



January 2021

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**Special thanks to the Editorial Committee:**

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# SSSD INSIDER

## **Term II – Academic Year 2020/2021**

Remarks from the Manager of SSSD - *Professor Dennis Conrad*

Happy New Year SSSD family and friends! I wish you the very best of health, joy, and success in 2021 and beyond!

As we enter this new year and its uncertainties, let us remind ourselves of the importance of motivation, and self-motivation. I acknowledge the well-known theory, as outlined by Abraham Maslow, that satisfying our lower level needs is key to motivation and growth. However, rather than focusing on the Hierarchy of Needs, let us instead consider self-determination, and its characteristics of autonomy, relatedness, and competence.

We need to recognize and build autonomy for ourselves and others, and resist tendencies to undermine self-sufficiency and facilitate dependence. Relatedness in community and belongingness is about respecting our diverse opinions, and creating synergies by aligning value to purpose. We should cultivate a community of openness rather than mistrust. Competencies are enhanced by planning for and setting *SMART* goals that allow for and measure growth.

As I write these words, I am also reminding myself to always reflect and self-evaluate. Far often, we get caught up in ourselves and the tasks, and can forget it is about building and sustaining each other for the betterment of our students, teachers, communities, and country at large.

### **Carnival Tabanca: Tips for Virtual Carnival**

Carnival is a period to socialize, partake in the various events and fetes, enjoy the sea, sand and sun or simply relax with family members. With the cancellation of Carnival 2021, there is the possibility of an increase in stress, depression, and anxiety.

To combat these, here are some tips for partaking in Carnival events virtually:

#### **Tips for Teachers**

- Continue to teach the history of Carnival to ensure the culture remains alive
- Educate the students on traditional mas
- Have a virtual 'Parade of the Bands/Class'
- Engage in mas making competition, and art and craft
- Engage in calypso writing competition and virtual calypso competition

#### **Tips for Parents**

- Screen all virtual content – both audio and visual (monitor the presence of your children)
- Monitor your alcohol consumption – the children are watching
- Maintain respect in your home environment
- Explore ecotourism options - know your country
- Participate in virtual fetes, calypso events, and other virtual carnival activities

With the 'new normal', adapting is KEY! While the face-to-face participation is restricted due to the Covid-19 guidelines, we can engage in and adjust to virtual events. Do not place your children /family at risk. Adhere to all protocols as advised by the Ministry of Health.

Let's be creative and ease the tabanca by conducting all events virtually!

## Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) Approach

The Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) approach describes both a philosophy and a service delivery model of the Student Support Services Division (SSSD). The MDT exists at the level of each district. Each district MDT comprises the lead of each SSSD unit for that district. Generally, the composition of the MDT includes:

- Senior School Social Worker
- Guidance Officer II (Secondary)
- Guidance Officer II (Primary)
- Diagnostic Specialist / Special Education Lead
- Developmental Assessment and Intervention Officer (Psychologist)

SSSD recognizes that while it is made up of four main units – each with professionals with specialized training in a variety of areas – the greatest value of the support offered by the division resides in being child / student focused. In so doing, we have come to understand that the human condition does not exist in neat packages. Instead, each referred student, while presenting with a primary intervention need, most times requires support for underlying factors, which give rise to the presenting concern cited for attention.

The MDT offers the following benefits:

- It serves as a case management model, which allows each referred case to be assessed through the lens of various disciplines.
- It serves as a monitoring and evaluation system for all cases managed by SSSD staff.
- It facilitates a multi-tiered approach to intervention – from teacher-led interventions through the School Based Intervention Teams (SBIT); to school-based interventions led by Guidance Officers/Counsellors, School Social Workers and Special Educators; to district-based interventions led by members of the DAIU.
- It facilitates the management of the Referral Process, ensuring that students have access to the levels of intervention required, including external / specialised support.



## Concession Application Process

Special Concessions are offered to eligible students registered for local examinations, such as Secondary Entrance Assessment (SEA), Primary School Leaving Certificate Examination (PSLCE), and National Certificate Secondary Examination (NCSE).

