



Break The Silence....Let's End Child Abuse!

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The Office of The Children's Advocate (OCA) partnered with its key stakeholders to strengthen its advocacy against child abuse, in response to alarming media reports regarding the atrocities of sexual abuse against children.

In collaboration with the Child Development Agency (CDA), Office of the Children's Registry (OCR) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the OCA called on more Jamaicans to break the silence on this intolerable violation of children's rights. Sexual abuse is one of the most heinous forms of violence against children, which no child should ever have to endure.

The agencies extended high commendation to Dr. Sandra Knight, a Paediatrician at the Bustamante Hospital for Children, who spoke about the issue in the April 1 edition of the *Sunday Observer*. The alarming news that greeted the public in the news article has been a major concern for the OCA and other child focused agencies for many years.

The statistics point clearly to the scope of the problem. The OCR, which is mandated to receive reports of abuse, received 7,245 reports of alleged sexual abuse for the period 2007-2011 (6,789 -



of them females).

The OCA, along with its partners, has been working over the years to address the issue of all forms of abuse against children through programmes, and policies that seek to prevent abuse and to provide treatment and care for young victims. The OCA also ensures, through its routine public education programme that persons are educated about the provisions as prescribed under the Child Care and Protection Act (2004).

Anyone who knows or suspects that a child is being or is likely to be abused has a legal obligation to make a report to the OCR by calling 1-888-776-8328 (PROTECT). Professionals who work with children ('prescribed persons') have a mandatory duty to report abuse.



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Ongoing sensitization of 'Prescribed Persons'

As part of the OCA's continued efforts to increase awareness about the Child Care and Protection Act (CCPA), the OCA partnered with several of its key stakeholders to sensitize 'prescribed persons' about their obligations under the CCPA. Section 6 of the CCPA defines a 'prescribed person' as:

- A physician, nurse, dentist or other health or mental health professional;
- An administrator of a hospital facility;
- A school principal, teacher or other teaching professional;
- A social worker or other social service professional;
- A owner, operator or employee of a child day care centre or other child care institution; a guidance counsellor; or
- Any other person who by virtue of his employment or occupation has the responsibility to discharge care towards a child.

During the month of May, the OCA partnered with the Ministry of Justice on a two day workshop at the Altamont Court Hotel. The workshop targeted professionals working in the health and education sectors. Over the course of the workshop, participants were engaged in discussions surrounding the CCPA, their legal responsibility, as well as the reporting mechanisms in place in the event a report needs to be submitted.

The OCA also conducted two (2) sensitization sessions during May and June with 'prescribed persons' working in juvenile remand centres. A combined total of approximately 70 correctional officers were targeted at the Metcalf Street Juvenile Remand Centre in Kingston, and Horizon Remand Centre in St. Andrew. Additionally seven (7) girls at the Horizon Remand Centre, and 150 boys at Metcalf Street were also sensitized about the CCPA. The Child Development Agency (CDA), Centre for the Investigation of Sexual Offences and Child Abuse (CISOCA), and Office of The Children's Registry (OCR), collaborated on this initiative.

Protect Me...Don't Hurt Me!

To further strengthen the OCA's public education awareness programme about child abuse, and its ill-effects on our children, a tri-media was recently erected in the bustling Half Way Tree area of St. Andrew. The board which is located at the entrance of the Pavillion Mall on Constant Spring Road, was unveiled in June.



Similarly, another board is currently under development and will be unveiled shortly in the Mandeville, Manchester. The tri-media in Half Way Tree was designed by National Outdoor Advertising (NOA), while the billboard scheduled for Mandeville is being developed by Global Media.



The OCA also launched its television Public Service Announcement (PSA): *Break The Silence*. The PSA was developed by the Jamaica Information Service (JIS), and was aired on local television throughout the months of May to June through the kind support of Television Jamaica (TVJ). TVJ has indicated, that were possible, the PSA's broadcast will be extended.

May 18 – National Children’s Day!

Children of Jamaica for the first time in the nation’s history, celebrated a day dedicated to them on May 18, 2012. National Children’s Day was borne out of the advocacy of the National Child Month Committee, a stakeholder group the OCA has had active membership over the years.

On May 6, Governor General Sir Patrick Allen proclaimed the third Friday of May each year as National Children’s Day.



-photo courtesy of: Jamaica Observer
Children perform at Child Month 2012 church service in Annotto Bay, St, Mary

This year’s theme for National Child Month was: *‘Jamaica 50: Let’s celebrate our children’*. Parents, guardians and the entire population were encouraged to treat all children similarly to how mothers and fathers are catered to on their special days set aside in May and June respectively.

Persons were also encouraged to wear yellow to celebrate National Children’s Day.

OCA calls for thorough investigation to identify origin of unidentified fumes

The Office of The Children’s Advocate (OCA) took note of the reports of unidentified fumes detected in the corporate area in June.

The OCA acknowledged the response by the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management (ODPEM), the National Environment and Planning Agency (NEPA), the Ministry of Health (MOH), and all other coordinating agencies, in working to identify the origin of the fumes.

The OCA was however concerned about the possible health effects the unidentified substance could have on children, particularly those in the Portmore, St. Catherine and those in custody at the Fort Augusta Adult Correctional Centre, as the authorities had reportedly detected a high concentration of the substance in the area.

While the OCA commended the efforts the authorities had expended during the initial stages of the occurrence, the Office nonetheless called for a thorough investigation to identify the origin of the unidentified fumes, as well as a resolution to the situation in the shortest possible time in keeping with the best interests of all.