



**CAYMAN ISLANDS
GOVERNMENT**

Statement to the Legislative Assembly

**First Meeting of the 2015/2016 Session
of the Cayman Islands Legislative Assembly**

By the Honourable Tara Rivers, JP, MLA

Minister of Education, Employment and Gender Affairs

Protective and Preventative Measures to Address Child Abuse

Delivered on 28 May 2015

Madame Speaker,

The issue of child abuse, especially sexual abuse, is a real concern. According to the “*Report on the Adolescent Health and Sexuality Survey, Cayman Islands 2013*” conducted by the Pan American Health Organisation and the World Health Organisation, the incidence of sexual activity and abuse of our children highlighted is very real and very disturbing. The effects of child sexual abuse include behavioral, cognitive and psychological effects. Substance abuse, eating disorders, low self-esteem and suicidal thoughts and self-harm actions can occur as a result of child sexual abuse. Addressing these serious health issues will require a multi-pronged approach involving many Ministries, government departments/agencies and the wider society as a whole.

I wish to update this honourable House on the work of the Ministry of Education, Employment and Gender Affairs to address issues surrounding child protection and at-risk youth in government schools. The Ministry does a lot of work in this area; however, I will limit my focus on the work done as it relates specifically to child sexual abuse identification, intervention and prevention.

For the past eight years, Hedge Funds Care (HFC) Cayman has generously provided the Ministry of Education with grants to support initiatives aimed at child abuse and neglect education, prevention, research and training. Hedge Funds Care, also known as Help For Children (HFC), is an international charity, supported largely by the hedge fund industry, whose sole mission is the prevention and treatment of child abuse. I wish to publically thank Hedge Funds Care (HFC) Cayman for their continued support of our children and the work of the Ministry in this regard.

Darkness To Light (D2L)

For the past 5 years, thanks to funding from HFC Cayman, the Ministry of Education has been offering *Darkness to Light Stewards of Children* (currently the 5 steps to protecting our children) training to school personnel. The ultimate mission of the *Darkness to Light* movement is to end child sexual abuse, and this “can only be accomplished by sharing the solution of prevention, awareness and education with more and more people. This, in turn, builds momentum and over time, changes the way our nation and culture care for, protects, and nurtures our children.” Learning the facts about child sexual abuse, talking about it and getting

involved in prevention and awareness helps to prevent it. **Child sexual abuse is an adult responsibility!** D2L empowers adults through awareness and educational programmes to prevent, recognize and react responsibly to child sexual abuse.

For this reason, it is a requirement that all teachers employed in government schools receive this training. As a result of a policy decision taken earlier this year, private schools are now also expected to provide their teachers with D2L or another Ministry approved training. This is outlined in the purchase agreement with private schools for 2015/16. Additionally, training is offered to all early childhood care and education centres.

Since May 2013, 27 training sessions have been delivered to government teachers, private school staff, the Extended After-School Programme staff, early childhood centres, Pastoral Support Workers, volunteers and community members. Approximately 450 people have been trained in the last two years.

Protection Starts Here/Seal of Protection initiative

The Ministry of Education, Employment and Gender Affairs is a key partner of the Cayman Islands Red Cross ("CIRC") led multi-agency "*Protection starts here*" project which has been working to not only raise awareness of the issue of child sexual abuse, but also focusing on the need for adults to take greater responsibility for the protection of children. The Ministry, in conjunction with other community partners (among them: Cayman Islands Crisis Centre, Family Resource Centre, Estella Scott Roberts Foundation, Department of Children and Family Services, Health Services Authority, National Drug Council, and the RCIPS Family Support Unit, among others), embarked on a joint effort to deliver this campaign which was initiated and led by the Cayman Islands Red Cross to raise awareness and take meaningful steps to fill in the gaps identified in child sexual abuse prevention and education.

This began as a public service announcement campaign and evolved into a project with the objectives of:

- 1) tackling child sexual abuse in a meaningful, thought provoking and honest manner;
- 2) empowering parents, teachers, caregivers and other concerned adults with information on child sexual abuse (what it is, how to identify it, what to do),

- information on how reports are handled, what the available resources are, and how to talk to children about it;
- 3) educating volunteers in non- profit/ charitable organisations that work with youth to help build the awareness of child sexual abuse and look at their practices more critically;
 - 4) spearheading the effort to get these same organisations to develop and implement child safety policies; and
 - 5) developing a child sexual abuse prevention education tool directed at young people.

