

The background features abstract, overlapping geometric shapes in various shades of blue, ranging from light sky blue to deep navy blue. The shapes are primarily triangles and polygons, creating a dynamic, layered effect. The text is centered in a dark blue, sans-serif font.

Local Best Practices and Emerging Gaps in Reintegration of Involuntary Returned Migrants

Subtitle: Overview of the Open Arms Development Centre Model

- ▶ Date: January 27, 2026
- ▶ Presented by: Natasha Gabbidon-Blake



Symposium Objectives

- ▶ Share local best practices
- ▶ Identify emerging gaps and risks
- ▶ Promote learning among stakeholders
- ▶ Inform future programs and policies

Key Dimensions of Reintegration

- ▶ Economic reintegration
- ▶ Social reintegration
- ▶ Psychosocial reintegration
- ▶ Institutional and policy environment

Why Reintegration Matters

- ▶ Prevents re-migration driven by desperation
- ▶ Strengthens community stability
- ▶ Supports economic recovery and social cohesion

Global migration trends: rising involuntary returns

- ▶ In Jamaica, global migration trends of rising involuntary returns are reflected in a steady flow of deportees averaging 1,500-2,000 annually over the past five years, primarily from the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada. This mirrors broader global patterns where stricter immigration enforcement and deportation policies have increased involuntary returns worldwide.

Global Migration Trends

- ▶ • Worldwide rise in deportations: The International Organization for Migration (IOM) notes that involuntary returns have grown as countries tighten immigration enforcement.
- ▶ • Drivers: Stricter border controls, criminal deportation policies, and limited pathways for legal migration.
- ▶ • Impact: Returnees often face stigma, unemployment, and reintegration challenges in their home countries.

Deportation



Demographics

- ▶ Predominantly men aged 20-45, though women and older adults are also affected.



The White House released images on Friday showing illegal immigrants lining up and boarding military planes as part of President Donald Trump's expedited mass deportation plan.

Local Impact of Involuntary Returns in Jamaica

1. Stigma

- ▶ • Deportees often face negative labeling as “criminals” or “failures,” regardless of the reason for their return.
- ▶ • Communities may be reluctant to accept them back, leading to social isolation.
- ▶ • Studies by the UNDP and IOM highlight that stigma is one of the biggest barriers to reintegration, undermining self-esteem and community trust.

Local Impact of Involuntary Returns in Jamaica

- ▶ 2. Trauma
 - ▶ • Many returnees experience psychological trauma from detention, deportation flights, and abrupt separation from families abroad.
 - ▶ • Reintegration is compounded by mental health challenges such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress.
 - ▶ • Jamaica's NGOs (like Open Arms) provide trauma-informed counselling, but national systems remain under-resourced.

Open Arms Development Centre



Brief History

- ▶ The Open Arms Development Centre Ltd (OADC) was originally established as the Open Arms Drop-In Centre in 2006 by the Ministry of Health, The Southeast Regional Health Authority (SERAH), Ministry of Local Government's Board of Supervision and Bellevue Hospital, as a collaborative partnership

Open Arms as a Drop in Centre



The Need for OADC

- ▶ The need for the OADC arose from the recommendations of a case study to deal with homelessness in the city of Kingston as well as to solve the problems created by the mentally ill and homeless persons who congregated daily in large numbers at the gate of and inside the Bellevue Hospital grounds.

EXPANSION IN SCOPE

- ▶ As time passed, the scope of the OADC expanded to a full-fledged non-governmental organization (NGO) under the Charities Act 2013 with the following objectives and functions:

Skills Training Centre



Then



Now



OADC Best Practices

4Rs

- ▶ Residential Care
- ▶ Rehabilitation
- ▶ Reintegration
- ▶ Resettlement

Residential Care

- ▶ Accommodation for up to 75 MEN and 8 WOMEN.
- ▶ Hygiene Care
- ▶ 3 meals daily
- ▶ Clothing
- ▶ Medical and mental care

Rehabilitation

Trauma-Informed Counseling

- ▶ • Individual and group sessions addressing grief, stigma, and adjustment challenges.



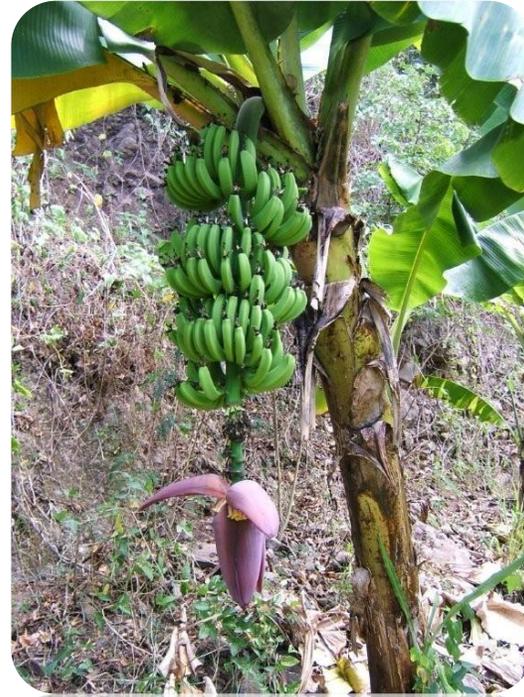
Rehabilitation

Skills Training & Education

- ▶ • Vocational programs (carpentry, tailoring, culinary arts, etc.)
- ▶ • Literacy and life-skills workshops.