Students may qualify for special concessions under the following circumstances:

- Students with learning disabilities/neurological /developmental disorders
- Students with medical, physical, and sensory impairments
- Other special circumstances

Guidelines for submitting applications for Special Concession:

1. The application must be submitted on the prescribed form obtained under the **'Resources'** tab on the MOE website.
2. A complete copy of the student's Cumulative Record Card and copy of the student's Birth Certificate must be submitted together with all relevant supporting documents.
3. A cover letter should be included in the application, clearly identifying the full name of the school, name of the student, the number of applications enclosed, and listing of any additional documents.
4. All applications should be forwarded, in a sealed envelope, clearly labelled "Application for Special Concession" and addressed to the "Ministry of Education, Examination Section".

While the deadline for the submission of applications has passed (14th December, 2020), applications resulting from emergency situations may be submitted after the given deadline date but no later than the 31st March, 2021.

Remember to note:

- Applications must be re-submitted for any student repeating the SEA or any other local assessment.
- Applications received after the final deadline will not be considered.
- Students, for whom applications have been submitted, may be visited or contacted by officers of the Student Support Services Division (SSSD), Ministry of Education.

## Psychoeducational Assessment Application Process

Is your child struggling at school? Are you concerned that he or she may have a learning disorder, an attention deficit, behavioural or emotional issues, which may be affecting his or her learning? If the aforementioned questions are areas of concern for you, then your child may need a psychoeducational evaluation.

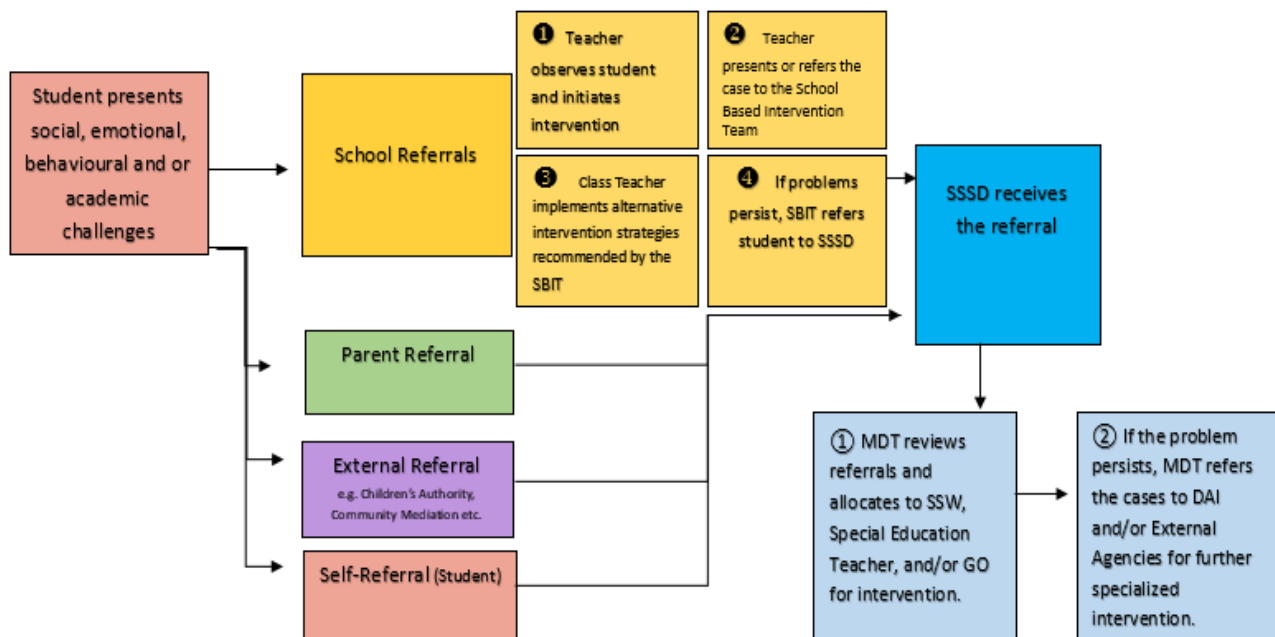
### What is a Psychoeducational Assessment?

