

Take Action: Civic Organization and the Red Cross

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INTRODUCTION

Civic organization is a group formed by people from within a community to serve or attend to a matter of community interest. It is called civic as it stems from the needs of the people who share or enjoy a common need or resource. From a historical society to a parent support group to a sewing club and even a book club, civic organizations play a very important role in keeping communities together.

Civic groups have been in existence in what would seem to be the beginning of time, and as it has been known to take many shapes, structures and forms, it will probably in my opinion be around till the ‘end of time.’

IDENTIFYING THE CONCERN

Schools in Trinidad and Tobago participate in co-curricular activities as sanctioned by the Ministry of Education. A co-curricular activity should be a time-tabled activity during the normal school hours that meant that all school meetings should normally be held during the school hours, which is 8:30 am to 3:00 pm. Meetings must not be conducted during the lunch time or after school hours. In Primary schools, the Red Cross functions under the Youth Arm group or “Link” that are formed within the school as a co-curricular body. Children who are attending that school between the ages of 5 and 11 can be enrolled. A link in one school is affiliated with a link in another school. Links together make up a chain. Within the school, a link is led by a teacher known to the Red Cross as a patron. A volunteer or patron forms the connection between the

school and the Red Cross Society. Meetings, enrollment functions and everything that transpires between the TTRCS and the school is done via this person. As we are both teachers within the Caroni Education District, we were interested in revealing the following data. ¹Statistics show that in Caroni, of the 65 primary schools only 12 links exist. Further, out of a total of 467 primary schools across the nation there are only 209 links. With a total student population of 119 305 (based on a 2011 Census), the number of Red Cross Youth Arm members are only 4022. The low levels of school and student participation were our first concern,

¹<http://www.cso.gov.tt/statistics/key-indicators>

In one group member's school, for example, there was a dormant "Link" which was another area of our concern. We thought of creating change and awareness in the interested students as well as providing assistance for the teacher patron. As the saying goes "Charity Begins at Home", we used this opportunity to design this "take Action Project" for our own use as well as the use in any other primary school in this country.

RESEARCHING THE CONCERN

The Trinidad and Tobago Red Cross Society (TTRCS) was formed as a result of a charter of the international parent organization in on the 12th July, 1939. The TTRCS is one of 186 national societies that are known to make up the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). Research was carried out for this assignment in order to give some insight into the history of the Red Cross and the Red Cross Society in Trinidad and Tobago.

²The information describing the formation of the IFRC and the photo are taken from www.ifrc.org/en/who-we-are/history/

THE FORMATION OF THE IFRC

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) was founded in **1919** in Paris in the aftermath of World War I. The war had shown a need for close cooperation between Red Cross Societies, which, through their humanitarian activities on behalf of prisoners of war and combatants, had attracted millions of volunteers and built a large body of expertise. A devastated Europe could not afford to lose such a resource.



(Source: www.ifrc.org/en/who-we-are/history/)

It was Henry Davison, president of the American Red Cross War Committee, who proposed forming a federation of these National Societies. An international medical conference initiated by Davison resulted in the birth of the League of Red Cross Societies, which was renamed in October 1983 to the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, and then in November 1991 to become the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies as it is today.

The first objective of the IFRC was to improve the health of people in countries that had suffered greatly during the four years of war. Its goals were "to strengthen and unite, for health activities, already-existing Red Cross Societies and to promote the creation of new Societies." There were five founding member Societies: Britain, France, Italy, Japan and the United States. This number has grown over the years and there are now 186 recognized National Societies - one in almost every country in the world.

The Red Cross idea was born in 1859, when Henry Dunant, a young Swiss man, came upon the scene of a bloody battle in Solferino, Italy, between the armies of imperial Austria and the Franco-Sardinian alliance. Some 40,000 men lay dead or dying on the battlefield and the wounded that were in extreme need of urgent medical care and attention. Dunant organized local people to bind the soldiers' wounds and to feed and comfort them. On his return, he called for the creation of national relief societies to assist those wounded in war, and pointed the way to the future Geneva Conventions.

