

# MEDIA RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

## **EOC TV Show Addresses The Hard Conversations.**

Many young people from “hot spot” areas are productive and hardworking members of society and their employment opportunities should not be limited based on where they live or grew up. Not only can this potentially work against an organisation, but it is also unlawful.

This was the main message taken away from the television series, ‘The Hard Conversations: Let’s Talk Equality’, as a young panel of go-getters from stigmatised areas came together to discuss discrimination in employment.

The series is a collaboration between the Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC) and Trinidad and Tobago Television (TTT) Limited.

The show is meant to give a platform to those who are affected by discrimination to raise their voice to dispel the stereotypes that threaten to confine and define them and others in their community. First-hand accounts from those affected are the conversations that matter because humanising the impact on individual lives can be one part of the solution to stigma and prejudice of a broad community.

David Roberts, the CEO of TTT Ltd appeared on the panel to discuss the topic, which is near and dear to his heart. Roberts, who grew up in Maloney Gardens is a proud product of the area and a testament to the CEO-potential that can come from stigmatised areas, if given the chance. Speaking on his experience of applying for jobs at the start of his career, he said, “when I entered the job market, of course, Maloney would have been seen as a high needs community and there were a lot of negative articles stories issues happening about the community. I heard people speaking about issues around getting employment because of where they reside. So, in terms of being proactive, I utilized my cousin’s address on my resume for a very long time due to fear of not getting an opportunity that I would have been qualified for.”

While we may face discrimination or unfair treatment because of where we live, he affirmed, “It is important for residents within the community to know that it is possible, and I am not special in the sense that it can't be done by someone else. You have to put in the work, and you have to make difficult decisions.”

Martha Rodney, a hard-working entrepreneur from Beetham Gardens, also appeared on the programme via Zoom and shared that she worked at an establishment in the past where the manager kept a close eye on her when she found out that she lived in the ghetto. However, Martha said, “I did not allow her behaviour to discourage me and over time, I showed the employees who Martha Rodney is, and my personality. A few weeks after everyone was comfortable with me. What people may think or have heard about the ghetto makes it is uncomfortable at times to say where you live.”

Obrina Wickham, a student at Bronx Community College and former resident of Morvant said, “Normally when people ask where are you from? I refer to Chaguanas because I tend to avoid the topic - you are from Movant, have you ever experienced violence? If I do encounter stigma, I answer questions openly. I do not have a problem with anyone asking me if I experienced violence or any sort of neglect, but I still try to avoid it as best as I can.”

Aliyah Abdulwudud, a motivational speaker and social worker shared, “It's important to speak positively about yourself and your community. When you speak positively or have a positive aura it draws people to you, and it breaks the stigma because you allow someone to see who you are and get the correct perception.”

Speaking on her experience in social work and motivational speaking Abdulwudud said, “My experiences have shaped what I do now because I know how it feels to be invisible, to feel less than and to not have the opportunities that others would have had. So that is why it's so important for me to continue working in these stigmatized communities supporting youth encouraging them to enrol in programmes that are available by the government.”

The practice of labelling certain areas as hot spots perpetuates a stigma that works against the productive and hardworking members of these communities. Further, it is unlawful under the Equal Opportunity Act to discriminate against someone based on their origin under four categories: employment, education, provision of goods and services and provision of accommodation. Under the Act, persons are entitled to equality and fair treatment, despite their status. The seven status grounds covered by the Act are race, ethnicity, religion, marital status, origin including geographical origin, disability and sex.

The EOC is committed to working towards the elimination of discrimination and the promotion of equality and good relations between persons of different statuses.

The next episode in the series will bring together a panel of persons with disabilities to talk about their experience. Further details will be shared on the EOC’s social media pages and website.

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## About the EOC

The primary task of the EOC is to oversee implementation of the Equal Opportunity Act Chapter 22:03, which prohibits certain kinds of discrimination and seeks to promote equal opportunity between persons of different status.

The Act is concerned with discrimination in four broad categories - employment, education, provision of goods and services, and provision of accommodation - where someone has suffered less-favourable treatment:

- Because of their status, that is, because of one of the following personal characteristics: race, ethnicity, religion, sex, marital status, origin or disability;
- Or by way of victimisation, that is, in retaliation for doing certain actions that are protected under the Act, for example, lodging a complaint with the Commission or giving evidence in support of someone who has lodged a complaint.

The Act also applies to a third category of conduct known as ‘offensive behaviour.’

A person who believes that they have been subjected to discrimination in any of the above areas may lodge a complaint with the EOC. The EOC is mandated to receive, investigate and as far as possible conciliate complaints.

If the matter is unresolved, the complaint can be referred to the Equal Opportunity Tribunal (the ‘EOT’). The EOT is a superior court of record and its mandate is to hear and adjudicate on matters referred to it by the EOC. The EOT has the power to make orders, declarations and awards of compensation as it determines to be appropriate.

The EOC urges all persons to be mindful of these provisions and to refrain from discriminatory practices which infringe the human rights of others.

For more information, please visit [www.equalopportunity.gov.tt](http://www.equalopportunity.gov.tt).

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