

A bit about Jamaica and why I am volunteering this winter,  
by Lesley Charles. Can you help?

To make a donation please go to [www.prmhomeless.org](http://www.prmhomeless.org)

When it comes to wealth, Jamaica is a land of extremes. On the north western coast, home to tourism, and in the suburbs of Kingston, wealthy Jamaicans live in first-rate housing, visit shopping centres featuring the best imported goods, and enjoy an elevated standard of living. The wealthy send their children to private schools and to universities abroad, and employ private security. Yet not far from these wealthy enclaves a much greater number of poor Jamaicans live in squalor, with poor housing, limited food supply, and inadequate access to clean water, quality health care, or education. Jamaica's rural poor, such as those in the north east, also face difficult circumstances, for many workers must try to grow their own crops by subsistence farming, or participate in the informal economy, in some cases, the drug trade, in order to survive. Both the rural and urban poor have suffered from the long decline in the quality of social services provided to Jamaicans. Though the British built a well-developed health and education system on the island in post World War II years, a lack of government funding for schools and hospitals has meant that these services have declined in quality over the years. Additionally Mental Health and Learning Disability Services, as we understand them, are virtually nonexistent.

Portland Rehabilitative Management (PRM) Homeless Shelter is a Non-Governmental Organization in Port Antonio Jamaica, providing food, shelter, medicine, and rehabilitative services to the homeless.

“Our objectives include rehabilitating clients to better health and less dependence with the goal of returning them to their families and community, providing an environment that encourages better self-care and healthier lifestyles, living together more peacefully and learning cooperative social skills.”

**THERE has been a 26 per cent jump in the number of homeless persons across the island between 2012 and March 2015.** According to statistics dated March 2015, the Board of Supervision in the Poor Relief Department recorded 1,418 homeless people, up from the 1,057 who were captured in its point in time survey that was done between November 18 and 24 in 2012. But only 181 of those persons are on the poor relief roll, while there are many others who are not even captured in the Government survey of those who have nowhere to call home. **The 25 bed homeless shelter in Port Antonio has just two paid staff and no other Government funding. Everything else, including food, cleaning products, utility bills and maintenance of the building has to be paid for through donations or provided by self funding volunteers like me. Volunteers pay all their own travel and living expenses and work 5 days a week on a rota.**

# Resident Stories

## Aimee

I was out there in Kingston, in the society living a normal life. I had work in the private sector, for seven years at a computer store. Then the global recession happened; it had a very adverse effect on my life. Job cut. Eviction. My life deteriorated rapidly. I couldn't compose myself materially or emotionally. My experience traumatized me mentally I didn't know I could be reduced to this state. I had to resort to the shelter. This place is a haven for care and protection. I am now here to reintegrate back into society and bring normality to my life. I am working hard on getting back on my own, working with the resources I have available and with what the shelter has to give. This place is a very God blessed place, it's a refuge centre, taking care of one's desperate needs. My dreams are to initiate my independence, to pay for all my own meals again and get around freely. I'm doing a lot of saving so that I can start again, from ground zero.

## Danna

Before coming to the shelter I was at home. My brother was beating me up, early on this year he abused me with a machete and rope and so on. I had to go to the hospital, and they brought me to the shelter. I find it nice here, things are ok. I've been doing different things, like going to the craft market and helping to sell things for the shelter. I'm looking to go to HEART to learn about nursing or early childhood teaching. I want to become a teacher. I want to build me own little house.

## Kaela

I was living at my grandmothers for some time but the space wasn't there so I couldn't stay there. I was on the street for weeks. Nobody tried to help me, not even my family, just one woman would get me some food. Then a family friend called the shelter to see if I could stay there and they sent a taxi for me that carried me here. At first I was afraid, but I got used to everybody and then things were okay. The shelter is helping me to build a house and get back on my feet. They helped me find some work. They're helping me get in touch with my family and helping with the problems I face along the way with building my house. Through being at the shelter I have hope. Since being here things have been picking up. I could be on the street and a whole heap of things could have happened to me. But being brought here saved my life. The shelter is a nice place here, and a lot more people can come here to get help to help themselves.

# Ted

I was diagnosed with schizophrenia several years ago, and no one was there to help me take my medication. I was hospitalized and rehabilitated which allowed me to take care of my son and work at a bakery. I was living in Kingston with some relatives and working at the bakery. The work made me joyful. But I started to get sick again, the schizophrenia. My relatives didn't know how to handle me and they called the police to take me. The police beat me up. So I left the place, all my things, and worked two more days and slept on the street. I left my jobs and came to Port Antonio. Things were looking good for me here, but I didn't have anywhere to sleep here. I went to my father but he didn't want me there because he said I was trouble. I was walking up and down Port Antonio with a big bag, I had nothing to do, nowhere to stay. I went to the policeman and they told me about the shelter and gave me the information and directions to get there.

At first it took a little time to get used to the people here, but I still tried my best. The shelter impacts me in a great way. I get three meals a day, I get shelter, and it is helping me re-enter into society. The shelter helped me take my medication regularly, it helps in a great way. I do better in the shelter. I'm working to get myself back into society. Every week I go to the bakery to pick up some bread. I'm making a bond with the supervisor there so I can get a job when they have an opening. I'm working to get a job and get some money and rent a one room house.