

The Vital Voices Global Partnership Connection from Buenos Aires to Kingston

By Taniesha Burke and Karen Otazo Hofmeister

Vital Voices Global Partnership's mandate of identifying, training and empowering emerging women leaders and social entrepreneurs around the globe, enabling them to create a better world for all through the provision of the capacity, connections, and credibility they need to unlock their leadership potential has reached the beautiful Caribbean island of Jamaica. Vital Voices commitment to networking and mentoring in particular were among many of its core areas of focus during the Caribbean and Latin American Summit in Buenos Aires in October 2008.

During this fantastic, bonding experience Dr. Karen Otazo Hofmeister, leadership expert and a committed Vital Voices facilitator from Houston, Texas, and Taniesha Burke, an enthusiastic entrepreneur from Kingston, Jamaica met. The networking between the two developed and matured into a mentoring relationship which led to the publication of Taniesha's first book: *Raising the Next Barack Obama: A Guide in How to Develop Core Principles for Success in Your Child*.

The network created through Vital Voices moved from mentoring to reciprocal mentoring. In August 2009 Dr. Otazo Hofmeister visited Kingston, Jamaica on the invitation of Taniesha to work closely on a leadership forum titled *"Invest in Solutions: Leadership and Responsibility"* with The Social & Economic Alliance for Development, (SEAD) which is a policy think tank of young professionals whose mission is to increase public participation and promote fair debate on critical social, economic, and environmental issues in national forums. Through collaborative and interactive meetings, focus groups, radio and television interviews, Dr. Karen was able to partner with savvy Jamaicans to support social entrepreneurship going forward while honoring the support of the Bureau of Women's Affairs and the American Embassy in enabling Taniesha to go to Buenos Aires last year.

Dr. Otazo Hofmeister expresses gratitude to Hilary Brown, M.D. for her hospitality as well as Taniesha Burke and Javette Nixon for connecting Vital Voices with SEAD Jamaica. The next step will be to make the Vital Voices chapter official with an event in Kingston and perhaps in Montego Bay.

This single meeting at a leadership forum between Karen and Taniesha is substantive proof that the lives many individuals around the world can be touched and transformed through a simply yet powerful tool of networking and mentoring of emerging leaders by those who have experienced the highs and lows of success.

See the following article by Taniesha Burke:

Transforming and empowering women through leadership: My experience in Buenos Aires

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Taniesha Burke, Contributor



Jamaican team (from left): Marcia Brooks, social worker; Andrea Downer, journalist; Patricia Atkinson, US Embassy public relations officer, and Taniesha Burke, CEO, Preston Childcare Services. - Contributed

Vital Voices Global Partnership is a non-governmental organization that identifies, trains and empowers emerging women leaders and social entrepreneurs to become change agents in our governments, communities, private sectors and families.

This phenomenal organization held a leadership and training programme for Caribbean and Latin American women in Buenos Aires, Argentina, from October 5 to 8, which I was privileged to attend.

As a young social entrepreneur, I was given the opportunity to meet and network with 200 exceptional women who are political and governmental leaders, peace-builders and human rights advocates, community activists, health care professionals, environmentalists, entrepreneurs and business leaders. The programme facilitated the formulation of strategies that are deemed useful to enhance women throughout the region.

core groups

Optimal success was achieved by creating core groups of similar specialization. I teamed with a group that focused on women as an economic force a new model of leadership.

My participation equipped me with the tools and practices that women entrepreneurs use to become, and remain, successful. As a young businesswoman, I was exposed to the concept of business sustainability and the importance of corporate social responsibility, and how these can be incorporated into my business and the community.

The high point of my participation was interacting with powerful women, learning and practicing the conduct of respected and influential world business owners and leaders in relation to the community media and the society at large.

Among the general topics covered was attracting and retaining top talents. This exposure caused a radical change of perspective on business management. The underlying lesson in this is that what has been considered the weakness of women our emotions is actually our greatest strength.

The opportunity of building powerful relationships with powerful women from Fortune 500 companies, NGOs and women from the grass roots in the business environment throughout the region is priceless!

One-on-one discussions with these women provided valuable information on creating a balanced life, while managing multinational corporations and family life simultaneously.

This experience has renewed my commitment and dedication to the mission of Preston Childcare Services (PCS) and my personal mission to initiate change in the families, communities and, ultimately, in Jamaica.

Listening to the challenges of women in some areas of the region, in particular an NGO, Autonomous Womens Movement in Nicaragua, I experienced a new sense of urgency about ensuring that PCS delivers on its mission, especially given the recent plight of women and children in our nation and the need for all to work to uplift this nation.

Chilean President Michelle Bachelet shared her experiences of herself and her parents being imprisoned and tortured for several days.

Her determination materialized into her becoming a pediatrician to help children and their families, and now she is in the most influential position, president of Chile. This and many more stories speak to heights of achievements that myself and other aspiring young Jamaican entrepreneur can and are attaining.

The Vital Voices, experience is a priceless gift that has empowered me to expand my vision, not only of PCS as a business, but also my vision of service, tailored towards the development of women in my community and Jamaica.

I look forward to a continuous and active association with Vital Voices and the network of powerful, creative, determined and strong women around the world.

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