



# THE SECRETARIAT

JAN – MAR 2018

*“Giving Hope to People Living with HIV Through Dedicated Service.”*

## Hand-In-Hand Ministries dedicates its new facilities!

*“Hand-In-Hand Ministries’ mission is to build strong communities and transform lives through cultural immersions, education, housing and health care”.*

After establishing itself in Belize in 2002 and providing services through its various programs, 2017 marked a great milestone as it celebrated its 15 years of service to the people of Belize. Programs like: The Building for Change Program where families are assisted through housing, the Scholarship Assistance Program where students are assisted in completing their High School Education, the Outreach Program where children are assisted through our Day-care, Preschool and our outreach program that caters to children marginalized by poverty and disease, namely HIV/AIDS country wide.



Now in 2018 we celebrate a huge milestone! A new Building to work from in one of the most vulnerable neighbourhoods. The building is named *The Fowler Community Center*, after the founder and cofounder, Wayne Richard Fowler, who lost his battle to cancer and Fr. Joseph Fowler, a retired priest in Louisville, Kentucky, still impacting many lives! The new offices are located at one and a half miles on the George Price Highway, Belize City, Belize.

The one thing that has remained constant in our work and services to others is “God”, who has been and continues to be an integral part of our success.



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For years this had been a dream for Hand-In-Hand Ministries to have its own offices to house all its programs rather than operating from several locations. Though many challenges were faced along this journey, we never gave up and we kept going as we strongly believed that God leads and we follow. Under the leadership of Mr. Abel Vargas, what was once a dream has finally come true with the support of donors and the support of



our partners and organizations that volunteered on this building project and the support from our fundraising events that made this project a reality. We still have quite a bit yet to go, like a fence, the completion of a basketball court and an at risk area for the young men in the area; however, we thank God that it has been completed to the extent of it being of service to others. Hand-In-Hand Ministries philosophy is *“just enough, just in time”*. We believe in the power of prayers and our ultimate goal to serve the St. Martin’s community...better will come, as we continue to change lives for the better and become the beacon of hope to a community in most need.

We pray and hope that with the continued support from our community, we will be able to bring about only positive changes in the area, with hopes of the change creating a ripple effect of positive outcomes and thus making it a better place to live!

If you would like to assist us, please email us at [abel@myhandinhand.org](mailto:abel@myhandinhand.org) or [maggie@myhandinhand.org](mailto:maggie@myhandinhand.org) or contact us at 615-4804 or 610-2602. Any contributions of \$10,000 or more will earn a permanent spot at the entrance of our building.



## BFLA Implements the Comprehensive Sexuality Education(CSE) Program

1. BFLA does training in CSE in over 8 high schools across the Orange Walk, Belize and Stann Creek Districts. Through the Youth Advocacy Movement and partnership with other groups many other out-of-school youths have been trained in CSE. BFLA is targeting 4 additional schools for the year 2018 to conduct per education training on CSE. The KISS mobile outreach provides services to young people as well as SRH information.



2. **Summer camps- BFLA has held summer camps in partnership with other entities in Orange Walk, Belize City and Dangriga. The SRH and CSE information is deliver to youth from ages 10 to 24.**
3. In 2016/2017, MOE asked BFLA to make contributions to revise the HFLE and BFLA contributed in adding GBV. In summer 2017 BFLA was asked to train teachers and a presentation was made to assist teachers in understanding sexuality and other aspects that could help them to become self-aware and provide a foundation of comfortability when teaching from their curriculum. A similar request was made by MHDSTPA to revise the parenting manual used by COMPAR. BFLA is looking to have a

formalized MOU with the MOE to solidify that BFLA will be utilized to support CSE training for teachers and in schools. There is a teacher toolkit.

4. AAHA- TWG BFLA has a representative on the technical working group for the Adolescent Health Strategy. Currently, a call for consultant is being made to assist with the development of the strategy. The strategy is to address the gaps in adolescent health and access to services. MOH has a timeline in which the strategy should be produced by December this year.