A psychoeducational assessment uses a variety of tools to examine the ability and achievement of an individual. It includes some aspects of a psychological assessment, such as an evaluation of social-emotional and behavioural functioning. However, it also places great emphasis on evaluating an individual's intellectual potential and current level of academic achievement. Key aspects of development, such as adaptive functioning and visual-motor integration skills, are also measured. The examination usually takes at least a full day to complete; during this time, the psychologist interviews the parent/legal guardian, administers all the necessary tests, and observes the child's behaviour and attention levels.

The components of a psychoeducational assessment include:

- **Background Information:** Personal information, medical history, and other academic, social, and emotional behavioural information on the child's development are collected during the intake session.
- **Psychometric Testing:** The student is given a series of activities to evaluate his or her cognitive skills, academic achievements, as well as visual-motor, behavioural, and social-emotional functioning.
- **Observations:** Throughout the evaluation, the student is observed to gain a better perspective on the factors influencing the behavioural, and academic performance.
- **Report and Recommendations:** Scored test results, information from questionnaires, and interviews are collated into a comprehensive report for parents, teachers, and other professionals.
- **Feedback Session:** The parents meet with the evaluator to go over the report. At this time, recommendations are discussed, and any questions with regards to the way forward are addressed. Resources and materials are often provided to help parents understand and manage their child's challenges. In some instances, the assessments are used to help students access specialized services, such as, concessions for examinations, special school grants, and alternative placement.

### The Referral Process



## Selected SSSD Projects

### Promoting Mental Health in Education: A Post Covid-19 Initiative

The Promoting Mental Health in Education (PMHE) programme focuses on the parents' perceptions as it relates to the psychological impact of the pandemic on their children. The PMHE is a post Covid-19 initiative, which aims to share information on the mental health and well-being of students who have expressed emotional concerns about the changes to the SEA, CSEC, and CAPE, as well as the shortened school term, as a result of the outbreak. The PMHE programme targets students, parents, and teachers to increase awareness of the importance of mental health and their ability to manage mental health challenges. Upon completion of the project, the PMHE will increase the student population's knowledge of mental health, obtain relevant data on the psychological impact of a pandemic within the education system of Trinidad and Tobago, and increase the intervention programmes within the school environment.

The main objective of the PMHE project is to promote the national importance of mental health and establish culturally relevant intervention programmes for the local student population in response to the effects of the pandemic. The project will be completed within three (3) phases:

- Phase one (1) - Sensitization and data collection
- Phase two (2) - Developing targeted interventions, augmenting divisional support and conducting trainings
- Phase three (3) - Whole school intervention, monitoring and evaluating.

In Phase 1, parents were asked to fill in an online questionnaire. The tentative results are as follows:

- Students who experienced depressive symptoms reported having trouble sleeping or sleeping too much, having difficulty concentrating, fidgeting/inability to sit still and restlessness.
- Students who exhibited anxiety symptoms reported experiencing muscle tension and unusual or excessive fear.
- Students who may have experienced trauma have difficulty remembering important information and express a desire to be with parent/s more than before.
- Students who exhibit sensitivity and maladaptive coping skills are not inclined to obey rules, nor do they show interest in completing tasks.
- Students who show psychological resilience are reported to have improved hygiene and overall self-care, engage in new hobbies or interests, and have an increased positive attitude and demeanour.

Phases 2 and 3 of the project will be completed in Term II of the Academic Year 2020-2021.

### Measures to Improve Your Mental Health



## Parenting in Education

The Student Support Services Division (SSSD) has been given the directive, and the professional obligation to work closely with parents in the education system through its Parenting in Education (PIE) Programme. Parenting in Education fosters opportunities for meaningful dialogue, collaboration, support, and intervention aimed at empowering parents to assist their children in reducing barriers to learning and ensuring their optimal social functioning.

