

Association of Female Executives of Trinidad and Tobago (AFETT)

White Paper on Child Care Solutions in Trinidad and Tobago

January 2010

*“Many things can wait; the child cannot.
Now is the time his bones are being formed,
his blood being made, his body being developed.
To him, we cannot say, tomorrow. His name is today.”*

Gabriella Mistral, Chile

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Section 1: RESEARCH OVERVIEW, GOALS AND METHOD

The research presented herein is primarily internet based, and includes examples of local, regional and international child care legislation and state activities protecting the rights of children.

The method of conducting research was the division of responsibility amongst AFETT committee members, with compilation carried out by the committee chair, over the period 2008-2009.

The key goals of the White Paper are:

1. To present local, regional and international best practices in child care to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, and the two main opposition parties, to:
 - a. *Provoke* discussion;
 - b. *Highlight* shortcomings and increasingly high levels of risk and crime against children;
 - c. *Inspire* positive change through budgetary and legislative action;
 - d. *Insist* that all political parties put differences aside to focus on the best interests of our children;
 - e. *Demand* urgent implementation of all protocols agreed to in:
 - i. UN *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC);
 - ii. Global society's commitment to the *World Declaration for the Survival, Protection and Development of Children*.
 2. To solicit financial support, from the private and public sector, for a nationwide Child Care study in Trinidad and Tobago, to identify and analyze local practices, customs and challenges.
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Section 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Antigua and Barbuda	Child Protection Act 2003 , to provide for the establishment and functions of a Childcare and Protection Agency, the licensing of childcare facilities, the maintenance of appropriate standards in respect of their operations and for other matters relating to the safety, care and protection of children.
Barbados	The child protection system in Barbados is administered by the Child Care Board (est. 1969), empowered by the Child Care Act (1969, amended 1981 which is supervised by the Minister of Social Transformation.
Grenada	The Child Protection Act was passed in 1998 to protect children at risk and children in care institutions, and gave rise to the establishment of the Child Welfare Authority (CWA), created in 1998 to ensure the care and protection of children in Grenada, Carriacou, and Petite Martinique. In an attempt to further address child abuse, a Child Care Protection Agency was established in 2001 to provide the government with an overview of the extent of abuse/violence against children, the structures and mechanisms that are available and the possible initiatives which can be taken to effectively address the problem.
Jamaica	<p>Childhood Commission Act (2003) is responsible for early childhood development, bringing all policies and standards under one umbrella - the Childcare & Protection Act (2004) which monitors the adoption of international childcare conventions locally and aims to promote a position on international children’s issues. Additionally:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Office of the Children’s Advocate documents conditions of correctional institutions and recommends urgent improvements. - The Ministry of Labour & Social Security / Pilot Project (2009) is an after-school facility for employee’s children which has evolved into an exemplary model of a low-cost, early-childhood institution. - Childhood Development Agency (an amalgamation of the Children Services Division, the Adoption Board, and the Child Support Unit) implements mandates of legislation.
Trinidad and Tobago	INFORMATION PENDING

INTERNATIONAL

Brazil	National Plan of Education (2001) includes Daycare Centres.
Canada	Provides Universal Child Care Benefit, Child Tax Benefit, National Child Benefit Supplement, Childcare Expenses Deduction and Child Tax Credit.
India	The need for childcare services is emphasized in the following national policies: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. National Policy for Children (1994) 2. National Policy for Education (1986) 3. National Policy for Empowerment of Women (2001) 4. National Plan of Action for Children (2005) 5. National Common Minimum Program (2004)
Japan	Has implemented law concerning the welfare of workers who take care of children or other family members including child-care and family-care leave, the purpose of which is to promote the welfare of workers who take care of children or other family members, and to contribute to the development of the economy and society.
Mexico	General Law on Health; Federal Law on the Protection of Children & Adolescent (1995)
Nigeria	Child Rights Act (1991), Child Rights Act (2003)
Norway	Early Childhood Education and Care Policy (1998) and Daycare Institution Act (2005)
UK	Child Benefit and Child Tax Credit
Sweden	The Education Act (1995) details forms of childcare to be provided, the obligations of local authorities as well as requirements for standardized quality of care. Since 2003 universal pre-school and state subsidized childcare has been available to all Swedes, for children aged 1-5 years.