## 9th Commonwealth Youth Parliament

Dominique Noralez was nominated by the Speaker of the House Madam Laura Tucker Longworth to represent Belize at the 9th Sitting of the Commonwealth Youth Parliament (CYP). The event was hosted by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) in collaboration with the Jersey States assembly in Jersey, English Channel Islands. The CYP programme, lasting from February 25th to March 1st 2018, was designed to demonstrate to potential future young parliamentarians the fundamentals behind the processes of Parliament in key institutions which underpin democracy

and good governance. In addition, it gives attendees a hugely valuable networking opportunity with other participants from across the Commonwealth, as well as with current young Members of Parliament who act as mentors throughout the week. This year's mentors came from the Jersey State, Kenya, Guyana and the Turks and Caicos Islands.



The mock parliamentary housing sitting was based on a fictional country named ***“Commonwealthland”*** that has a Westminster style parliamentary System. The issues debated throughout the sittings included Access to Universal Health Services, a quality based educational policy and access to skills programme and planning policy as it relates to environmental protection and urban development.

This programme offered a unique opportunity to develop leadership and experience and to be empowered to make a positive difference in shaping the future of their own communities.



With 60% of the Commonwealth's population aged under 30, the CYP is one of the key programmes organised by the CPA and responds to the needs of its young constituents. The CPA recognises that young people have a proven capability to lead change, and are an invaluable investment for now and the future of the Commonwealth.

***The 10th CYP will be hosted by the Indian Parliament.***

# PANCAP Youth Advocacy Workshop



Kevin Mendez, Chair of the PANCAP's Steering Committee on Youth Advocacy and rep of young key populations, Andrew Munnings as CYA for Belize, and Diego Grajalez as representative for young persons living with HIV had the opportunity to interact with Caribbean youth leaders in a Youth Advocacy Workshop, organized by PANCAP, held in Trinidad and Tobago on January 19th & 20th, 2018.

The goal of the training was to better prepare the Caribbean's youth to efficiently mobilise in the response to HIV/AIDS through improving access to HIV combination prevention, care, treatment and support services, in recognition of their sexual and reproductive health and rights. The training related to the recognition in the Caribbean Regional Strategic Framework (CRSF) on HIV and AIDS 2014-2018 that to strategically target the HIV epidemic will require establishing and sustaining an enabling environment by addressing social and cultural drivers of the epidemic and by removing barriers to access sexual and reproductive health information, education and services. The pillars of the training included:



***Targets of Advocacy, the rights based approach to advocacy, the process of developing a successful advocacy plan, using evidence to inform policy, and using the branches of government to enforce rights.*** A follow-up meeting was held in Belize on February 23rd, 2018 with youth stakeholders with the objective of reflecting on the outcomes of PANCAP's Youth Advocacy Meeting (2018) and developing a tentative road map for the introduction of the 3 priority areas highlighted in the CRYAF-SRH 2018. Invited guests included representative from the Caribbean Regional Youth Council, The Department of Youth Services, The CARICOM Youth Ambassador, Our Circle, Belize Youth Empowerment for Change, and The Belize Family Life Association.

## 5 Youth to represent Belize at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in London, April 2018

A featured event of the April 2018 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting as we move "***Toward a Common Future***" will be the Commonwealth Youth Forum (CYF) with a focus on a more sustainable future, a fairer future, a more secure future, and a more prosperous future. The Commonwealth population consists of ONE BILLION youth and Belize will be properly represented!

The CYF provides an opportunity for the young people of the Commonwealth to build cross-cultural connections and networks, debate the challenges facing its young people, and agree on youth-led initiatives to influence decision-makers and ensure young people have a voice in its future.

Belize's representatives include:

**Ruth Gutierrez** who is a Belizean student on the prestigious full Erasmus Mundus scholarship in a joint Master's degree in Aquaculture, Environment and Society program.

**Kristin Marin** who is the Vice Chair - Members and Partnerships of the Caribbean Regional Youth Council 2018-2020.

**Kevin Mendez** who is attending as a One Young World Official Delegate.

The national delegates are:

**Kris Miller** who is a board member for Belmopan Active Youths and Vice President for the Belize Youth for Road Safety Project.

