

IS OUR FUTURE IN OUR SCHOOLBAGS TOO?

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Background

- Parents expressed concerns:
 - Lack of financial support although they themselves are unable to work because of need to care for their children;
 - Inconsistency in attainability of support;
 - Lack of schooling possibilities for their children;
 - A 'not knowing' what to do next;
 - Uncertain future.

The Study

- Informants: Parents of children with speech-language-communication delay, including ASD, ADHD, CP and DS children; ASD predominant;
- Purpose: To identify:
 - their current measure of medical and educational support;
 - Possible solutions to the problem.
- Context: Most have been turned away by government schools.

The Promise

- *‘To your tender and loving hands, the future of the Nation is entrusted. In your innocent hearts, the pride of the Nation is enshrined. On your scholastic development, the salvation of the Nation is dependent...you carry the future of Trinidad and Tobago in your school bags.’*
- ‘Universal’ free education up to age 12 since 1961;
- 2001: ‘Universal’ secondary education.

The Stated Policy

- *‘Special education is the provision of education for students with disabilities. Special education is most effective when a student's special needs are recognised, diagnosed and accommodated as early as possible. Special education is coordinated through the Student Support Services (SSS) Division of the Ministry of Education, which has the responsibility for Special Education throughout Trinidad and Tobago. The SSS provides:*
 - *Auditory and visual screening.*
 - *Physical health intervention.*
 - *Psychomotor evaluation.*
 - *Diagnosis and remediation of learning and behavioural problems.’*

(tt.connect.gov.tt)

The Policy (cont.)

- *The Division also provides support for physically and sensory challenged students, parental and family awareness and teacher education. Teams of service providers that include special education teachers, school psychologists, guidance officers, and school social workers have been placed throughout the school system to provide the most comprehensive services available.'*
- The list of persons qualifying includes specifically those with autism and speech or learning disabilities.

The Reality

- Dr. Tim Gopeesingh himself admits that most children are not catered to and most 'fall out of' the education system (CARICOM/UNESCO meeting, November 16, 2013)
- Our findings suggest they never even make it into the system.

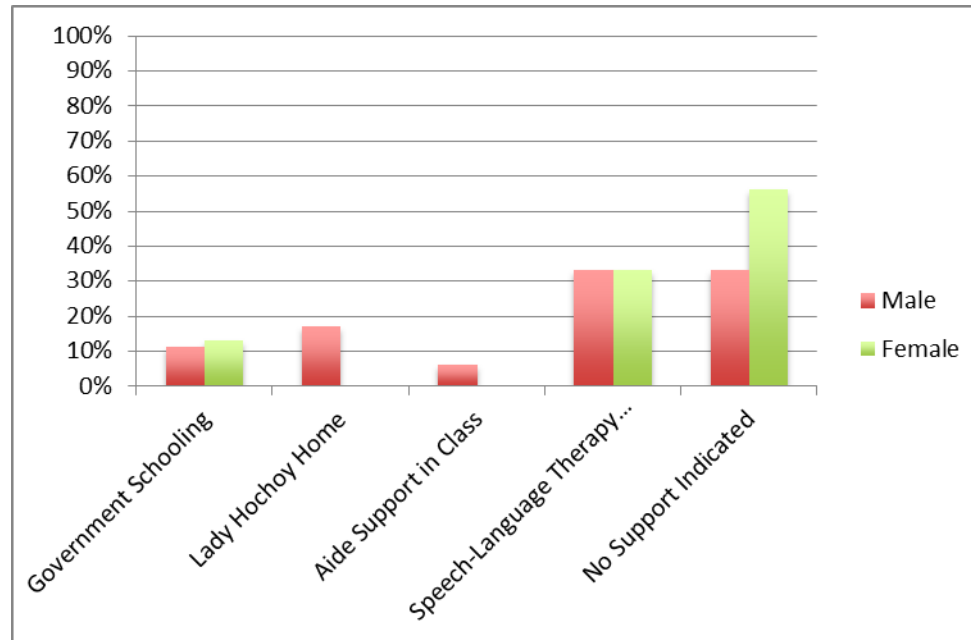
The Medical Side: speech and language therapy

- One post exists at San Fernando, Port-of-Spain and Scarborough General Hospitals;
- Only one filled is at Scarborough;
- Salary offered \$8000 per month;
- None assigned to Health Centres;
- None assigned to schools;
- Aide system not functioning.

The Research

- Rationale for the study: Expressed parental concerns;
- Informants for the Study: 3 private SLP clinics, two with pre-school facilities: one in each of North, South and Central Trinidad.
- Case Histories collected.
 - 56 in total;
 - 27 from children aged 5-14;
 - 18/27 males; 9/27 females.
- Major questions:
 - Describe the process you have been through with medical authorities since you recognized your child was having communication difficulties.
 - Describe the process you have been through with educational authorities since you recognized your child was having communication difficulties.

The findings



Child Support by Government for Education
and Speech-Language Services

Case Study 1

- Naveen is just five (5) years of age. He began to talk normally but stopped talking suddenly at age two (2). He also started to manifest hand-flapping and his speech became echolalic. He cried all day and night and slept very little. At the Health Centre his mother was given no advice for his condition; he was 'diagnosed' there with autism but there was no further recommendation. At age three (3) he started attending a private pre-school but after one month the school said that it could not keep him because he was disruptive.

Case Study 1 (cont.)

- He then went to another 'special' school where his mother discovered he was regularly beaten and put to sleep so she removed him from the environment. His mother applied to the government Early Childhood Education Centres (ECCE) but they refused to take him because of insufficient staff support to cope with Naveen. She applied to the Ministry of Social Welfare for financial support which came through after one year. However, she would like him to be able to attend regular school and that is looking unlikely as she has been told there are only six aides for each school district and they will not accept a private aide.

Case study 2

- Roger is ten years old; he is non-verbal and has sensory integration challenges. When he was a small child it was recognized that he was taking too long to speak but he still played with other children and it was not until he was four (4) and had stopped playing with other children that it was recognized that something was really wrong. At that stage he would refuse to enter any building to the extent that it became very difficult to even consider taking him for further assessment. As a result his education was very limited until his current SLP support went to his home and worked with him until it became possible to bring him out to school. He is coping well in terms of understanding school work and wanting to attend school but does not participate socially at all and is troubled by an apparent obsessive-compulsion to move about and touch things repeatedly. His future is unclear.

The solutions

- Massive restructuring of education and allied health systems to redress the current deficit;
- Easier and more direct and explicit access to funding for therapeutic services;
- Training for a cadre of classroom aides;
- Larger salaries for highly trained individuals who support: SLP's; OT's.
- SLPs in each hospital and health centre and several attached to each school district.
- It can be done 😊.