Due to the holistic approach to the development of our nation's children, our parents are integral stakeholders for students' success. This mandate is in complete harmony with the strategic goals and objectives of the Ministry of Education. Parenting in Education is just a part of a suite of services within the core functions of SSSD. A transference of applicable parenting skills is to be utilized within the education system.

The Parenting in Education (PIE) Programme provides continuous support and enhancement of life for parents of children with special needs, and parents of children who have experienced some degree of trauma, grief, and other challenging life circumstances. PIE aims to foster greater parental involvement in school and community, as well as a decrease in student indiscipline in school and within the community.

Some of the topics covered under the Parenting in Education Programme include, but are not limited to:

- Building healthy parent-child relationships
- Children and social media
- The Laws of Trinidad and Tobago that impact children and families
- Emotional intelligence
- Mental health
- Career guidance
- Transitioning
- Parental contributions to academic performance
- School gambling prevention
- How to reduce absenteeism and truancy
- Understanding child development
- Carnival tips for parents
- Parental involvement in education
- Parenting during Covid-19
- Digital well-being
- Parenting in the digital age



## Community Voices

Based on the ecological model embracing all systems holistically, a community approach has been introduced since the pandemic to include all stakeholders within the communities through the Community Voices Programme. This project is facilitated by the SSSD and is aimed at listening to the experiences of the community members and stakeholders in each of the seven (7) educational districts during the Covid-19 lockdown period. Families have been severely affected by the pandemic restrictions; thus, this project creates a platform to discuss the effects on students and families.

As part of the project, stakeholders are encouraged to share their challenges and find solutions within the communities, directly or indirectly. This is geared towards improving stakeholders' relationship, students' life outcomes, parenting and strengthening the community involvement through the collaborative efforts of all community stakeholders.

The data were collected by way of virtual focus groups where participants engaged in discussion around scripted questions. The participants reported that the pandemic has impacted many aspects of community and student life. Themes emerging

- Covid-19 Safety Protocols
- Parents/Family
- Community
- Learning & Education
- Devices & Internet
- Unemployment & Finances
- Coping Skills
- Mental Health

The project seeks to strengthen the collaboration and service delivery to our stakeholders to meet the needs of our children. The feedback derived from the assessment will assist in forming a framework to add to School Social Work Intervention Strategies for the new Academic Year 2020-2021.

## Special Concessions: Things You Need to Know

**Q: What are special concessions or alternative arrangements for examinations?**

Special concessions are the arrangements made to the standard format of an examination paper or to the conditions under which an examination / assessment is done, in order to accommodate the special need(s) of the student.

**Q: Why are special concessions granted?**

Special concessions are designed to provide equity, not advantage, and serve to 'level the playing field' for students with physical, learning and other disabilities, and special challenges. Concessions increase the student's access to instruction and assessment by addressing identified needs, thereby, reducing or eliminating the effects of a student's challenge/disabilities.

**Q: What categories of special concessions are available?**

Concessions offered can be categorized in four ways:

1. **Presentation Accommodations** adjust the presentation of test material and / or test directions, e.g. instructions in sign language, Braille, large print. These may include the use of specific personnel (Interpreter, Reader).
2. **Response Accommodations** adjust the manner in which students respond to or answer test questions, such as oral responses transcribed by a scribe; Braille.
3. **Setting Accommodations** adjust the place where the testing normally occurs; this may include separate room, or preferential seating.
4. **Scheduling Accommodations** adjust the time allowance or scheduling of test. For instance, the provision of extended and/or compensatory time, and scheduled breaks.