The Red Cross was born in 1863 when five Geneva men, including Dunant, set up the International Committee for Relief to the Wounded, later to become the International Committee of the Red Cross. Its emblem was a red cross on a white background: the inverse of the Swiss flag. The following year, 12 governments adopted the first Geneva Convention; a milestone in the history of humanity, offering care for the wounded, and defining medical services as "neutral" on the battlefield.

² www.ifrc.org/en/who-we-are/history/

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO RED CROSS SOCIETY (TTRCS)

³The **mission statement** of the TTRCS is: To improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity. The information below describing the TTRCS is taken from the TTRCS facebook page at ³www.facebook.com/#!/TTRCS?sk=info

DISASTER MANAGEMENT - (Disaster Preparedness, Mitigation, Response and Recovery). The TTRCS Disaster Department operates within the scope of the National Disaster Management Plan, while carrying out its own goals and objectives. The TTRCS assists those struck by disaster and minimizes disaster-related problems through Basic First Aid and CPR training, relief services and distribution, water safety training, community-based disaster preparedness, international people tracing services and rehabilitation programs. When a disaster threatens or strikes, the Red Cross is called upon to assist in Shelter Management, and provides food, health and psychological services to those affected. In addition to these services, the core of Red Cross disaster relief is the assistance provided to disaster victims to enable them to resume their normal daily activities independently. The TTRCS also feeds emergency workers,

handles inquiries from concerned family members outside the disaster area, and helps those affected by disaster to access other available resources. Working closely with Disaster Management is WELFARE, focusing on sustainable programs to enhance the traditional method of relief items distribution (donation of goods to vulnerable persons, sporadic relief efforts). We have established strategic alliances with the Rotary Club, Missions International, The Blood Bank of Trinidad & Tobago, Living Water Community, FEEL and other good corporate citizens working with vulnerable groups in the society as non-profit organizations.

HEALTH & HIV/AIDS – We are seen as leaders in this field in Trinidad and Tobago, and we work closely with all the major stakeholders. The TTRCS recently conducted peer-to-peer support training for more than four hundred (400) persons in the Ministry of Health. From November 23 to 26 we will pilot the introduction of a gender module within the HIV/AIDS Outreach Work. Trinidad and Tobago is also the Chair of the Caribbean Health Network. Additionally, we were recently lauded at a UN meeting as one of 5 NSs who are aggressively engaged in outreach programs that primarily concentrate on non-communicable diseases.

The YOUTH ARM resides mainly in the primary school system, with our Link Groups numbering about 5000. Nine (9) new youth groups began in the secondary school system this year and eight (8) cadet groups are attached to the Branches. The Restoring Family Links program is a small, but very satisfying part of our work. We are primarily the confirmation authority for foreign military organizations, and others come to us for help in tracing of family members.

AMBULANCE & FIRST AID SERVICE – The TTRCS provides Ambulance Services for corporate and government events, and recently introduced a revised First Aid / CPR / AED program. This comprehensive training program is designed and certified by the American Red Cross, to train lay responders to overcome any reluctance to act in emergency situations, and to recognize and care for life-threatening respiratory or cardiac emergencies. We also offer flexible training and certification in:

- Infant and Child CPR
- Adult CPR
- Wilderness First Aid

- Psychological First Aid
- Wilderness First Aid Training
- Professional Rescuer Training
- Instructor Training

⁴All work is based on the Seven Fundamental Principles of the IFRC as outlined in the **Youth and Juniors Handbook**: The National Red Cross of Trinidad and Tobago.

1. Humanity
2. Impartiality
3. Neutrality
4. Independence
5. Voluntary Service
6. Unity
7. Universality

THE YOUTH ARM OF TTRCS

The Youth Arm of TTRCS is a division that exists in many primary and secondary schools. Its major function is carried out through a school run organization, run with a teacher at its head. It functions like any other civic group as there is no cost to join. Being a part of this organization, there is social interaction with group from other schools for various events such as their annual walkathon and sports day.