PAPERS

- **The Rights of the Child and The Caribbean Perspective – Prospects and Challenges for the 21st Century.** Mrs. Hazel Thompson-Ahye, Senior Tutor - Eugene Dupuch Law School, Nassau, The Bahamas.
- **The Private Sector as a Service Provider and it’s Role in Implementing Child Rights.** Bruce Abramson, UN Committee on the Rights of Child

WEBSITES

Section 3: RATIONALE

It used to be said that “it takes a village to raise a child.” The truth of that statement is as relevant to 21st century Trinidad and Tobago as it is was back in the “ole days.”

One of the most important changes going on in many societies is that parents and the extended family are playing an increasingly smaller role in the raising of their children, with institutional child-care being one of the substitutes for familial child-rearing. Many people are concerned about the correlation between parents’ diminishing involvement in their children’s lives and the difficulties that kids are having in growing up to be healthy, happy adults¹.

The mysterious and still unsolved disappearance of 8 year old Leah Lammy put a harsh spotlight and reality check on the lack of child care solutions for working parents in modern Trinidad and Tobago. What if Leah’s parents, both of whom were working on that fateful day, had access to a safe and reliable means of transport to collect their daughter from school? Let’s suppose that their employers allowed at least 1 parent time off with pay to pick her up from school, and bring her back to an onsite company child-care facility or a registered child-care facility close to work or home? In either of these scenarios, it is quite likely that the outcome would have been dramatically different.

Reference **APPENDIX ONE: Data on Murdered, Missing and Abused Children under 18 years of age**

The Association of Female Executives of Trinidad and Tobago (AFETT) is at the forefront of lobbying the Government, Public and Private sector companies to implement family friendly policies in the workplace. Why? Because we can no longer afford not to. This White Paper seeks to articulate the relevant issues pertinent to this topic, and to recommend a practical way forward, so that working parents can comfortably balance parental and professional responsibilities. The time to act is NOW.

Under the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), to which Trinidad and Tobago has acceded, **each State has a duty to maximize the survival and healthy development of each boy and girl under its**

¹ **The Private Sector as a Service Provider and it’s Role in Implementing Child Rights.** Bruce Abramson, UN Committee on the Rights of Child

jurisdiction. The position that a State takes on the role of the family in promoting the best interests of children and adolescents is therefore central to how it will go about fulfilling its CRC obligations. Implementing the CRC is intimately connected to choices about visions. The Convention is not only about the promotion of the welfare of children and adolescents, it is about the ensuring of their rights.

In particular, we remind you of Article 6 of the CRC which provides that *States Parties recognize that every child has the inherent right to life and States Parties shall ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child.* This right of the child is considered a fundamental right. A child's right to survival and development involves not only basic health and welfare issues and the right to life, but issues of **protection of childhood** – and Article 6 charges the State with positive action on behalf of the child's survival and development.

Child abuse, child abandonment, abduction, sale of, or trafficking in children, sexual exploitation, early marriage, child labor, the right to maintenance, to be cared for by parents, to maintain contact with them, the right to education, including early childhood education, the right to the development of his or her personality, talents and mental and physical abilities, the right to rest and leisure, to be protected and insulated from the illicit use of narcotic drugs, to be protected from involvement in armed conflict and to receive rehabilitative care when necessary, are all threads interwoven in the tapestry of this fundamental principle of the child's right to life, survival and development. This must mean for the child the right, not to mere existence, but must speak to his or her quality of life.²

² **The Rights of the Child and The Caribbean Perspective – Prospects and Challenges for the 21st Century.** Mrs. Hazel Thompson-Ahaye, Senior Tutor - Eugene Dupuch Law School, Nassau, The Bahamas.

Section 4: PROBLEM STATEMENT

WHY CHILDREN?

Children and adolescents need special attention and assistance because they are in the process of development. This is the period when they acquire their basic values, form identities, learn that they are loved, valued, accepted, and that they have a place in the world; during this period they develop the habits, skills, and some of personal ties that will serve them for the rest of their lives.³

Children in rural areas, homeless children, children in institutions, children living in poverty, children infected by HIV/ AIDS, frequently do not receive the care and attention and access to resources as other children.⁴

It is clear that child care issues lie at the heart of providing a solution to the social and economic well being of families, businesses and society.

CHANGING FAMILIES

For some time, globally and locally, we have witnessed significant transformation in family arrangements:

- nuclear families are being replaced by single parent (or no parent) arrangements;
- extended families are being replaced by nuclear families or just single parent households;
- child-bearing occurs frequently outside of marriage;
- the rates of divorce increase;
- “serial marriages” become more common.

