

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **Down Syndrome Community: A World of Potential.**

“Each person with Down syndrome has different talents and the ability to make a valuable contribution to their family, community and society,” says the Chairman of the Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC) Ian Roach.

The Chairman was speaking ahead of World Down Syndrome Day, which is observed on Sunday 21 March by United Nations members. Staff at the Commission donned colourful socks to raise awareness, but the Chairman said that raising awareness is only the first step. He called on employers to be more inclusive in hiring practices and on civil society to educate themselves on the syndrome.

He said that lack of access to education and information, employment and medical care presents barriers to persons with Down syndrome. Removing these hurdles will allow the community to add more value to society and lead more fulfilling lives.

“We have an individual and collective role to play in improving and promoting a fair and unbiased living experience for all members of society. The EOC will continue to protect the rights of persons with disabilities, including persons with Down syndrome.”

The Chairman commended the work of the Down Syndrome Family Network (DSFN) for its commitment to helping persons with Down syndrome achieve their greatest potential while providing support to their families and friends.

DSFN Founder, Glen Niles, said, “everyone has different strengths so not every person with a disability needs to attend a special school, some of them can actually be included in the regular school system, or in the work place, which is happening on a small scale right now thanks to our efforts.”

He said “the DSFN has collaborated with the business community to offer internship programmes for persons with Down Syndrome. My son Tyrese Niles who has Down syndrome began working at Aeropost for three months and his contract was extended to four and a half years.”

Niles cited examples of persons with Down syndrome who have been hired and are making strides in their industry. He said, “Christy De Souza received a three-month internship to learn basic office skills at Pepper Advertising. Now she is the first person with Down syndrome to work for the Government as an OJT in the Office of the Prime Minister, Gender Affairs Division. Surya Hosein worked at the Digicel IMAX for three months and his contract has continuously been extended.”

World Down Syndrome Day (WDSD) is commemorated annually on March 21<sup>st</sup>. This year focuses on improving connections to ensure that all people with Down syndrome can connect and participate on an equal basis with others.

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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 would urge 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).

**Contact:**

***Shelly Dolabaille***

Manager, Corporate Communications

**Equal Opportunity Commission**

Central Courtyard

55-57 Manic Street

Chaguanas

Tel: (868) 672-0928 ext 231

Mobile: (868) 330-4791

Fax: (868) 671-8826

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