



## JCA STRENGTHENS WORKPLACE WELLNESS THROUGH PEER SUPPORT NETWORK



As global attention on health and wellness continues to grow, the Jamaica Customs Agency (JCA) remains committed to fostering a supportive and holistic work environment for its employees.

In observance of World Mental Health Day on October 10, 2022, the Agency launched its Peer Support Network (PSN) as

an extension of the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP). This initiative was designed to focus on the development and maintenance of a cadre of committed, trusted and competent employees, equipped to support their colleagues.

Aligned with the Agency's Health and Wellbeing Policy, the PSN continues to expand across all JCA locations, ensuring that employees have accessible peer-based support systems.

According to Sean Davis, Senior Human Resource Officer responsible for Employee Relations and one of two PSN Coordinators, since its implementation the Agency has seen substantial results in the form of the following:

- Increased Mental Health Awareness & Responsiveness across the organisation;
- Expanded knowledge of the EAP which offers counselling support for employees and their immediate family members, including referrals made by PSN'ers to the programme;
- Exploration of evolving mental health topics through virtual sessions;
- Implementation of "Wellness Walls" in some Units, to allow for sharing and posting of positive affirmations and encouragement;
- Implementation of three PSN WhatsApp Communities, aligned to the various dimensions of wellness, and open to all employees, based on shared interests. These are JCA Garden Tribers - for lovers of plants and flowers and budding farmers; JCA Style Your Life - exploring dressing ideas, décor concepts, DIYs, etc.; and JCA Adventurers - for sharing of spots and sites to visit for site-seeing, food exploration, vacationing and much more.

Following the successful staging of this year's PSN retreat, participants engaged in collaborative discussions aimed at strengthening and expanding the programme. The sessions were enriched by insights from both internal and external presenters, who shared valuable perspectives and practical strategies for continued growth.



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Among the featured presenters was Suzette Buchanan, Chief Executive Officer of Bellevue Hospital who spoke on Mental Health in Today's Workplace. She believes initiatives such as the Peer Support Network are not only important but are essential. "The modern workplace is demanding, and many adults are navigating high levels of stress, personal responsibilities, and unspoken emotional strain," she explained, shedding light on the importance of these initiatives. She continued, "what makes peer support powerful is that it creates a safe, relatable space where individuals feel seen and understood, often by someone who "gets it" without judgment. For many, that first conversation with a peer can be the difference between silent struggle and seeking help. It humanises the workplace and reinforces that wellness is not a luxury it is a necessity."



Suzette Buchanan presenting at JCA's Peer Support Network Retreat 2026.

According to Buchanan, "continuous training and supervision, clear boundaries and referral pathways, confidentiality and trust-building, visible leadership support and ongoing engagement" are some of the many ways programmes such as these can be improved and advanced.

She concluded by commending the Jamaica Customs Agency for such an initiative which shows a "clear signal that an organisation values its people beyond their output" and encouraged other entities to adopt such a programme. "When structured properly, this model can significantly improve morale, productivity and overall well-being. When employees feel supported, they show up not just as workers, but as whole individuals, which has a ripple effect across teams, performance and culture."

Through initiatives like the PSN, the JCA continues to demonstrate its commitment to the mental, emotional, and social well-being of its workforce, reinforcing a culture of care, connection, and resilience.