



Diahann Gordon Harrison appointed new Children's Advocate

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Overseeing the welfare of Jamaica's children is no cushy job, and new Children's Advocate Diahann Gordon Harrison is acutely aware of the challenge.

"It's very daunting in that there's always something happening. But it's also very rewarding to know that I can find areas in which I can make real impact. I think this platform is really one you can do a lot with, and so there is satisfaction even though it has only been a few weeks," she said. She officially started on January 9, 2012.

But what exactly does the children's advocate do? Mrs. Gordon Harrison explained the post is an appointment under the Child Care Act. The Office of the Children's Advocate (OCA) was established in 2006 and is the 'regulating authority' for all relevant authorities, even government institutions, as long as they deal with children (persons 18 years and under).

MANDATE

"Our broad mandate is really to focus on the best interests and advancing the rights of children. So if we see the possibility that rights could be infringed, it is our responsibility to advocate and to have those rights protected. If we see where they have been infringed already, we have to make very active representation to the relevant parties to make sure the infringement ceases and sometimes to



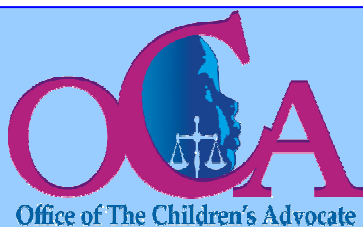
-Contributed Photo

have corrective actions taken where appropriate," she said.

The OCA is a commission of Parliament and is not tied to any specific Ministry. On the contrary, the Advocate's work involves various ministries from Labour and Social Security (child labour) to National Security (human trafficking) and, of course, the education and youth ministries. Mrs. Gordon-Harrison believes having a strong team is a must and used the first two weeks to learn the operations, meet the various units, and implement systems in terms of managerial best practices to get to the next level.

She said the next phase will include targeting troubled areas and seeing first-hand what it is out there, and what kind of systems the OCA can implement to effect change appropriately.

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New OCA Website coming soon

The OCA will soon boast its new website: www.oca.gov.jm.

The development of the website, which is being designed by the Jamaica Information Service (JIS), is being monitored by the Public Education and Special Projects Department. The project started in mid-February and will cover: the design of the website; registration of the domain name; the creation and implementation of a new email service for all OCA staff; hosting; and maintenance.



The development of email addresses component of the project has been implemented with the roll-out on March 15, 2012. All OCA staff now have their company emails and are connected to the server which is hosted by the JIS.

The JIS has been extremely helpful in assisting person familiarize themselves with the system, and have provided a few steps to assist staff in logging on to the webmail service.

1. Open your browser and navigate the following link: <http://oca.gov.jm/mail>
2. You will be prompted to type in your username and password. Type in your full email address, e.g. nstaff@oca.gov.jm
3. Type in your password. e.g. [newaccount123](#)
4. You will be asked to choose from several email programmes. **Roundcube** is the recommended option.

New Children's Advocate Appointed

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Mrs. Gordon Harrison says she wants the OCA to be a proactive body.

"I don't want to knock being reactive, because I believe it is important to effectively respond to issues that arise. But I think for you to be making a meaningful contribution, you have to combine that reactive with the proactive approach because it's only through proactive approaches, can you get sustained preventative social measures in place to prevent the atrocities," she said.

EARLY DAYS

Diahann Gordon Harrison was born in Kingston, but her early years were in Ocho Rios. She attended Immaculate Conception High School and went on to the University of the West Indies (UWI), majoring in History, however she was always interested in law. Upon completion of her first degree, she did a 'direct entry programme' into law and she went straight to Barbados. Called to the bar in 2000, she rose to the rank of senior Deputy Director of Public Prosecutions. But despite her success in the court room, she sensed it was time for a change.

"Commitment is the underbelly of true success, personal or otherwise, and having started my career at the public bar and serving there for 11 years, and having made my contribution there and experiencing quite a bit from that perspective, I thought, what better way to continue making a contribution to Jamaica, and making an impact on public life, than to speak for the most vulnerable and voiceless," she reasoned. As a prosecutor, many times she was the voice of children, victims of incest or other atrocities. "So now instead of confining myself to advocacy in the courtroom in front of a jury, I've now decided to take it to the national platform," she said.



Mrs. Diahann Gordon Harrison assumed duties as the new Children's Advocate on January 9, 2012

Being a mother, she said, didn't influence her decision but "having the maternal nurturing instinct certainly is an asset in a post of this nature". The post doesn't specify gender, but asked whether she thought a woman was more suited for the job. "Women bring to the table a very keen eye for detail. They are, perhaps, naturally more nurturing than men. But that doesn't mean that a man who is just as competent couldn't step up to the table and do a very effective job!"

A confessed foodie who loves entertaining and, of course, family time, she said she is well aware of the demands of the job. But she is adamant she will find that balance. Her vision for the OCA includes making it technology-savvy, fully interactive, and for it to be seen internationally as a force that carries out the provisions of the Convention of the Rights of the Child. Mrs. Gordon Harrison wants the public to see the OCA as the arbiter/advocator for children's rights.

Her goal is clear!

-Source: *The Gleaner*, February 6, 2012

Justice Fair 2012

"One People, One Spirit, One Justice"

The Legal Aid Council on Saturday, February 11, 2012 hosted its annual Justice Fair, under the theme: *One People, One Spirit, One Justice*. The was one of the many event to commemorate the Ministry of Justice's Restorative Justice Week 2012, and Jamaica's 50th year of independence.



Minister of Justice, The Hon. Mark Golding (L), poses with OCA staff members at Justice Fair 2012 held at the Emancipation Park. (L-R) Shannon Hendricks, Legal/Policy Officer; Nicole Hayles, Public Education & Special Projects Manager.

The OCA participated in the event through the mounting of an information booth. Person were able to access information on the role and functions of the OCA, the Child Care and Protection Act (CCPA), how to make a report or file complaints, the rights and best interest of children, among other issues.

Persons who were not able to attend the event, were also privy to information about the OCA, as the Of-
fice's Legal and Policy Officer, Ms. Shannon Hen-
dricks, participated in an outside broadcast on News
Talk 93FM.

HR Movements

The Human Resources Department reported much activity for the January to March quarter. During the period there were:

- 3 new staff (including the Children's Advocate)
- 1 Promotion
- 2 Separations
- 4 Birthdays
- 4 Training sessions



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