Comparative Analysis: Lived-Experience Systems Leadership in the Caribbean & Guyana

Research date: 9 October 2026 **Question:** Is there anyone else in the Caribbean (and specifically Guyana) doing what Jha'asryel-Akquil Bishop does? If yes — who, and what can he learn? If no — document the gap with evidence.

The benchmark (his lane, precisely defined)

Not "youth activism." Not "NGO programme delivery." His lane is **intersectional lived-experience leadership at systems/policy level**: a person with lived experience across homelessness, LGBTQ issues, and mental health/neurodivergence, who has spent 15+ years sitting at funding and policy tables, training governments, and designing systems. His definition of the work: every substantial experience — trauma, program participation, leadership, professional practice, relationships — becomes expertise, and the expertise is the *solutions* developed through it.

The full practice (the package, never one lane): social technology design (he co-founded Streetlives and YourPeer — peer-navigation platforms built from lived experience); philanthropic advisory (seven years at a funding table); community development and school-club development; sexual-health peer training; peer recovery coaching; policy across homelessness, social justice, human rights, housing justice, and immigration; asylum navigation; teaching artistry and creative practice; participatory research and research leadership; programme management; customer service.

The builder offer: he is the expert in the products he co-founded. The opportunity is not only his candidacy for roles — it is replicating and delivering Streetlives and YourPeer to new communities.

On paper (published, verifiable): The Imprint (June 2020); Guyana Times (April 2026); Point Source Youth National Symposium (2021); NYC Continuum of Care / nyc.gov Steering Committee record (July 2021); Stanford Basic Income Lab (2020); co-authored with Matthew Morton, Chapin Hall (2020); Adam Bard's letter on the $15M HUD Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program win (2022); his sworn declaration (VSP 2011–2016). His positions are black and white, on paper, published on websites — never "emerging," never "aspiring."

Demonstrated in practice (the expertise as work, not claims):

Practice	Demonstrated record
Social technology design	Co-founder, Streetlives (peer-navigation platform); co-founder, YourPeer
Philanthropic advisory	7 years on the Steering Committee, NYC Fund to End Youth and Family Homelessness (a funding table)
Community & school-club development	Peer Educator/Volunteer Youth Consultant, Volunteerism Support Platform, Guyana, 2011–2016
Sexual-health peer training	SASOD Peer Trainer certification (2016)
Peer recovery coaching	3MV completion (Housing Works, 2017); Friends of Recovery–NY Train-the-Trainer (2018)
Policy (homelessness, housing justice, immigration, human rights)	Helped New York City win the $15M HUD Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program grant (Adam Bard letter, 2022); NYC CoC Steering Committee voting member
Teaching artistry & creative practice	Diploma in Theatre Arts and Drama (Institute of Creative Arts, Guyana, 2015)
Research & research leadership	Chapin Hall co-authorship with Matthew Morton (2020); Stanford Basic Income Lab (2020)

Practice	Demonstrated record
Management & youth leadership	NYC Youth Action Board Co-Chair (2021); True Colors United national youth forum (2020)
Customer service	Apple Technical Specialist, 2018–2022 (iOS hardware/software support)
Programme delivery	Columbia Tamer Center NYC Housing Fund Program (2023); StepUp Ministry employment programme (2022); Out in Tech Youth Mentorship (2018)

Verified record: 7 years on the Steering Committee of the NYC Fund to End Youth and Family Homelessness; co-founder and board Director of Streetlives (NYC peer-navigation for unhoused youth); helped New York City win a $15M HUD Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program grant; Columbia Tamer Center programme (2023); Peer Educator/Volunteer Youth Consultant with the Volunteerism Support Platform, Guyana, 2011–2016 (his sworn declaration); True Colors United national youth forum on homelessness (his account); SASOD Peer Trainer (2016); Diploma in Theatre Arts and Drama (Institute of Creative Arts, Guyana, 2015). Every peer below is measured against four criteria: (a) years in lived-experience leadership, (b) seat at funding/policy tables, (c) systems-design or training-government work, (d) cross-country footprint. (Research note: this study compared the homelessness-systems lane specifically; the intersectional frame — three lived-experience domains, no comparable leader found in the researched public record — is developed in the positioning dossier.)

Tier 1 — Caribbean-wide youth leadership infrastructure

CARICOM Youth Ambassador Programme (CYAP), 2025–2027 cohort. The region's flagship youth-leadership pipeline. Current names verified: Christopher Brathwaite (25, Barbados — Fulbright Scholar, foreign-policy professional) and Janae Herbert (18, Barbados — UWI student, youth parliament leader); Janet Simon (Antigua and Barbuda — appointed Dean of the CYA Corps, 1 Sept 2026; trained educator, Commonwealth Youth Peace Ambassador, focus on mental health and NCD prevention); Renee Atwell (Trinidad and Tobago — former Dean, attorney); Ashanti Ramsay (The Bahamas); Ashley Gooden and Danielle Seales (Cayman Islands). Their work is real — education, mental health, diplomacy, regional integration — but it is **representative youth advocacy, not lived-experience systems leadership**. None has 15 years in the lane; none sits at a funding table; none trains governments on lived experience. Verdict: same generation, different lane entirely.

