal of seeking to prevent boys, in the 12 to 14 years age group, from dropping out of the formal school system. The study, titled Retaining Boys in School, sought to find out why male students were dropping out of school and how they could be retained in the formal school system.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The specific objectives of this study were:

- To find out from a random sample of boys in the YMCA Programme why they dropped out of school and why they have remained in the YMCA Programme.
- To identify the schools from which these boys came prior to their enrolment in the YMCA Programme.
- To analyse the content, methodology and mode of delivery of the YMCA Programme and the content, methodology and mode of delivery of two of the schools that supply most of the students to the YMCA Programme and compare these two analyses to determine the differences between them.
- To identify those factors related to the dropout of boys from the formal school system, which could be addressed by modifications of the welfare programmes and/or the programme delivery approaches currently being employed by two schools.
- To persuade these two schools to adjust aspects of their programme delivery or welfare assistance to students to take account of some of the factors identified as major concerns of at-risk boys, and which have been ameliorated by elements of the YMCA Programme.
- To determine the dropout rate of boys in the two selected schools over the last two years on a term-by-term basis.
- To assess the dropout rate over one school year after the recommended adjustments have been made to the programme of the two schools.

HYPOTHESIS

Adjusting the schools' programme to take account of some of the concerns of at-risk boys will reduce their dropout rate from the formal school system by at least 20 per cent below existing rates.

EXPECTED DELIVERABLES OR MEASURABLE OUTCOMES

The following were agreed to be the measurable outcomes of this action research study:

1. A list of the reasons given by at-risk boys for dropping out of school.
2. A list of the reasons given by at-risk boys for remaining in the non-formal education programme run by the YMCA.
3. A comparative analysis of the main elements of the programmes of two selected schools within the formal system and the YMCA non-formal education programme, in relation to the needs and concerns of at-risk boys.
4. The dropout rates per school term of boys from two schools over the last two years.
5. The dropout rates of boys over one school year after an intervention designed to take account of the needs and concerns of at-risk boys.
6. Improved capacity of schools to monitor the participation of students, particularly at-risk boys, in their programmes.

METHODOLOGY

In essence, the methodology employed eight elements organised in two distinct groups or phases of activities. The first phase or group activities were centred on identifying why boys enrolled in the YMCA Programme left the formal school system along with those features and factors of the YMCA Programme that could account for the retention of boys in that programme. Further, to determine which of these factors and features could be adopted and adapted to the formal school system. The second phase or group of activities focused on designing and implementing intervention strategies in consultation and collaboration with two of the schools from which several boys came with a view to determining whether these interventions could enhance the capacity of these schools to retain boys.

Activities in Phase One

- Examining the student records of the YMCA Youth Development Programme with respect to biographic information, the schools previously attended and the reasons given by boys, or their parents, for enrolling in the YMCA programme.
- Canvassing and obtaining the views of boys in the YMCA Youth Development Programmes, through questionnaires, focus group discussions and in-depth interviews, with respect to why they left the formal school system and have remained in the YMCA Programme.
- Canvassing and obtaining the views of principals and teachers from two of the schools that the boys had attended prior to enrolment in the YMCA Programmes.

- Comparing the Programme used by the YMCA and those employed in the two selected schools in order to identify differences that could possibly account for the fact that boys who had dropped out of formal education would enrol and attend a non-formal programme regularly.
- Triangulating the data obtained from the data sources.

Activities in Phase Two

- Designing and developing an intervention strategy based on the results of the data analysis and in consultation with the Principals and senior staffs of the schools.
- Supporting the two schools in the implementation of the intervention strategy through training, school visits and general interaction with staff and parents.
- Strengthening the capacity of the two schools to monitor student participation and performance through the use of an educational management information system.

Each of these eight elements of the methodology requires some elaboration.

Examining the Records of the YMCA Youth Development Programme

The YMCA keeps individual files on all students enrolled in the Youth Development Programme. These files were examined to obtain information on three counts. First, to ascertain the names of the schools that the boys attended previous to being enrolled at the YMCA. Second, to determine the reasons given by the parents or guardians of the boys for enrolling them at the YMCA. Third, to ascertain the ages of the boys enrolled in the Youth Development Programme.

Canvassing and Obtaining the Views of Boys

The views of the boys enrolled in the YMCA Programme and the Amy Bailey Centre were canvassed concerning their reasons for dropping out the formal school system and attending the YMCA Youth Development Programme. This was done in four steps.

First, a questionnaire was designed and developed to solicit the views and opinions of the boys enrolled in the YMCA Programme and the Programme at the Amy Bailey Centre. A draft of the questionnaire was pre-tested on a small sample of boys that had previously attended the YMCA Programme. Based on the response to the draft questionnaire, slight modifications were made. (The questionnaire in its final form is shown in Appendix 1).

Second, arrangements were made with the teachers of the Centres to allow the questionnaire to be administered to the boys. Prof. Miller administered the questionnaire to two classes at the YMCA. Following observation of the procedure used by Prof. Miller, Mrs. Sharon Gardner administered the questionnaire to remaining classes at the YMCA and to the boys at the Amy Bailey Centre. The questionnaires were administered over a total of two days, as the classes were available. Responses were received from 135 boys out of a possible total of just fewer than 200. The time of school year at which the survey had to be carried out is usually affected by poor attendance. This was the principal

factor in the shortfall between the number enrolled and those responding to the questionnaire. All the boys present over the two days in which the questionnaire was administered responded to the questionnaire.

Third, from the analysis of the many reasons given by the boys for leaving the formal school system, the ten most frequently mentioned were selected for inclusion in the Focus Group Interview Schedule. The criteria used for selecting the ten reasons were:

- Frequency of mention
- Reasons that could be influenced by school policy

To be included, a reason had to satisfy both criteria. For example, reaching the school age was frequently mentioned but was not included in the Interview Schedule because this reason could not be influenced or changed by any action of the schools since this was a matter of school supply and matter for national policy making.

The Focus Group Interview Schedule did not only include the ten reasons for leaving schools that could be influenced by schools but also asked for suggestions from the focus groups concerning what schools could do to address these matters. The Interview Schedule therefore contained 20 questions. Each reason given for leaving school was matched by a question asking the boys what schools could do about that item. (See Appendix 2).

