

# Mek arwe go pong tory

*News from the Lacey family in Antigua*

**...long time, no see...** It's a sorry state of affairs that we've only found time to send you an update of our work in Antigua, now that we are far away from the sunshine isle and holidaying in not-so-sunny England! "Have you given up on your newsletters entirely?" asked our supervisor, the refreshingly candid Rev. Tom Quenet during our last call with him!

So our apologies to all for the delay since our last issue – our excuse being the general busyness of life... becoming all the more hectic after the arrival of Abigail Amálie on 16th February in St John's – the first Antiguan to be born in to the Lacey family! We were also fortunate to have Tom come to Antigua for five days in February, to meet with us and visit the GARD Center, and also – with insightful timing – to become one of the first to meet Abigail. We were very pleased to have the outgoing president of the MCCA, our mentor and very good friend, Rev. Dr. George Mulrain

conduct Abigail's baptism on 10<sup>th</sup> June – a wonderful occasion at the Gilbert Memorial Methodist Church, attended by some of our colleagues at the GARD Center as well.



Much has been happening in our work at the Center in the interim, and now that we're at the mid-point of our service, it's encouraging to see some of the early ideas, conversations and actions we took on beginning to bear fruit. For brevity, we thought we'd show the main points on a timeline (see next page), but we've elaborated on some of the more exciting ones in the articles to follow. **C.**

**...japanese funding for new building...** A year has gone by since my first email to the Japanese Embassy in Trinidad. In that year we have submitted a project proposal for the construction of a new training facility. Lengthy clarifications and negotiations followed and in March we finally received a call from Trinidad informing us that Tokyo had chosen to finance our project.

Groundbreaking took place at the end of March. The Japanese Ambassador to the East Caribbean flew in from Trinidad, the Antiguan Minister of Information



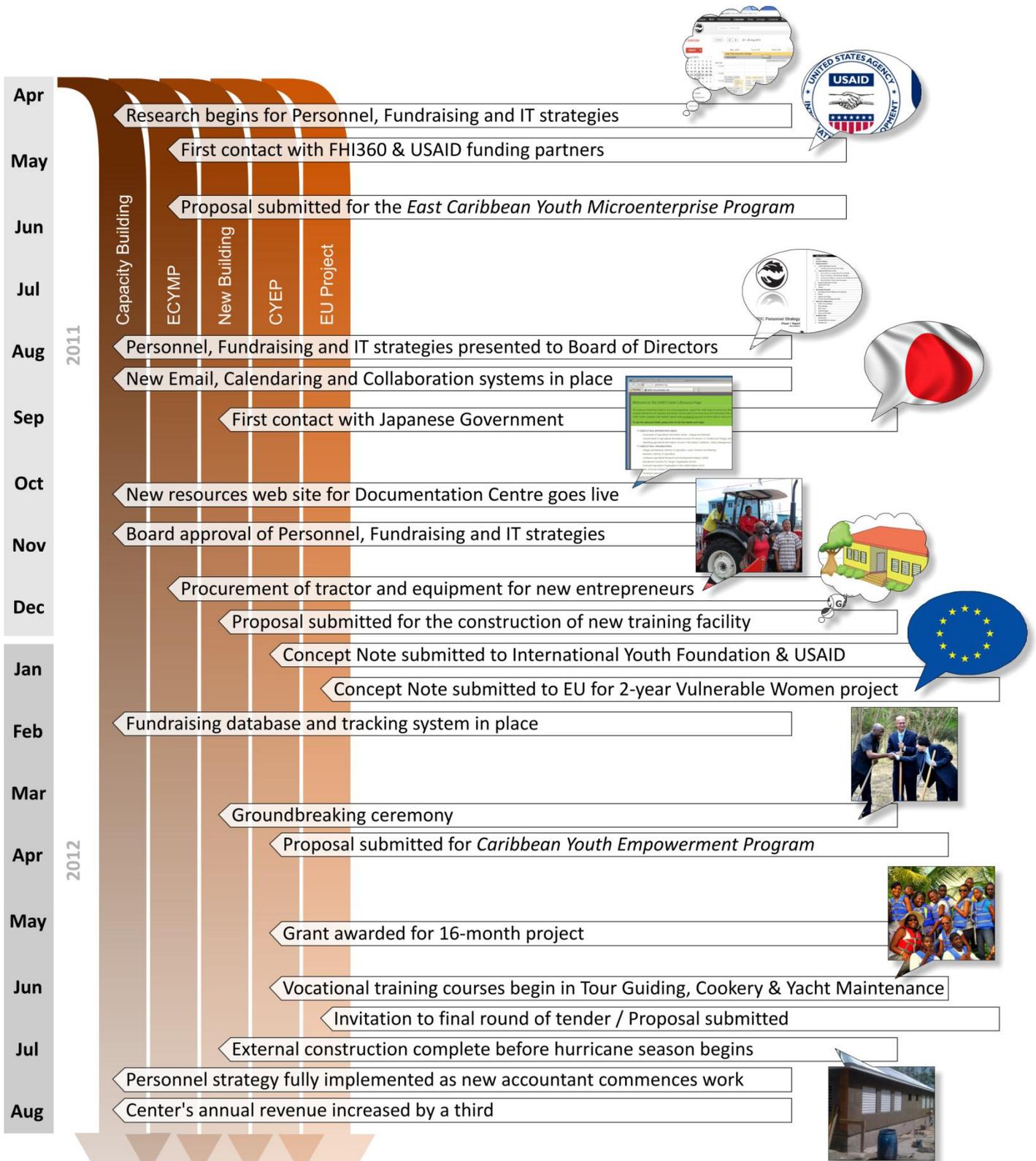
and the Ambassador to Japan attended, as well as the president of the MCCA and other dignitaries. Construction commenced in May and the superstructure has now been completed – just before the height of the hurricane season.