(Source: www.ttredcross.org/photo-gallery/nggallery/photo-gallery/youth)



(Source: www.ttredcross.org/photo-gallery/nggallery/photo-gallery/youth)

Social Studies are based on the ideas of social justice and social meliorism. The job of an educator is to ensure as much as possible that schools are able to effect global change through the education of students. In the Trinidad and Tobago Social Studies syllabus for Primary Schools, the focus or theme for Standard 4 is Our Nation and there is a unit that is entitled “My role as a Citizen.” and another “Living in Trinidad and Tobago.” At the Standard 5 level, the theme is World Studies and there is a unit called “Connecting Ourselves to the World.” The TTRCS is a part of a global organization and provides information about the Red Cross and Red Crescent organizations throughout the world thereby this group can be used as examples in all of the unit areas for students to gain a better understanding of the world as global entity and their place in it.

As with any non-profit organizations there are limited resources with which to function. Funds are gained through fundraising activities and through donations from citizens and the private sector. Many corporate sponsors provide funds and manpower. All funding received locally goes into a Disaster Preparedness Fund Account at a local bank. Funding received from regional or global donations is credited to the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent for use internationally.

Funding for the Youth Arms in schools is also obtained through fundraising and donations. The group will have documentation that allows it to function from the TTRCS and with this an account at a bank can be held. All funds raised or received are deposited into this account. When students engage in fundraising activities it helps to boost team spirit and overall moral of the group as it can extend to the communities over the weekend thereby enhancing their relationship as well as appreciation for the wider community.

Volunteer teachers or patrons attend meetings each month organized, by the Education District school supervisors and are trained in First Aid skills by Red Cross officials. They in turn plan, organize and hold meetings and train the Link within their school. Students participate in fundraising activities, sporting events, competitions based on practical First Aid skills and the two year program outlined in the “Handbook” which we can make available to any patron who desires to take up the mantle.

⁴http://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/other/icrc_002_0513.pdf

For the Enrollment Ceremony, Girls wear a white uniform while boys wear black long pants and white short sleeved shirts. They recite the **Red Cross Pledge** - “I...(name)..... as a Youth Member of the Trinidad and Tobago Red Cross Society, promise to serve God and my country, and to join with others, all over the world, to help the sick and suffering.” They receive their Membership Badge, an Enrollment Certificate and they sing the Junior Red Cross Song.

Red Cross Links engage in various events each year some occur within and without their school environment.

⁵Some of these activities are:

- ***National Chain Gathering***

The National Chain gathering is conducted each May by the TTRCS Yoth Department with the Ministry of Education. On this day, the Links and Junior and Senior cadets participate in a parade to celebrate Henri Durant’s achievements and the success of the

Red Cross Movement around the world. They are presented with trophies and book prizes for their achievements.

- ***Founder's Day***

On this day in May of each year, the youth attend a church service and have a uniformed parade held in honor of the Red Cross founder Henri Durant.

- ***National Youth Camp***

The TTRCS National Youth Camp is held annually during the summer vacation. Campers participate in a Survival Skills Course and Leadership program. At camp they are exposed to numerous discussions and lectures pertaining to youth and youth development as well as a show to uphold the seven fundamentals of the Red Cross Movement in daily living. Camp closes after the camp fire night, when there is a cultural show and the distribution of Certificates of Participation and Awards.

- ***Annual First Aid Competition***

This competition in which Links participate, tests their skills and knowledge of Red Cross History, First Aid and Community Health. Certificates of Participation are issued to the teams and trophies and special prizes are presented to the winners at the following year's National Chain Gathering.

- ***Youth Awareness Week***

Youth Awareness Week is a week dedicated to the appreciation of the Red Cross Youth. It opens with a service/assembly at which youth members re-dedicate themselves to the Red Cross Crescent Movement. The week's schedule includes tree planting, fire drills and safety lectures followed by a day of fun activities.

- ***World AIDS Day***

On world AIDS day, the Youth red Cross, in association with the Regional Health Authority, holds a street parade. During the school day, the TTRCS HIV/AIDS Department's staff visit the TTRCS affiliated schools to raise the awareness of the virus. Youth engage in a variety of creative activities such as hand printing, t-shirt and banner making exercises.

