



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

Senator the Honourable Donna Cox
Minister of Social Development and Family Services

LAUNCH OF

GRANDPARENTS' PROGRAMME

Friday, August 13, 2021

10:00 a.m.

Salutations

- Permanent Secretary, MSDFS, Ms Jacqueline Johnson;
- Chief Technical Officer, Mr. Michael Reid;
- Director, Division of Ageing, Dr. Hyacinth Blake;
- Deputy Director of the National Family Services Division, Ms. Kathleen Sarkar;
- Other Heads of Divisions and Staff at the MSDFS;
- Members of the Media;
- Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning.

I am pleased that you have joined us at the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services for yet another milestone event.

Today we advance in our journey towards making this Ministry the most inclusive, impactful and relevant to anyone in the national community who is in need of our assistance. Today we officially launch our Grand Parenting Programme.

As I reflected on this programme, I was drawn to an African proverb that says, “When an old person dies, a library dies with them.” Everything we know, everything we have learned from our predecessors, is at risk if we do not properly gather and transfer it to the next generation.

In the workplace, when a long serving employee retires or relocates, the team loses institutional memory – the accumulated set of facts, traditions, values, systems, and processes that make up an organization. So, too, is the case with the knowledge and memory within families.

The truth is that new technologies and forms of communication have eroded the respect once commanded by elders. In the past, surviving into old age was uncommon, and those who survived served a special purpose as guardians of tradition, knowledge, and history.

In the current age of the iPhone and Internet, our elders no longer have an exclusive hold on certain kinds of knowledge. We now tend to think that whatever we need to know can be found online. We have so much information at our fingertips, but it's not all meaningful or relevant to us.

We at the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, and in particular, the Division of Ageing and National Family Services, recognizing the tremendous importance of grandparents, and the fundamental role they still play in the development of the family unit, have designed this grandparenting programme to support grandparents in these critical times, and to ensure that the library of wisdom they possess is not lost to future generations.

As I highlighted in my 2020-2021 Budget Presentation, the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services recognises the need for greater support for grandparents, who often perform many roles in support of their grandchildren. This may range from occasional to regular or full-time grandchild care.

One of the impacts of the introduction of Public Health Regulations and “stay at home” measures due to COVID-19 pandemic, was the closure of all day-care centres and a shift to online learning.

The Government is mindful that this resulted in an increased burden on parents to find safe options for both childcare and supervision. Many grandparents have willingly shouldered this responsibility, taking on the task of supervising remote learning, providing care and protection, including emotional support for children. These are not easy tasks for persons who have already completed the care and protection of their own children and now classified as the elderly. Many of them may have been plunged back into childcare due to the death of their own children and now see this as an obligation to all, based on love for their children and grandchildren.

In its 2010 report, the Social Planning and Research Council pointed out that grandparents who play a leading role in the upbringing of their grandchildren are more likely to experience financial hardship as a direct result of their active role.

Furthermore, grandparents faced other challenges, including but not limited to physical and mental health problems, social isolation, housing issues, education concerns, and difficulty in navigating modern technology.

It is in that gap, that we at the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services now stand.

As the Ministry adopts a more responsive and multifaceted approach to social services delivery, in the same way that widows and widowers have now been officially classified as a vulnerable sector within the population, so too is the Ministry intent on giving priority to helping, empowering and transforming the lives of grandparents who are taking care of their grandchildren.

The provision of childcare by grandparents has yielded many benefits, including the love and stability of family life, allowing parents to return to work after childbirth and child supervision, all in support of building stronger families.

It is evident that a client-focused approach is needed in order to effectively support grandparents who are raising grandchildren. Simultaneously, there is need for grandparents to understand the changes in societal norms and laws.

The Children's Act, for example, describes grandparents as 'caregivers' and due care and attention must be given to ensure that grandparents residing in homes are included in efforts to ensure that the care and protection of children meet the established standard in keeping with the law. Hence, it has become imperative that special training be provided to grandparents who are raising grandchildren.

While grandparents have always been included and encouraged to participate in the National Family Services Division's (NFSD) Parenting Workshops, this year for the first time, emphasis will be placed on the role of Grandparents under the Parenting Programme.

It is envisaged, that this Programme will support and equip grandparents with the necessary knowledge and skills, to make responsible decisions regarding the safety and well-being of grandchildren and other children under their care. The first of these training programmes is expected to commence in October and would cover a variety of topics including;

- Self- Awareness/ Self Care (as a grandparent)
- Stages of Child Development (0-18 years)
- Challenges of grandparents
- Gender Awareness and Parenting
- Communications/ Social Media
- Smart Devices and Online School
- Discipline vs Punishment
- Sexuality and Teenage Pregnancy
- Managing Natural Tensions Between Parents and Grandparents
- Understanding and Preventing family disputes/violence
- Practical Tips/Resources (Organisations that provide support, grants etc.)

- Services offered by the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services to grandparents
- Household Budgeting
- Legal Custody/Guardianship arrangements.

As we work towards providing support for this selected group of the citizenry, the Ministry will intensify its advocacy for positive shifts in the values, attitudes and behaviours of not just grandparents but other relatives, friends and communities as well. We will continue to collaborate with Non-Government Organizations, Community-Based Organizations, Faith-Based Organizations and other stakeholders to promote safe platforms for older persons to speak about their experiences and identify areas for needed assistance.

As the Ministry undertakes a more responsive and multifaceted approach to social services delivery, it has been noted that there is need for priority to be placed also, in helping, empowering and transforming the lives of grandparents. In addition to accessing the Senior Citizens Grant, grandparents who are legal guardians of their grandchildren can access other Grants in support of their grandchildren, once they meet the necessary criteria.

The Ministry of Social Development and Family Services remain committed to strengthening the safety net for the most vulnerable as we take our country forward.

It is therefore imperative that support be provided to these unsung heroes who often give without complaining or asking anything in return.

The family is the bedrock of the Community. Grandparents build strong families; strong families build strong communities; strong communities will create a better Trinidad and Tobago.

I wish to commend the National Family Services Division for spearheading this initiative and offer them my continued support. I also wish to acknowledge the work of the Ministry's Policy and Research Units for their contribution towards the crafting and designing of this Grand-parenting Programme, which is definitely poised to add value to the social landscape of Trinidad and Tobago.

Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you for the courtesy of your attention, and may God continue to bless us all.