



WORK MATTERS

COLUMN

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The Issue of Street Dwellers

In 2013, as I stood on the stage of the Miss Arima Borough Pageant Royale; I was asked by one of the judges what changes do I hope to see in Arima? And my answer was, in recent years there has been an increase in violence by street dwellers against the people of Arima, and so my hope is that I can engage the necessary authorities so that steps can be taken to have them removed from the streets and placed in facilities where help can be rendered.

Now, at this time we would have been hearing of a lot of horror stories of street dwellers attacking people in Arima, either verbally or physically. It was really devastating for people going about their daily lives, commuting to and from work, shopping etc. and having to be fearful of street dwellers' attacks. I too have experienced the fear of passing by a "Vagrant" as we would say, wondering if they were about to attack. Some may think this is a joke and laugh at the situation but in reality, it is really a serious situation that needs to be addressed by the community and national authorities who are mandated to secure our safety and welfare.

So, at that time I thought getting them off the streets and getting them the necessary help needed would have been one of the best changes for the safety of the people of Arima. This was definitely one of the projects that I wanted to initiate because I believe it would have been very impactful to the community and would have aided in the safety of the community and the homeless. I was very passionate about this issue and feel that it is something that should be in the national discussions as it affects all our lives.

I believe that they need to be humanely removed from the streets and placed in either homes or some type of facility that would allow them to live their lives in some degree of comfort as human beings. It has been argued that many of them have mental challenges or problems with drug use, which leads to their proclivity to fits of aggression or violence. One option in my opinion, is to engage different authorities that could help by providing a rehabilitation facility or team-

ing up with the local health authorities/ health facilities to provide medication and treatments those street dwellers with drug, mental and other health issues.

Fast forward nine years later in July 2022, I came across an article titled "pregnant woman gets cuffed on the head by vagrant". Immediately I felt guilty about this incident because I believe that I had an opportunity to initiate a programme to put things in place to limit or prevent future incidents like this from happening. The article further stated that the woman went to the police who explained to her that nothing can be done about the situation. It was really disheartening reading that article, because one can only imagine the physical and emotional damage which was done to this woman and the many other people who have experienced similar incidents. As an individual, and a concerned citizen of Trinidad and Tobago, I am once again motivated to pursue this project, to prevent future incidents like this and I can only hope I will get the support needed from the Borough of Arima and other authorities. Also, having a facility for the perpetrators, the police or any other authorized personnel can take these street dwellers to get the help they may need. I believe this project should not only be focused in Arima but throughout Trinidad and Tobago, because there have been many incidents in Port of Spain, Sangre Grande and other places. Once the support is given, by the national community, corporate citizens, non-governmental organizations and others, I believe we can all make a very positive impact on our beautiful twin island, where we can elevate the levels of our safety and security. We as a people, have the ability and responsibility to ensure that we take care of all our citizens, including the mentally ill, homeless, and addicts. It is with this spirit that I believe that we can make this nation stronger, while taking care of our vulnerable populations.

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