- ***Senior Citizens Treat***

In this activity, the youth host twenty-five senior citizens from different homes in an evening of entertainment, treats and gifts. At the close of the evening, the elderly are presented with hampers.

⁵www.ttreddcross.org/youth

WHO SUPPORTS US?

The Red Cross society is a voluntary non-profit organization which holds its own fund raisers. Individuals and corporate companies also make monetary donations as well as in other services to ensure the day-to-day functions can be carried out. As such, the Link basically does the same and conducts its own fund raising activities.

CREATE A PLAN

STEP 1: Seek the Principal's approval.

First through a verbal discussion and later through writing, the benefits of re-igniting such a project would be discussed with the teacher patron and the school's principal.

The Letter

Sir,

Mrs. Annette Chanicka-Beharrylal and I are seeking permission to revamp the Red Cross Junior Link that had for many years ago been an active and vibrant one. Formation of a Red Cross Link will entail the following:

- a) Writing a letter to parents informing them of our plans, requesting their permission and urging them to consider enrolling their child/children.
- b) Holding an after school meeting with interested parents (date, time, venue and agenda to be decided)
- c) Engaging a guest speaker and resource personnel to enlighten all interested parties.
- d) Re-arranging the venue.
- e) Your permission to speak to the staff at the monthly staff meeting and inform them of our plans to try to get as many of them on board with us.
- f) Addressing students at the Morning Assembly to get them interested.
- g) Raising funds.

Thank you for your co-operation in this venture and we do look forward to working with you and a favorable response.

Respectfully,

.....

Mrs. Marissa King-Farrell

STEP 2: Letter to Parents

At the end of discussions, letters for interested parents can be drafted for circulation.

Dear Parent/Guardian,

Mrs. Marissa King-Farrell and a few other teachers have undertaken the responsibility of forming a Red Cross Link in the school. As such they have carded a meeting for you (date and time to be decided) to highlight the benefits of being a part of such a program. There will be a person on hand to answer any questions you may have.

Please make every effort to attend.

Respectfully,

.....

Principal

STEP 3: Meeting with Parents

Agenda for Meeting

- i) Opening Prayer
- ii) Welcome
- iii) Brief History of the Red Cross
- iv) Advantages of enrolling into the Red Cross
- v) Feature Speaker: Ms. Denise King - certified USA Paramedic, EMT trainer and off-shore rig employee
- vi) Distribution of envelopes containing - Consent Forms, pattern for Red Cross uniform and sample material
- vii) Vote of Thanks

viii) Refreshments to be served

STEP 4: Ongoing Training

Meetings with prospective Red Cross members to be held over a period. During this time, information is relayed to the students and they are prepared for their function within the school as members of this organization.

STEP 5: Fund Raising

Funds are to be raised to assist students with the purchasing of their uniforms, pins and patches. This will be done through school bake sales where parents can assist by donating items to be sold. This is to be first activity to be done as a team to invoke that camaraderie that comes from being a part of such a group.

STEP 6: Enrollment Rehearsal

Members engage in the training for the official enrollment ceremony.

STEP 7: Enrollment Exercises

Parents and interested parties are invited to the ceremony where students now officially become member of the Youth Arm of the TTRCS at the school.

As new members of the TTRCS, the first activity carded was planned to create awareness within the immediate school community through a walk-a-thon and also to raise funds with the sale of breakfast on the day.

This will entail:

- Selecting a theme for the walk.

- Planning a Route, seeking permission from the Police Department in area, requesting police supervision of students on the road, informing them of event's date, time and route to be pursued.
- Arranging assistance from auxiliary medical personnel such as the Red Cross for any emergencies that may occur on the day.
- Enlisting voluntary support donations from Corporate Sponsors (businesses in the community).
- Printing 'Walk a Thon' sheets for students' sponsors.
- Donation Sheets for parents requesting breakfast items such as bake, sada roti, rolls, sliced bread, mini pizzas, pumpkin, bodi/beans, salted fish, smoked herring and sausages.
- Fresh seasonal fruit such as water melon, oranges or pineapple.
- Salad items such as lettuce, cucumbers, carrots, tomatoes and cabbage.
- Acquisition of drinks such as bottled water, milk drinks and fruit juices from interested persons.
- Letters to the human resource personnel stating event particulars and approximate number of students that will be attending.
- Advertise on the school's website and place a banner with the Theme outside the school.

