



NEWSREEL WORLD

2020-12-05

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av *Alanna Leslie*

ALANNA LESLIE: Hi, I'm Alanna Leslie, and it's time for Newsreel World. Today, we're heading to Australia, Ghana and India. But first, the island of my birth, Jamaica, which is where I'm recording this episode.

Jamaica

Around the world, the coronavirus pandemic has led to homeschooling becoming the new normal for many students. In Jamaica, the government has said that schools should remain largely online until the end of the winter term to help prevent the spread of the virus. Students rely on laptops and tablets to log into online class sessions, but what happens if you don't have access to this equipment or can't afford it? One teacher set out to tackle this problem in her own way. I've been to meet her to find out more.

Taneka McCoy Phipps: You can describe me with three words: powerful, purpose-driven and passionate for kids.

Alanna Leslie: That's Taneka McCoy Phipps, a woman on a mission to fill the gap in education caused by the coronavirus pandemic for young people in eight inner-city communities in Kingston, Jamaica's capital.

Taneka McCoy Phipps: Education right now becomes a pandemic, not only health. They would have had this free access but now it's online and it comes with a cost. They're seeing a wide gap in that which they should have known by this time. They're dropping back

Alanna Leslie: For a large percentage of young Jamaicans, it's been possible to make the switch to remote learning. But it's estimated by the Ministry of Education that at the beginning of the school year in October, almost half a million students were unable to access the online learning systems.



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Taneka McCoy Phipps: The work that is set online, a lot of parents don't even understand how to go about with their children. And likewise, the kids just the same. There's nobody there to really emphasise or to ensure that they're still learning.

Alanna Leslie: Taneka sets out at 6 am and for two hours she goes from blackboard to blackboard and writes out a new lesson.

Alanna on location with Taneka: So talk to me about the work that's been put out today.

Taneka McCoy Phipps: It's numeracy and literacy, each day we try to put out numeracy and literacy, language and mathematics.

Taneka McCoy Phipps: Some of the boards, they're not broad enough to hold both subjects. So I give language today and math tomorrow.

Taneka McCoy Phipps: I couldn't just go in there and do it. So I ask for permission from the owners of the wall and once they say, go ahead, I'll just go ahead and buy my paint, my brushes and everything and just put up one there. Parents would pass by and say "Miss, what's happening there?" And I tell them, I said work will be here in the community on the board, come here and take work off.

Alanna Leslie: Taneka's efforts have meant that students across these areas have had new lessons at least three times a week throughout the pandemic. Taneka made the decision to continue the initiative in spite of the potential dangers.

Taneka McCoy Phipps: At times when we go in the community in the morning so early, we could sense that something went on last night or in that very same morning. We see police coming out with vehicles of men on it and so forth.



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Alanna Leslie: I got to speak with two of the students who have grown to rely on Taneka's efforts,

Alanna on location: What Mrs McCoy has been doing in the community, how has that helped you?

Vox 1: Oh, wow. That has helped me very much because some of my dreams mostly depends on going to school. She giving us worksheets to do that has been a very good thing for me because, not being able to attend the online classes I get work to do on the same way so my brain is not going to sleep.

Alanna on location: How has the blackboards helped you?

Vox 2: When Covid-19 just came in, it was a struggle, a great struggle because I did not get to do any work until they come up with the blackboards. When I'm engaging in this work it's like I'm at school.

Alanna Leslie: Another side of the initiative is the provision of hot meals for some of the students.

Taneka McCoy Phipps: Here I am now, thinking about one of the basic rights of the child, which is education, without even thinking that some of these children are operating, doing these worksheets on an empty tummy. I want to pull it together and see if I can prepare a little hot meal; not everyone just those that would have been really in need of it.

Alanna Leslie: There has been a collective effort from the government of Jamaica to get much needed equipment to those who need it the most. But with just a few more weeks to go until the end of term, some students continue to wait. But what is clear is that the lives of the students in eight inner-city communities in Kingston have been deeply nourished by the ongoing efforts of Tanika McCoy Phipps.

Kenya

ALANNA LESLIE: Environmentalists in the Kenyan capital of Nairobi are celebrating saving an iconic fig tree.



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The authorities had announced in October that they planned to uproot the tree to make way for the construction of the Nairobi Expressway.

