

World Down Syndrome Day 2023

TOMORROW, the Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC) will join with the Down syndrome community to celebrate World Down Syndrome Day. The theme proclaimed for 2023 is With Us Not For Us. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that the incidence of Down syndrome is one in 1,000 to one in 1,100 live births worldwide.

World Down Syndrome Day (WDSD) is a global awareness day which has been officially observed by the United Nations since 2012 and each year it is observed on March 21. Did you know that March 21 was chosen as the day of celebration as it matched the three copies of chromosome 21, unique to people with Down syndrome?

This day aims to celebrate and promote people with Down syndrome having the same rights, freedoms and opportunities as everyone else, ensuring an equal playing field. WDSD raises awareness and educates the public about the congenital disorder in an effort to raise awareness and fight misconceptions associated with the condition.

This year, focus is being placed on taking the human rights-based approach to disability. This approach sees people with disabilities as having a right to be treated fairly and afforded the same benefits and accommodations, working with others to improve their lives.

People with Down syndrome are entitled to the fundamental human rights as any other individual. This means they should be fully included within their families, communities, religious groups,



online communities and civil society.

The EOC encourages and implores those who work in the best interests of people with Down syndrome to do so in alliance with them, empowering them to take decisions and bolstering them to have their voices heard. WDSD gives these individuals and their families a window of opportunity to speak on their experiences and advocate and champion for the well-being and inclusivity of those living with the condition.

People with Down syndrome are more often times subjected to stigma and various forms of discrimination within society.

For example, they may be excluded from activities due to provisions, criteria or practices that disproportionately affect them. Generally, stigma generates feelings of inadequacy on those affected, resulting in social exclusion and deprivation, unemployment, little to no access to financial resources, intolerance, less access to health services and, worse, quality of life.

WDSD, through its sensitisation and awareness activities, acts as a catalyst to break some of the stigmas surrounding Down syndrome so that the public can receive those individuals into their com-

munities with open arms. People with Down syndrome, like anyone else, enjoy the feeling of belonging and inclusivity. Being properly included means being treated fairly, not subjected to victimisation, being validated to make their own choices and being involved in every aspect. WDSD encourages them to live a full life and be an active part of their communities.

It gives them the recognition and empowerment they deserve and an opportunity for them to raise their voices and advocate for themselves, influence the governments towards more inclusive policies and legislation, and be included in the day-to-day discourse.

It is therefore incumbent on our leaders, health professionals, educators and all entrusted with the care of people with Down syndrome to guarantee that they are safe, protected and given the opportunity to make their positive contributions to society.

The emblem for World Down Syndrome Day is a yellow and blue ribbon, the colours that represent the genetic disorder. On March 21, those wanting to raise awareness about Down syndrome can wear odd, mismatched, crazy, colourful socks and have them proudly on display while walking around, which means that they are actively advocating for change.

If you believe that you have been subjected to discrimination based on your disability, you can lodge a complaint at the Equal Opportunity Commission via our website: www.equalopportunity.gov.tt or e-mail: complaints@eoc.gov.tt.