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**Boys as Jamaica's Future: A Practitioner's Reflection on
Early Intervention, Positive Masculinity
and Transformation in Action**



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Boys as Jamaica's Future: A Practitioner's Reflection on Early Intervention, Positive Masculinity and Transformation in Action

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Abstract

As a Jamaican educator and founder of the *Boy Power Movement*, I have become increasingly convinced that boys' educational needs must be addressed early, holistically and without placing their advancement in competition with that of girls. This practitioner reflection explains why I established the Jody Brown Boys' Symposium, how the initiative developed from a parish-based intervention into the *Eastern Sons Boy Power Summit*, and what the experience has taught me about literacy, mentorship, positive masculinity, practical learning and community partnership. I situate my reflections within Jamaican education data and international research, while acknowledging that public reports of participation and continuity do not by themselves establish long-term impact. I therefore argue for a next phase that combines the relational strength of the symposium with school-based follow-up, safeguarding, measurable outcomes and sustained collaboration. My central position is that boys should not be approached as problems to be managed, but as learners and future citizens whose potential must be deliberately cultivated.

Introduction: Why This Work Became Personal

Jamaica's future is sitting in classrooms today. Throughout my career as an educator, I have worked with boys who were curious, capable and eager to contribute, but I have also encountered boys who appeared restless, discouraged, angry, ashamed or already convinced that school was not a place where they belonged. Those encounters have shaped my belief that the way adults interpret boys' behaviour matters. A boy who is labelled only as disruptive may also be struggling to read. A boy who appears indifferent may be protecting himself from repeated embarrassment. A boy who refuses help may have learned that vulnerability is incompatible with manhood.

My concern for boys has never been an argument against girls. Girls' achievements must be celebrated, protected and extended, particularly in fields and situations where inequity remains. I reject the idea that educational opportunity is a contest in which one gender must lose for another to gain. For me, equity means recognizing that different learners may require different forms of support if the national promise that every child can learn is to become more than a slogan.

The evidence makes targeted attention difficult to dismiss. In June 2026, the Ministry of Education, Skills, Youth and Information announced a national Boys' Committee after Primary Exit Profile results again showed a female advantage in Language Arts and Mathematics. Girls recorded 80.2 per cent proficiency in Language Arts compared with 63.5 per cent for boys, and 73.2 per cent in Mathematics compared with 64.9 per cent for boys (Jamaica Information Service [JIS], 2026a). Yet the pattern is not one of universal male incapacity. In 2023,



girls outperformed boys in Mathematics and Language Arts, while boys performed better in Science and Social Studies (JIS, 2023). I interpret these differences as a call for careful diagnosis, not stereotyping.

This article presents my perspective as a practitioner. It is not an empirical impact evaluation of the Boy Power Movement. Rather, it combines research, public documentation and reflection on the choices that shaped the initiative. I am of the firm belief that boys' development requires joined-up attention to literacy, social-emotional learning, positive masculinity, mentorship, practical career exposure, spirituality and values, family engagement and school follow-up.

Why I Chose to Intervene Early

The idea for the Boys' Symposium grew from a simple but urgent concern: many interventions reach boys after academic, behavioural or emotional difficulties have become deeply established. By the time some boys arrive at secondary school, they may already identify themselves as failures, resist reading, distrust adults or use disruptive behaviour to protect a fragile sense of competence. I believed that we needed to meet boys earlier, while schools and families still had substantial opportunities to strengthen habits, confidence, identity and aspiration.

I also wanted the intervention to begin by seeing their potential rather than from a deficit mindset. Terms such as 'at risk' may help institutions identify vulnerability, but they can become labels that reduce a child to his difficulties. My intention was not to gather 'problem boys' and lecture them into obedience. I wanted to create a space in which boys could be affirmed, challenged, exposed to new possibilities and reminded that their choices mattered. They needed to encounter adults who could see more in them than a disciplinary record or a test score.

The first publicly reported symposium was held in St. Thomas on May 31, 2023, under the theme 'Today's Boys ... Tomorrow's Men.' Thirty boys from ten primary schools participated, with guidance counsellors helping to identify learners who could 'benefit from the experience' (Stewart, 2023). The programme combined motivational engagement, grooming and self-care, interaction with public agencies, values formation and exposure to adults who could widen the boys' sense of possibility. I chose these elements because education is not only the transmission of subject content. It is also the formation of identity, judgement, relationships, habits and hope.

The theme was intentional. I wanted the boys to understand that childhood choices are connected to adult responsibility. 'Tomorrow's men' was not a call to toughness, dominance or emotional silence. It was an invitation to imagine manhood as discipline, service, respect, courage, responsibility and care for others.