TAKE ACTION

Students become more civic-minded, tolerant, respectful, compassionate, non-discriminatory, kind, helpful and more caring. Government would hopefully see an end to the crime situation here and by extension the world. Mankind will once more live in a peaceful environment. Some suggestions based on our plan are:

1. Perhaps the Ministry of Education can try to devise a plan to take the Red Cross message into all pre-schools, primary schools, secondary schools, youth groups, penitentiaries and so on.

2. Get more teachers involved so that anyone can assist should an emergency occur within the compound at a school event and by extension their own environment instead of limiting it to solely the Red Cross Patron.
3. Educate each other through Staff Professional Development Days. Through the Principal's and the Ministry of Education's permission for a representative of the Trinidad and Tobago's Red Cross Society to come in and demonstrate basic Red Cross skills on an annual basis.
4. Address health challenges specific to the **community**. For example, a mosquito prone area will have programs dealing with keeping a mosquito free environment and symptoms of dengue fever. Recently, at the school in question, there was a Health Fair and issues were identified. The Red Cross could have been invited to hold talks on that day.
5. Activities such as first aid, emergency response, health promotion and prevention methods, addressing stigma, providing psychosocial care and community empowerment can be provided.

EVALUATE THE PLAN

Due to the changes in the assignment, evaluation of the plan was not possible. Despite this, we both feel that this is very necessary part of any school. Being a part of such a group will have many benefits. The Youth Arm of the TTRCS is a wonderful avenue to encourage the understanding to young children that they are a part of a larger unit, the community.

It can help them to:

- be a part of a group and experience a sense of belonging
- improve self esteem and overall self worth
- learn basic skills to improve their own quality of life and of others
- learn from each other as they learn new things
- be better citizens by recognizing the importance of giving back to their own society

APPLY YOUR LEARNING

During this assignment, as teachers who were ourselves unfamiliar with the working of the Red Cross in Trinidad and Tobago and by extension, within the primary school system, knowledge was definitely gained. Great insight was gained as to what really is the function of the TTRCS and as a result, even at our ages, we feel better equipped as citizens of this country to now make a positive contribution via our channel of the young learners. Awareness will we shared with as many students as is possible. As a result, we can indeed be better prepared to assist in this new area as well as through the delivery of the Social Studies Curriculum.

As teachers in the Infant department, with students as young as five, the topic “People in the Neighborhood” was identified as an area where our knowledge can be shared. In addition to the police officer and the nurse, doctor or taxi driver, these persons can be identified as well as their functions. Here the Red Cross worker can be included as an important member of society. Awareness will be created by showing the students that each and everyone can be a “Red Cross” worker.

The same can be done for the different levels throughout the curriculum.

CELEBRATE YOUR SUCCESS

As children leave each year to go on to secondary schools, there is a need to continue to invite students to be members. They can see the benefits themselves and desire to be a part of the group as activities are held. These should all be in keeping with best teaching practices where all learning should be student-centered. With that in mind, learning will be maximized as students can see it as fun and not just work.

Additionally, at the end of each academic year, it would be a good idea to hold a prize giving ceremony to highlight and award any outstanding work done within the group within the school. Students are recognized in front of their peers for exceptional work done throughout the past year. This will only serve to motivate all students to do their best so that maybe next year, they may receive such awards. Awards may be given for leadership, team leaders or even helpfulness, all qualities that are important to a well-rounded individual.

Additionally, after one year of participation the Link gathers for The National gathering which is conducted each year in May by the TTRCS in conjunction with the Ministry of Education. On this day, the links and Junior and Senior cadets, participate in a parade to celebrate Henri Dunant's achievements and the success of the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement around the world. They are then presented with trophies and book prizes for their past year's outstanding achievements.