**Dominique Noralez** who is a Commonwealth Youth Parliamentarian and President for the National Youth Council of Belize.

Outside of the fruitful conversations that will be held in the official youth forum, it is also an election year for the Commonwealth Youth Council and the chairpersonship is mandated to be in the Caribbean region for this term. For more information on the forum and the elections follow this link: <http://www.mi-event.info/event/cyc-elections2018> and <https://www.chogm2018.org.uk/forums>

## SIXTH MEETING OF NATIONAL AIDS PROGRAMME MANAGERS AND KEY PARTNERS OPENS WITH CALL FOR MORE COUNTRY OWNERSHIP OF HIV RESPONSE



MINISTER OF HEALTH, TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO HIGHLIGHTS LACK OF RESEARCH TO ASSESS THE RESILIENCE OF CARIBBEAN TERRITORIES IN THE FACE OF WITHDRAWAL OF EXTERNAL SUPPORT

Tuesday, March 13, 2018 (PANCAP Coordinating Unit, CARICOM

Secretariat): The Pan-Caribbean Partnership against HIV and AIDS (PANCAP), the mechanism that provides a structured and unified approach to the Caribbean's response to the HIV epidemic, commenced the Sixth Meeting of National AIDS Programme (NAP) Managers and Key Partners in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago from 12–14 March 2018.

Delivering the Feature Address, Honourable Terrence Deyalsingh, Minister of Health, Republic of Trinidad and Tobago highlighted that it has been more than 34 years since the first reported HIV and AIDS case in Trinidad

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and Tobago and the Caribbean and over 17 years since highly active antiretroviral treatment (HAART) became a reality.

However, he emphasized the need to focus on the sustainability of the response. ***“From the outset of the HIV epidemic in the Caribbean, there have been varied efforts to ensure that our regional and local communities achieved sustainability in our response to HIV”***, stated Minister Deyalsingh, ***“Sustainable HIV programmes are characterized by the ability of a national government and regional partners to increasingly assume full strategic and financial responsibility for their HIV and AIDS response over the long-term”***.

The Minister explained that this requires the development and strengthening of policies, infrastructure, skills, processes, human and financial resources to ensure that the response can survive, adapt and scale-up. He highlighted that financing is key to mounting a sustainable response and referred to the approaching 2020 deadline for the ***“90-90-90 Fast-Track Target”***. Further, he explained that ***“the region finds itself in a global environment with complex development priorities that pose challenges to national budgets and affect bilateral cooperation. The region is expected to experience reduced technical and financial inflows and must collectively mobilize domestic resources especially, for the support of prevention and the elimination of HIV-related stigma and discrimination among key and vulnerable populations, as complimentary external financing dwindles”***. Minister warned that while the desire to achieve sustainable responses is widespread, little formal research has been undertaken to assess the resilience of Caribbean territories, in the face of the withdrawal of external support.

***“As a region, we need to urgently heighten the research and the debate on the sustainability of the HIV response,”*** stated the Minister.

Addressing the participants, Chair of the Regional Coordinating Mechanism (RCM), Global Fund Project and Minister of Education, Guyana, Honourable Nicolette Henry advocated for more country ownership of the HIV response.

***“To achieve the objectives of the Caribbean Regional Strategic Framework on HIV and AIDS there is still need to strengthen country ownership of the response and shared responsibility to strategically align efforts to end HIV as a public health problem in the Caribbean”***, stated Minister Henry, ***“As a region we are still challenged with late diagnosis, particularly for men. Yet there is much to celebrate. People are living much longer with HIV, many more patients are on ART and there are greater methods and practices for fast-tracking prevention, operational financing mechanisms, and authority and responsibility of National AIDS Programmes. These are all essential requirements for closing the gap and shepherding an AIDS-free generation”***.

