



OCA Receives 44 Complaints Sept. to Nov. 2010

What's inside...

| | |
|---|---|
| OCA Receives 44 Complaints Sept. to Nov. 2010 | 1 |
| Mary Clarke Calls for Expedition of Evidence Amendment Bill | 2 |
| Special Consultation Hosted for Universal Children's Day | 3 |
| OCA participates in SDC 3rd Annual Child/Parent Symposium | 3 |
| Bedridden Kellie Needs Help | 4 |
| Notice Board | 4 |

A total of 44 complaints of abuse were received by the Office of the Children's Advocate (OCA) for the period September to November, 2010.

Speaking at a press briefing in December, at the OCA's Downtown Kingston offices, Investigating Officer at the agency, Mr. Courtney Berry said the reports of abuse vary from sexual and physical to abuse in the correctional system.

"All are under investigation at the moment. We do visits to correctional institutions to investigate all cases of abuse that are reported or wherever they occur in the system," Mr. Berry said.

"We also have complaints of education neglect, where parents refuse to send their children to school. There are also cases of child neglect, where parents would leave their children alone at home for extended periods," he added.

Mr. Berry said the OCA is currently investigating the case of a missing child in Tivoli Gardens, who has not been seen since the unrest in the community, in May.

"All the information has been collected; the report has been done and given to our senior legal officer, who is now doing a report to send to the Commissioner of Police and also to the Coroner for an inquest,"

Mr. Berry said.

Meanwhile, in her remarks, Legal Officer at the OCA, Miss Nicole Wright informed that for the period September to November, the OCA has successfully applied for bail for two children at the Southern Circuit of the Children's Court, after thorough investigations.

"One child was actually re-united with family members. We also successfully made pleas in mitigation during the sentencing of one child before the court and the child was given a non-custodial sentence as a result of our advocacy," Miss Wright said.

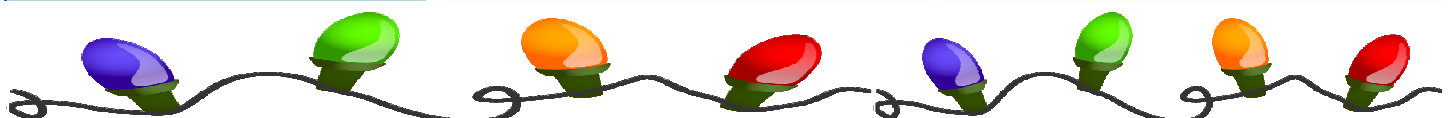
She added that the OCA has been called on to assist in securing representation for children in approximately six matters currently before the Spanish Town Children's Court.

"In approximately two matters, we watched proceedings on behalf of children in abuse cases and then gave them advice and assisted them in getting maintenance from the fathers who happen to be the perpetrators," Miss Wright said.

The OCA, a Commission of Parliament, was created under the Child Care and Protection Act of 2004. Its mandate is to ensure that the rights of children are protected, and enforced, and that their best interests upheld at all times.

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Mary Clarke calls for expedition of Evidence Amendment Bill

Children's Advocate Mary Clarke has repeated calls for the finalization of the Evidence Amendment Bill to allow for video-recorded statements from child victims of sexual abuse to be used as major evidence in the courts.

Clarke, whose comments were made in Kingston on Tuesday at the launch of a four-day, multi-agency child-protection workshop, said the Office of the Children's Advocate was concerned over the delay in amending the law, despite requests made as far back as 2008.

"Why is it taking so long, if we say children are our priority? We must put in place all the mechanisms necessary to ensure they are a priority," said Clarke.

The Children's Advocate told **The Gleaner** that the delay in implementing a system of recorded video statements was clearly evident in the low conviction rates for perpetrators of sexual violence against children.

"It's so much on a child. Can you imagine a young child who was raped repeating the story over and over to different institutions, going before court and the trial process?" asked Clarke, noting that children should not be allowed to relive tragedy.

She said recent data indicate there had been a downward trend in violent crimes from 2008-2009, as well as a decrease in violent crimes against children, except for rape and carnal abuse.

Information obtained from the 2009 Economic and Social Survey of Jamaica revealed that, out of 1,175 reported cases of rape and carnal abuse, only 585 were cleared up. Cleared-up designation does not mean the perpetrators were convicted.

Clarke, while commending the Ministry of Justice's efforts in drafting legislation to protect children from crimes such as sexual offences, trafficking in persons, and child pornography, said the Evidence Amendment Bill was needed to complete the picture.

"When we want a law to be passed quickly, we get it passed quickly. I am appealing to the authorities in the interest of the children of Jamaica to see if they can push this one through also," said Clarke.