The new site will enable GARDC to increase the number of students it trains, and its ICT lab with 20 donated computers will open up the possibility of e-learning. Our students will no longer need to use "outdoor classrooms" which, in tropical heat and conditions, hardly encourage learning! The facility is already being used for some of the Center's

other activities such as a summer camp for youth, and the newly available space will save resources previously spent on hires of other venues. **V.**



...ideas and conversations start to bear fruit...



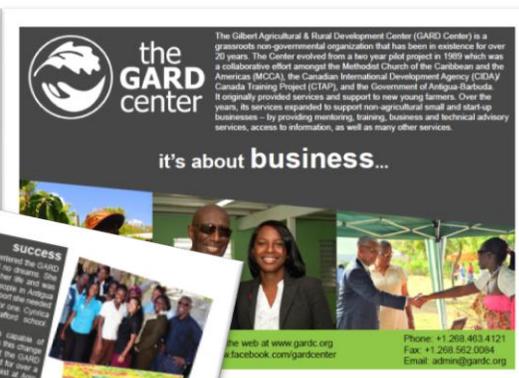
**...youth microenterprise programme...** We spoke of the *East Caribbean Youth Microenterprise Program* in our first newsletter, and the project experienced multiple changes since its inception. After lengthy discussions with the donor, the GARD Center received funds as the only successful organisation in Antigua. This resulted in the purchase of a tractor, irrigation systems, start-up seedlings and fencing for six young farmers: three recent GARDC trainees in agriculture, and three existing farmers.

Project-managed by Chris, the initiative provided training in the use of record keeping software required for the award of the *Good Agricultural Practices* credential, facilitated meetings with various cooperatives and potential customers, and provided business mentors through the Center's mentorship programme. It also attracted considerable media attention, including front-page newspaper coverage of the presentation of our new tractor!