The procedure for conducting the focus group discussions were:

- Arrangements were made with the teachers of the YMCA Programme to allow for the conduct of focus groups.
- Boys for each focus group were randomly selected from the class register of each group of the YMCA Programme. Six focus groups were held with a total of 55 boys. The six groups varied in size from six to ten boys.
- Each focus group was asked to respond to the questions posed on the Focus Group Interview Schedule.
- Prof. Miller conducted the first focus group discussion with 10 boys. Mrs. Gardner observed the procedures used by Prof. Miller.
- Mrs. Gardner conducted the other five focus groups.
- The six focus groups were done over a period of two days.

Fourth, individual interviews were conducted with 26 boys. These interviews were done over a period of four days. Boys selected for interview had experiences related to the main categories for leaving schools reported in the questionnaire and focus group interviews. These included reaching the school leaving age, being expelled, teacher/pupil relationships, being victims of violence, committing violence, socio-economic circumstances, being a slow learner and internal migration. These in-depth interviews provided rich contextual details concerning the experiences of the boys on these matters.

Obtaining the Views of Teachers and Principals

The staff of the YMCA searched their enrolment records and listed the schools previously attended by the boys. That list was analysed by Prof. Miller. The analysis showed that the approximately 200 boys enrolled in the YMCA Programmes came from a total of 87 different schools. Only in five cases did ten or more boys enrolled in the YMCA Programme come from the same schools. In most instances it was one or two boys that came from a particular school.

The schools selected for inclusion in the project were the two schools with the highest number of boys enrolled in the YMCA Programme. One had 13 boys enrolled in the YMCA Programme and the other 11 boys. Prof. Miller visited these two schools, explained the project to the principals who both agreed to be included in the project. Both schools are double shift All Age schools located in Kingston, about one mile apart.

Mrs. Joyce Ellis and Prof. Miller collaboratively designed and developed an Interview Schedule for Principals and a Questionnaire for Teachers. (See Appendix 3 and 4). These instruments were designed to obtain the views and opinions of principals and teachers concerning the reasons for the poor participation and dropout of boys from the formal school system as well as their suggestions of remedial measures that could be adopted. Prof. Miller interviewed the principals while Mrs. Ellis administered the questionnaire to the teachers in each school. Both schools operated the shift system hence the administration of the questionnaires to the teachers had to take account of this fact of school organisation. Both schools had a combined total of 100 teachers. Responses were received from 71 teachers.

Comparing the YMCA and School Programmes

Through interviews with the principals and vice principals of the two selected schools, information was gathered concerning some of the main features of the organisation of the schools, welfare programmes and organisation of instruction. A similar exercise was done with the Executive Secretary of the YMCA and the Head of the Youth Development Programme at the Centre at 19 Hope Road.

A comparative analysis was done with respect to the similarity and differences between the organisation and programme at the schools and that of the YMCA. The analysis showed that the YMCA and schools programmes differed in several respects. However, the schools could only adopt two of the differences. The other differences were organisational and defined the divergence between formal and non-formal programmes.

Comparing the Data Sources

When the data obtained from the boys, teachers, and the analysis of the two programmes were compared, it was found that the three data sources only agreed on one factor that could account for boys dropping out of formal schooling - socio-economic circumstances. The analysis of the two programmes produced one factor that coincided with views of the

boys but not of the teachers. This was that many boys were slow learners, with some possibly being challenged by learning disabilities. Accordingly, the YMCA programme had established a systematic relationship with the Mico CARE Centre for the referral of boys for diagnostic assessment. The data from the boys revealed three additional factors to the two already identified. These were concerns for personal safety, criticisms of the insensitivity of teachers who consistently treated them harshly and embarrassed them in numerous ways and the desire for assistance with reading. Teachers and principals mentioned one factor not present in the other sources - lack of parental guidance and supervision.

Designing the Intervention Model

The interventional strategy and model was designed in relation to the findings from the three data sources as outlined above and in consultation with the principals and other senior staff of the schools.

The assumptions of the Model of Intervention were as follows:

- It is possible to prevent, or at least minimize, deviant behaviour of boys if those at risk are identified early, say between 8 and 14 years and exposed to interventions designed to address their concerns and needs.
- A whole school approach involving principals, teachers, boys, parents and the community, if possible, is most likely to succeed, than single interventions all directly focused on the boys.
- A combination of empathy and caring on the one hand and firmness and sanctions on the other is most likely to succeed in making a positive impact on boys at risk.
- Hearing from the boys themselves is the starting point of meaningful action.
- It is not sufficient to seek to change the behaviour of the boys. It is vitally necessary to implement interventions designed to alter their life chances in a manner that conveys hope, meaning and purpose to the boys.
- The challenges facing schools serving large numbers of high at risk boys require much more professional support than can be expected of existing school personnel.

The elements of the Intervention Strategy identified from the analysis of the three data sources were as follows:

- Alleviation of socio-economic hardship
- Identification, assessment and treatment of boys with learning disabilities
- Developing or strengthening the reading programmes in the schools
- Sensitivity training for the teachers
- Assistance to parents and boys experiencing challenges
- Promoting and fostering wholesome values in the schools

Supporting the Schools in the Implementation of the Interventions

The principal and staffs of the schools took the responsibility for the implementation of the interventions outlined about. The project assisted and supported the principals and staff by mounting seminar and workshops that provided training in relation to different interventions, providing materials in relation to the recognition by teachers of students that could have developmental challenges, making regular school visits to provide assistance and encouragement with respect to the implementation process, obtaining counsellors for the sessions with parents and supporting the efforts of the schools to obtain sponsorship for boys.

Strengthening the Capacity of Schools to Monitor the Participation of Boys

The capacity of the schools to monitor the participation of boys was strengthened by providing the schools with the computer hardware and software to implement a school management information system. Training was provided to five members of the staff of each school in basic computer literacy skills as well as in the procedures in using School Manager, the particular management information system that was provided. Assistance was also given to both schools with respect to the entry of student biographical information. At the end of the study, both schools had created databases with respect to its student population as well as developed the skills to keep track of student enrolment and attendance.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROJECT OVERALL

The project began officially on May 1, 1999. The first activity carried out was that of canvassing the opinions and views of the boys enrolled in the YMCA Youth Development programme. This required the cooperation of the teachers in charge of both centres. This was readily received.

