INDIVIDUAL PROJECT

Identify someone with a disability who has made a note-worthy contribution to Trinidad and Tobago. Identify the factors which contribute to the success of the individual.

JESSICA JACOBIE

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PROFILE

Jessica Kashia Jacobie, was born on August 26th 1984 in Castries, the capital of St. Lucia. Jessica is the middle child of an older brother and younger sister. This twenty one-year-old prodigy has unknowingly begun to change the way in which society views persons with disability.

Jessica was born with Congenital Blindness, which means she was visually impaired at birth. Congenital blindness can be inherited or caused by an infection, like measles, that is transmitted from the mother to the developing fetus during pregnancy. Jessica has about three percent vision in her right eye that allows her to see bright colours; she likes the colours pink, green, blue and red. In order for Jessica to function efficiently and effectively she relies on a number of devices that are designed to assist persons with visual impairments. The most important of these is called "JAWS", Job Assess With Speech. Not only does she use the programme but she is also responsible for teaching how to use it.

Jessica attended the School for the Blind from about two and a half years old to the age of eight. At age nine Jessica was placed into the "normal" school system because of the efforts of the Saint Lucia Blind Welfare Association who believed that there should be full integration of all blind and visually impaired children to obtain equal educational opportunities and experiences. She attended the Ave Maria Girls Primary School from September 1993 to July 1996 and having passed the local Common Entrance examinations she then attended the Leon Hess Comprehensive Secondary School from 1996 to 2001. When she graduated from the Leon Hess Comprehensive Secondary School in July 2001, she had attained a full academic certificate at the Caribbean Examination Council [CXC]. Her courses of study included English Language, English Literature, Mathematics, Office Practice, Principles of Business and Social Studies. This was a major achievement to Jessica, because she was the only student in that year to receive a grade One in English Literature.

Jessica is presently a Second year student at The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus in Trinidad and Tobago. She is pursuing a Bachelors Degree

JOB EXPERIENCES

In the summer of 2001 and 2002, Jessica was employed as a telephone operator with the bank of Nova Scotia [Boulevard branch] in Castries. This, being her first major job experience, opened her eyes to a plethora of dreams and possibilities. Her self-confidence was increased and the job helped her to choose her future career. This career is business oriented, primarily focused on Management, International Relations, and Strategic Human Resource Development. Jessica hopes to become a Consultant for organizations for persons with disabilities around the Caribbean and by extension the world.
From mid November of 2003 to the end of June 2004, Jessica was employed with the Saint Lucia Blind Welfare Association as a facilitator of their computer-training program, sponsored by the United Nation Developmental Programme [UNDP]. She was one of two facilitators charged with the responsibility of training blind and visually impaired clients, as well as some of the association's staff responsible for teaching and assisting those persons. The students' ages ranged from six-years-old to middle-aged.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

(1996–2001) - From form three to five she was a member of the DRUG FREE club and the choir, and was also involved in peer counseling.

In 1998 she participated in the Drug Abuse Resistance Education [DARE] programme facilitated by the Royal Saint Lucia Police Force and attained the following awards:

ii. Overall Top Achiever [with respect to all participating schools. ]

In 2001 she was a recipient of the award for Perseverance in Academic Achievement upon graduation from the Leon Hess Comprehensive Secondary School.

Jessica has been a very active member/client of the Saint Lucia Blind Welfare Association, where she volunteers to go out to the "regular" schools to read and speak about blindness during the month of May which is "reading month".

She has also represented at local and regional conferences and other activities. In 2002, she was chosen to be a presenter at a conference in Saint Kitts on technology's ability to permit greater accessibility to information and higher education standards for the blind. At this conference Jessica was the youngest presenter.

In the year 2003, Jessica was Saint Lucia's first ever representative at the Canadian National Institute for the Blind [CNIB], Gretzky Sore Teen Camp. This camp focused immensely on independence in terms of daily living skills, technology, mobility, orientation, and education.

In February of the year 2004, Jessica was chosen by the Ministry of Education, Saint Lucia to attend a lunch at Government House with Prince Andrew [the Duke of York], Saint Lucia's Governor-General and Minister of Education, as part of Saint Lucia's 25th independence anniversary celebrations. This lunch was held for Saint Lucia's top 25 young persons.

In July of 2004 Jessica, along with four other persons, represented the Blind Welfare Association at a congress in Martinique. The Congress focused on educating the blind
and visually impaired children and their putting together a Francophone Zone for the Caribbean Council for the Blind [CCB].

She was also a member and served for a short period as Secretary/Treasurer of the Fraternity, Economic, Thrift and Consumer Organization [FETCO]. This organization consisted of seventeen blind and/or visually impaired and sighted persons. Its primary focus was to "create gainful employment opportunity, to ameliorate the precarious economic disadvantage of blind and visually impaired members and to uplift their social status through self-help income generating activities ".

Jessica is also a member of the Committee for Persons with Disabilities in her community. The committee is responsible for the training, and other forms of assistance (non-financial) for persons with disabilities in the community.

Her leisure pursuits includes reading, writing poetry and short stories, listening to music, teaching Braille, experimenting with unfamiliar computer programs, engaging in debates on current issues, socializing, interacting with children, enjoying the natural scenery, and being there for persons whenever she can assist.

HER SOURCE OF STRENGTH AND INSPIRATION

Jessica's greatest strength and inspiration is her faith in God, without whom she claims nothing would be possible. Moreover her inspiration also comes from her family, friends, teachers/lecturers, and other supporters who constantly keep encouraging her to self-actualize. Another important source of inspiration is the many persons [especially students] who stop her in the street to ask intelligent questions or just to say that she is their role model or that they admire her for her perseverance.

JESSICA'S CLOSING REMARKS

She has refused to accept physical and social prejudice and discrimination, the architectural constraint of poorly designed buildings that do not accommodate disabled persons and lack of access to employment opportunities that would enable disabled persons to obtain an income and give meaning to their lives. These constraints can have a negative impact on how persons with disability perceive themselves; however, to Jessica it was just the opposite.

Apart from her chosen career choice, Jessica's dream is to write at least two novels, to become a Poet, a Braille Teacher, an Ambassador for her country and Blind Persons, a Professional Computer Training Facilitator, News or Magazine Editor and Founder or Leader of an Organization with the interests of blind persons at heart.
“I would like to urge every young person out there to try to be the best that he or she can be as the future depends heavily on us. It goes without saying, that not everyone is academically inclined, but it also goes without saying, that we all are talented and skilled in our own way. Search yourself and experiment positively to seek your abilities before giving up and becoming another "human parasite". As the saying goes, it is what we do now and the path we choose to walk now which will determine what society we will develop in the future”.

CONCLUSION

This has been a rare experience, in that, if was not for this course I may have graduated without ever knowing such a fascinating person. The average persons’ life can be so comprehensive with deadlines, personal commitments, pandemonium and chaos that we sometimes never slow down to just to say "hello". This assignment has broadened my cognitive thinking and the way I socialize. Personal growth is what I have gained from the assignment. We all face challenges in life. However, it is not what we face but how we face it determines who, what and where we will be in life.

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