The CIRC has produced and continues to distribute a multimedia tool (DVD) which helps those agencies who work to educate and prevent child sexual abuse – as well as parents/guardians/teachers and other adults who are responsible for children – by standardising the way which we talk about child sexual abuse on a national level. The DVD tool is a compilation of interviews, presentations, public service announcements, and other key information to the education and prevention efforts of child sexual abuse in Cayman. School counsellors and the Senior Policy Officer for Gender Affairs participated in the interviews for this DVD tool. This DVD tool is utilised in conjunction with the *Darkness to Light* training, as it provides a local context to the issue of child sexual abuse.

Currently there are no national standards for youth serving organisations in the Cayman Islands, which is a major risk factor and serves only to empower perpetrators of child abuse. The CIRC's "Seal of Protection" initiative, which my Ministry is also a part of, is an effort to identify, verify and recognise those organisations and institutions which are putting necessary safety measures in place for the protection of children, including –

1. Mandatory Criminal history records
2. Written policies and procedures on the following:
 - a. Mandatory reporting and how to report;
 - b. Recruitment process (interviewing, references);
 - c. Interaction with youth/ guidelines for day to day and other extraordinary circumstances; and

- d. Code of Conduct.
3. *Darkness to Light* training for staff and volunteers
4. Recertification of D2L training every 2 years
5. First Aid Training for percentage of staff

Talking About Touching/Second Step/Child Protection Unit

The *Talking About Touching* programme is currently being delivered in the public primary schools and includes developmentally appropriate teaching techniques to help children learn safety skills, such as refusing and reporting unsafe touches, as well as basic safety skills (i.e. for cars, bikes, and fire) and the “Always Ask First Rule”. The programme is designed for early childhood to Year 4, and provides a great way to talk to young children about sensitive but essential topics. Through the HFC grant, the Ministry was able to purchase *Talking About Touching* kits for all primary schools in the Cayman Islands.

Additionally, nine *Talking About Touching* kits were distributed to pre-school centres who attended a training session on the 5 November 2014 offered and led by an Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Officer and one was provided to the Cayman Brac Day Care Centre, whose staff were trained on 23 February 2015 by the Children and Youth Programme Case Manager from the Cayman Islands Crisis Centre. The Ministry of Education’s Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Unit, along with the Ministry’s project lead, has been working in partnership with the Cayman Islands Crisis Centre (CICC) and offered additional training and support for the pre-school centres. A meeting was held with the CICC’s Children and Youth Programme Case Manager and the ECCE Unit on 8 January 2015 to discuss how best to offer this support for the centres. A follow-up to the 5 November 2014 training session was held with principals and lead teachers on 19 January 2015 to review the materials in more detail. Following this meeting, the CICC’s Children and Youth Case Manager has visited those centres who requested further assistance with implementation of the programme.

In December 2014, the organisation that publishes the *Talking About Touching* and *Second Step* materials (Committee For Children) released the *Child Protection Unit*. HFC has awarded the Ministry of Education a grant to purchase and utilise

the *Child Protection Unit*. According to the developers of the *Child Protection Unit* programme:

“The *Second Step Child Protection Unit*, combined with the *Second Step* program, provides a comprehensive approach to help children feel safe and supported. The *Child Protection Unit* includes training and resources for administrators, program directors, and staff; lessons and activities for children; and family resources.

The *Child Protection Unit* is unique in that it includes a robust training for administrators and program leaders that helps them assess their current child protection policies and procedures. This in turn helps them develop a comprehensive child protection strategy that aligns with current research and best practice, including specific policies and procedures designed to protect children from abuse in a school or youth program setting, such as a staff code of conduct and procedures for reporting staff violations of protection policies. Research has shown that teacher and staff education is important for effective child protection programs (Riley & Roach, 2006). The *Child Protection Unit* training specifically prepares staff to recognize common indicators of abuse and neglect and report according to their school or program’s reporting procedures when they have “reasonable cause to believe” a child is being abused and/ or neglected. In addition, it trains staff to respond appropriately to children when they disclose maltreatment and encourages development of safe, supportive, and nurturing relationships between children and staff so children may feel comfortable disclosing. It also provides staff techniques to respond supportively to children showing signs of possibly having been abused or neglected.