Whilst smaller family units have become predominant, many families still depend on the extended family, reaching out to grandparents, relatives and friends in times of crisis, or incorporating babysitters. The pressures to reconcile competing demands of work and family are especially demanding for single parents in a context where the age group bearing the highest number of children is also the age group with the highest proportion of women who have never married or have common-law partners.

³ **The Private Sector as a Service Provider and it's Role in Implementing Child Rights.** Bruce Abramson, UN Committee on the Rights of Child

⁴ **The Rights of the Child and The Caribbean Perspective – Prospects and Challenges for the 21st Century.** Mrs. Hazel Thompson-Ahye, Senior Tutor - Eugene Dupuch Law School, Nassau, The Bahamas.

CHANGING CHILDREN

With mom and/or dad working late, or working 2 jobs to “make ends meet” children and adolescents are forced to make decisions for themselves, some of which are cause for great alarm. One area of autonomous choices is sexual activity. According to WHO studies, for instance, the number of 15 year olds reporting having sexual intercourse is high (e.g., 38% in the US, 37% in Scotland, and 30% in France), and the mean age of sexual initiation of these youngsters is low (e.g., 13 years in the US, and 14 years in France and Scotland).⁵

Other changes of great concern include teenage pregnancies; high and rising suicide rates, particularly among boys; and the increase in smoking and other drug usages, along with a lowering of the ages of drug initiation and addiction. These changes mirror the behaviors that are found in the adult segment of the population, and in popular entertainment.

Recent studies on the brain development of young children indicate that quality child care plays a crucial role in healthy brain development. Missed opportunities to provide quality child care during the critical formative years come at a price.

CHANGING WORK

Another change are work-patterns: both mothers and fathers tend to be increasingly occupied in the labor force, with both of them working longer hours; as a consequence, there are changes in who is engaged in the raising of the children. The economic need for two incomes, coupled with the steady rise of single parent families headed in large part by women, has placed extreme pressure on working parents, especially working moms, to provide safe and affordable child care arrangements for their offspring.⁶

⁵ WHO, **Health and Health Behaviour among Young People** (2000), at 115-120.

⁶ **The Private Sector as a Service Provider and it's Role in Implementing Child Rights.** Bruce Abramson, UN Committee on the Rights of Child

Companies operate in a 24/7 global economic environment which results in non-traditional work schedules: earlier start to a work day, longer working hours, weekend, overtime and triple time work. In the absence of safe, affordable and structured child care facilities, working parents are hard pressed to find solutions to their child care issues.

What is a working parent to do when he or she has to work late, or work a double shift, while their children are home alone? An uneasy, worried employee does not make for optimum on the job productivity.

Additionally, companies have to work harder to attract and retain the talent they need to succeed in a competitive market place. Many companies have morale problems, particularly those that have gone through or are going through down-sizing. As more women enter the work force, work longer hours, and increasingly do the same jobs as men, there are policy choices to be made about who should be the most directly engaged in the raising of children.

CHANGING SOCIETY

Long hours spent waiting for public transport or in gridlock traffic jams getting to and from work, precious time lost from a work day to drop-off or pick-up children from school, lessons and other after school activities, road rage, the unrelenting crime situation all add up to social disorder. In the midst of all this chaos, our vulnerable children easily fall victim to unscrupulous adults, from taxi drivers to caregivers.

Vital communities are essential for strong businesses, and child care is central to the economic well-being of families, businesses and communities. Communities with necessary services such as child care, are better able to attract and retain workers, and reduce migration. The unpredictability of Trinidad & Tobago's infrastructure, especially transportation and utilities, play a large role in heightening work/family conflict. Additionally citizens fear of criminal violence places more stress on working parents who seek to ensure their children's safety.

Section 5: RECOMMENDATIONS

Whilst we applaud the Government's efforts in offering incentives for the establishment of Child Care facilities in Trinidad and Tobago, and welcome the focus on 'Caring Society' and 'Innovative People' identified in Vision 2020, AFETT recommends further steps be taken, to ensure safe, affordable and constructive care environments are being provided for our nation's children.

INVOLVEMENT

As this is an issue which impacts our nation at all levels, we further recommend that no less than four (4) Ministries champion this cause, namely:

- Ministry of Social Development
- Ministry of Gender, Culture and Community Development
- Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro-Enterprise
- Ministry of Education

NATIONAL / STATE CHILD CARE FACILITIES

We commend to the Government the concept of provide safe and affordable / subsidized child care for all as provided in Sweden.