Farming



Car Wash



&

Carpentry



Sewing & Upholstering



Reintegration

- ▶ Open Arms uses a holistic reintegration model: stabilizing immediate needs, addressing trauma, building economic independence, reconnecting families, and advocating for systemic change. This approach restores dignity and empowers returnees to thrive in their communities.

Reintegration

- ▶ Documentation & Legal Support
 - ▶ • Assistance with obtaining IDs, travel documents, and legal papers.
 - ▶ • Guidance on navigating Jamaica's reintegration and migration frameworks.
 - ▶ • Advocacy for policy reforms to reduce bureaucratic barriers.
- ▶ Entrepreneurship support and small business incubation.
 - ▶ • Partnerships with local businesses for job placement.
 - ▶ • Focus on economic independence as a foundation for reintegration.

Reintegration

Family Reunification & Social Support

- ▶ • Mediation and counseling to rebuild family ties.
- ▶ • Support for children of returnees, including school enrollment.
- ▶ • Community outreach to reduce stigma and promote acceptance.

Community Engagement & Advocacy

- ▶ • Anti-stigma campaigns and public education.
- ▶ • Collaboration with churches, schools, and community groups.
- ▶ • Policy advocacy with government and international partners to strengthen reintegration systems.

Resettlement Model

Purpose

- ▶ • To help involuntary returned migrants and vulnerable residents transition from temporary shelter to independent living.
- ▶ • Ensures that reintegration is sustainable, not just immediate.

Resettlement

Housing Support

- ▶ • Assistance in finding safe, affordable housing.
- ▶ • Partnerships with landlords, community housing projects, and faith-based organizations.

Employment & Economic Stability

- ▶ • Job placement services and vocational training.
- ▶ • Small business start-up support and micro-grants.
- ▶ • Ongoing mentorship to maintain employment.

Resettlement

Family & Community Reconnection

- ▶ • Mediation and counseling to rebuild family ties.
- ▶ • Community outreach to reduce stigma and promote acceptance.

▶ Psychosocial & Spiritual Support

- ▶ • Continued trauma-informed counseling.
- ▶ • Faith-rooted mentorship and community support groups.
- ▶ • Peer-led initiatives to strengthen resilience.

Key Gaps in Open Arms' Reintegration Work

Lack of Financial Resources

- ▶ • Heavy reliance on short-term donor funding.
- ▶ • Limited ability to sustain or expand programs (skills training, counseling, housing).
- ▶ • Difficulty in scaling successful initiatives due to budget constraints.

Staffing Limitations

- ▶ • Number of staff required **16** number currently employed **4**
- ▶ Small team stretched across multiple roles.
- ▶ • Limited access to specialized professionals (psychologists, social workers, legal advisors).
- ▶ • Staff burnout due to high caseloads and emotional demands.

▶ Limited Housing Capacity

- ▶ • Shelter space is insufficient compared to the number of returnees needing immediate accommodation.

- ▶ • Overcrowding reduces quality of care and limits intake.

▶ 4. Insufficient Mental Health Resources

- ▶ • High demand for trauma-informed counseling, but limited access to professional mental health services.

- ▶ • Reliance on faith-rooted and peer support, which cannot always meet complex needs.

Weak Coordination with Government Agencies

- ▶ • Reintegration requires collaboration across ministries (security, labor, health, education), but coordination is fragmented.
- ▶ • Returnees often fall through the cracks due to bureaucratic delays.

Documentation & Legal Barriers

- ▶ • Many returnees struggle to obtain IDs, birth certificates, or police record.
- ▶ • Lack of streamlined processes delays access to jobs, housing, and social services.

Community Stigma & Social Exclusion

- ▶ • Persistent negative perceptions of deportees hinder reintegration.
- ▶ • Limited public education campaigns to shift attitudes.

Limited Economic Opportunities

- ▶ • Skills training programs exist, but job placement is inconsistent.
- ▶ • Employers may discriminate against returnees.
- ▶ • Few pathways for entrepreneurship support or micro-financing.

Sustainability & Monitoring

- ▶ • Programs often rely on short-term donor cycles.
- ▶ • Weak long-term monitoring and evaluation systems to track reintegration outcomes.

Disaster & Crisis Preparedness

- ▶ • Jamaica's vulnerability to hurricanes and economic shocks disrupts reintegration services.
- ▶ • No dedicated contingency funding or infrastructure for continuity during crises.

How Stakeholders Can Help Open Arms

- ▶ Financial Support
- ▶ Staffing & Capacity Building
- ▶ Volunteer programs to ease staff workload.
- ▶ Training for staff in specialized areas like trauma care and migration law.

Policy & Government Collaboration

- ▶ Strengthen coordination between ministries (security, labor, health, education).
 - ▶ • Streamline documentation processes (IDs,).
 - ▶ • Community Engagement
- ▶ Mental Health & Psychosocial Support
- ▶ Economic Empowerment
- ▶ Monitoring & Evaluation
 - ▶ • Support Open Arms in building systems to track reintegration outcomes.
 - ▶ • Share data and lessons learned to improve programming and policy.

Takeaways

- ▶ Open Arms is filling critical gaps in Jamaica's reintegration system, but faces financial, staffing, housing, mental health, coordination, stigma, and sustainability challenges. Addressing these requires policy reform, stronger partnerships, and sustained investment.

- ▶ Helping Open Arms means investing in dignity and resilience. Stakeholders can contribute through funding, staffing, policy reform, community acceptance, mental health support, and economic empowerment. Together, these actions ensure that involuntary returned migrants are not just sheltered, but truly reintegrated into society.