The Minister’s sentiments on low diagnosis figures for men were echoed in remarks by Dr Cesar Nuñez, UNAIDS Director, Latin America and Caribbean Regional Support Team, who stated ***“the region as a whole is lagging behind on the HIV testing and viral suppression targets. One of three people (36%) living with HIV in the Caribbean is not aware of their HIV status, and late diagnosis is a challenge in several countries, particularly for men. In 2016, one-third of those on treatment were not virally suppressed (33%). This is what we must seek to understand and address. Why are most systems able to initiate treatment once people are diagnosed, but not to retain them in care and achieve the gold standard of viral suppression?”***

Ms Annelise Hirschmann, Regional Manager for Latin America and the Caribbean, The Global Fund noted the success of the region’s response to HIV. She reminded the participants of their critical role in defining a path for the challenges ahead and emphasized the need to use treatment and key population cascades to make decisions on investing domestic and donor funding. Ms Hirschmann advocated that data should be used to shape decisions

on the response more effectively. “We know that the region does not have huge increases in domestic financing for health, but are we effectively utilizing what is available?” stated Ms Hirschmann. She also urged participants to continue to plan for the sustainability of the HIV response in light of reduced donor funding.

Dr Edwin Bolastig, PAHO/WHO Representative (ag.), Republic of Trinidad and Tobago reiterated PAHO/WHO’s commitment to all partners involved in the HIV response towards achieving the 90-90-90 Targets by 2030. Dr Bolastig stated that country ownership of the HIV response aligned with the Regional Strategic objectives are indeed essential for the response. He also noted that while more countries have been validated for the Elimination of Mother-to-Child Transfer of HIV and Syphilis (EMTCT), there is still work to be done. In light of this, he recognized PANCAP’s consistent efforts to bring together regional minds for the collective thought process towards building consensus, creating synergies and generating collective action towards ending HIV. He also highlighted the synergy between PAHO/WHO and PANCAP in advocating for universal health coverage and ensuring that no one is denied health care because of age, sexual orientation, occupation, religious beliefs, etc.

Mr Ivan Cruickshank, Administrative and Finance Manager, Caribbean Vulnerable Communities Coalition (CVC) highlighted the critical need for data necessary to achieve the 90-90-90 Targets. He also advocated for full involvement of civil society representatives at all levels in the implementation of HIV programmes and the region’s overall response.

Dr Nikkiah Forbes, Director, National HIV/AIDS and Infectious Diseases Programme, Ministry of Health, The Bahamas continued the theme of the meeting, calling for more interest by governments in the sustainability of the response. She stated ***“I make a respectful but urgent plea to our governments to commit to, as well as finance their National and Regional AIDS response”***.

Dr Forbes acknowledged the financial costs of such a commitment but implored governments to also consider the costs associated with inaction. ***“I also want you to remember that the colour of AIDS awareness is blood red, for its connection to blood and passion – not just red for anger in the face of injustice”***, stated Dr Forbes, ***“The AIDS response must prevail beyond party colours, such as in The Bahamas where fortunately HIV has been a matter that our successive government administrations have consistently supported”***.

Director of PANCAP and Chair of the opening ceremony, Mr Dereck Springer highlighted that the meeting provided an opportunity to reflect on the Region’s progress towards achieving the 90-90-90 Targets, to identify gaps in the region’s response and discuss strategies for filling the gaps. He noted that the meeting was being convened at a time of declining resources therefore the region must ensure greater efficiencies and effectiveness of HIV programmes.

The three-day forum culminated on Wednesday, 14 March as National AIDS Programme Managers, Chief Medical Officers, Permanent Secretaries, Development, Regional and Implementing Partners, including civil society organizations that work with people living with HIV and key population groups (including youth), will reach an agreement on approaches for integration as a key strategy for sustainability of the HIV response.

# NAC HIV Training for Belize's Labour Department

In an effort to increase awareness of HIV/AIDS, The National AIDS Commission collaborated with the Ministry of Labour to provide a two-day workshop to key Labour Officers at the Best Western Biltmore on March 15-16, 2018. The training explored a variety of topics pertinent to HIV prevention and the effects of HIV related work place stigma and discrimination.