We therefore recommend:

- The establishment of the highest possible standards and criteria for all child care providers, including:
 - Wages that are equitable, performance based and linked to cost of living;
 - Highest possible educational requirements;
 - Pre-employment screening to include evaluation of:
 - Medical fitness;
 - Character and psychological aptitude for the work;
 - Previous employment history and work ethic.
 - Regular training to international standards, including cultural changes on issues of Gender Equity. Many parents and teachers persist in socializing boys and girls differently. Boys receive approval for being aggressive, and sends the message that boys, who will ultimately become men, are superior to girls, giving them the authority to assume power and control and to exercise the concomitant right to dominate and disadvantage girls. Girls may receive the message that

they are subservient to the boys, may define their worth by motherhood and their career success by marriage. Their supreme accomplishment may lie in “making a baby”, or two or three or four. This is particularly true of girls in the low socio-economic stratum. Thus, the seeds may be sown for girls to become victims of domestic violence.⁷

- Monitoring of all facilities to ensure safe and constructive environments are being provided to our nation’s children.
- Implementing legislation to:
 - Protect all children at child care facilities;
 - Prosecute child care providers who do not meet required standards.
- Using the Ministry of the Attorney General model to implement child care facilities at all State and Public Sector offices.

CORPORATE / PRIVATE CHILD CARE FACILITIES

It is a well documented fact that businesses with child care programs report workplace improvements and bottom line savings in areas such as employee retention, lowered levels of absenteeism, increased productivity and strengthening the company’s image as a “preferred employer.”

We recommend:

- Establishment and standards for all private child care providers, along the same lines as those stated earlier for state provided child care;
- Clear definitions of a ‘facility’ as mentioned in the 2008-2009 National Budget;
- Deductibility from corporations the tax liabilities of:
 - expenses incurred in the repair and maintenance of such facilities
 - salary, security and other operating costs incurred in staffing such facilities.

⁷ **The Rights of the Child and The Caribbean Perspective – Prospects and Challenges for the 21st Century.** Mrs. Hazel Thompson-Ahye, Senior Tutor - Eugene Dupuch Law School, Nassau, The Bahamas.

CHANGING WORK

We commend the Government's steps in trying to alleviate the problem facing many working parents today through the promotion of Child Care facilities, however we encourage the Government to assist in supporting other avenues that can potentially relieve some of the burden for parents, while at the same time improving the nation's productivity.

1. As the largest employer in the country we ask the Government to demonstrate leadership in this issue by implementing employment framework policies directed towards:
 - a. flexi-time / staggered hours;
 - b. telecommuting;
 - c. compressed work weeks;
 - d. part-time / career breaks;
 - e. job sharing;
 - f. extended paternity leave;
 - g. extended maternity leave with pay.
2. Provide incentives such as tax breaks and grants for organizations that implement the initiatives above and demonstrate cost savings / productivity enhancements.
3. We also recognize that the Government as a policy maker and driver already has established several initiatives through various Ministries geared towards the support and improvement of lives of its citizenry. We do however note a gap relating to the provision of support/networking services relating to general parenting and offer the following ideas:
 - a. Expanding programs to include general parenting and child care networks and support services either through the Ministry of Education and the Parent Teachers Association or through the Ministry of Social Development;
 - b. Provision of child care assistance either in the form of tax breaks/credits or grants to low income single or dual income families particularly for children 3 months to 5 years old;
 - c. Provision of tax breaks/credits or grants to companies who are unable to construct a facility and would like to:
 - Create partnerships with existing facilities to subsidize their operational costs and therefore provide an avenue for childcare for their staff;
 - Subsidize the cost of child care for their employees through BIK or allowances.

THE DISABLED

We raise concerns about access to child care for our disabled youth population and remind the Government of Article 23 of the CRC which enjoins all States parties to recognize that a mentally or physically disabled child should enjoy a full and decent life, in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance, and facilitate the child's active participation in the community. We therefore recommend a system of early comprehensive assessment of children and periodic evaluation be put in place so that remedial action can be undertaken at the earliest opportunity, thus maximizing the chances of successful intervention.⁸

TRANSPORT

A safe, reliable and subsidized public school transport system, for both the physically able and disabled, will go a long way in alleviating some of the fall out working parents have to deal with, on a daily basis.

MONITORING

The CRC mandates that the best interest principle be applied to all actions concerning children. It, therefore, poses a challenge to all institutions, public and private, social welfare institutions to act in the best interests of children. All institutions which act for, and on behalf of children must be supervised. Guidelines for them must be set down, widely disseminated and policies put in place to ensure their compliance.

COMMITMENT

The Association of Female Executives of Trinidad and Tobago stands ready to partner with the Government, opposition, civil society and all interested private sector stakeholders in implementing the recommendations detailed above and looks forward to further discussions on the issue of national Child Care Solutions.

