



CIPRIANI COLLEGE
OF LABOUR AND CO-OPERATIVE STUDIES

WORK MATTERS

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COLUMN

A Symposium to emulate and enter into the national discourse: The Model of Care for residential homes

The Model of Care is essential for increasing the standard of care that we provide to one of our most vulnerable groups – our children.

The Cipriani College of Labour and Co-operative Studies (the College) is extremely concerned with Social Justice and as an integral part of this focus, we have partnered with St. Mary's Children's Home (the Home) in Tacarigua as they are the premier institution in Trinidad and Tobago that is dedicated to the care of our orphaned children.

As a major part of our engagement as partners, we (the Home and The College) have embarked on developing a Model of Care that is focused on all aspects of care for orphans and marks a novel approach to improving the standard of care for the children. The College and the Home hosted a Symposium on 11th March 2024 at the College, which can only be regarded as a resounding success as it engaged a range of professionals in the residential care industry who were able to share their experiences and expertise with the participants. Central to the informed and lively discussions was the Model of Care.

This model is unique and interrogates all aspects of care and proposes and recommends strategies and policies to enhance the present level of care and ensure the continued upgrading of all policies and strategies in relation to childcare in our residential homes in Trinidad and Tobago, and as the results unfold, it can be easily transferred to other homes locally and regionally. This is possible as it incorporates best practice from all over the world, while being tailored to our unique and challenging cultural realities.

Integral to the model are considerations of processes that include resident intake, orientation, institutional handover, training, evaluation, crisis management, childcare, among others. The Home had developed this Model following the legal requirements of the Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago (CATT),

as well as giving due consideration to the international conventions to which this country has acceded.

As concerned citizens and caregivers, it is imperative that we consider the consequences of our inaction and/or apathy as it relates to the care of our children. To be sure, while there is much conversation about the standards of care of our children, we need to be cognizant of our collective responsibility to ensure that they are recipients of the highest standard of care and consideration, individually and collectively.

This bold initiative, spearheaded by the management of the St. Mary's Children's Home (Gwenyth Bleasdel as Manager and Dominic Martin as Deputy Manager, as well as Father Maxwell and his Board) should not be taken lightly, or be relegated to simple conversation. The initiative, while novel, is characteristic of the philosophy, policies, practices, and approaches, which set St. Mary's Children's Home apart from the other residential homes in our nation.

While the Home does not profess perfection in all that it does, it can be commended in its attempt to evaluate its practices, develop new programmes and policies, and re-engineer its operations to ensure that the residents (our most vulnerable) have access to world-class approaches and standards that will surely guarantee increased levels of care, innovative strategies and an overall environment that is dedicated to higher standards, and an holistic experience for its residents.

This is a cry for introspection, knowledge-seeking, adaptation, recognition, innovation, and forthrightness, as it relates to residential care in our system here in Trinidad and Tobago. I am suggesting that it is not sufficient to pontificate about the 'what we have' or 'we are doing our best', but it is a call to go beyond what 'has been' and 'what we have been doing' to a place where we are satisfied that our efforts, struggles and labors are duly considered and deemed acceptable while moving us in then right direction as it relates

to the care and security of our children in residential care.

In the final analysis, we will be judged by how we treat our most vulnerable, and I pose the questions.... are we satisfied with what we have produced in residential care thus far? Are we comfortable with the standard of care as it exists for our children in residential care in Trinidad and Tobago? Are we willing to acknowledge and support the pioneer work being undertaken at St. Mary's Childers's Home? Regardless of our individual to communal evaluations and responses, I am pleased to support the work that is being done, and I am confident that it will bear fruit in the short, medium, and long terms, regardless of the neigh-sayers and others who are neither qualified or equipped to make objective evaluations, or far less able to add any constructive contribution to this discourse.

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