**Q: Who may qualify for a special concession?**

Students may qualify for special concessions under the following circumstances:

1. Students with medical, physical and sensory impairments: Applications for students with medical, physical and sensory impairments must be accompanied by bona fide documentation from a recognized medical institution or licensed professional.
2. Students with learning disabilities: Applications for students with learning disabilities must be accompanied by bona fide documentation (valid for a maximum of three years from the date of assessment) from a professional / organization qualified to do psychoeducational assessments. It is important to note that students without documented disabilities who receive classroom support or use instructional tools or accommodations in the classroom are **not** automatically eligible for this special arrangement.
3. Other special circumstances: These may include **EMERGENCY SITUATIONS** which can adversely affect students' performance, on the day of the exam, such as, broken arm, illness, or family trauma.

**Q: How can a parent or teacher apply for a special concession?**

A parent or teacher may apply by completing and submitting the prescribed forms to the school administrators (principals) by the given deadlines. Applications must be submitted with the relevant supporting documents.

**Q: Will every student with a special need automatically be granted a concession?**

No. The provision of special concession / alternative arrangements that are not required by the student to access the test may actually interfere with the student's performance and adversely impact student achievement as measured by the assessment / examination.

## Socialization with Students with Special Educational Needs (SEN)

Socialization of students with special needs within our general education system needs improvement. The challenges faced by the SEN student can be medical, behavioural, developmental, learning, and communicational.

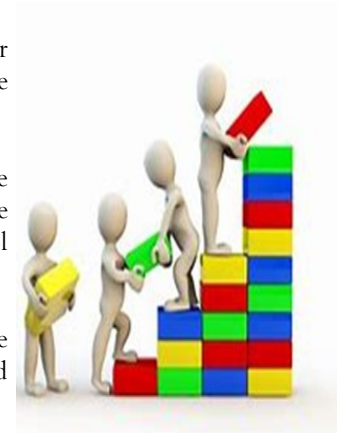
Challenges experienced by students with SEN:

- Isolation (exclusion within the classroom flows over to the playground and activities)
- Bullying by teachers and peers
- Few friendships – mostly with students in lower classes or younger than themselves
- Limited equipment and common space for regular students and SEN students to share
- Little or no sensitization to the SEN category and few guidelines to develop tolerance and acceptance
- Labels which can be framed into name-calling
- Depression due to prolonged misjudgment and isolation
- Tendency to engage in risky behavior/punishable actions for inclusion into subgroups
- Acceptance of physical and mental harm from subgroup for the sake of inclusion and seeming acceptance from/within the group
- Mental health

Amidst the challenges identified, the reality is that all children have the right to an education regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, or other circumstances. While emphasis is usually placed on how to make the students with SEN fit into the school and setting, *not enough attention* is given to help the typical students in the general education classroom understand, support, and celebrate their peers with SEN.

Here are some brief strategies aimed at assisting students in the classroom celebrate diversity:

- **Educate yourself:** As parents and teachers, you are the role models and will set the stage for children to understand how their classmates with special educational needs differ in some ways but are very similar to them in many other ways.
- **Encourage cooperation:** Guide children to embrace differences and not be afraid or make fun of others with special educational needs in the classroom. Diverse learners in the classroom basically want the opportunity to be involved in all aspects of their school experience. Demonstrate to them, ways in which this can be achieved.
- **Focus on strengths:** We all have strengths, and children with special educational needs are no different. Given the chance, they will be determined to share their talents and capabilities with you and their peers.



With these strategies, let's help all students celebrate the differences among them and break the stigmatization.

*We can do this if we work together, and support each other!*

### Inspirational Quote

*"A child with disabilities often spends hours being taught how to interact with others...*

*But why don't we spend time teaching those without disabilities how to interact with them?" - Unknown*



## The Student's Corner: Successfully Managing Blended Learning

Did you want to return to physical school this term? Are you tired of hearing about blended learning? Have you thought about building a time machine to go back to a time before Covid-19? Let it be known that I am rooting for you and that time machine!

Until then, life, like time, must continue even with a pandemic. This means that we will continue to help you learn and develop so that you can cope in the world – especially a world with Covid-19. It's not as hard as you may think. In fact, you're going to see just how possible it is.