A total of 22 key Labour Department managers and administrators were present at the two-day workshop. Facilitators of the HIV training included Mr. Arthur Usher, Communication Officer of the National AIDS Commission, Mr. Keron Cacho, Program Coordinator of the National AIDS Commission, Mr. Antonio Coyoc

and Jevan Chavarria of Ministry of Health, Mrs. Eva Burgos of Go Belize, Ms. Derricia Salazar of Our Circle and Ms Dominique Noralez from The National Youth Council of Belize. These facilitators presented on Belize's HIV Statistics, the Belize Health and Information System, the concerns and issues surrounding Key Affected Population in Belize and addressed the many ways and facets that the Ministry of Labour can assist in alleviating the issues. The workshop also informed its participants about the various international commitments that Belize has signed on to and ratified, correlating to both Human Rights and HIV service provision.

The NAC continues to maintain a dynamic and multi-sectorial approach to the HIV response in Belize and we take this moment to thank all our partners and colleagues for their support and look forward to your continued partnership.





# 20,000 STRONG



In an effort to keep pace with the growing global movement for gender parity, the Office of the Special Envoy for Women and Children in collaboration with the National Women's Commission (NWC), UNICEF Belize, The Embassy of the United States of America, the Women's Department and the Ministry of Human Development, Social Transformation and Poverty Alleviation hosted, for a third time, the *National 20,000 STRONG Women's Empowerment Rally on Friday, March 16, 2018*. The first rally took place in 2014 and brought together some 12,000

women and girls from the six districts and the Cayes making it one of the largest non-political events in Belize. It has since become a biennial event as part of Belize's activities for International Women's Month.

At its core, the movement aims to celebrate the achievements of Belize's sheroes as well as to offer a platform where we speak on the trials and to share the successes of our women and girls. This year, the Rally brought into sharp focus the challenges and needs of our adolescents under the theme "Nurturing the Next Generation" **#PressforProgress**. Major objectives:

- To bring national attention to the issues impacting adolescents – girls and boys, particularly education, violence, inequality, inclusion and access to services
- To give adolescents the opportunity for their voices to be heard; share their perspectives on the issues affecting their peer group and highlight the role they play already in designing and supporting responses to these issues.
- To highlight the opportunities available for adolescents, particularly girls, in the area of Science Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics (STEAM) to help engender a change in attitude and perceptions about the abilities, roles and opportunities for girls and boys.
- To promote self-efficacy in girls and encourage them to become agents of their own change and development.



The Empowerment Rally included dynamic speakers from secondary schools across the country, a motivational keynote speaker and other short presentations on the importance of investing in our women and girls. In addition, the event created a platform; i.e., a marketplace where local artists and entrepreneurs promoted and showcased their products. The marketplace also included a mini exhibition where students from secondary schools from the different districts showcased their artistic work and innovations while encouraging other young persons to get involved.



In an attempt to create momentum, a dynamic and robust public relations campaign surrounding this year's theme was developed to encourage citizens to advocate for a change in the status quo for the benefit of women and girls. This campaign relied heavily on social media



but also utilized broadcast media (radio and television) to mobilize citizens. The centrepiece for public engagement in the campaign was a call to the general public to use the “hands out” concept i.e. (pressing) along with their image and the hashtag **#PressforProgress** to demonstrate their support for change for women and girls. This call has gone out with an encouragement for the public to highlight a change towards which they are committed to advocate and work in the

community. These changes include: keeping a gender parity mind set, forging positive visibility for women and girls, advocating for access to justice,

challenging stereotypes and celebrating women’s achievements. In addition to this, a series of media rounds with key partners and social influencers was organized to further engage the public and keep the conversation on social change for women and girls going.

### Education:

- Reduce the numbers of incidences of bullying in the school
- Increase the number of schools that offer non-traditional courses to girls and boys
- Increase in the number of schools that participate in the Financial Literacy competition offered by MOE, with a specific focus to include more girls
- Increase in the number of schools that participate in the Innovation competition offered by PWC, with a specific focus to include more girls
- Increase in the enrolment in the ITVET, particularly girls (by district and gender)



### Child Protection

- Reduce the number of children that experience violent discipline in the homes
- Reduction in the number of children who are aware of the mental health service
- 500 parents/ teacher are empowered to effect real change in the direct environment of the family and the schools, ensuring that the traditional societally ascribed roles, responsibilities and opportunities for girls and boys experience a change.