The second activity carried out was the analysis of the YMCA records of the Youth Development Programme. Following that analysis, the principals of the two schools identified were contacted. The project was explained to both principals. In both instances the principals set out meetings with senior staff at which the project was outlined. At one school the Chairman of the Board was in attendance. Following these meetings, both schools decided to participate in the project. Following the agreement of the schools to participate in the project, arrangements were made for conducting the interviews with the principals and administering the question to the teachers.

Bearing in mind that both the YMCA Programmes and the schools closed for the school year in the first week of July and much of June was spent in administering and taking end of year examinations, there was considerable pressure to complete the data gathering exercises within the small window of opportunity that was available between May and the second week of June. However, despite the best efforts, some of the activities spilled over into the examination period. The time of year that this exercise was carried out probably accounted for the fact that about 30 per cent of the boys enrolled in the YMCA

Programmes and approximately 30 per cent of the teachers in the two schools were missed in the data gathering exercise.

The summer period was used for the analysis of the data and the identification of the elements of the Model of Intervention. These activities were completed by the end of August.

Consultations with the schools began in mid-September because the schools could not accommodate us before that time. The consultation took place in the following stages:

1. The results of the comparative analyses were shared with the principals of the two schools separately. They were asked to consider the extent to which the results of the analyses were valid and to state whether the school would be willing to implement strategies that would address these factors. If the principal considered the results of the analysis valid and was willing to participate in implementing measures to address the factors identified, then they were asked to set up a meeting with their senior staff in the school and representatives from the Board of Management of the school and of parents.
2. Both principals agreed that the results of the analyses appeared valid to them and expressed their willingness to participate further in the project. Meetings were set up with the Vice Principals, Guidance Counsellors and representatives from the Boards of Management. Through these meetings the Model of Intervention was drafted for further discussion and as the basis of future planning.
3. The principal researcher had discussions with two ministers of religion, a consultant psychiatrist working in the field of mental health, head of a graduate programme training counsellors and a principal of a private school and prominent musician who has been using the popular culture to promote values and moral education. These discussions were focused on elements of the intervention strategies that were developed through consultation with the schools.

The elements of the Model of Intervention developed through the consultations can be summarised as follows.

1. Alleviating Socio-economic Hardship

One of the defining features of the YMCA Programme is the financial assistance given to boys who are experiencing severe economic hardship. This assistance is provided through sponsorships solicited by the YMCA. Bank accounts are opened for these boys who receive allowances on a bimonthly basis. The assistance is tied to continued enrolment and regular attendance in the programme. Both boys and teachers report that socio-economic and financial hardship is a critical factor in the participation of boys in the school system. The assumption here was that teachers and guidance counsellors in public schools are well aware of students who are experiencing severe socio-economic hardship. It would not be difficult

therefore for schools to identify boys in need of financial assistance. Further, it is assumed that schools could secure sponsorship for these boys by approaching a variety of organizations related to the school or to the community in which they are located. Such organizations would include businesses, churches, the PTA, past students associations, philanthropic individuals, service clubs and other civil and charitable organisations.

2. Identifying, Assessing and Treating Boys with Learning Disabilities

The YMCA Programme identifies boys who may be suffering from mental or learning disabilities and sends them for testing at the Mico Care Centre. The results of this assessment are then used in their instruction. The Joint Board of Teacher Education, with assistance from the Government of the Netherlands, has recently developed a 15-hour instructional module for teachers on the subject of recognizing exceptionalism among students. This module also includes a list of referral agencies that could assist students and schools in addressing the challenges of exceptionalism among students. This module can be purchased from the Joint Board and used for the in-service training of teachers. The proposal here was four-fold:

- (i) That an in-service seminar be mounted for the teachers in the two schools on the subject of exceptionalism using the JBTE module and trained personnel in this field as the presenters.
- (ii) That the schools develop relationships with the referral agencies that could assist the teachers with the instruction of these students.
- (iii) That the instructional prescriptions developed by the referral agencies be incorporated as guides from the instructional programme developed in the schools for these boys.
- (iv) That if the incidence of exceptionalism in the schools warrant it, the hiring policy of the school could include teachers trained in the particular areas in which the incidence of exceptionalism is highest and that the instructional programme of the schools be altered accordingly.

3. Developing or Strengthening the Reading Programmes in the Schools

Many boys identified themselves as slow learning in need of special assistance in learning to read. They also expressed a strong desire to learn to read. There is empirical evidence to the effect that students who attend irregularly in Grades One and Two, usually fail to master basic reading skills in these early grades, do not catch up by following the regular instruction in the succeeding grades. The four elements of this strategy can be outlined as follows:

- a. Review the instruction being delivered in the school up to the Grade 2 level to ensure that all the basic phonetic skills necessary for reading are being appropriately and systematically taught.

- b. Test all students in the school above Grade 2 using a diagnostic reading test. This testing should be done on an individual basis and should include both oral and written instruments and should cover all the basic phonetic skills.
- c. Develop a remedial reading programme that would include the use of a special reading room equipped with adequate reading aids and materials. One or two Reading Resource teachers who deliver remedial instruction to small groups of students, as identified by the diagnostic testing.
- d. Keep individual records of students and their mastery of the various reading skills. This record of reading achievement would follow students from one grade to the next in order to guide the teachers in the delivery of reading instruction.

4. Sensitivity Training for Teachers

Many boys expressed the views that some teachers were hostile to them, embarrassed them repeatedly, were not sympathetic to their problems and did not respect their feelings or views. In a nutshell, some teachers saw the boys as problems and not as having problems. Further, they stated that many of the lessons were boring and did not in any way motivate them to learn. The intervention proposed here has the following elements:

- a. Seminars with teachers that would sensitise them to some of the challenges faced by at-risk boys.
- b. Workshops with teachers to develop interesting and stimulating lesson plans.
- c. Role reversal sessions involving teachers and boys with a view to exploring their relationships and identifying ways of improving these relationships.

