Gender Inequality in Jamaica: "It's a Cultural Thing"

The abuse and objectification of women and girls is an issue that has been hidden under a veil of forced silence for so long it is now firmly rooted in Jamaican Culture. There is no haven for women in a society in which gender inequality has been institutionalized by all primary cultural agents namely the church, the family, and the education system. This inequality takes many forms, but most pervasively, gender based violence. UN reports that 1 in 3 Jamaican women have faced intimate partner violence during her lifetime. In our society, safety is a luxury.

By age 13, most Jamaican girls have already experienced some form of physical, verbal or sexual abuse often at the hands of the male figure they look up to. Sadly, it is to be expected and quietly endured. For every woman that finds the strength to speak out, five others suffer in silence.

At the peak of their vulnerability, on average age 15, these girls are preyed upon by older men who at times take it into their own hands to enact "til death do us part". Increasing the count of intimate partner homicide to an average of 5 per month according to reports in 2014. Unfortunately, it is at this point of no return that gender inequality is reluctantly named. Never in the home where responsibilities are unequally distributed or where girls are expected to otherwise seek financial support. Never in the workplace where sexual harassment prevails. Never in the school where courses of study are divided based on gender and never in the church where women are often prohibited from leading.

Sisters for Empowerment & Equality

Inspired by those girls whose stories of survival and success go unheard, Sisters for Empowerment and Equality (SEE) is an art-based mentorship program geared towards the creation of a supportive community which will encourage girls, from low income or rural communities, to pursue their dreams.

We believe all girls are born with the incredible power within themselves to change their own lives and communities. SEE aims to Encourage, Unite & Equip girls, aged 13-16, in their endeavor to rise above challenging circumstances.

SEE will take the form high school societies supported by a larger organization of sisters engaged in the pursuit of gender equality. Each society will be monitored and maintained by mentors as well as school administrators. With the guidance and support of mentors, students will pursue art-based projects that promote a positive relationship with the community. SEE societies will also encourage unity between schools, through joint activities and trips to conferences.

We hope to challenge gender stereotypes and create a platform from which girls can shine, through: mentorship, creative expression and community outreach.

Our Impact

Sister's for Empowerment and Equality (SEE) strives to aid in the endeavor for gender equality in Jamaica, by building awareness within rural communities and acknowledging the beauty and strength of Jamaican femininity. We believe that with support, there are no ends to what girls can achieve.

Encouragement, Unity and Equipment

At the heart of our operation, are our principles of Encouragement, Unity and Equipment. We will:

- Encourage girls to pursue their dreams
- Unite them with others to build a supportive community.
- Equip them with the skills and resources to express their individual beauty.

The Market

Now more than ever before, conversations about gender discrimination and violence are being facilitated in Jamaica, sparked by outcry in response to recent spike in cases of carnal abuse and intimate partner homicide just before Christmas, 2016.

There are several organizations, governmental as well as NGOs working towards gender equality in Jamaica, most notably Jamaica Forum of Lesbians, All-Sexuals and Gays (J-FLAG), Sistren Theatre Collective as well as programs sponsored by the University of the West Indies, Jamaica and governmental organizations such as the Office of Children’s Registry, Foster Homes for Girls and Women Centre’s of Jamaica.

These groups mostly work in urban/commercial areas with groups of women aged 20-30 to advocate for equality, through; providing care for teen mothers, appealing to pass laws, hosting workshops and creating media campaigns.

Sisters for Empowerment and Equality will engage girls aged 13-16 who are at pivotal stages in their lives, within rural areas where gender discrimination and violence are most prevalent and where traditional ideas are most influential. It is also notable that we will work within the familiar setting of their High school, which has never been done before. SEE will focus on providing support for these girls, and using art to reaffirm the importance of their individuality and experiences, as well as to highlight their power as change makers.
Method of Action

**Mentorship**

No one can stand alone, and unfortunately, many of the girls SEE will engage do not have supportive figures in their lives. The power of a role model is unimaginable, especially if you share similar experiences. To facilitate this, mentors will be university students who have lived or studied in the same communities as their mentees. Mentorship will encourage girls to step out of their dictated roles to imagine the great contributions they can make to society.

**Community Outreach**

This fosters a sense of social responsibility and also reaffirms their ability to change their communities. Through the planning and execution of community development projects, girls will form positive relationships with and inspire members of their community. The process of organizing the project as a team will also improve the collaborative and leadership skills of the mentees.

**Creative Expression**

Creative expression will be used as a means of voicing concerns and sharing experiences for which there are no words. Through visual art, creative writing, music and performance, we hope:

- Girls will feel liberated to express their individuality
- To pluralize the perceptions of what it means to be a Jamaican woman.
- To contribute to the effort for gender equality in Jamaica.

**Annual Summer Retreat**

SEE will launch in Summer 2017 with a four-day retreat in St. Elizabeth, Jamaica featuring workshops on leadership skill development, music, creative writing, photography, dance, and resume building. The retreat has been organized to engage 24 girls from three high schools which have displayed great interest in SEE namely; Black River High, Bishop Gibson High and St Elizabeth Technical High. Girls will be separated into groups of four to be exposed to the artistic discipline they have displayed interest in. Presenters will be invited to address the girls on topics regarding empowerment. Annual retreats will give mentees an opportunity to present art work and report on progress of community outreach projects. At the end of the retreat girls will be awarded with certificates to acknowledge their participation.

**How will we measure our impact?**

The goals listed above will be reflected through improvement or increase in mentees' :

- Performance in school
- Extracurricular involvement
- Leadership positions
- Completion of community development project

It is important to note, that due to the sensitivity of the issue, our approach is non disruptive and aims to prevent heightening of tensions within the community.

### Budget

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<tr>
<th>Revenue</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grants</td>
<td>$10,000</td>
<td>Grants applied for range from $4,000-$10,000</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expenses</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Travel</td>
<td>$1,500</td>
<td>Includes airfare and local transportaion for facilitators</td>
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<tr>
<td>Venue</td>
<td>$2,000</td>
<td>Rental fee for camp ground for a period of 4 days</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supplies</td>
<td>$1,500</td>
<td>Art materials, administrative supplies, shipping fees, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Services</td>
<td>$2,500</td>
<td>Stipends for workshop facilitators &amp; mentors</td>
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<td>Food</td>
<td>$1,500</td>
<td>10 meals as well as snacks for students</td>
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<td>Emergencies &amp; Damage</td>
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<td>Medical emergencies, property damage etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>$10,000</td>
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### The Timeline

| March 2017 | Complete recruitment of mentors and compile profiles to send to High schools involved. |
| June 2017  | Sisters for Empowerment and Equality 1st Annual Retreat & Launch                      |
| September 2017 | First meeting of SEE societies in High schools.                                      |
| December 2017 | Community outreach project proposal submission deadline                              |
Meet the SEE Team

Founder
Shantelle Brown ’19
Neuroscience & Behavior and Hispanic Literature Double Major
“My core belief in equality led me to identify as a feminist early on. These values guide my daily interactions and guided me to successfully establish a big sister society at age 16. These values as well as my belief in the monumental results of small actions have now guided me towards pursuing my dream to end gender inequality through SEE.”
Experience: Event coordination, extensive research, public relations, performance studies, creative writing.
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Recruitment Team
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