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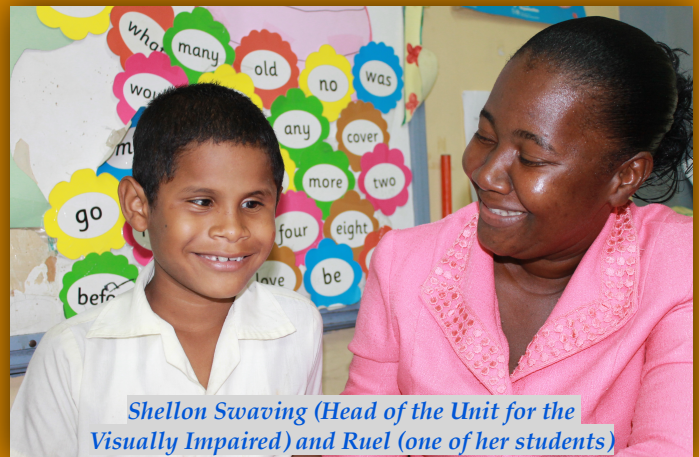
Making a difference for Linden’s Children who are Visually Impaired.

On a rainy December morning we made our way to Linden – located sixty-five miles to the south of Capital of Georgetown, Guyana. It was here that we found Shellon Swaving who heads the Unit for the Visually Impaired at the Wismar Hill Primary School.

Surrounded by students, she was all too eager to share with us her passion for teaching and in particular her love for students who are blind and visually impaired.

From an early age Shellon had two goals in life, that of being a teacher and the other of assisting the visually impaired in any way possible.

Growing up with a sister who is blind only served to fuel her passion and years later in 2009 her dream became a reality when she took over the reigns of the Unit for the Visually Impaired at the School.



Shellon Swaving (Head of the Unit for the Visually Impaired) and Ruel (one of her students)

“I have a sister who is blind, so I have the experience and I’ve always had the interest in working with children to help them. Because when she became blind, it was a while back and that was the end of her school life. You know in those days in Guyana there was no hope. Of course I was not a Teacher at that time, but now that I’m into teaching it has been a privilege getting into the Special Education field”.

With the assistance of other Teachers, Shellon oversees twenty-four students who are visually impaired, and while there have been challenges over the years, she believes in possibilities and never takes no for an answer .

“One child is blind and deaf, that’s one of the greatest challenges for us. It is so hard because she cannot say what she wants and sometimes her parents do not see education as the best thing for her. We try to tell them otherwise, but that does not work; I believe they are in need of counseling and to make the situation worse, there is no Social Worker to help us”.

Most of children in the Unit are from Linden, but some also come from farther afield, one such place is the Village of Coomacka Mines.

Twelve-year-old Sydney is from Coomacka Mines; he had already completed his Primary School Education, but was far from ready for Secondary School.



Sydney

Sydney went through his Primary years (at another School) not being able to recognize letters; he never saw what an ant looked like and all those things. We went up into Coomacka and found hi; he should have been going to Secondary School and I asked the Ministry (of Education) if he could spend at least two years with us and we would give him a foundation. Right now he’s writing, he is identifying letters and numbers.

Because he has such a desire and a passion for school, sometimes he insists on coming on weekends - his mother has to remind him that there’s no school on Saturdays and Sundays!”

There are other remarkable stores emanating from the small classroom at the Wismar Hill Primary School.

There is seven-year-old Sean who has problems with light, attributed to eye surgery at a tender age.

“He has problems when he is outside in the light. He came to us from another School where he was not writing; he was not performing at all. At that School, maybe they did not see anything good coming from him. Now that he is at our School

and with the support of the Unit, today he is at the top of the class. He can read and spell; his parents had given up on him; now they are all proud. His mother marvels at the work he is producing”.

The overall success of the Unit must also be attributed to the work of other Teachers, including Alstrion Reid.

“It’s rewarding You finally feel as though you are earning your salary because there is somebody here who really needs you; who you can make a difference for; so you’re finally earning your pay.”

Her greatest wish echoes the desire of the other Teachers in the Unit – the need for training.

“I did not choose to go in this direction by teaching children with special needs; I think it chose me. There was the need for a Teacher so I ended up here. I have not regretted it and I’m thinking about staying, but I wish I could be trained to deal with children who are blind and visually impaired,” she said.

Music also plays an important role in the lives of the students and this is made possible with the help of their Music Teacher, Amin Britton who understands the challenges they face all too well. This is because he too is visually impaired due to Glaucoma.

