



VMBS Assistant VP Clover Moore makes a point during the event.



VMBS Foundation's Regina Owen and British Council Programme Manager Damion Campbell.

VM Foundation/British Council help students to bridge digital divide

"I was experiencing difficulties attending online classes. Now I have received this tablet, I am truly grateful," said student-athlete, Gage Buggam, from St. Elizabeth Technical High School.

Buggam was one of several beneficiaries of a donation of 15 tablets initiated by social enterprise students of some schools involved in the Social Enterprise in Secondary Schools Programme, made possible by the Victoria Mutual Foundation, at a function at the Jamaica Pegasus hotel in New Kingston last month.

The British Council and the VM Foundation have been collaborating on the project since it was launched in 2018.

Like many other groups seeking to assist persons in the pandemic and keeping their social enterprise activities going students first thought to collaborate with the British Council and VM Foundation providing masks to students in their schools once they resumed face-to-face learning, as part of an effort to stop the spread of the dreaded COVID-19.

Then students like Buggam reached out and indicated that they had a greater need.

"Since the pandemic, students and teachers have been contacting the British Council and the VM Foundation to assist with confronting the digital divide," explained Damion Campbell, Programme Manager at the British Council Jamaica.

"I had a lot of outstanding assignments because I didn't get to do most of it from last year after my phone got destroyed," said the student-athlete.

Buggam's challenges are not dissimilar to those faced by thousands of students across Jamaica for whom the move to schooling entirely on online platforms is a new normal.

Until COVID-19 forced the closure of schools across the country, the physical classroom had been the primary place of learning in the nearly 1000 publicly-funded educational institutions.

The VM Foundation, as main partner in the SESS-J project, jumped at the opportunity to further support students to support the social mission of the social enterprises when it learnt that students identified this as a problem they wanted to tackle.

"Ensuring that our children can continue to participate in online learning during this pandemic is of great importance to the VM Foundation," said Regina Owen, Programme Administrator at the VM Foundation. "This donation is focussed on reaching students who otherwise would have had difficulties accessing the device—which is important to the learning process," she explained.

"We are happy to know that this initiative has reinforced the fact that the social enterprise training undertaken by our young people has resulted in them supporting the drive for educational continuity as a crucial step for their disadvantaged peers—even during a global health crisis—so I am particularly pleased that this generous donation will play a role in promoting young people as change makers advancing the education of our students," Campbell said.



St Elizabeth Technical High School students receive tablets.



St Jago High receives tablets.

High praises for VM Foundation/British Council Social Enterprise Programme

Secondary students and teachers who have benefitted from the Social Enterprise in School Initiative, managed by the British Council Jamaica and funded by the VM Foundation, are issuing high praises.

The initiative, which was launched in 2018 as part of both organisations' thrust to equip high school students with transferable skills to solve modern day social issues.

The participants praised the organisers for providing a framework that builds future leaders and entrepreneurs from the secondary level.

Principal of the Kingston Technical High School, Maulton Campbell, applauded the team at the British Council and VM Foundation for providing his students with an opportunity to expand their soft skills.



"They have grown significantly in confidence from the exposure they have received from the programme," Mr. Campbell stated. "I've noted that there has been improvement in their academic abilities, and their collaborative and problem-solving capabilities." He further highlighted that the knowledge and training received are 'very applicable' and 'transferable' in many areas in the classroom and in the business world.

The principal was proud of the progress Kingston Technical has made with their project that offered cosmetology services to the community. "Currently, we are without a full-fledged cosmetology lab, so we are using the income earned through

our social initiative to fund the construction of the new facility," he explained.

The training offered by VM Foundation and the British Council is focussed on building several core skills namely critical thinking and problem solving, collaboration and communication, creativity and imagination, citizenship, student leadership, and financial literacy.

Another participant, Nicholas Solomon, a student of Glenmuir High, expressed his gratitude towards VM Foundation and British Council for the opportunity to be a part of the initiative.

"It is my first time being a part of a programme like this. And, I have seen tremendous growth in myself," Nicholas asserted. So enthused by the programme, Nicholas became a self-acclaimed recruiter and motivator within the Glenmuir Social Enterprise Club. "I did a lot of work inviting persons to join the club at school, after I saw the benefits I derived from the programme," he added.

Meanwhile, Damion Campbell, Programme Manager at British Council Jamaica expressed satisfaction with the overall execution of the project now in its final phase.

"It really embodied what social entrepreneurship is and equipped young people with life skills they are not generally introduced to in the regular secondary school curriculum. Also, it was great to see how the programme impacted these students to become leaders in school and in their own communities," he pointed out.

He explained that the next mandate for the British Council is to assess the overall performance of the project and continue the organisation's social entrepreneur initiative in Jamaica.

"We are still in the evaluation stage with the VM Foundation to see what we can do better and decide from there the partnership forward," Mr. Campbell explained. "On a national level, the British Council is looking to transfer to the policy level to achieve a greater impact so we can institutionalise and scale our efforts."

The programme between the British Council and the VM Foundation started in 2018.



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