### Activity to Cope with Blended Learning

Get a pen/pencil and paper, take a deep breath, and consider these:

#### 1. Why are you in school?

Draw a picture or write the words that come to your mind when you read this question. On your happiest, most motivated day, what helped you make the effort to attend school? Did you write or draw a plan for your future? Did you have a job or career included? Whatever you wrote or drew is your first step to coping with blended learning because this becomes the purpose to drive you to keep trying every day.

#### 2. What works for you?

By now, you are an experienced online learner. You have completed an entire term of online schooling and you deserve praise for that success. It is important to recognize your accomplishments, and being an online student is an important one.

#### 3. What distracts you?

Be honest as you write down your distractions. There may be the obvious ones, like your phone or the television, or there may be other unexpected distractions, like food or pets. Make a note of all your distractions. Then, go through each one and ask yourself how you can minimize that distraction. Answering these honestly would help you develop simple but effective strategies to be a better online student.

#### 4. What do you miss the most?

Many students say they miss their friends. If you feel like this, make an extra effort to have some virtual/safe social time with friends or classmates. Please note that this social time should not be during classes. You can even consider having a virtual study partner/group. The trick is in figuring out what you miss most about physically attending school and finding a safe alternative.

#### 5. What can you do better?

What is the first thing that came to your mind when you read that question? Was it to manage your time better? Do your assignments on time? Attend classes more regularly? Ask questions when you don't understand something? I have found that most students already have a good idea how they can improve. Make a list of all the ways you can be a better online student (you don't have to show this list to anyone, so you can be truthful). Then read through the list you have made and choose one item to try this week.

#### 6. How to deal with those difficult days?

Be kind to and patient with yourself. These are new times with unprecedented challenges, and sometimes we all have difficult days. On those days, remind yourself that you can get through your challenges, after all, you've done it before.

If you completed the activities above, that means that you identified a goal and created a plan to manage online learning and to be a better student. Such a big, complicated thing and you did it so easily.