“I’ve lived with my disability all my life, so I understand what they face everyday. I look forward to teaching them; music is great therapy. Of course I have to change some of the things because some of them are pretty young; I love them and there is so much hope. They will all make it in this life.”

Another Teacher of whom the School is very proud of is Tishawn Rodney, who was once at student at the Unit. His specialty is in the area of Information Technology.

“I enjoy it a lot, I love teaching them the Computer Screen Reader Programme, JAWS (Job Access with Speech). I feel proud not just good to be working at the School that once helped me in my development. I want to continue working with people with disabilities.”



Teachers in the Unit for the Visually Impaired (l-r) :Lavern Mingo, Alstrion Greaves, Tishawn Rodney, Amin Britton, Shellon Swaving



The Teachers in the Unit for the Visually Impaired at the Wismar Hill Primary School are determined to make life better for those under their care. Everyday they enhance the educational experiences of these children by instilling self-confidence and encouragement to advance the learning process

While challenges abound, such as the lack of equipment, the need for proper lighting and training for the staff, Shellon and members of her team continue to count their blessings.

"We don't get special salaries for this, but the satisfaction is great; they are all independent. What more could we ask for? Oh at the end of the day it feels so very, very good, knowing that we can make a difference in their lives and this is what makes it worth it all," Shellon said with pride.

PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS 2012

During the year under review, CCB/Eye Care Caribbean, with the support of its Members and Partners, continued to execute its mandate, and several activities were implemented. The following are some of the highlights

CCB Project Management Committee

The Project Management Committee, tasked with overseeing the implementation of the EC Project, "Delivering Vision 2020 in the Caribbean" held its face-to-face meeting during January 23rd and 24th, 2012 at the City View Hotel, in Antigua and Barbuda.

The meeting was attended by Representatives from the Project countries: Guyana, Jamaica, St. Lucia and the CCB Secretariat (Antigua). The EU Programme Officer, Pauline Lucas-Cummings, with responsibility for the Project, and based at the EU Office in Guyana, participated as an Observer.

The Representative from Haiti was unable to attend due to problems encountered with travel.

During the course of the year, the PMC held three other meetings using the Ventrilo VoIP Platform, which allowed Representatives of Project Countries to participate from their respective offices.

The Meetings undertook critical reviews of the project activities, achievements, and challenges; and sought clarification on several issues. The Committee also confirmed planned activities and related budgets for 2012.

(For the details of our Programme Highlights visit:

From the Desk of the CEO - Arvel Grant

Continuing the push towards a Caribbean fully compliant with the objectives of Vision 2020 (The Right to Sight)



Refurbishing of vision centres in Antigua & Barbuda more than 80% complete.

As a lead up to the launch of vision centres in Grays Farm, Johnson's Point and Clare Hall, **CCB/Eye Care Caribbean** is collaborating with the Government of Antigua & Barbuda, to implement simultaneous one month Eye Clinics for clients and employees of: The Clarevue Psychiatric Hospital and the Fiennes Residence for the Elderly.

More than 500 persons will be examined through the month of February.

Those clients and employees who need prescription glasses will be provided with their spectacles by **CCB**, without cost. All of the equipment and supplies required to implement the vision centres are being allowed duty free by the Government.

JAMAICA – Mandeville – Ophthalmology Operating Theatre to be Commissioned by April

Excluding some mechanical and electrical installations, the suit of Operating Theatres is ready to receive the specialized equipment which will convert a mere building into a place where thousands of Jamaicans will have their sight restored. The 100% clean air conditioner has been lifted into place with the aid of a heavy lift crane and most of the equipment required to make the building functional have been purchased and delivered to the site.



New Eye Departments in Guyana, Haiti and Jamaica

Over the past months, **CCB/Eye Care Caribbean's** Regional Maintenance Manager, Henry Latty has been busy visiting the emerging facilities, installing, calibrating and testing the new systems. One senior Nurse from Linden, Guyana and Mandeville, Jamaica are preparing to spend six weeks in the Commonwealth of Dominica, refining their theatre skills under the expert supervision of Consultant Ophthalmologist, Dr. Hazel Shillingford-Ricketts. The Nurses will return to their respective eye departments by the end of March, to start supervising the configuration and sterilization of their surgical space, in preparation for the start of surgical activities required by the English speaking Caribbean.



Dr. Hazel Shillingford Ricketts - Consultant Ophthalmologist

(For the details of From the Desk of the CEO visit:.....)

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The Government of Guyana



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Our Mission.....

Our Purpose.....

Our Goal.....

Our purpose is preventing blindness and visual impairment while restoring sight and creating opportunities for persons whose sight cannot be restored.

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