ALANNA LESLIE: But in November, Kenya's President Uhuru Kenyatta issued an order to save the tree, declaring it a "beacon of Kenya's cultural and ecological heritage". 25-year-old Elizabeth Wathuti was one of the environmentalists who campaigned to save the tree, and she told Reuters how she felt after the change of heart.

Elizabeth Wathuti: This decision today gives me hope that activism works when it comes to protecting our environment and our green spaces. This particular fig tree is just a symbol of the bigger picture of what we are asking for. We want a green and clean city, a green and clean Kenya.

India

ALANNA LESLIE: In 2018, India decriminalised homosexuality across the country. But since then, equality for homosexual people in India has stalled. For example, same-sex marriage is still illegal there. But the pressure to change that is building, as Chhavi Sachdev reports from Mumbai,

Chhavi Sachdev: This was the mood on the streets of Mumbai two years ago, when India's supreme court finally made homosexuality legal. Before this, same-sex couples could be arrested and harassed because homosexuality was labelled a criminal offense under section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, a law that had been in place since 1861. Now, some couples want to know why they also can't get married. In October 2020, three same-sex couples asked the courts for permission to get married.

Chhavi Sachdev: All three cases are in review, two in the Indian capital, Delhi and one in the coastal state of Kerala.

Mannat: The Indian Constitution is considered to be one of the most progressive and inclusive documents.

Chhavi Sachdev: This is Mannat, an 18-year-old who identifies as a bisexual woman.

Mannat: As a young Indian woman, I have seen discrimination on many levels. I myself discuss such issues with my peers, and they all seem to be on the same page as me. We collectively believe that the LGBTQ community should be allowed to marry, adopt children and live a fruitful life.

Chhavi Sachdev: Aditya is a 17-year-old high school senior.

Aditya: I support gay marriage, especially since homosexuality itself has been legalised in this country.

Chhavi Sachdev: Recently, the Solicitor General of India said that same-sex marriage would go against Indian values.



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But the petitioners are asking to register their marriages under what's called the Special Marriage Act, which seems gender neutral. It does not say that marriage is only between a man and a woman. And, under the Indian law, everyone is equal.

Aditya: It is absurd not to allow gay people the right to marry because you want again, a constitutionally enshrined value because you're treating people who are heterosexual and homosexual unequally.

Chhavi Sachdev: Mannat says the topic doesn't come up much with adults and it really should.

Mannat: Adults especially require help breaking away from the stigma of discussing sensitive topics due to the kind of culture they grew up in.

Aditya: There are some people amongst my friends who would argue that those who are opposed to gay marriage are fundamentally unempathetic because they are holding their values and beliefs above other human beings.

Chhavi Sachdev: Without marriage, same-sex couples have no right to inherit property or even adopt a child. They can't access medical care benefits or even visit each other in hospital.

Mannat: It is about time that the Indian LGBTQ+ community be treated equally and with dignity.

Chhavi Sachdev: For decriminalising homosexuality, the push came from all members of the LGBTQ+ community. Equal marriage has fewer proponents, but the conversation has clearly started. This is Chhavi Sachdev reporting for Newsreel World from Mumbai in India.

ALANNA LESLIE: Thanks Chhavi.

Australia

ALANNA LESLIE: A social club in Australia is using new and old games to help teenagers with autism learn social skills and form friendships. People who are autistic often find it hard to communicate and interact with other people and can get anxious or upset about social events. Being autistic does not mean you have an illness or disease. It just means your brain works in a different way. The social club is run by psychologist Heath Fletcher. The students play old-fashioned board games or computer games such as "Dungeons & Dragons" and "Warhammer". Heath loves the club and says: "You get to see kids who have never had a friend in their life make friends."

Ghana

ALANNA LESLIE: A short blast there of the Asew Jingla remix of Grandpa Me Nie by Ghanaian artist Bisa Kdei.



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It's one of the tracks on the new festive film *Jingle Jangle: A Christmas Journey*. Bisa's music is partly inspired by "Highlife", a genre that originated in Ghana early in the 20th century. *Jingle Jangle* is a musical fantasy film about an eccentric toymaker played by Forest Whitaker and his adventurous granddaughter played by Madalen Mills.

ALANNA LESLIE: That's all from me today, and for this year! Have a wonderful rest of 2020 and we'll speak to you in 2021. Bye!