5. Assisting Parents and Boys Experiencing Challenges

Most teachers identify the lack of parental guidance and poor parental supervision as key factors contributing to poor participation and poor performance by boys in schools. Some teachers identify boys who pose problems in schools and link their behaviour to parental guidance and supervision. On the other hand, several boys complain that in many instances parents and teachers co-operate to inflict grievous punishment on them. The intervention strategy suggested here is directed at assisting both boys and parents to media their difficulties, constructively resolve tensions and conflicts in their relationship and thereby cope better with their situations. The strategy consists of three basic elements.

- a. Teachers within schools would identify boys manifesting behaviour and other problems that put them at risk of dropping out of school. Guidance

counsellors within the schools would organize group therapy sessions with these boys.

- b. The parents or guardians of these boys would be invited by the parent leadership of the PTA to participate in group therapy sessions directed at assisting them with coping effectively with the young sons or wards. These sessions would be offered once per week for two hours at the school over a six-month period and would be operated by trained counsellors or counsellors in training from the Caribbean Graduate School of Theology.
- c. There would be bi-weekly meetings, or as the need arises, between the guidance counsellors of the schools and the counsellors running the sessions for parents.

6. Promoting and Fostering Wholesome Values in the Schools

The majority of boys reported concerns about personal safety, cited instances of being exploited by those bigger and stronger than they were and expressed fears of being hurt physically. This was a very important factor identified by the boys in explaining poor participation in school and dropout from the formal school system. While many boys suggested mechanical measures to address their concerns, for example, installing metal detectors in schools and carrying out spot searches for weapons, these are seen here as short term and superficial. The strategy proposed here is based on holistic assumptions and is directed at creating a shared belief and value system by both teachers and students.

The elements of the strategy proposed here are as follows:

- a) Systematic, regular and repeated affirmation by the school community of a specific set of beliefs and values concerning the sacredness of human life, self worth and self esteem, respect for others, social obligation to the weak, personal responsibility for actions and spiritual resistance of negative stereotypes and expectations.
- b) Deliberate promotion of these beliefs and values through school rituals, popular culture, the arts, sports and games and by cross references to reinforcing aspects of the normal school curriculum.
- c) Consistent and impartial application of a regimen of graded sanctions appropriate to levels of infraction of the specific belief and value system promoted in the schools.

A full statement of the Model of Intervention was prepared and presented to teachers of both schools at staff meetings attended by the Project Team (Appendix 5). At these staff meetings teachers expressed their views and made comments, some of which was incorporated in the final version of the Model of Intervention.

Implementation of the Intervention Strategies

Actions taken to implement the six intervention strategies were as follows:

- The principals of both schools wrote letters to business and organisations in their surrounding community explaining the project and seeking sponsorship for boys experiencing economic and financial hardship. In addition, the Chairman of the Board of one school sought assistance from a service club of which he was a member. The principal researcher also made contact with some organisations, which was followed up by letters from the schools.
- The 100 Manuals of Exceptionality was purchased from the Joint Board of Teacher Education. Mico Care Centre was contacted and provided a staff member to mount seminars in the two schools on Exceptionality, and agencies to which students could be referred.
- Mr. Brian Heap of the Creative Arts Centre of the University of the West Indies, agreed to run workshops with the teachers of both schools using Process Drama to sensitise them to situations which confronted many of the boys at risk.
- The Caribbean Graduate School of Theology was contacted and agreed to provide Counsellors from the Masters in Counselling Programme who would run sessions with parents of boys who were manifesting various behavioural problems.
- Yekengale, Principal of a school using an Afro-centric curriculum, musician and presenter used by the Culture arm of the Ministry of Education to run seminars with teachers, was contacted to mount seminars with selected teachers on how to promote wholesome values through General Assembly and to give performances to this effect.
- Mrs. Joyce Ellis, Educator of the Project, was designated to assist schools with the development of the reading programme.

The consultations with the schools to develop the intervention strategies, the meetings with the staffs of the schools to secure their inputs and the preparatory activities to support the implementation of the strategies, took place between mid-September and the beginning of December 1999. The period January to June 2000 was the time available to implement the invention strategies. Summer 2000 was designated as the period for the analysis of the project outcomes.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

There were several limitations to the Study as implemented. These can be listed in summary form as follows:

1. The design originally proposed for the study was for the intervention strategies to be implemented in the schools over a period of one academic year. However, the time of approval of the study, which allowed it to start-up in May, did not permit the commencement of the implementation of the intervention strategies in September. Implementation of the intervention strategies could only commence in January, which only allowed the strategies to be implemented over two school terms. The implications of this were two-fold. First, two school terms is even more limited than one school year with respect to the reversing behaviours and patterns that have developed over a much longer time. Second, missing the summer period meant that there was little or no time to have workshops with teachers that were not disruptive of the regular schools programme. To compound the problem further, both schools operate on a shift basis. This meant that in some instances the same workshop had to be held for both shifts in both schools requiring presenters to do four of the same workshops. This could not always be fitted into some presenters' schedule, resulting in some teachers not receiving the training related to some intervention strategies.
2. Despite the best efforts of the schools and the principal researcher, no company or organisations was forthcoming in providing sponsorship for boys, notwithstanding some promises being made. The schools, through teachers and guidance counsellors, identified between 90 and 100 boys in each school from dire financial circumstances. The number of boys so identified did not exceed 15 per cent of the total number of boys enrolled. Considering that both of these schools served a high proportion of students from inner city communities, the proportion identified as requiring assistance could not be said to be high. By being unsuccessful in securing sponsorships, this strategy was not implemented.
3. Mrs. Joyce Ellis served as the Educator on the study and played a vital role in working with the schools to implement the various strategies. In particular, she had direct involvement with the implementation of the Reading Programme in both schools. She worked closely with both the principals and the teachers directly involved in the implementation of the strategies through regular visits to the schools. Mrs. Ellis died suddenly in the Easter Vacation. It was not possible to replace her for the period of the Summer Term in which instruction took place. For that period, the schools were not supported in the implementation of the strategies to the extent that was planned.
4. The study and its design underestimated the range and severity of the challenges being experienced by the schools. The design of the study implicitly assumed that the reasons experienced by the boys in the YMCA Programme encompassed the range and severity of the challenges facing the schools. This assumption proved not to be valid. For example, the study did not anticipate that there would be a small core of boys that were disruptive of the schools programme through operating in the style of 'dons' within and outside of the schools. Also, it did not anticipate the fact that several students were seriously affected by the killing of relatives and close friends and were in need of post-traumatic counselling.