-source **The Gleaner**

Special Consultation Hosted in Observance of Universal Children's Day

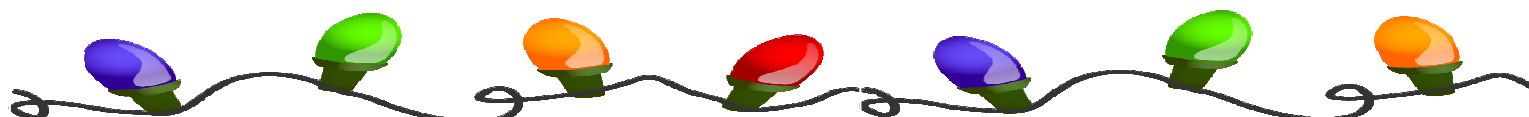
The Office of the Children's Advocate (OCA) hosted a special consultation with children at the St. Andrew Juvenile Remand Centre in Stony Hill, in observance of Universal Children's Day which is celebrated on November 20 annually.

The consultation featured presentations on the rights and responsibilities of children, the role and functions of the OCA and how they may contact the office to make reports. This was followed by group discussions and the children were given an opportunity to write directly to the Children's Advocate.

Approximately 48 boys are housed at the Remand Centre for various offences. These include stabbing, wounding and the possession of illegal weapons.

The information gathered was used to enhance research being undertaken by the OCA which is aimed at developing a profile of Children in Conflict with the Law. This research which commenced in March is currently in its final phase and upon completion will include recommendations of appropriate prevention and intervention strategies to be undertaken to better assist these wards.

Universal Children's Day is celebrated annually on November 20 and is a day of worldwide fraternity and understanding between children. It was set up by the United Nations who recommends that the day is devoted to promoting the welfare of children worldwide.



OCA Featured in SDC 3rd Annual Child/Parent Symposium

The Office of the Children's Advocate was among a group of agencies that participated in the 3rd Annual Child/Parent Symposium 2010 hosted by the Social Development Commission (SDC), in collaboration with the Duhaney Park Primary School in Kingston. hosted , where were discussed, Wednesday November 24.

The one-day workshop, which focused on critical issues relating to the protection of children and proper parenting skills was held under the theme - 'Protecting Our Children, Our Responsibility' - in observation of Parenting Month and Community Month, commemorated November, each year. The event was open to parents, teachers, students and residents from four main communities,

Speaking at the workshop, Research Officer at the Office of the Children's Advocate, Dwayne Cargill, reminded the gathering that children are to be protected from all types of violence, neglect, exploitation and abuse including physical, emotional and sexual abuse.

He also advised the children on how to protect themselves at home, at play and at school.

Representative of the Bureau of Women's Affairs, Tara Sue Morgan, further informed the students of their rights and responsibilities as children.

Boys and girls were equal and had the same rights, Miss Morgan said, as she advised the children, who were mainly from basic schools in the area, on the appropriate ways in which adults, and even their own parents, should touch them the difference between "good touch and bad touch".

"Do you know that not even mommy or daddy is supposed to touch you, and make you feel uncomfortable?" she pointed out. She advised the students to "always tell" and to "speak up" whenever they are touched inappropriately by an adult.

"Tell an adult, tell mommy, daddy, your teacher or even the police, if someone hurts you and makes you feel uncomfortable," she said.

Miss Morgan also told the parents that it was their responsibility, as adults, to protect their children. She reminded parents and teachers of the days when it was the entire community that had the responsibility of child rearing.

"We need to go back to those days, because we all have a responsibility, we all have a part to play. Our children are being violated in many ways," she cautioned.

Students of the Resurrection Basic School perform a poem entitled 'I Have a Right', during the Child/Parent Symposium 2010 at the Duhaney Park Primary school, Kingston on Wednesday November 24.





Investigation officer at the OCA, Gloria Thompson hands out treats to the children at Walker's Place of Safety during the OCA's Annual Christmas Treat.

-picture taken from the Jamaica Observer

Bedridden Kellie Needs Help

Investigating Officer at the Office of the Children's Advocate (OCA), Gloria Thompson, has appealed for assistance for Kellie*, a bedridden resident of the Walker's Place of Safety in Kingston.

Now 25 years old, Kellie has been unable to leave her bed for a number of years, as she is disabled and in need of a wheelchair. Ms. Thompson explained that the chair has to be custom built, due to Kellie's size.

"The staff has to get help to move her around and to bathe and to change her and without the wheelchair, she has been unable to move because she has gotten very big in size it has been difficult," she said.

Ms. Thompson made the plea during a Christmas treat put on by OCA staff members for residents of the home. She told JIS News that Kellie is also in need of accommodation.

"They have been trying to find somewhere that they could take her, because she is no longer within the age (that the home caters to), but they have been unable to find adequate housing for her," Ms. Walker noted.

"She wants to move, she needs some help, (but) she doesn't have any family member or friends who can take care of her," Ms. Walker added.

Each year, as a means lifting the spirits of children in homes at Christmas, OCA puts on Christmas treats at the various facilities. The Walker's Place of Safety was founded in 1972 for orphans, abandoned and mentally challenged children.

The home receives a subvention of \$5,000 from the Government per week for each child, and some help from private sector entities. There are 38 children are housed at the home.

*Name changed to protect her identity.
-source JIS

Notice Board

- ✓ **OCA 5th Anniversary Week**
February 13-18, 2011
- ✓ **Launch of OCA's '09-'10 Annual Report**
February 2011
- ✓ **Launch of Profile of Children in Conflict with the Law Study** March 2011

Best Wishes for the Yuletide Season