The *Child Protection Unit* lessons build on the foundation of social-emotional and assertiveness skills taught in the *Second Step* lessons by teaching children how to refuse unsafe situations and sexually abusive touches. The lessons teach children to recognize unsafe and abusive situations and report these situations to adults immediately. Since children are more likely to learn personal safety strategies if they are given many ways to practice the skills (Davis & Gidycz, 2000; Finkelhor, Asdigian, & Dziuba-Leatherman, 1995), the *Child Protection Unit* lessons include a variety of teaching strategies and give children multiple opportunities to practice skills. Each lesson also comes with a fun activity children can do

with a parent or caregiver at home to practice the skills and it is geared for use with early childhood children to Year 6 students.

Encouraging parents and caregivers to talk with children about sexual abuse is a key component of child sexual abuse prevention. Many parents want to educate their children about sexual abuse but are reluctant to because it is difficult to discuss (Wurtele & Kenny, 2010). The *Child Protection Unit* includes media and resources for families to help them talk with their children about this difficult subject.

The *Child Protection Unit* is a comprehensive child protection program that, combined with the *Second Step* program, can address the multiple factors needed to prevent and intervene in cases of child abuse and/or neglect. The foundational social-emotional skills provided in the *Second Step* program combined with staff training and child lessons in the *Child Protection Unit* empower schools and programs to create a safe and supportive learning environment in which children can thrive. The *Child Protection Unit* carries this one step further by providing family materials that can contribute to greater protection beyond the lessons.”

Programme Manager (At-Risk Youth) of the Ministry of Education will be attending a 3-day conference in June 2015 which will provide an opportunity to learn directly from experts about systemic implementation tactics for social-emotional learning and participate in a training session where program developers will review and walk through the *Child Protection Unit* and strategies for helping schools to prevent child abuse, looking at the latest research and best practices in child protection and creating safe schools and prominent researchers and leaders will address child safety/school policy and discuss what it takes to put theory into practice.

Life skills working group

A primary schools life skills working group was formed in December 2013 to develop a set of recommendations from the group in order to achieve a common vision surrounding the provision of life skills in the primary schools and determine what support and materials are needed in order to achieve this vision.

The group reviewed programmes/sessions currently being offered, discussed strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to current provision, and developed recommendations on how to move forward with provision. The group established a common set of resources for character education themes and developed a framework around these resources (common units/schemes of work), which includes the *Talking About Touching* and *Second Step* social-emotional learning materials, and will now focus on ensuring consistent and well delivered programmes are offered at all primary schools.

It's Not Your Fault (INYP)

It's Not Your Fault is a Canadian Red Cross programme which has been adapted and utilised in several countries throughout the world to help empower youth ages 12 and older with knowledge about their rights, what abuse is and how to identify abuse (sexual, emotional and physical) and neglect, as well as developing skills to help them disclose when abuse has taken place. As a peer education methodology, INYP trains peer educators to lead these sessions with fellow students (with additional support from trained adult leaders), thus helping to minimise the age and communication gap between the educators and those participating in the programme. This programme is appropriate for the secondary schools. Once peer educators are trained by the Canadian Red Cross facilitators to deliver *It's Not Your Fault*, these students will be equipped to help their fellow students by offering them workshops that identify different types of abuse and why it happens; who can provide help; how to help a friend; and how youth can make a difference. The Ministry of Education is partnering with the CI Red Cross to conduct a pilot of this programme at John Gray and Clifton Hunter high schools.

This is some of the important work that the Ministry of Education, Employment and Gender Affairs is doing to address the incidence and issues related to child abuse, including child sexual abuse. As discussed, the efforts of the Ministry has increased in this regard since this Government took office in May 2013.

I believe the time has come to make child protection training mandatory for certain professions, and persons working in certain agencies and civil society organisations, especially those working with our children. More discussion of this will obviously need to happen, with the Government as a whole and at a national level; however, it is a discussion that I would encourage to happen sooner rather than later. As a country, we need to take concerted, collective, and decisive action to stem the tide and incidence of abuse, especially sexual abuse, of our children.