⁸ **The Rights of the Child and The Caribbean Perspective – Prospects and Challenges for the 21st Century.** Mrs. Hazel Thompson-Ahye, Senior Tutor - Eugene Dupuch Law School, Nassau, The Bahamas.

APPENDIX ONE: Data on Murdered, Missing and Abused Children under 18 years of age

Statistics on Murdered and Missing Children for the years 2007, 2008 and for the period January 1st to October 31st, 2009

REP – Reported

RET – Returned

OUT - Outstanding

YEAR	MURDERED			MISSING		
	M	F	SUB-TOTAL	REP	RET	OUT
2007	22	1	23	282	241	41
2008	37	6	43	347	323	24
2009	37	6	43	389	350	39
TOTAL	96	13	109	1,018	914	104

*Source: The Crime and Problem Analysis Branch of the Trinidad & Tobago Police Service

Based on the information shown in the table above, there have been 109 and 1,018 reported cases of murdered and missing children. In terms of missing children, 914 have been returned leaving an outstanding 104 yet to be discovered.

The following cases have been highlighted and clearly reflect the need for the government to pass legislation for the protection of children:

March 2009 : Leah Lammy, 8 years old, a pupil of the Edinburgh Government Primary School, was dropped to school by her mother at 6.55 a.m on Tuesday 10th February, 2009. The child was told that she would have to travel from school to her home in Longdenville because her parents would not be able to collect her. When the child did not return home by 4:30 p.m. that evening, her mother called her cell phone. A man answered and asked for a \$300,000 ransom. The family reportedly pleaded with the man on the phone, who promised to call

later that night. That call never came. Salis Mack, 33 years old, of King Sultan Avenue, Cunupia has been charged with this kidnapping and for stealing her cellular phone. To date Lammy is yet to be found.

June 2009 : Tecia Henry, 10 years old, who was missing for 4 days was found dead and buried under a shallow grave beneath a house in Laventille. She was sent to a nearby parlour for a few items but never returned home. The owner of the shop said that he did see Tecia but told her to come back in a few minutes as the shop was still closed. The young Henry was last seen by residents who observed her walking in the direction of her home. After reports of the missing Tecia was made to the police and there was not an immediate response to look for the child, residents of the community engaged in protest as they did not believe the police was treating the matter with urgency. Following days of heated protests, National Security Minister Martin Joseph and acting Police Commissioner James Philbert visited Tecia's mother, to assure her that they were utilizing all resources available to them in their effort to locate Tecia. Crime Stoppers also issued a \$10,000 reward for information leading to the whereabouts of Tecia. Unfortunately, neither protest nor the efforts of the police were able to save the life of Tecia.

March 2008 : Himraj Sookai, 49 years old, accused his wife of being unfaithful and as such gave his son, Kennedy Sean Deolal, 4 years old a poisonous liquid to drink and then took a dose himself. The family resided in Cunupia and the bodies were discovered in a house in which the family recently acquired in Caroni. The bottle containing the poisonous liquid is believed to be Lanate LV, a systemic agricultural insecticide was discovered in the bedroom. The police claimed that Sookhai, who sold chickens for a living had marital problems.

May 2008 : Hope Arismandez, 8 years old, was raped, buggered and stabbed to death. Her semi-nude body was left on a dirt road in the cane field in Charlieville. She was reported missing by her mother four days prior to the discovery of the body. The neighbour said Hope had spent the day with her on Saturday, while her mom was at work, before the suspect who is also a relative and lived at home with the family picked her up at about 5 pm. After days of interrogation the suspect confessed. Hope lived at home with her mother, the suspect and a brother.

Child Abuse

For the period January to September 2009, the Child Line Centre received 13,684 help calls, an increase by 5,527 when compared to the same period in 2008. These statistics included physical abuse, domestic violence, incest, child abandonment and sexual abuse against children. A Child Counselor from the Rape Crisis Society indicated that more persons were coming forward and reporting crimes, however, mothers were still afraid of the “fall out” with family and friends. Based on the fact that now these occurrences involve fathers, step fathers, and close relatives.

Following the gruesome death of 4 year old Amy Anamunthodo and 6 year old Sean Luke in 2006, government moved to pass legislation to protect children but to date it is yet to be implemented.

Amy Anamunthodo was raped, sodomised, beaten and suffocated at her home in Marabella and Sean Luke’s body was found in a cane field near his home in Couva after being buggered to death.