'Bashy Bus' HIV prevention programme

The project, which is being carried out by the St. Catherine-based non-governmental organization, Children First, with support from the Ministry of Health through the National HIV/STI Control Programme, brings HIV awareness and prevention messages to young people in communities where they live.

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)-supported 'Bashy Bus' HIV prevention project has been extended to St. Ann, with the handing over of a mobile unit to the St. Ann Health Department on Thursday January 27.

Through the use of colourfully decorated buses, which serve as mobile clinics, young people benefit from confidential HIV testing and counselling, and using music, dance and drama, the peer educators and youth facilitators on board, known as the ‘Bashy Bus Kru’, engage the youth in conversations about their sexual reproductive health, especially as it concerns their vulnerability to HIV infection.

With two other units in operation, Executive Director for Children First, Claudette Pious, said the programme has been very effective, to date.

“An evaluation was done and based on the evaluation we have really changed some behaviours. In the communities that the buses have been working, there have been (positive changes) in terms of the age of sexual debut and also as it relates to the use of condoms. So we are very excited about expanding the work and really getting people involved,” Ms. Pious said.

UNICEF Representative, Robert Fuderich, said that he was very happy about the partnership with the Ministry of Health, in reaching out to young people across Jamaica.

“The partnership has been wonderful and this is the kind of effort that we need more of - a partnership between government, non-government organisations (NGOs) and the United Nations (UN),” he stated.

“We hope that through this partnership and the use of the Bashy Bus, we will have more and more people becoming aware of their HIV status and how to prevent the disease,” he added.

Meanwhile, Medical Officer of Health for St. Ann, Dr. Patrick Wheatle, thanked UNICEF and Children First for their donation to the parish.

“The bus will be going into the different communities and we are appealing to persons to make use of the services that the bus will provide and listen to the positive messages that will be shared as well,” Dr. Wheatle said.