What the Evidence Taught Me to Avoid

As the initiative developed, research strengthened my conviction that boys' underachievement cannot be explained by one cause. It is not enough to say that boys are lazy, careless or naturally less interested in school. It is equally inadequate to blame mothers, absent fathers, female teachers, technology, poverty or peer pressure as though any single factor explains every learner. UNESCO (2022) links boys' disengagement with poverty, child labour, repetition, harmful gender norms, inflexible schooling and weak learning experiences. The World Bank similarly identifies labour-market expectations, social norms and education processes as interacting influences (Welmond & Gregory, 2021).

This complexity matters in Jamaica. Wright's (2025) analysis of CSEC and CAPE outcomes found that female students were 8.5 and 6.6 percentage points more likely, respectively, to pass a generic subject than their male peers. However, school characteristics, subject selection and the composition of subject cohorts explained much of the measured difference. I find this conclusion encouraging because it suggests that outcomes are not fixed features of male identity. Structures, expectations, subject pathways and learning environments can be changed.

The Jamaica Education Transformation Commission (JETC, 2021) offers a useful national framework through its emphasis on pedagogic transformation, STEAM, social-emotional learning and equity. These principles challenge me to ask not merely whether a boy is present in school, but whether he feels that the curriculum is meaningful, whether he can read well enough to access it, whether he has a trusted adult, and whether the school environment allows him to seek help without humiliation.

Research on masculinity has been especially important to my thinking. The Jamaican Man-Box study found that restrictive expectations of 'real men', including emotional repression, compulsory toughness and extreme self-reliance, remain influential and are associated with harm to mental health and relationships (Levtov & Telson, 2021). I have therefore come to view positive masculinity as an educational issue. When a boy believes that reading is not masculine, asking for help is weakness, or respect is earned through aggression, his relationship with learning becomes more difficult.



Building the Boy Power Movement

The movement's development has been gradual. I did not begin with a finished national model. I began with a concern, a local network and a willingness to bring people together around boys. Each staging taught me more about what captured the boys' attention, what partners could contribute, and what would be required to move from an inspiring event to a sustainable intervention.

At the second staging, held at Rudolph Elder Park in 2024, boys from two parishes in Jamaica participated in equipment troubleshooting, cardboard recycling, art and craft, jewellery making and engagement with government and corporate booths (JIS, 2024). I valued these activities because they connected education to making, creativity, environmental responsibility and possible careers. The lesson was not that all boys learn in one way or that hands-on experiences should replace academic rigour. Rather, practical activity can provide an entry point through which literacy, numeracy, collaboration, problem-solving and confidence become visible and meaningful.

By May 2026, the initiative had developed into the third Eastern Sons Boy Power Summit at Bath Primary School, involving boys from St. Thomas, Portland and St. Mary. Under the theme 'Today's Learners ... Tomorrow's Leaders,' the summit included motivational presentations, agency booths, practical activities, community participation, devotional leadership by a school boys' group and support from the Ministry of Education, Skills, Youth and Information (JIS, 2026b). The widening geographic reach was encouraging, but the deeper significance for me was the continuity. Many good initiatives disappear after one successful event. Sustaining the programme across three stagings required partnership, trust and a shared belief that the work was worth continuing.

The themes also evolved deliberately. 'Today's Boys ... Tomorrow's Men' focused on identity and adult responsibility. 'Today's Learners ... Tomorrow's Leaders' placed learning at the centre of leadership. I wanted the boys to understand that leadership is not simply visibility, status or authority. It begins with teachability, self-management, service, competence and respect for others.

What the Boys and the Process Have Taught Me

My first lesson is that high expectations are most powerful when they are joined with dignity. Boys should be corrected, held accountable and challenged to improve, but shame is not a sustainable teaching strategy. Public humiliation may produce temporary compliance while weakening trust and belonging. I have become more convinced that adults can be firm without being cruel and demanding without making a child feel worthless.

My second lesson is that exposure can break the cycle of limitations. A child cannot easily aspire to a future he has never seen. When boys meet professionals, agencies, skilled workers, entrepreneurs, artists, educators and community leaders, occupations that once seemed distant become imaginable. Career exposure is therefore not an added attraction; it is part of helping boys connect present learning with future purposes.

My third lesson is that mentorship must be broad and carefully structured. Responsible men are important because boys need to see men reading, serving, apologizing, managing emotion, respecting women and working with discipline. At the same time, I would never minimize the contribution of mothers, grandmothers, female teachers, guidance counsellors and female leaders. Many boys are sustained by women. The goal is not to exclude women, but to expand the number of trustworthy adults surrounding each boy. Any formal mentoring programme must include screening, safeguarding, training, supervision and clear boundaries.

My fourth lesson is that literacy cannot be separated from identity. Reading is the gateway to every subject, to technical training, job applications, digital information and lifelong learning. A boy who repeatedly struggles to read may begin to protect himself by rejecting the activity that exposes his difficulty. We must therefore make literacy intervention dignifying, diagnostic and culturally relevant. Jamaican and Caribbean stories, biographies, sports, music, agriculture, science, technology, entrepreneurship, faith-based texts and graphic formats can help boys see reading as a source of power rather than punishment.