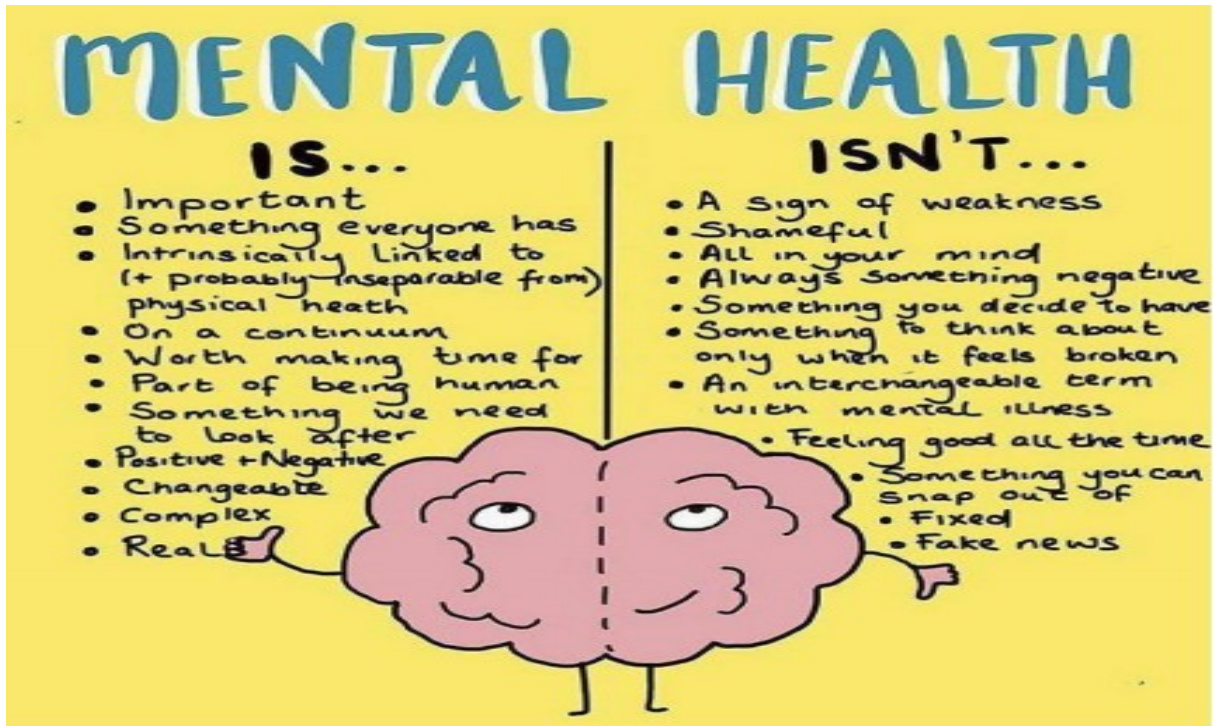
***Good job!***

## The Student's Corner: Activities for the Kiddies

### Activity 1: What is mental health?

Mental health includes the way we think, feel, and behave, as well as how we cope with stress and challenges. Just like we can be physically healthy, we can be mentally healthy.

Mental Health + Physical Health = Happy Human 😊



### Activity 2: Who can I go to for help?

When you feel you are having problems with your mental health, you should go to someone you trust for help. It is important that the person you trust is an adult (for example, your parent, family member, counsellor or teacher) and can provide you with the help you need. **It is okay to talk about our feelings.**

List the persons you go to or can go to if you feel like you are having problems with your mental health.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_



## STEVE MARTIN WILLIAMS – Pioneer of SSSD



*"The pessimist complains about the wind, the optimist expects it to change but the leader adjusts the sails" John Maxwell*

One year after graduating from the University of Yale, in Connecticut U.S.A, with a Masters of Divinity (Counselling), Mr. Steve Williams joined the newly established Guidance Unit at the Ministry of Education in 1980 as a Guidance Officer I. Mr. Williams was placed at Diego Martin Junior Secondary School, where he designed, planned, and implemented programmes for students, and delivered parent education workshops, with the aim of maximizing students potential.

In 1983, he was promoted to the position of Guidance Officer II, where his excitement and enthusiasm were tainted by the demands of managing adults – a role he felt unprepared to perform. However, through ‘trial and error’ and with the help of individuals, such as the late Eric Drue and Dorris Phillip, he survived. In addition to this, Mr. Williams credited his continued success to the annual ‘refresher courses’, which he pursued at the Guidance & Counselling Association, during his vacations abroad in the United States of America (U.S.A).

In 1995 when he was promoted to the position of Guidance Supervisor, it came as no surprise to anyone. In this capacity, he managed the national Guidance & Counselling Programme and saw the need for the amalgamation of Special Education, School Social Work, and Guidance and Counselling units.

In 2004, he envisioned the total expansion of the Unit, and through consultations and support of the then Minister of Education, the Student Support Services Division (SSSD) was established. Mr. Williams became the Manager of SSSD, a position he held until retirement in 2012.

At present, Mr. Steve Williams heads the Foundation for Human Development, a registered charitable organization, where he is dedicated to facilitating healthy human relationships and promoting authentic human development. Coupled with this, he also has a weekly radio programme, titled *On the Inside with Steve Williams*.

We salute Mr. Steve Martin Williams – pioneer, manager, educator, and counsellor – for thirty-two (32) years of outstanding service and commitment to the SSSD. You are an inspiration, and we appreciate you!



### Upcoming Events

- International Day of Education - 25th January
- World Day for Social Justice - 20th February
- Zero Discrimination Day - 1st March
- International Women’s Day - 8th March
- School Social Work Week - 7th to 13th March
- International Social Work Week - 16th March
- Community Voices - 18th March
- World Down Syndrome Day - 21st March
- Deadline for Concessions - 31st March
- World Autism Awareness Day - 2nd April
- Symposium: Valuing Psychoeducational Assessments (TBA)
- Symposium: Exploring the role of School Psychologist in Trinidad (TBA)
- Career Fair - St. George East and Victoria (TBA)

January 2021						
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March 2021						
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