Accordingly, none of the interventions directly addressed the needs of these students. Again, it underestimated the security needs of the schools. For example, during the period of the study, someone disguised as a student shot a male student of one of the schools on the school premises. That student escaped death by somersaulting back into the school, and in so doing avoided shots hitting vital organs although he was shot nine times. This incident traumatised the entire school for several days.

5. The pupil teacher ratio of 1:42 that obtained during the period of the study constrained the implementation of some components. Both schools are large and operate on a shift basis. One school has an enrolment of just over 1300 students and the other just over 1700. Both schools were deemed to be overstaffed and therefore had constraints in fully implementing the Resource Room strategy as well as hiring teachers who could implement some of the remedial programmes that were anticipated from the diagnosis of learning problems.
6. The acquisition of computers and the educational management information system was significantly delayed because of the time it took for the YMCA to obtain GCT exemption for these items. In addition, the computer received did not match the specifications and this was not discovered until problems arose in the data entry phase. While the supplier did make good by taking back the machines and providing computers that did meet the specifications, this was too late for the EMIS to be used by the schools to monitor student progress during the period of the study.

THE STUDY AS IMPLEMENTED

Taking into account the limitations outlined above, the study as implemented, can be shown in tabular form as follows:

Table 1

The Study as Implemented

Planned Interventional Strategies	Actual	Comments
1. Sponsorship of boys	No sponsorships obtained	Not for want of effort
2. Assessing and Treating Disabilities		
a) Seminar for Teachers	Seminar held at one school. Manual on Exceptionality distributed at both schools	Could not match timetable of one school with schedule of the Presenter
b) Relation with Referral Agency	Relation established between Mico and one school.	
c) Instructional Programme	Boys referred but	Project period was too short

based on Assessment	Assessment not done.	for cycle of identification and assessment.
d) Hiring of Teachers	Not done.	Constrained by Teacher Pupil ratio
3. Reading Programme		
a) Review	Done at both schools	
b) Testing of boys	Done at both schools	
c) Remedial Teaching through Resource Rooms	Done at both schools	The Resource Rooms needed much more materials.
d) Record Keeping	Not Done	Computers only became fully functional in July.
4. Sensitivity Training		
a) Seminar using Process Drama	Done at both schools	
b) Workshop to help adjust instructional programme	Not Done	Difficulties in scheduling
c) Role Reversals	Partially in Seminar	Not sufficient to be effective. Difficulties in scheduling prevented more sessions.
5. Counselling for Parents		
a) Identification of boys	Done at both schools	
b) Counselling sessions with parents	Several sessions at some with parents determining the content of sessions at one school. Only two sessions at the other school.	Problem of follow-up at one school after the sudden death of Mrs Ellis
c) Interaction of school and parents' counsellors.	Very limited	
6. Promoting wholesome values		
a) Assemblies involving the use of popular culture	Done at both schools	Very well received by students
b) Seminar with teachers selected by Principals to lead School Assemblies	Done at one school	Teachers not identified at one school.
c) One Assembly per week promoting selected values	Done in May/June at one school	
d) Graduated System of Sanctions	Not implemented	Problem of scheduling

MEASURABLE OUTCOMES

The proposal and the terms of reference of the study stipulated that the measurable outcomes of the study would be:

- A list of the reasons given by at-risk boys for dropping out of school.
- A list of the reasons given by at-risk boys for remaining in a non-formal education programme run by an NGO.
- A comparative analysis of the main elements of at least two schools within the formal system and a non-formal education programme, in relation to the needs and concerns of at-risk boys.
- The dropout rates per school term of boys from two schools over the last two years.
- The dropout rates of boys over one school year after an intervention designed to take account of the needs and concerns of at-risk boys.
- Improved capacity of schools to monitor the participation of students, particularly at-risk boys, in their programmes.

Each of these will be set out and discussed in turn.

1. List of Reasons Given for Leaving the Formal School System

Table 2 shows the list of reasons given to the YMCA by parents/guardians or boys for seeking entry to the Youth Development Programme at the Hope Road Centre.

Table 2

Reasons Given to the YMCA for Seeking Admission to the Youth Programme

Reasons for Seeking Admission	Number of Boys
Slow Learner	49
Graduated	04
Getting off the streets	03
Slow in reading	02
Finance	02
Internal Migration	02
Dropped out of schools	02
Learning disability	01
Average student	01
No reason recorded	37
Total	101

Table 2 shows that for the vast majority of the boys for whom the official records show the stated reason for seeking admission, learning difficulties were given as their principal motivation. Forty-nine were said to be slow learners; two were said to be slow in reading and one was said to have a learning disability. Reasons related to expulsion, violence and teachers are not mentioned in their records or having reached the school leaving age. Three boys were said to have sought entry in order to 'get off the streets'.

Table 3 shows the list of reasons given by the boys themselves for dropping out of the formal school system.

Table 3

List of Reasons for Dropping Out of the Formal School System

Reasons for Dropping Out	Number of Boys
Reached school leaving age	63
Expelled from school	08
Not learning anything	08
Just did not go back, fed up with school	08
Slow Learner	07
Parents moved from the community	07
Problems with teachers	06
Could not pay school fees	04
Not reading well, want to learn to read	03
Location or facilities of school	03
Bullies and fighting	03
Was bad or rude	02
Stabbed a fellow student	02
School Closed	01
School had no athletics	01
Students played too much, idlers	01
Tested by Mico Care referred to YMCA	01
No Response to the Question	07
Total	135

Table 3 shows that of the 135 boys answering the questionnaire asking them why they left school, 128 gave reasons while seven did not answer the question. Of the 128 giving reasons 63, or 49.2 per cent, said that they had reached the school leaving age of 15 years. School supply within the public secondary school system accounted for them seeking opportunities through the YMCA. Nineteen boys, approximately 15 per cent, cited learning difficulties as the reason for dropping out. Eight said that they were not learning anything, seven admitted to being slow learning while three said that they had trouble learning to read and one had been referred to YMCA by the Mico CARE Centre. Approximately 10 per cent, or 12 boys, stated that their behaviour problems accounted from them leaving or being put out of the formal school system. Eight were expelled, two had committed violent acts and two said that they had been bad or rude without giving any details. Three boys claimed to have left to avoid bullies and fighting. Four boys, 3.5 per cent, stated that they were unable to pay school fees.