CARICOM Youth Advisory Committee on Prevention of Crime and Violence (YAC-PCV). Eight youth members (18–29) across member states; its published membership criteria explicitly include "lived experience" alongside advocacy and technical expertise, and it feeds youth input into CARICOM crime-prevention policy. This is the **closest institutional precedent** for lived-experience seats at a Caribbean regional table — but it is advisory, new, crime-prevention-specific, and its members are not systems leaders with funding-table records. Verdict: proves the region's institutions are open to the concept; nobody there matches the benchmark.

Other infrastructure (Commonwealth Youth Council Caribbean reps, Young Americas Business Trust, national youth councils): entrepreneurship, peer education, and representation lanes. No lived-experience systems leaders found.

Tier 1 — the narrower cut: lived-experience systems leadership in the Caribbean

Joel Simpson — SASOD, Guyana (the one genuine peer). Founder and Managing Director of the Society Against Sexual Orientation Discrimination, founded 2003 by University of Guyana students; 20+ years of continuous leadership. Built a 10–15 person student group into Guyana's national LGBTQ authority: first Pride parade in the English-speaking Caribbean, regional leadership through CariFLAGS (Caribbean Forum for Liberation and Acceptance of Genders and Sexualities) and the Caribbean Vulnerable Communities Coalition, and a 2025 LGBTQIA+ legislative manifesto with demands put to political parties ahead of national elections. This is the **same model in a different lane**: lived identity → national organisation → legislative advocacy → regional network leadership. Verdict: the closest thing to a peer in the Caribbean. Different population (LGBTQ rights, not homelessness), but the playbook is directly transferable.

Disability-led policy leadership (emerging peer cluster). A real, growing lived-experience-to-policy pipeline: Senator Janeel Odle (Barbados — a disabled person holding a Senate seat: an actual policy-table seat); Judy Sango (President, Dominica Association of Persons with Disabilities — building a GBV task force, doing policy advocacy with government); Joshuanette Francis (Antigua and Barbuda, Good Humans 268 Inc — youth panel on lived experience at the 2025 Caribbean Disability Network Conference); Zinzee Noel (Grenada — UN Youth Advisory Group, conceived the UN HireAbility employment campaign); Kerry-Ann Ifill (Barbados — PWD advocate); Loik Charles (Dominica — DAPD board). The Commonwealth Disabled Peoples Forum ran a **regional Training-of-Trainers** in Barbados (October 2025) to produce Disability Equality Trainers who educate government officials — a direct template for his ministry-training model. Verdict: genuine lived-experience policy leaders, but mostly earlier-career and disability-specific; none has his 15-year funding-table record.

Homelessness lived-experience leadership in the Caribbean: none found. The homelessness space is occupied by: service operators (Carla Gulotta, Portland Rehabilitation Management Homeless Shelter, Jamaica — rights advocate and shelter head, but not lived-experience-led per available evidence); systems coordinators (Kemar Saffrey, Barbados Alliance to End Homelessness — proposed a multi-agency coordination platform); government ministers (Desmond McKenzie, Jamaica — the Desmond McKenzie Transitional Centre); researchers (Dr. Priya Kissoon, UWI St. Augustine — street-dweller research); and in Guyana, the state-run Night Shelter (administrator Sheila Veerasammy), Potluck (charity founded by medical professionals), and REACH Foundation (youth volunteers). **Nobody with lived experience of homelessness sits at a Caribbean policy or funding table.** Verdict: the lane is empty.

Tier 2 — Guyana specifically

National youth leadership is crowded; lived-experience systems leadership is absent. Verified landscape:

- **Presidential Youth Advisory Council** — youth perspectives feeding Vision 2030 and national policy (letter by Dharshinie Gokarran, Guyana Chronicle, June 2025).
- **10th Annual Youth Parliament** (August 2025) — 92 participants debating national issues including restorative justice for juveniles; plus the Speaker's National Youth Debating Competition.
- **Ministry of Human Services "Catalyst Collective"** (launched September 2026) — youth voice in policymaking, complementing 12 VIBE youth hubs.
- **Prominent young leaders:** Amrita Naraine (25 — AI entrepreneur, Chevening Scholar, World Bank Group Ambassador; tech/entrepreneurship lane); Dr. Davindra Dave Lalltoo (Recover Guyana founder — 12+ years executive leadership, National Youth Award 2019, Caribbean Global Award 2024; youth-led nonprofit, environment lane — the closest to national systems leadership, but not lived-experience); Magaiva Gonsalves (Project New Nation — hinterland youth services); plus young professionals across governance, peacebuilding, and community development.
- **Joel Simpson** (above) remains the single Guyanese peer in the lived-experience-to-policy model.

