

The Royal Barbados Police Force
Giving Youngsters a Second Chance

Since 1983 the Royal Barbados Police Force, through the Juvenile Liaison Scheme (JLS) has been giving young offenders a second chance.

The JLS is essentially an alternative to incarceration programme which has as its primary goal the redirection of juveniles from a criminal sub-culture and to reduce the rate of recidivism. This diversionary approach dates back to the establishment of a reformatory school set up on the recommendations of the commission of poor relief in 1875. It was also felt that juvenile association with hardened criminals during periods of incarceration lead to a higher rate of recidivism (re-offending). This thinking led to the establishment of the Government Industrial School and the Probation Department.

However, despite these structures being put in place it was found that at the beginning of the 1980's, juvenile crime had escalated significantly, it was also revealed that a large percentage of persons in prison had previously attended the Government Industrial School. It was on this premise that the Royal Barbados Police Force established the Juvenile Liaison Scheme in 1983. The objectives of the Scheme are:

- (1) Reduce juvenile delinquency
- (2) Divert juvenile offenders from the rigors and traumatic experiences of the Criminal Justice System
- (3) Counsel juveniles who are considered to be at risk of becoming involved in criminal activity as well as their parents.
- (4) Offer voluntary supervision and counselling of juvenile admitted to the Scheme.

How It Works

Minors between the ages of eleven to sixteen who commit minor offences or who exhibit behavioural problems can be referred to the programme by school administrators, social agencies, the business community, police offences, parents or concerned citizens.

The Juvenile Liaison Scheme comes into action when:-

- (a) the aggrieved party has no objections
- (b) where it is a first offence
- (c) when the juvenile in the presence of his/her parents admits their wrongdoing and is willing to be part of the programme and
- (d) when parents agree to have the child admitted.

On being admitted to the Scheme the juvenile is counselled and supervised in such areas as goal setting, respecting self and others, anger management, conflict resolution and the importance of team work amongst others. The juvenile is essentially challenged and encouraged to choose a positive alternative to criminal activity.

Counselling last approximately six months during which time home and school assessments are undertaken. At the end of this period the Juvenile Liaison Scheme Management Committee (comprised of individuals representing the Welfare and Probation Department, the Child Care Board, the Ministry of Education, The Attorney General's Office and a member of the Clergy) makes a decision whether to administer the

police caution (where an improvement or a turn around is made) or to extend the counselling period.

Note: The police caution is basically a stern warning and allows the juvenile to maintain a clean record.

A tracer study done in 1997 showed that approximately 80% of juveniles participating in the Scheme remained conviction free. Of those that did commit a first offence, they were four years removed from the programme. Trends have indicated that the further removed the clients were from the Scheme the more likely they were to commit criminal acts.

Sergeant Seilest Bradshaw who heads the Juvenile Liaison Office contends that the programme has helped many young persons back on the right track. Sergeant Bradshaw also spoke about project HYPE (Helping Young People to Excel) which was conducted in the Northern parishes. The sergeant stated that the Force recognised that there was a need to establish linkages with the young people in the area, so as to foster healthy relations between the Force and the communities.

Sergeant Bradshaw further indicated to Challenge to Change that the Juvenile Liaison Scheme has a Summer and Christmas programme a School Outreach Programme in addition to a volunteer programme all with the goal of listening, understanding and sharing.

Do you want to make a difference?

Join the Juvenile Volunteer Programme.

For more information contact Sergeant Bradshaw at 430-7632