There is a marked difference between the reasons given to the YMCA officially by the parents/guardians or boys and those reported through the questionnaire administered by this study. The principal reason given to the YMCA was that of learning difficulties

experienced in the formal school system. While this reason ranks second in the questionnaire responses, reaching the school leaving age is by far the most frequent response given by the boys. Indeed, the dates of birth of the boys recorded on the official files as well as given on the questionnaire corroborates the fact that many of the boys had reached the school leaving age, Table 4. It should be noted that in administering the questionnaire, the boys were told not to state their names and were assured that the information given was for research purposes and would be strictly confidential.

Table 4 shows the age range of the boys enrolled in the YMCA Youth Development Programme.

Table 4

Age Range of Boys Enrolled in the YMCA Programme

Age Group	Per Cent of Boys
13 years and under	1
14-15 years	25
16-17 years	59
17-18 years	15
Total	100

Table 4 shows that the majority of boys enrolled in the YMCA Programme are beyond the school leaving age for All Age and Junior High Schools of 15 years.

In seeking to probe the dissatisfaction that these boys had with the formal school system, they were asked to state what they did not like about the school from which they left to enrol in the YMCA Programme. Table 5 shows the responses to this question.

Table 5

Dissatisfaction with the School the Boys last attended before Enrolling in the YMCA

What they disliked about the School	Number of Boys
Nothing: they liked the school	27
Principal/Teachers	24
Fighting	18
Bad boys and bad behaviour	10
Bullies	07
Everything: they despised the school	05
Non-functional Bathroom facilities	06
Lack of Sports facilities	03
Rules were too strict	02
Arrogant attitudes of students doing well	03
Approach of school security personnel	03
Untidy state of the school	01
No holidays	01
Shooting in the area	01
Had to buy from the Canteen	01
Too much punishment	01
Maths tests	01
No Response	19
Total	133

Table 5 shows that 27 boys did not report any dissatisfaction with the school they attended previous to coming to the YMCA. These were boys who reported that they left school because they had reached the school leaving age. High on the list of dissatisfaction were principals and teachers, with most of it directed at the teachers. Modes of punishment, lack of interest and teaching methods featured prominently in the reasons given for disliking the teachers. Also high on the list of dissatisfaction was issues of personal safety related to aggression on the part of other boys. Fighting and bullies were the main targets of dissatisfaction in this area. Non-functional bathroom facilities and lack of sports were also mentioned by several boys but could not be considered major areas of dissatisfaction.

When Tables 2, 3 and 5 are taken together, it can be seen that in Table 3, reaching the school leaving age is by far the most frequently given reason for leaving the formal system. In Table 2 the official records of the YMCA show learning difficulties as the main reason given by the boys or their parents as wishes to enrol in the YMCA Youth Development Programme. In Table 5, dislike for principals and teachers along with violence among boys, figure most prominently in the dissatisfaction of the boys with the schools they previously attended.

The Focus Group discussions and the in-depth interviews highlighted the fact that concerns for personal safety, the desire to learn to read and the hope of finding teachers who were more kindly disposed to teaching slow learners in terms of both attitudes and methodology, were of greatest importance to the boys. Concern for personal safety was not only among boys who had been victims of violence but also among those who had

committed violent acts who feared reprisals. Most of the boys admitted to having difficulties with reading and expressed the deep desire to learn to read. Not being able to read fluently appeared to be a source of great anxiety for these boys. Many of the boys were highly critical of teachers for embarrassing them with respect to their low achievement, being hostile to them and not caring whether or not they learned. Some boys even claimed that parents were often in collusion with teachers to use corporal punishment as long as 'their eyes were spared'.

Reaching the school leaving age of fifteen years was the most frequently given reason for boys leaving the formal school system. This is a matter of national educational policy about which schools can do very little. From the perspective of factors that school policy can address personal safety, learning difficulties, particularly with respect to reading, and teachers who were hostile and insensitive, featured as the main reasons for boys leaving the formal school system.

Reasons For Remaining In The YMCA Programme

The boys were asked to state the features of the YMCA Programme that they liked. It was assumed that answers to this question would give some clues with respect to why they attended and completed the programme.

Table 6
Features of the YMCA Programme that the boys reported that they liked

Features that they like	Number of Boys
Principal/Teachers	30
Swimming	24
Teaching of reading	10
Teaching methods	10
The Programme	9
Welding	8
Everything	8
Financial assistance	6
Being a good school	4
Surroundings	4
It is a learning channel	2
Gives us hope	2
Teaching of Mathematics	2
Treatment received	2
Way things are set up	2
Classrooms	2
Classmates	2
Nothing	2
Allow you to pick up where you left off	1
Strict rules	1
Football	1
No Response	2
Total	134

Table 6 shows that teachers and teaching figured very prominently among the features of the YMCA Programme that the boys liked and found attractive. This seems to suggest that the boys were generally of the opinion that the teachers and the Programme were paying attention to their learning needs. Swimming followed next, the YMCA has a large pool and runs a well-structured swimming programme. Generally sports play a very important part in the life of teenaged males. It would appear that it is this factor that gives swimming such prominence among the desirable features of the YMCA Programme. In the questionnaire and in the focus groups several boys spoke of the importance of sponsorship. In their view they were paid to attend the programme instead of having to pay for it. The difference between the number of boys who mentioned this feature of the YMCA programme in the open-ended questionnaire and those that spoke of this feature in the focus groups seem to have been related to some amount of pride on the part of some boys who appeared unwilling to freely admit to its importance.