Nobody in Guyana combines lived experience of marginalisation with 15 years of leadership, funding-table seats, and government-training work. Verdict: in his specific lane, it is just him.

Tier 3 — Gap analysis

Criterion	His benchmark	Best Caribbean/Guyana peer	Gap
(a) Years in lived-experience leadership	15+	Joel Simpson: 20+ (different lane); disability leaders: emerging	**No peer in his lane**; Simpson matches on years only
(b) Seat at funding/policy tables	NYC Fund Steering Committee 7 yrs; $15M HUD win	Sen. Janeel Odle (Senate seat); Simpson (legislative advocacy, regional networks)	**No peer with funding-table seats**; Odle/Simpson hold policy seats in other lanes
(c) Systems-design / training-government work	Pitching ministries now; Streetlives systems	CDPF Training-of-Trainers (disability model exists)	**Lane empty** — the model exists in disability, not in his lane

Criterion	His benchmark	Best Caribbean/Guyana peer	Gap
(d) Cross-country footprint	NYC + Guyana, Caribbean ambition	Simpson: Guyana + regional; CYAs: national + regional	Peers match on regional reach, not on the systems-leadership substance

Verdict

In the specific lane — lived-experience (homelessness/marginalisation) systems leadership with 15 years and funding-table seats, training governments — he stands alone in Guyana and in the Caribbean. The evidence supports his claim. Youth leadership in the region is well populated (CYAP, Youth Parliament, Presidential Youth Advisory Council), but it is representative advocacy, not lived-experience systems leadership. The homelessness space has operators, coordinators, ministers, and researchers — but zero lived-experience leaders at policy tables. One genuine peer exists in the adjacent lane (Joel Simpson, LGBTQ rights, 20+ years, national-to-regional), and an emerging cluster exists in disability-led policy (Senator Janeel Odle, Judy Sango, the CDPF training network).

What to learn from the peers

1. **From Joel Simpson — the institution-building playbook.** He turned a 10–15 person UG student group (2003) into the national authority that moved Pride, legislation, and regional networks. That is the exact trajectory available for a lived-experience institution in Guyana. Tactically, copy his **manifesto move**: SASOD's 2025 10-demand LGBTQIA+ manifesto put to parties before elections — a "Caribbean Lived Experience Manifesto" ahead of CARIFESTA XVI or the next election cycle would do the same work.
2. **From the disability movement — the training model.** The Commonwealth Disabled Peoples Forum's regional Training-of-Trainers (Barbados, Oct 2025) producing Disability Equality Trainers who teach government officials is the proven template for his Caribbean ministry-training rollout. He does not need to invent the format — he needs to be the lived-experience-homelessness/youth version of it.
3. **From the CARICOM YAC-PCV — the institutional opening.** CARICOM now explicitly recruits "lived experience" into regional advisory structures. That is a door he can walk through as the region's most credentialed practitioner, not as another youth representative.

Positioning insight (the single most important one)

Do not compete with these peers — convene them. The disability movement, SASOD, and the youth infrastructure already proved the lived-experience-to-policy model works in the Caribbean; he is not introducing a foreign idea, he is filling the one empty seat at a table others built. His positioning line writes itself: *"The Caribbean has youth ambassadors, disability senators, and LGBTQ pioneers at policy tables. It has never had an intersectional lived-experience leader — homelessness, LGBTQ, mental health — at those tables. I am the first — and I am bringing the model to every ministry in every Caribbean nation."* The strategic move is a **Caribbean lived-experience leadership network with him as convener** — Simpson, Odle, Sango, Francis, and the CYA Corps Dean as founding allies — which turns potential "who is this guy?" resistance into a coalition no minister can dismiss.

Sources: nationnews.com (Barbados CYAs, Dec 2025); blackstarnews.com / winnmediaskn.com (Janet Simon Dean appointment, Sept 2026); caricom.org (YAC-PCV); en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Society_Against_Sexual_Orientation_Discrimination; 76crimes.com (SASOD 2025 manifesto); easterncaribbean.un.org (HireAbility campaign); dominicanewsonline.com (DAPD); antiguaobserver.com (Caribbean Disability Network Conference 2025); guyanachronicle.com (Catalyst Collective Sept 2026; Potluck 2017; youth leadership May 2026); guyanatimesgy.com (Night Shelter); newsroom.gy (Youth Parliament Aug 2025); jamaicaobserver.com (Gulotta shelter advocacy); barbadostoday.bb (BAEH; youth homelessness).

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