



**Ministry of Local Government
and Community Development**

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NEW *Beginning*

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Portland Drop-in Centre and Night Shelter Officially Open

The homeless population in Portland now has a safe place to sleep, access to warm meals, medical care and other amenities following the official opening of the Portland Drop-in Centre and Night Shelter. The facility was officially opened by Hon. Desmond McKenzie, Minister of Local Government & Community Development, on Friday, July 18.

The facility is the first of its kind in the parish to operate on a 24-hour basis and will house up to 28 individuals at a time.

Minister McKenzie highlighted the need for the drop-in centres across the island, stating that several million dollars have been allocated for accommodations to be built for the impoverished.

"We have spent more than \$400 million building up these facilities across the country. Every one of these facilities is fully furnished and properly staffed.

We have provided the requisite resources to ensure that food and medicine is available. What we are seeing is an approach by government, churches, [and] private sector to lift the standards and to improve the life of these persons who depend on the state for assistance."

The Portland drop-in centre was constructed at a cost of \$56 million through the Municipal Corporation. The facility's construction began in May 2024, and features separate female and male dormitories, showers, foyer, a dining area, doctor's office and a laundry room. Other special features include ramps for the physically challenged and water-harvesting systems to collect and store rainwater.



The newly built Portland Drop-in Centre and Night Shelter

Minister of Local Government and Community Development, Hon. Desmond McKenzie, (left) along with Mayor of Port Antonio, Paul Thompson, during a tour of the Portland Drop-in Centre and Night Shelter.

Buff Bay Gets New Market

Vendors and customers from Buff Bay and surrounding Communities were out in their numbers on Friday, August 8, 2025, to witness the grand opening of the newly constructed Buff Bay Market. Construction of the facility was completed just over a year after construction began.

The new state-of-the-art Market features three sections — a Fish and Meat area that can accommodate up to five vendors, 48 stalls for fruit and vegetable vendors and a haberdashery area, which will accommodate up to six vendors. In addition to that, the property includes an administrative office, new restrooms and a water harvesting system to collect and store water for use within the market.

Minister of Local Government and Community Development, Honourable Desmond McKenzie, recalled the condition of the market when he initially visited the property, five years ago.

“This is a very special day because after years, finally we are seeing the fruits of the labour of all those persons who have worked tirelessly to ensure that this market is reopened, and this market is ready for business. I remember coming here with Minister Vaz about five years ago, when I came here the market was in operation but not looking good because first of all, there were no sanitary facilities, and the state of the market was not pleasing. I gave a commitment then that we would provide the funds to undertake the repairs to the market.”

The Minister continued by announcing that additional funds will be allocated for the construction of shops to facilitate vendors who sell groceries in the market.

“We’re going to be spending some more because additional shops for haberdashery business will be constructed at the rear of the market and those works will commence shortly because the additional funds of the \$11 million [I think] that was requested have been signed off and will be made available,” he said.

Member of Parliament, Hon. Daryl Vaz, who was also present at the ceremony, said that the Buff Bay Market, in the past, was a source of contention for many years despite carrying out restoration exercises on the market’s previous structure.

“This market has been the source of a lot of contention over the years. We have in the past done some refurbishing, but it has never been fully operational [and] to meet the requirements of the vendors,” he said.

“I really want to say to the Minister of Local Government and to the Municipal Corporation that this is in fact a great great day for West Portland,” he continued.

The Buff Bay Market, constructed at a cost of \$55 million, is the first of its kind to be constructed with fire prevention systems in place to mitigate the likelihood of the structure being engulfed. Additional investments will be made to erect more shops and install CCTV cameras to further secure the market and those who use it.



From left: Acting CEO of the Port Antonio Municipal Corporation, Jumaane Robinson; Cllr. of Buff Bay Division, Dionne Hunter; Member of Parliament for Portland Western, Daryl Vaz; Minister of Local Government and Community Development, Hon. Desmond McKenzie; and Mayor of Port Antonio, Cllr. Paul Thompson, along with patrons at the opening ceremony of the Buff Bay Market.

