



Abyssinia a Journey of Change

OVERVIEW

USING SPOKEN WORD TO UNDERSTAND COMMUNITY VIOLENCE

In February 2017, The Oral Tradition ROOTS Foundation in collaboration with the National Library and Information System Authority (NALIS) partnered with Servol Limited to host a 15-week interactive spoken word workshop on **Using Spoken Word to Understand Community Violence**. This workshop was part of a Case Study entitled [Breaking Bad: How transnational drug trafficking creates violent masculinities in local Caribbean communities in Port of Spain](#) conducted by Dr. Adam Baird, Principle Investigator, Centre for Trust Peace and Social Relations, Coventry University, UK in collaboration with the University of Sheffield (UK), the University of the West Indies (St. Augustine), Promundo (USA) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Co-investigators included Dr. Dylan Kerrigan (UWI) and Dr. Matthew Bishop (UOS).

This project used masculinities as an interpretive lens and drew upon scholars across the disciplines of Peace Studies, Cultural Anthropology, and International Relations. The methodology is rooted in Trinidadian “Spoken Word” oral traditions, and art and music, to grasp how male identity, culture, community violence and transnational organised crime and drug-trafficking (TNOC) intersect.

A total of twenty-one (21) trainees participated in this project from Beetham Life Centre, Diego Martin Regional Life Centre, El Socorro Regional Life Centre and the defunct Morvant Life Centre now absorbed into the Barataria Hi-Tech Centre.

ABYSSINIA A JOURNEY OF CHANGE

In September 2017, The Oral Tradition ROOTS Foundation in collaboration with the Community Transformation Foundation social arm of Walking in the Spirit Ministries; Women of Transformation; Certus Consultancy Limited and endorsed by the Citizen Security Programme, Ministry of National Security, launched **Abyssinia a Journey of Change**. The Servol Pilot Project and Season One were sponsored through the Public Affairs Division of the US Embassy Port of Spain and Season Two was sponsored through the Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism Unit of The Commonwealth Secretariat, UK.

Abyssinia a Journey of Change presents a fresh new dynamic social intervention approach to drugs, gangs and violent extremism. The initiative uses real life testimonials of persons who were formerly involved in a life of crime and violence as a medium to sensitize students in schools across Trinidad and Tobago on the consequences of living a life of crime, and the impact of such a choice on the individual and the community. The aim is to show youth how transforming attitudes can lead to more positive life outcomes. A total of ninety-four (94) trainees participated in this project from the following Servol Life Centres.

Adolescent Development Programme	Junior Life Centre
Diego Martin Regional Life Centre	St. Anns/Cascade
Beetham Life Centre	Laventille
Barataria Hi-Tech Centre	

Informed by the data obtained from Servol trainees, in October 2017, the project was expanded into Secondary Schools across Trinidad. One thousand, one hundred and thirty-nine (1139) students were engaged in Season One of the project. Additional data received from Secondary School students informed the delivery of Season Two. In January 2018, Abyssinia a Journey of Change engaged five thousand, three hundred and seventy-three students (5373). The breakdown is as follows.



Sponsors/Partners		
US Embassy POS		The Commonwealth Secretariat UK
Schools	Season One	Season Two
Diego Martin Central Secondary School	73	92
Diego Martin North Secondary School	114	395
Mucurapo West Secondary School	71	189
East Mucurapo Secondary School	71	514
Belmont Secondary School	63	368
Success Laventille Secondary School	64	343
Morvant Laventille Secondary School	n/a	45
San Juan South Secondary School	110	n/a
ASJA Boys' College Charlieville	73	165
ASJA Girls' College Charlieville	75	718
Siparia East Secondary School	115	281
Siparia West Secondary School	26	583
Marabella North Secondary School	105	171
Marabella South Secondary School	68	n/a
Point Fortin East Secondary School	n/a	740
Point Fortin West Secondary School	82	585
Cedros Secondary School	29	184
Total	1139	5373

DESCRIPTION

The Ministry of Education through the Chief Education Officer via official correspondence dated, April 16th 2018, approved ROOTS Foundation to engage secondary schools in a project designed to address school violence and conquering violent extremism amongst vulnerable youth in at-risk circumstances.

Abyssinia a Journey of Change Season is intended for vulnerable students in at-risk circumstances from secondary school across Trinidad and Tobago. It chronicles the lived experiences and social realities of three individuals; a Muslim (male) and two Christians (male and female) as they share their journey of failure, crime, drugs, illusions of fame and grandeur, death and prison through this transformational and inspirational message of CHANGE.

This approach of using the lived experiences and social realities of persons who were formerly involved in a life of crime and violence to bring the stark reality to young persons of the consequences of their choices and actions is hoped to assist in transforming attitudes towards more positive and rewarding life outcomes. Born out of a desire to bring peace amongst youth enthralled in street gang violence and those susceptible to violent attacks, the facilitators continue to inspire and motivate young persons into walking the straight and narrow path towards success. In presenting the real-life outcomes of death, jail, pain and sorrow, lost opportunities and a life unfulfilled to those most vulnerable, it is hoped that reflection and introspection can take place to foster an opportunity for CHANGE.

This project will address:

- ☐ Gang Violence (Rasta City vs Muslim City)
- ☐ Identifying Violent Extremism (Individual and Community)
- ☐ Gangs and Drugs
- ☐ Violence/Bullying in Schools
- ☐ Sexual Gender-based Violence (Parry and Intimate-Partner/Date Rape)
- ☐ Respect vs Disrespect
- ☐ Borderline



OBJECTIVES

- ☐ To inspire students into choosing the right decisions.
- ☐ To enable students to become confident and believe in themselves.
- ☐ To introduce students to persons with REAL stories.
- ☐ To help them discover that they too are capable of amazing things.

The character qualities to be visited in the presentations are:

- ☐ Honesty
- ☐ Leadership
- ☐ Trust
- ☐ Courage
- ☐ Patience

Key performance indicators:

- ✓ Number of students attending sessions.
- ✓ Written and oral feedback from students.
- ✓ Positive reviews from teachers and auxiliary staff.
- ✓ Opportunity for student performances and interactions with team.