My fifth lesson is one of humility: a successful event is not the same as proven transformation. Public reports establish that the initiative occurred, attracted partners and continued to grow. They do not establish that attendance caused lasting improvements in reading, behaviour, school attendance, emotional regulation or transition outcomes. I regard this distinction as essential. Advocacy should be passionate, but claims must remain honest.



A Secular and Values-Based Responsibility

My commitment to boys' education is grounded in both national development and faith. From a secular perspective, Jamaica loses human capacity when any young person leaves school without the literacy, numeracy, communication, technical competence and self-management required for employment and family life. Early disengagement narrows the future supply of technicians, farmers, entrepreneurs, educators, creatives, health workers, fathers, community leaders and mentors.

A values-based perspective asks what kind of men education is helping to form. Jamaica's approved Philosophy of Education begins 'Under God' and calls for the nurturing of each learner's potential through academic and vocational learning, values, life skills, inclusivity, respect and love of country (Ministry of Education and Youth, 2024). I see this as an invitation for schools, families, churches, community organizations and public agencies to cooperate around shared virtues even when participants do not hold identical beliefs.

Within my Christian understanding, Proverbs 22:6 presents adults as stewards of children's formation, while Luke 2:52 portrays development in wisdom, stature and relationships with God and people. These biblical scriptures do not justify domination or restrictive gender roles. For me, they support a view of manhood marked by discipline, humility, courage, service, compassion, justice and respect for women and girls. Strength includes self-control. Leadership includes service. Faith includes responsibility.

From an Annual Event to a Sustainable System

The next stage of the Boy Power Movement must preserve the warmth, visibility and partnership of the summit while creating stronger continuity around each participant. A memorable day can ignite hope, but transformation depends on what happens before and after the event. I therefore believe that participating schools should use a simple referral process based on multiple indicators rather than labels. Attendance, literacy need, social-emotional concerns, behaviour patterns, family circumstances, teacher observations and the boy's own voice can guide selection.

Each participant should leave with a short development plan, a named school-based adult and scheduled follow-up. Mentors should work through safe, documented arrangements connected to schools and families. Where a boy requires specialized support, the programme should strengthen referral pathways rather than attempt to replace counsellors, psychologists, social workers or other professionals.

Evaluation also needs to become a central part of the model. It need not be excessively expensive or technical. A core dashboard could compare baseline and follow-up information on attendance, reading confidence, disciplinary referrals, participation, goal clarity and school belonging. Short interviews with boys, parents and teachers could explain changes that numbers miss. Data should be disaggregated by age, school, disability and location while protecting confidentiality. This evidence would help us identify which components deserve expansion.



What I Believe Jamaica Must Do Next

Based on the evidence and my experience, I believe Jamaica should pursue six connected actions.

Strengthen early-warning and early-support systems in primary schools. Persistent absence, low literacy, withdrawal and escalating behaviour should be addressed before secondary transition. Early support can prevent temporary difficulty from becoming a stable identity of failure.

Make literacy intervention dignifying and relevant. Diagnostic teaching, small-group support, attractive libraries, digital texts and Jamaican and Caribbean material should be paired with learner choice and practical application.

Explicitly teach social-emotional skills and positive masculinity. Boys need language for emotion, strategies for resolving conflict, permission to seek help and models of strength based on self-control, responsibility and service.

Develop mentorship networks. Schools, alumni, churches, professional bodies, youth organisations and businesses can provide role models and career exposure, but common standards are necessary to protect children and maintain quality.

Connect academic learning with purposeful activity. STEAM, TVET, agriculture, music, sport, entrepreneurship, coding, food preparation, design and community projects can reveal the usefulness of literacy and numeracy. Practical learning should enrich, not replace, strong academic instruction.

Fund long-term partnership. The national Boys' Committee, schools, teacher-training institutions and community initiatives should document effective practice and distribute responsibility across institutions so that programmes can survive changes in leadership.

Conclusion: The Legacy I Hope to Build

I began this work with a conviction that remains unchanged: Boys should not have to reach crisis point before adults decide that they are worth sustained attention. They need early support, positive role models, emotional language, clear boundaries, faith and values, career exposure and adults who refuse to reduce them to their worst day.

The Boy Power Movement has shown me what can happen when schools, guidance counsellors, public agencies, businesses, churches and communities gather around boys with a common purpose. It has also reminded me that inspiration must be followed by systems. The movement's future value will depend on stronger school follow-up, safeguarded mentorship, family partnership and credible evaluation.

Jamaica does not have to choose between the advancement of girls and the development of boys. We need both. My hope is for an education system in which every learner is seen, supported, challenged and prepared for life. When boys grow in wisdom, skill, character, faith and responsibility, they become more than successful students. They become builders of families, communities, institutions and the nation. That is the legacy I hope to help create. That is transformation in action.

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