

Take Action:

Supporting the Lady Hochoy School/Home for the Mentally Ill in Trinidad.

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Identify your concern.

Our identified concern was that of the teachers of mentally challenged children in Trinidad are sometimes lacking much needed resources. Many children and parents rely on the teachers at the Lady Hochoy School to educate and care for their children. If these teachers are unable to meet the carrying needs of these children, they won't be as effective as they could be.

We hoped that getting involved in fundraisers to help the home would bring

- Bring awareness to our students that there are mentally challenged persons in society.
- Develop civic minded citizens who believe they have the power to improve a situation.

Research Your Concern

To find out more information on this concern we visited the Lady Hochoy School and Home for the mentally challenged in Cocorite Trinidad.

The Residential Center of the Lady Hochoy Home was established on March 20th 1961. It was established to meet the needs of children who were severely mentally retarded. Previously children with mental disability were housed at the St Ann's Mental Hospital together with

adult patients at the St James Infirmary which was at the time called the House Of Refuge.

The home is guided by the mission statement of the Trinidad and Tobago Association of Retarded Children which states **“To provide and environment for persons with mental retardation to enable them to achieve their full potential for integration into main stream of a well informed society.”**

The first residential centre, the Lady Hochoy Home, was opened, with an intake of the 25 children from the House of Refuge, and two weeks after those from the St Ann’s Hospital.

The Centre was built on land donated by the Government, and funded on the basis of a two-thirds contribution by the government and one-third raised by the Association. Donations are always welcome as there are extras needed for the children.

Upon our arrival we interacted with some of the teachers and students at the school. As we visited the classrooms and spoke with the teachers, they informed us that their classes were comprised of no more than 8 children. These children suffered from different mental conditions including

- **Mild Mental Retardation**

This forms 90% of the mentally retarded. They may need some assistance in complicated tasks but can achieve social, vocational and communication skills similar to their non disabled peers.

- **Moderate Mental Retardation**

This individual may show significant delays during the preschool years. They can be taught basic academic skills and as adults can do well in simple repetitive tasks in a supportive environment.

- **Severe and Profound Mental Retardation**

Identified at birth, these children may need 24 hour, round the clock nursing care but can be taught, depending on the severity of retardation basic self-care skills.

- **Autism**

Autism can often be identified from the first years of life. This is extreme isolation and an obsessive insistence on preservation of sameness. Also characteristic of autism is gaze aversion and speech abnormalities (echolalia). These individuals do not achieve good social adjustments.

It was also brought to our attention that teachers were in need of supplies to assist them with hands on activities for these children.

Although the school receives a 2/3 subvention from the government and 1/3 by the TTARC donations are always welcomed. We decided to assist by donating school supplies (puzzles, colouring books, stationary and physical education equipment such as balls and exercise mats.)

Who Supports You?

To find out who else might be interested in this take action project of helping the students and teachers of the Lady Hochoy School and Home we

- Informed parents of our concern.

- Informed school administrators of our respective schools.
- Contacted sporting goods stores informing them of our expectations and the assistance needed.

The response was a positive one and all persons contacted were eager to find out more about this project and the role they could play in assisting us.

Create A Plan

Our first step was to calculate the amount of time we had to raise funds. This was approximately 6 weeks.

We then revisited the list of needed supplies given to us by the teachers at the school. This list was then put in order of priority (most needed first) and attached estimated costs to these items.

A brainstorming of fundraising ideas suitable for our students and the amount of money needed to be raised was our next step. Each class was to raise an estimated \$500.00 and this would be done through the selling of chow (pickled fruit), preserved fruit including mangoes, cherries, paw paw (papaya), doughnuts and cakes. Donations from parents and school administration were also welcomed.

Over the next five weeks we raised approximately S1500.00 in cash and \$1000.00 worth of items were donated.

One week before our planned trip to the School/Home we shopped for items, while constantly consulting with the School/Home to ensure we were staying the course.



These are just some of items be presented to the School/Home

Take Action

Presentation Day



Students from all 3 schools St Joseph Girls' RC, St Joseph Boys' RC and Arouca Government Primary School arriving at the Lady Hochoy Home/ School.

The Presentation.



Children getting ready for the presentation.



Senior teacher for the school receiving items during the presentation.

More Presentation Pictures



Interacting with the children of the school.



Making a presentation to the Principal



Interacting with adults at the Home



Evaluate the Plan

On the whole we believe the plan was a good one because

- We raised awareness for children who are mentally challenged.
- Our students participated in an activity to help other children who although are a little different are children just like them.

- We were supported by parents, students, school administration, businesses and persons in the community.
- The plan was a feasible one which the children related to and had a working understanding of.
- It showed Social Studies in action.
- It served as a developmental tool for our students becoming more civic minded citizens.
- It was enjoyable for all participants.

Apply your Learning.

We have learnt some new things while doing this project.

- Children are not as fragile as we think. It was thought that our students may not respond well to the children and adults at the school and home. Contrary to this they adapted well and we learnt that despite the differences between the two groups they were all children.
- The Take Action was not as difficult as we thought. With proper planning we were able to execute it on time and with a limited budget. This can be done with each new class we have. The projects can be as simple as organizing a class library. It helps build character and citizenship of our students. It also brings the Social Studies alive for our students.
- The children of the three schools worked together despite their age and gender differences. Co operation can help make a difference in the lives of others.

- The children learnt more about themselves. They became more aware of the needs of others. They learnt proper social skills and a sense of moral responsibility.



Education is not the filling of a bucket, but the lighting of a fire."
– W B Yeats