Table 7

Features of the YMCA Experience that Boys Dislike

Elements that they dislike	Number of Boys
Fighting	25
Nothing	19
Boys only, no girls	8
Bullying, taking things from little boys	7
Bad behaviour of some boys	6
Stealing by some boys	5
A few teachers	5
Some boys are idlers	4
Prevented from swimming	3
Canteen and lunch staff	3
Teachers don't punish	2
Strict rules, can't go to the gate	2
Poor hygiene of some boys	1
No grades in the school	1
No football	1
Vendors	1
No response	5
Total	99

Table 7 shows the features of the YMCA Programme that the boys disliked. It can be seen in Table 7 that fighting, bullying, bad behaviour ranked high on the list of features they disliked. These were no different from some of the features they disliked at the schools in the formal system, which they left, Table 5. It would appear that issues of personal safety are as much a factor in the YMCA programme as it is in the formal school system. Nearly 20 per cent of the boys did not dislike anything about the YMCA. However, some were not thrilled by the fact that the YMCA Programme at the Hope Road Centre did not enrol girls.

The Main Differences Between The YMCA And Schools' Programmes

When the programmes of the two schools in the formal system were compared with that of the YMCA, the five main differences were identified:

1. For boys 12 years and over, the programme in the formal school system was three years compared to two years at the YMCA.
2. The schools in the formal school system enrolled boys between the ages of 11 and 15 years while the ages of the boys in the YMCA programme ranged from 13 to 17 years. In essence, the YMCA Programme offers second chance education to boys who have underachieved in the formal school system, for a variety of reasons.
3. The programme in the formal school system is organised on a grade and age basis while the YMCA Programme is organised on a year and set basis. On entry, boys are tested and on the basis of the test results, especially in reading attainment, are assigned to sets. The sets are taught according to their level of attainment, or lack of it.
4. A standard feature of the YMCA Programme is that boys suspected of learning disabilities are sent to the Mico CARE Centre for assessment. YMCA has established a working relation with the CARE Centre and uses the assessments done by Mico as a basis of providing instruction to the boys assessed. While there are limitations on the extent to which boys can be given individual attention based on their learning prescription, the latter provides a working guide for their instruction. Neither of the two schools in the formal school system had established such a systematic relation with any referral agency whose mission is to provide diagnostic assessment to assist in the instruction of students.
5. All boys enrolled in the Youth Development Programme are paid a month stipend during the school year. This stipend is paid on condition that the boys meet certain attendance criteria each month. From the perspective of the boys, they are paid to enrol and attend the Programme instead of having to pay.

When the differences between the schools in the formal system and the non-formal programme at the YMCA are compared, it is only the systematic assessment of children suspected of developmental challenges and the sponsorship of boys in need that can be adopted and adapted in the formal school system. Schools in the formal system are constrained by national policy with respect to the age range of students, grade structure of the school and duration of programmes.

Dropout Rates Of The Two Schools

The criteria used for enrolment was that the students should have not only registered with the school but attended for at least one day. Leaving the school, or dropping out was judged on the basis that the student did not attend the school for at least the months of June and July. In other words, the students did not finish the school year and their absence exceeded the period of one month, which is the Ministry of Education standard for dropping a student off the School's Register.

Table 8

School A

Boys: Grades 4 to 9

Categories	1998-1999	1999-2000	Comments
Number of boys Enrolled	345	358	
Number of boys leaving during the school year	44	52	
Per cent of boys leaving during the school year	12.8	14.5	A slightly higher rate in 1999-2000
Number of boys leaving Sept to Dec	15	24	
Per cent of boys leaving Sept to Dec	4.3	6.5	A significant increase in 1999-2000
Number of boys leaving Jan to July	29	28	This is the period of implementation of the Intervention in 2000
Per cent of boys leaving Jan to July	8.8	8.4	No significant difference for the period of the Intervention.

Table 8 shows that from the records available at School A the rate of leaving school, dropping out, by boys in Grades 4 to 9 was quite high. The dropout rate for boys in Grades 4 to 9 was 12.8 per cent for 1998-99 and 14.5 per cent for 1999-2000. In addition, the dropout rate for boys showed a general increase in 1999-2000 over the rate for 1998-1999. This is true of the year as a whole as well as for the first term of the school year. However, for the period of the Intervention in this Study, the dropout rate was slightly lower but not significantly different that the previous year. While the indication of an overall increase for the year as a whole but a very slight decrease in the period of Intervention, is promising no conclusion would be drawn with respect to the impact of the Intervention on reversing the dropout rate.

Table 9

School B

Boys: Grades 4 to 9

Category	1998-1999*	1999-2000	Comments
Number of boys enrolled	267	460	Missing Registers for 1998-99
Number of boys leaving school during the school year	29	66	This increase may be an artefact of missing records
Per cent of boys leaving during the school year	10.9	14.3	
Number of boys leaving Sept to Dec	18	19	
Per cent of boys leaving Sept to Dec	6.7	4.1	
Number of boys			
Number of boys leaving Jan to July	11	47	This was the period of the implementation of the Intervention in 2000
Per cent of boys leaving Jan to July	4.4	10.7	

* Despite diligent searches in known places, a number of Registers for the school Year 1998-1999 were not found including all the Registers for Grade 4 classes.

There were so many missing Registers for the school year 1998-1998 at School B that it was not possible to confidently report a dropout rate for 1998-1999 or to make any definitive comparisons between the two years.

The data from Tables 8 and 9 do not confirm that hypothesis that the intervention would reduce the dropout rate by 20 per cent. There are four critical points to observe. First, it was envisaged that the intervention would have been implemented over an entire school year. Due to the time of approval of the Study it was not possible to implement the interventions over an entire school year but rather over two terms, Easter and Summer. Second, the data seem to indicate that the dropout rate for boys is highest in the first term of the school year, the Christmas term. Interventions designed to impact the retention of boys should include the first term in order to have maximum effect. Third, one intervention – sponsorship – could not be implemented while others were implemented at different points within the two terms. This meant that there was not enough time for the

interventions that were implemented to have their effect. Third, missing Registers at both schools, but one more than the other, introduces some doubt with respect to the accuracy of the computations for the school year 1998-1999. It could well be that the rates were higher for the classes whose Registers could not be located. For these reasons it is not possible to infer that the interventions could not have the hypothesised effect. More to the point is that in the circumstances in which they were implemented it would appear that they did not have the hypothesised effect.