The assistance provided aims to accelerate the start-up/young businesses into successful and sustainable enterprises, which will provide lasting income for the entrepreneurs and their families, but also help address the food security of the nation as a whole. **C & V.**

**...promotional material...** One of the obstacles to successful fundraising that I encountered early on was the lack of promotional material. That was either missing or very outdated. The little resources we had were also often inappropriate for a quick and “user friendly” introduction of the Center’s activities. Alongside Rachel (a Peace Corps volunteer in the role of graphic designer), we set out to give it a try and fill the gap. There are currently a few promotional leaflets featuring three of the Center’s programmes and more material will hopefully follow. **V.**



**...women in focus...** As a part of the Center’s fundraising strategy, I’ve been screening multiple donor sites including the one of the European Commission. Six months in, there was a first opening: the EU was asking various organisations to submit their concept notes (initial project ideas).

The specifications given by the EU seemed a good overlap with what the Center has already been doing. Our proposal focused on vulnerable young women in Antigua. The project itself hopes to improve their situation by providing vocational or entrepreneurial training which will lead to increased employment or self-employment of the women. Another ambition is to establish a “one stop shop” for small and starting businesses where people can get specific support e.g. help with business plans, acquire a mentor for their business, get connected to small loan opportunities, or benefit from further training.

Six months after submission, the Concept Note was selected to proceed into the final stage of the bidding process, and we’re currently awaiting the results of this. **V.**

**...the SAVE campaign...** One of the greatest pleasures of our training in Queens, prior to commencing our service in Antigua, was the network of new friends we made from every corner of the world – amongst them the well-known and inspiring *Canon Gideon Byamugisha* ([en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gideon\\_Byamugisha](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gideon_Byamugisha))

It was therefore a great honour to be asked by his organization to create the web site for a new faith-sector campaign to end HIV in Africa and beyond - spanning 22 countries - which I implemented in time for World AIDS Day in December 2011.

Take a look at the site at [www.savecampaign.org](http://www.savecampaign.org), and particularly the *World AIDS Day Message* from Canon Gideon under *Latest News*. **C.**

**...caribbean youth empowerment program...** The biggest project by far in which the Center is now engaged is CYEP: the *Caribbean Youth Empowerment Program*.

Following a long phase of preparing a Concept Note, then a full project proposal in early 2012, we were awarded USAID funding for a 16-month project which kicked off in May to provide vocational training and internship to 230 vulnerable youth (often guys who dropped out of school, are unemployed and unemployable, and who are at high risk of joining gangs or becoming drug dealers). We are both sharing the project management, and Vera is focusing especially upon the *Monitoring & Evaluation* aspects – to make sure the project stays on track and that, as a Center, we make the most efficient use of our resources.

As well as the technical areas, we're also providing training in ICT, Maths, English and Life Skills in order to help the youths become more attractive to employers. Our target is to see 40% of graduates gain employment.

We commenced with one course in *Tour Guiding*, and have partnered with the Hospitality Training Institute to run *Basic Cookery* and *Food & Beverage Service*. For these, we identified the need to train the youth in a remedial or "foundation" course, using our existing base of tutors – which has been funded by the Pan American Development Foundation.

Of the 40 students on the foundation, the 25 most enthusiastic and best performing will proceed to undertake the year long training program to be run later in the year.



And we've just started an entirely new course... for both the Center and indeed Antigua... in *Yacht Maintenance*, which has proved so popular amongst young men that we've had to run two concurrently!

Despite harsh economic conditions, the job prospects in both the tourism industry, and especially the area of yacht maintenance, appear to be strong – so we are very hopeful that many of our current aspiring trainees will be able to lift themselves out of their current circumstances and get on the path to a great career. **C.**

**...prayer points...** Please pray for:

- The safety of all our staff, students and premises in the upcoming hurricane season.
- All the students who have enrolled on one of our courses – especially for two who have recently become homeless.
- The outcome of the project proposal currently under review with the European Commission.



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*Chris and Věra Lacey are working at the Gilbert Agricultural and Rural Development Center in Antigua, providing IT and management support and training.*

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The **Methodist Church** 

