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Violence Interrupters



DAN AND SHARON
BUTTRY



SUPPORT PLEDGED





Dan and Chris chilling in Montego Bay

The last week of July I was invited to do conflict transformation training in Jamaica. Jamaica—sandy beaches, rum, reggae music, vacations in the sun—wow, being a missionary is really tough! There's another side to Jamaica. I was invited by Rev. Everton Jackson, Pastor of the Calvary Baptist Church in Montego Bay. (I can hear the music about Montego Bay in my ears right now, and maybe you can, too!) Montego Bay has been under a State of Emergency because of the high levels of violence. The tourist areas are all sealed off, but in the communities where ordinary people live, just staying alive can be a challenge.



A “people sculpture” by workshop participants to show conflict dynamics they deal with

So in our second 2-day workshop Everton introduced us to the Violence Interrupters. These are amazing people, grassroots folks, some pastors, others community activists. Their calling is to literally do what their title says—interrupt violence, stop it from happening. They are obviously very courageous and dedicated people, and I was blessed to try to equip them further for their serious and desperately needed work.



Chris Perkins (in his Superman shirt) leads a participatory tool

I invited Chris Perkins to join me as co-facilitator in these Jamaica trainings. Chris is from the Metropolitan Baptist Church in Kansas City where he does a lot of youth outreach as well as working as a counselor in the Kansas City public schools. I first met Chris when he was a student at Central Baptist Theological Seminary and we were on an educational trip to Thailand and Myanmar. Then in 2013 he and two other CBTS students attended our 10-day Training of Conflict Transformation Trainers in Kenya. So Chris knows our training style and the tools we use. We stayed in touch, and I kept thinking about a mission context where Chris could bring his special skills and experience. Jamaica was it, especially with the context of urban violence, something that Chris was dealing with as his peacemaking passion.



Chris and I led a 2-day training for higher level community leaders—heads of various organizations in Montego Bay as well as many church leaders. But it was the following training with the grassroots folks that really inspired our souls. These Violence Interrupters were gritty, gutsy and full of amazing energy. The first day we plunged into finding win/win solutions to the problems on the street, how to do informal mediation. The second day we were going to do more analysis of the systemic problems of violence they were facing and how to strategize to solve those problems in bite-sized pieces.

Before we started the second day, an older man who was one of the Violence Interrupters came to me. He got a chance to practice informal mediation immediately after our workshop. A domestic dispute escalated, and he was called in as a Violence Interrupter. The woman had a massive knife. Nobody was sure if she was going to kill herself or kill her husband/boyfriend. The Violence Interrupter told me about his four hour intervention in the home, using some of the skills we had practiced to finally defuse the situation. The

woman gave him the knife, and they came up with a plan to address some of the problems that had nearly erupted into violence. I can't recall anybody who used their workshop learnings in such a dramatic way so quickly! Violence was successfully interrupted. Nobody was killed that night!



Rev. Everton Jackson speaking at Calvary Baptist Church in Montego Bay

Everton invited me to give a lecture to the wider community. That was the initial invitation, but I said we'd do much better and deeper work with the trainings. Everton is working on his Doctorate in Peace Studies at the University of the West Indies. After our training sessions, he has signed up to come to our next 10-day TCTT, in Kenya, something we call the "Grad School of the University of the Streets." Both the academic and the activist perspectives are important, and he'll be equipping himself with both of those as he continues to give prophetic and practical leadership to the peacemakers in Montego Bay.