New Public Restroom for Junction

Local Government and Community Development Minister, Hon. Desmond McKenzie, on August 7 opened a new public restroom in Junction, St. Elizabeth.

The Minister also announced urgent plans for a drop-in centre to assist vulnerable residents in the town.

In his address to residents, business interests and other stakeholders, Mr. McKenzie said that the Government spent more than \$200 million last year upgrading public sanitary facilities nationwide, underscoring the essential role of accessible, clean public restrooms.

The Minister emphasised that sanitary facilities are not optional amenities but foundational elements of progress.

“Public sanitary facilities are critical to any infrastructural development, as no town can effectively thrive without having accessible and clean restrooms for the general public,” he said.

Mr. McKenzie said the local authority has been instructed to identify suitable land for the construction of a drop-in centre in Junction.

He described the centre as a lifeline for street people and other vulnerable groups, offering essential services and a safe place to access support.

A drop-in centre, he explained, provides basic services to accommodate street people and other

vulnerable groups, offering a bridge to broader social assistance, health services, and community integration.

“The approach I take has always been to put the needs of residents first and remind you that it all starts with local government. We are about local government and community development, so our mandate is to connect with the people – the communities. We have to do right by them in everything that we do,” he said.

The Junction project and the planned drop-in centre are positioned within a wider national push to improve public amenities in urban and rural towns. Mr. McKenzie said the upgraded sanitary facilities will serve as a model for similar upgrades across the parish and the country, ensuring that towns can attract commerce, tourism, and residents with confidence that basic needs are met in a clean, accessible environment.

Local leaders and residents welcomed the Minister's remarks, expressing optimism about the tangible benefits the new facilities and upcoming services are expected to bring.

“People often overlook the importance of having clean public sanitary facilities,” Junction businessman, Peter Swaby, told **JIS News**.

“It's a very important part of any development,” he said.



Newly opened Junction Public Restroom Facility

Denise Chito Receives Furnished One-bedroom Extension to Her Home Under the Indigent Housing Programme

Denise Chito and her family were smiling from ear to ear during the handover ceremony, last Friday (July 25), for a furnished one-bedroom extension to their previously built home, under the Indigent Housing Programme.

Chito, who is a mother of four, previously received a one-bedroom unit under the New Social Housing Programme. During the hand over ceremony of that structure in May 2025, on instructions from Prime Minister, Dr. the Most Hon. Andrew Holness, Hon. Desmond McKenzie pledged to provide an additional bedroom under the Indigent Housing Programme to better accommodate Chito and her children.

"Right at this location, the Prime Minister gave me direct instructions that the Ministry of Local Govern-

ment, our Indigent Housing Programme, should now come in and take up where the social housing aspect left off," Minister McKenzie said while speaking at the ceremony.

"When I spoke with the Mayor, I said to him that I want this unit to be completed as quickly as possible and the technical team in the Ministry as well as the technical team here in St. Thomas, put their heads together and so today, we are here now to open part 2, under the Indigent Housing Programme side," he continued.

Minister McKenzie emphasised that under the Indigent Housing Programme, the houses are built and furnished with the basic necessities for recipients.

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Ms. Denise Chito and her family sit with Minister of Local Government and Community Development, Hon. Desmond McKenzie, Member of Parliament for St. Thomas Western, James Robertson and Mayor of Morant Bay, Cllr. Louis Chin.

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“We provide the home, additional section to house the entire family, they don’t have to worry what [they’re] going to sleep on, they don’t have to worry what they’re going to sit around and eat. All the basic furnishing has been provided for this home,” he added.

The Minister also added that the local government would also address the children’s welfare, adding that the state will ensure that the children’s needs are met until they no longer require assist-ance from the Poor Relief Department.

A part of the Minister’s commitment was to also provide Ms. Chi — a promise he fulfilled during the ceremony.

Meanwhile, Ms. Chito expressed heartfelt gratitude to the Ministry of Local Government and other agencies who have assisted her over the years as she gave the vote of thanks at the ceremony.

“I feel so alive, thank you very much,” she said.

