



***Senator the Honourable Donna Cox***  
**Minister of Social Development and Family Services**

**Address**  
**Agricola Credit Union**

**SEA Awards 2022**  
***‘Empowering Families, Transforming  
Education’***

Saturday September 17, 2022

2:00 p.m.

# SALUTATIONS

- Ms Charlene Charles-Belfon, Master of Ceremonies and member of the Bursary Committee;
- Dr. Arthur Potts, President, Agricola Credit Union Co-operative Society Ltd.;
- The Board of Directors;
- Ms Marcia Quammie, Manager;
- Mrs. Charmaine Giroux-John, Chair, Bursary Committee;
- Committee Members;
- Agricola Staff;
- Students;
- Parents;
- Specially invited guests;
- Members of the Media;
- Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Afternoon

Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, it is indeed a pleasure to be here today to celebrate the achievements of the Secondary Entrance Assessment (SEA) students. Each of you all has made your parents, your schools and your credit union very proud and today, you are being honoured for your hard work and diligence. I have been informed that this award ceremony has been taking place for the last 30 years, and is a signal event in the Agricola Credit Union's calendar. Your Credit Union's dedication to celebrating the academic achievement of your shareholders' children must be applauded.

I have been part of the Credit Union movement for a number of years, so I can tell you about the valuable contribution credit unions, such as Agricola, have made to building families, communities and our society as a whole.

Today, I am talking to you wearing many Hats. First is my 'student' Hat. I was once just like you, excited, happy, just starting out, ready to move to the next level, to secondary school. I am also wearing my 'credit union' Hat, as a longstanding member of the credit union movement; and finally, I am wearing my 'Minister of Social Development and Family Services' Hat. In this capacity I can see the future of our country and the role played by credit unions towards economic prosperity and social stability.

Your theme for this event, ‘Empowering Families, Transforming Education’ is powerful, because there are hundreds of stories of families who have been empowered and have had their history altered because they realised that education was the key to lifting themselves out of poverty. These families received support through institutions like the Credit Union, so that their children were educated to receive the best that this country has to offer.

Today, many families continue to receive financial assistance to help their children achieve their educational goals; thus ensuring that the generational cycle of poverty is broken. So, whether it is smaller items such as school fees, uniforms, books, lessons or bigger items such as a home or a car, we can all agree that the credit union has been there for its members.

Indeed, this was the rationale behind our country’s first Prime Minister, Dr. Eric Williams’ insistence on the establishment of the Common Entrance Examination. Through this examination, hundreds of thousands of students were able to attend secondary school for free. Prior to common entrance, many students were not able to win one of the few Exhibition scholarships, or their parents could not afford to source the funds necessary to pay for their tuition at a secondary school.

It was this same rationale that prompted another Prime Minister, the Honourable Patrick Manning, to introduce the Government Assistance for Tertiary Education (GATE) programme, which saw tens of thousands of students being able, for the first time to access a University education. Education changes lives and opens the door for opportunities, so you can become whatever you choose to be.

Today, I would like to challenge Agricola, and perhaps this is a project your Education Committee can take on, to seek out some of the earlier recipients of these awards, and find out where they are. And if they cannot be found, begin with today's recipients, track their progress through their respective schools, to see the impact of your contribution on their lives in the longer term.

Ladies and gentlemen, no child achieves academic success on his/her own. More often, it is the village, the teachers, the parents, the grandparents, the other siblings, and a whole lot of other persons who would have contributed to their success, and so today is also about thanking them for their contributions as well.

At the Ministry, we understand the powerful impact the immediate and extended family can make on others and that is why we have adopted a holistic approach to helping, empowering and transforming families.

Through the various Divisions of the Ministry, we have embarked upon a series of initiatives that are also designed to strengthen families, and provide them with the tools necessary for raising the 21<sup>st</sup> century child.

Only recently, through the National Family Services Division, we launched our latest round of Community Parenting Workshops. These workshops include sessions on parenting for men, co-parenting as well as dealing with family violence. We are excited about our sessions for grandparents: sharing information on modern parenting, ensuring among other things, that they understand the value of technology so that they will not be fearful of using it. The National Family Services Division also provides psycho-social and counselling support for family members. All of the programmes and services are absolutely free so I encourage everyone here to reach out to the Ministry for whatever help you may need.

Ladies and gentleman, boys and girls, *David Ogden Stiers (an American actor)*, says “*Family means no one gets left behind or forgotten.*” All members of the family should be given an equal opportunity to develop. Today’s ceremony testifies to the level of support and investment made by parents and significant others that contributed to the success of our youngsters seated here this afternoon.

To our young scholars present here, football legend Pele said, *"Success is no accident. It is the hard work, perseverance, learning, studying, sacrifice and most of all, love of what you are doing or learning to do, that make you successful."* You must commit to the work you have to do to achieve success. There is no short-cut here, no back door or no side entry. You just have to put in the work, with determination and purpose, bearing in mind that career you desire in your heart. Above all, Do Not quit! Never Give Up!

*"The reward for work well done is to do more."* I encourage you to continue to excel academically and always remember what Katherine Paterson, a well-known American writer said, *"a dream without a plan is a wish"*. Many of you may have dreams of becoming a nurse, doctor, mechanic, hairstylist but these dreams can only be accomplished if you study. You must have a study plan and make sure that you stick to it. That extra hour of study you put in everyday before you go to bed will pay off in the long run. Social media, video games and talking with friends online can be distractions that can hinder your opportunity to succeed. What you put into your studies will be the result that you will get. Your education is one of the most important aspect of your life, and you should not let anything or anyone come in the way of your dreams.

Children, your lives can be transformed thorough education, so make full use of your school days. Stay focused and committed to your academic development. You have already demonstrated commitment to the principles of success and I extend hearty congratulations to each of you and give you my best wishes in all your future endeavours.

Parents, I am urging you to continue investing in the lives of your children. Educating them is one of the best gifts you can give to them because in your old age they will support you rather than depend on your pension to support them. Develop the attitude of gratitude in your children, so they will never take for granted your contributions and the sacrifices you made to their growth and success. Ensure that they understand the value of money by enrolling them as members of this Credit Union, if you have not yet done so. Encourage them to learn the value of thrift, of saving for a rainy day and to adopt the right attitudes and behaviours.

I must congratulate the Agricola Credit Union on the continuation of this initiative for the past 30 years, and once again offer you not only my absolute support but that of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, as we work together to make a huge impact on the ability of our families to lead empowered and fulfilled lives.



Congratulations again to all awardees and I encourage you to continue to reach for the stars. Take advantage of all opportunities presented to assist you in reaching your goals. As you settle into your secondary schools, I am encouraging you to continue the strong tradition of excellence and high performance. I shall be checking in on you and following your progress over the coming year.

My parting words to you today: Make your Parents Proud! Make your Credit Union Proud! Make Your Country Proud! and above all else make Yourself Proud!

I thank you for the courtesy of your attention.

May God bless you all, and may God bless our Nation