

# MEDIA RELEASE

Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> September

For Immediate Release.

## **EOC COMMEMORATES BLIND AWARENESS MONTH.**

The Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC) will amp up its advocacy efforts in the month of October for Blind Awareness Month.

This is a continuation of the EOC's robust public education programme, which advocates for equality of opportunity and treatment for all. Persons who are blind are protected by the Equal Opportunity Act (the Act) under the status ground of "disability".

### **Town Hall Meeting in Point Fortin**

To commemorate the month, the EOC will join a distinguished panel of guests at a Town Hall meeting hosted by the Council for the Development and Enhancement of the Family (CODE-F). This meeting will take place at 5:00pm on Tuesday 11 October at the Point Fortin Borough Corporation Town Hall. The format will take the structure of a panel discussion covering the topic, "Living with visual impairment/blindness and the attending challenges including discrimination."

This town hall meeting is one part of a week of activities hosted by CODE-F in the month of October, "Blindness is not our Weakness: Inclusion – No boundaries, no limits".

The EOC will also set up an information kiosk where persons can play games for prizes and ask questions about the rights, which are protected by the Equal Opportunity Act.

The EOC was invited by The Holy Spirit Project to participate in the week-long activities.

### **Appearance on Radio**

Mrs. Jeanista Agard, Founder/Facilitator of the Holy Spirit Project, who is herself blind, has in the past invited the EOC to be interviewed on the programme on numerous occasions to raise awareness on how the commission provides redress, especially for the blind community and other members of the public. The live interviews allow the EOC to continue its advocacy for inclusivity in the workplace, especially as it relates to reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities.

The month of October is no exception and the EOC will appear on the programme on Friday 28<sup>th</sup> October to once again, raise awareness on the rights of persons who are blind and encourage them to lodge a complaint if they have been discriminated against while accessing the four (4) categories covered by the Act.

The Act protects persons based on their religion, race, ethnicity, marital status, sex, origin and disability under the categories of Employment, Education, Provision of Goods and Services and Provision of Accommodation.

## **Social Media**

The EOC will also embark on a social media campaign, sharing information capsules about caring and respecting persons who are blind or visually impaired.

The series will inform members of the public on titbits such as how to assist persons who are blind to navigate in public using common courtesies; to raising awareness on how to promote inclusivity in workplaces and businesses; and accessing the EOC as a viable avenue for redress if they have been discriminated against.

## **EOC Chairman's Statement**

EOC Chairman Ian Roach said, "As the leading state advocate on equality, we have a major responsibility to raise awareness and advocate for every Trinbagonian so that they have the equal opportunity to make the most of their lives and talents. It is not uncommon for people who are blind or have low vision to function independently with the same range of abilities as anyone else, once provided with appropriate training and equipment. Thus, they deserve an equal opportunity to employment, education, goods and services and accommodation, while being treated with respect and dignity."

He added, "The EOA is an essential piece of legislation because it ensures equality for all including one of the most vulnerable groups in society, persons living with disabilities."

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) there are at least 2.2 billion people globally who suffer from some form of visual impairment or blindness, inclusive of those who simply wear corrective lenses.

In commemoration of Blindness Awareness Month, the WHO has stated, "Everyone, if they live long enough, will experience at least one eye condition in their lifetime". It is therefore important that the citizenry take advantage of Blindness Awareness Month, when it rolls around yearly in the month of October, because it brings a heightened focus on the blind and visually impaired community and the realities of adjusting to living with loss of sight."

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### **For more information, contact:**

***Shelly Dolabaille***

Manager, Corporate Communications

**Equal Opportunity Commission**

55-57 Manic Street , Chaguanas

Tel: (868) 672-0928 ext 231

Mobile: (868) 330-4791

E-mail: [shelly.dolabaille@eoc.gov.tt](mailto:shelly.dolabaille@eoc.gov.tt)