“We are blessed, we are grateful to each and everyone who have blessed our [lives] in a positive way. Some might gave us a word of encouragement, some might [have given] us prayer, we are thankful to each and everyone who have blessed me... Today I am not only looking [for] help for myself from my children. I want my children to go out there and help others,” she explained.



Ms. Denise Chito and her family along with the Hon. Desmond McKenzie and members of the Morant Bay Municipal Corporation touring the extension to their home, following the handover ceremony.

Shawya Farquharson and Family Receive New Home

Indigent house handed over in Brompton St. Elizabeth

Welcome to my home”, were the words uttered by Ms. Shawya Farquharson, the newest recipient of an Indigent Housing Solution, as she stepped into her new home on July 4, 2025.

The additional section, which was completed in an unprecedented two-phase project, is an add-on to the studio unit previously built under the same Indigent Housing Programme. The previous dwelling was in a serious state of disrepair and was deemed unsuitable for the family.

Speaking at the ceremony, Honorable Desmond McKenzie, Minister of Local Government and Community Development, provided some insight as to why the added structure was needed.

“When I came here, and we committed to build a one room, I couldn’t have felt comfortable seeing firsthand, what existed beside [the previously indigent unit], and knowing that it is one family,” he said.

The Minister also pointed out that the Indigent Housing Programme, is a meaningful way for the Government to care for the indigent population in Jamaica. He also added that the parish of St. Elizabeth alone, has seen an investment of close to \$100M since the programme began in 2016.

He further emphasized the quality of the units being built noting that the Ministry has not received any complaints about the houses.

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Ms. Shawya Farquharson (centre) surrounded by family, members of the St. Elizabeth Municipal Corporation to include the Mayor, His Worship Cllr. Richard Solomon; Member of Parliament, Floyd Green; and Reverend Godfrey Watson, as she and Minister Desmond McKenzie cut the ribbon to her home.

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"Right across Jamaica that we have gone, there has not been one complaint about the house that we have built. They don't leak, the walls don't crack up, they are in excellent conditions," he said.

All the houses under the programme are concrete structures, fitted with water harvesting systems and are fully furnished to ensure that the basic needs of recipients are met.

Overcome with emotion, Farquharson welcomed and thanked attendees, the Ministry and the Poor Relief Department, for their intervention.

"Let me begin by extending a warm and grateful welcome to each and every one to the official opening of my home, yes, my home," Farquharson said. "Welcome to my blessing, welcome to my miracle, welcome to my home," she continued.

Minister McKenzie noted that Agencies, such as the Poor Relief Department and the municipal corporation will continue to help recipients of the Indigent Housing solutions to ensure that their children can attend school and meet their medical and other needs.



Ms. Farquharson shows off the keys to the additional section of her house.

Ensuring True Inclusivity and Economic Growth Through Special Entrepreneurship Grants

On Thursday, July 17, 2025, 100 entrepreneurs from St. Catherine, Clarendon and Kingston gathered at the Ministry of Local Government and Community Development for the Social Development Commission's (SDC) Special Entrepreneurship Grant Presentation Ceremony.

The Grant, which is a part of the SDC's Local Economic Development Support Programme (LEDSP) is geared towards providing support through training and funding for regularised nano businesses across the island. A nano business is the smallest unit of enterprise.

Keynote Speaker and Minister of Education, Skills, Youth and Information, Senator Dr. the Honourable Dana Morris Dixon, emphasised that the grants are a pathway to new possibilities for entrepreneurs and the broader Jamaica.

"These grants are providing new hope, new possibilities, and new opportunities to communities across Jamaica, and that is what inclusive economic growth looks like," she said.

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Minister of Local Government and Community Development, Hon. Desmond McKenzie, hands over a cheque to Executive Director of the Social Development Commission, Omar Friths, to boost the agency's Local Economic Development Support Programme (LEDSP).



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Senator Morris Dixon further highlighted the value of the programme and provided insight into how the beneficiaries can access additional training and funding from other programmes available through the Government.

“We are equipping young people with skills that are relevant for the 21st century, more importantly, we are equipping them with skills that are free,” she added.

Minister of Local Government and Community Development, Hon. Desmond McKenzie emphasised that the Social Development Commission has been putting its funding to good use since being allocated a budget from the central government in 2016.