The major outcome of the implementation phase of the Study were the lessons learned with respect to the additional needs of boys that were not covered by the six interventions, the time needed for planning, orientation and training in implementing the various interventions and how each intervention had to be implemented.

IMPROVING THE CAPACITY OF THE SCHOOLS TO MONITOR AT-RISK BOYS

The approach employed to improve the capacity of the two schools to monitor the participation and progress of the boys and students generally in the school, was to provide each school with computers and an educational management information system, Primary School Manager. Five persons from each school including teachers and members of the clerical staff were provided with training first in basic computer literacy and then in the features of Primary School Manager. The training was provided at the Computer Lab of the Institute of Education at the UWI.

Following the training, student data for all students enrolled in both schools for 1998-1999 and 1999-2000 have been entered into Primary School Manager in both schools. HEART Trainees assisted with the data entry exercise. Following the entry of the biographic data for all students enrolled in both schools, both computers began to malfunction. It was discovered that the supplier had not provided the machines specified by both the purchase order and invoice. The delay that ensued did not allow the EMIS to be used to monitor the progress of the boys during the study.

However, at the termination of the study, both schools had a functioning computer with an EMIS that contains the biographical data of all students enrolled in the school over the last two years. They also have at least two staff capable of using the Primary School Manager to register current students, track attendance, and dropout and performance data for all students, including those of at-risk boys. Boys schools are now in much improved situation to record and retrieve enrolment, attendance, dropout and repetition data for their students than they were prior to the commencement of the Study.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

The following lessons were learned from implementing the intervention strategies:

1. Six months, or two school terms, is not sufficient time to allow each of the intervention strategies to be fully implemented and then to have an impact. Teachers cannot be withdrawn from regular duties to be oriented and trained in the requirements of the intervention strategies during the school term. The merging of the orientation and training of teachers alongside the regular programme of the school slowed the period over which interventions can have effect upon students. All orientation and training should be done prior to the beginning of the school term or school year in which interventions are to be implemented.
2. More boys leave the schools in the first term than in either of the other two terms of the year. Any intervention that attempts to retain boys in schools should include the first term within the period of implementation.
3. There is a marked movement of boys in and out of schools during the school year. While there are boys leaving the schools each term, there are also boys being admitted almost each month of the school year. The net result is that there is no significant decline in enrolment in the schools. What is clearly indicated, however, is that several boys are changing schools they are attending during the course of a school year. The data from this Study would suggest that, in addition to internal migration, this movement of boys between schools is largely related to dissatisfaction with the perceived extent to which a particular school is meeting their learning needs. Getting into trouble at one school and moving to another may also be a factor.
4. Several of the problems encountered in the school were more severe than anticipated. For example, of the more than 450 boys in Grade 4 to 9 in one school, only one was reading above Grade level, only three were reading at Grade level and more than half of the boys were functionally illiterate. The magnitude and the severity of the problems that exist require more prolonged application of the interventions designed to address the challenge.
5. It is necessary to include emotional and behavioural disorders among the disabilities being experienced by boys, many of whom have seen, or had close relatives and friends killed or severely injured or have been disoriented because of the migration of parents, particularly mothers.
6. The schools encountered security problems that undermined the morale of both staff and students.
7. There are a small but significant minority of boys between the ages of 10 and 14 years that are already involved in hardcore deviant activities including gang

membership. They need specific interventional activities that were not included in the project. The residential programme developed by the Kingston Restoration Company (KRC) appeared to be more appropriate to their needs.

8. Some students in the schools serving inner city communities are subject to traumatic situations often involving the death or serious injury of close friends and relatives. They are in need of post-traumatic counselling and support to mitigate the emotional harm that could result from these experiences.
9. Schools serving relatively poor students and communities have considerable difficulties in soliciting the financial assistance needed to support interventions designed to address the challenges they face.
10. Many boys are in need of mentors who can give them encouragement and guidance.

CONCLUSIONS

The activities in Phase One of the study, canvassing the views of boys, teachers and comparing the YMCA and school programmes, identified the following six strategies which are critical to the retention of boys in schools:

- Alleviation of socio-economic hardship
- Identification, assessment and treatment of boys with learning disabilities
- Developing or strengthening the reading programmes in the schools
- Sensitivity training for the teachers
- Counselling assistance to parents and boys experiencing challenges
- Promoting and fostering wholesome values in the schools

The activities in Phase Two involving the actual implementation of these interventions in two schools highlighted the fact that these six strategies did not adequately address the range and severity of the challenges being faced by the two schools. Boys in the YMCA Programme represent one sub-set of boys whose needs the formal school system is challenged to address. Boys in the YMCA belong to that sub-set of boys, or their significant adults, who are still interested in continuing their education and who are more or less willing to make some attempt to conform to acceptable canons of behaviour. Schools within the formal system must address the needs of boys with a wider range of challenges and orientations.

The lessons learned from the implementation of the six intervention strategies clearly indicate the need to add the following four strategies:

- Withdrawal of some boys from the school and their immersion in a residential programme of behaviour modification and their subsequent reintegration in the schools.
- Mentoring for boys who are trying to succeed but who need encouragement and guidance from persons who they can look up to and who can inspire them.

- Post traumatic counselling for students, and sometimes teachers, following acts of violence affecting the school or communities from which students, or teachers, come.
- Improved security for schools not only to prevent breaches but also to reassure students and teachers of their safety.

In addition to adding these four strategies to the six that were implemented in this study, any future study or project should plan to have a period of preparation of at least six months and a period of not less than one school year of actual implementation of the ten strategies before any attempt is made to measure impact on the agreed objectives of improving the quality of participation, the level of performance, standard of conduct and the degree of retention of boys in schools.

This exploratory Study has laid the groundwork for future studies that build on the lessons learned.