

A Letter From the Founder:

When I tell people about my desire to work with Jamaican youth, they are often curious about my connection to this small place. "Why Jamaica?" they ask. I simply reply that my mother and father are from that small place. For many the response is too simple, and I must elaborate. I then share the story of my father's childhood at the Alpha Boys' School and Home, a residential vocational home for children--many of whom have been abandoned, orphaned, or abused.

During visits to Jamaica, I usually spend half of my time in Kingston--home to the Alpha Boys' School--and the other half within the Treasure Beach community of St. Elizabeth parish, where my maternal grandmother resides. In Treasure Beach, I rest in the "simple" ways of life: eating mangos from my grandmother's tree, braiding her hair as we sit on the porch, and sipping hot tea as we look at old photographs of our family. As my grandmother and I sit together, I marvel at the years that are etched in her skin and the depth that remains in her eyes.

Although our relationship began when I was already an adult, I learned a lot from Grandma. It was at her house that I developed a keen awareness of smells. The air was different there--unadulterated. At Grandma's house, I also learned the meaning of community. Throughout the day, neighbors and passers-by would ask permission to collect ripened fruit that had fallen from the two mango trees that canopy her walkway. With bags in hand, children and grown-ups alike would pick up the sweet fruit and begin their journeys homeward. The smiles on their faces intimated that some of those mangoes would not make it all the way home.

I too know the temptation of having a mango in hand and being beckoned by its fragrance. Yet, what is more enticing is the mango tree itself and what that tree represents. Large and stately, the mango tree is a powerful symbol of what I love most about my family's homeland, Jamaica. At grandma's house, I learned that the mango tree provides more than sweet, nutritious fruit. The mango tree is also a gathering place, a stronghold within communities, and a place of respite, providing shade and beauty. The mango tree symbolizes rootedness and longevity; it endures for generations and has lasting consequence.

Mango Tree Foundation has been created in the spirit of this legacy. At Mango Tree, we aim to provide a strong foundation for vulnerable youth--many of whom do not have the safety and security of a home or sense of rootedness in a family. We endeavor to provide supportive and stable networks for young people by facilitating linkages to family and community. Mango Tree is committed to helping youth realize their full potential by increasing access to educational opportunities and meaningful, productive jobs. Through international collaboration, we strive to build a larger community of caring for Jamaica's children and adolescents. With your help, we endeavor to become a refuge and stronghold--one that has lasting consequence in the lives of generations of young people. As you continue to peruse the contents of our website, we hope that you will be compelled to join this global community in helping to improve the life chances of vulnerable youth.

Peace and Blessings,

Sandra Richards Mayo, Ph.D.
Founder and President
Mango Tree Foundation