“I have no doubt in my mind that we have gotten value for money, and we have created more small business entrepreneurs in this country because of the success of this programme,” he said.

“Never in the history of Jamaica as we have seen the unemployment rate at the level that it is today... and we within local government and the SDC can say that we have contributed to the reduction in unemployment because of programmes such as this,” he continued.

The special entrepreneurship grant is a strategic approach to addressing the needs of nano and micro businesses in underserved communities by empowering recipients and providing immediate relief for their businesses. As of January 2025, over 1000 nano enterprises have benefitted from grant funding of more than \$46 million.

An additional \$11 million was handed over to the SDC at the ceremony to provide funding for 250 more entrepreneurs.



Past grant recipient, Charmakay Barrett (centre), poses with Minister, Hon. Desmond McKenzie and Senator Dr. the Hon. Dana Morris Dixon.

YSEP Testimonials

"I am writing on behalf of myself, and I believe I can also speak for many others to say a heartfelt thank you for the opportunity you have provided through YSEP 2025.

Even though I have been waiting for others to give an official thank you I felt it important to share my appreciation now 🥰. This has been a wonderful opportunity, and I am truly grateful.

Over the past month you have not only opened a door for us to gain summer employment, but you have also helped our financial burdens in a remarkable way. Beyond the job itself, your patience, guidance and willingness to listen to our concerns have made this experience even more valuable. You have been more than a councillor you have been a mentor.

I would also like to say thank you to our group leader. Though small in physical stature his dedication and leadership have truly been inspiring, his willingness that has motivated us all.

*To you, the parish council and the local government team, thank you for making this programme possible, YSEP 2025 is more than just a summer job for me, it's a chance for young people like us to grow learn and build a better future." - **Patricia Aspinall (Manchester)***

*"As a representative of my team and myself. I would like to sincerely thank the Youth Summer Employment Programme (YSEP) for granting me the opportunity to be part of such a remarkable and impactful initiative. This experience has been truly rewarding, offering not only personal and professional growth but also a generous financial contribution at the end of the programme, for which I am deeply grateful. I also extend my heartfelt appreciation to our Porus Division Councillor, Mrs. Claudia Morant-Baker, for her invaluable role in making it possible for me to participate in this tremendous programme. Your support, encouragement, and belief in my potential have been instrumental, and I am truly honoured to have been part of this journey." - **Lafaith Lindsay (Manchester)***

"Serving as a Team Leader for the Youth Summer Employment Programme (YSEP) over the past three years has been one of the most transformative experiences of my life. This programme not only shaped me into a confident and capable leader but also connected me with incredible individuals — both peers and mentors — who inspired growth, collaboration, and community impact. Leading the Wakefield division taught me the true meaning of responsibility, adaptability, and teamwork. From coordinating tasks to motivating my team, I developed critical skills in communication, problem-solving, and decision-making.

Every challenge became an opportunity to learn, and every success reinforced the power of collective effort. The programme's structure allowed me to step into leadership with support while also encouraging independence — a balance that prepared me for real-world professional environments.

One of the greatest rewards of YSEP was the people I met along the way. From dedicated coworkers who became lifelong friends to supervisors who pushed me to exceed my own expectations, the relationships I built were invaluable. The programme fosters a culture of mutual respect and ambition, where everyone — regardless of background — has the chance to thrive.

*The four-week intensive experience wasn't just about personal growth — it was a gateway to financial empowerment. Through YSEP, I gained hands-on experience in budgeting, time management, and professional etiquette. The stipend provided allowed me to contribute to my household, save for future goals, and understand the importance of financial literacy — a lesson that continues to benefit me today. YSEP is more than a summer job; it's a launchpad for young leaders. The confidence, skills, and connections I gained have propelled me forward in my academic and professional journey. To any young person considering this programme: Take the leap. The growth you'll experience is immeasurable, and the impact will stay with you long after the summer ends" - **Raheem Dennis***





Ministry of Local Government and Community Development's School Uniform Day 2025



SDC National Community T20 Cricket Finals (St. Ann)



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