



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

**Ministry of Social Development and Family Services**



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Priority: **HIGH**

#### **Minister Cox calls for greater solidarity and connectedness at Down Syndrome Day Conference 2021**

*Port-of-Spain* --- “The Ministry remains fully committed to the elimination of any and all barriers that may hinder persons with disabilities from enjoying the utmost respect, dignity of self and equality” said Minister of Social Development and Family Services Senator the Honourable Donna Cox, as she addressed participants at the Down Syndrome Family Network’s 9<sup>th</sup> Annual World Down Syndrome Conference at the Hyatt Regency on March 19<sup>th</sup>. The theme for the event was **#Connect** and also included presentations from Ms. Shauntel Neal-Howe, President of the National Down Syndrome Congress, Dr. Kishore Vellody MD, Medical Director of the Down Syndrome Centre of Western Pennsylvania, Ms Ria Mohammed Davidson, Human Rights Lawyer and Disability Advocate, and self-advocate Ms. Christy De Souza.

The objective of the conference was to stimulate an international discourse on issues relevant to inclusion and human rights. Under the theme, **#CONNECT**, which the Ministry fully endorses, this year’s World Down Syndrome Day envisions that all people with Down Syndrome can connect and participate on an equal basis with others. The conversation focused on how society can engender an all-inclusive environment for persons with Down Syndrome, as the speakers shared their experiences, knowledge and expertise, bringing perspectives from around the world.

According to Minister Cox: “Through continued collaborations with the Ministry’s Disability Affairs Unit, as well as that of the Non-governmental Organisations Unit, the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services’ executive, staff and the wider citizenry, are able to stay informed about developments and issues surrounding persons with Down Syndrome and also, know how we can contribute further to improving their happiness, success and full participation in all spheres of social, legislative and economic activities.” The Minister further stated that, “since the world has been forced to adopt new methods of communication and connecting that are accessible to everyone”, it was quite fitting that the theme for this year was **#connect**. Conference attendees were informed that the Ministry’s focus during this fiscal will be on improving connections to ensure that all persons with Down Syndrome and other disabilities can connect and participate on an equal basis with others. The Minister stressed that effective and meaningful participation of our children and adults can only be achieved via accessible information and communication, support systems and inclusive consultation.

Minister Cox took the opportunity to highlight some upcoming and ongoing initiatives by the Ministry in support of persons with disabilities, which included providing basic sign language training, in collaboration with UWI Open Campus, to a cohort of officers in the Social Welfare Division. The intention is to facilitate communications with persons who are either deaf or hearing impaired so as to ensure they receive the highest standard of service, as well as sensitization sessions for Ministry personnel, members of private and Government organisations, schools and members of the media.

Based on the theme, Minister Cox highlighted that #Connect must be an ongoing commitment on all our parts, and gave the assurance of the Ministry's continued support and attention to the elimination of barriers that may hinder persons with disabilities from enjoying the utmost respect, dignity of self and equality.



*Minister of Social Development and Family Services Senator the Honourable Donna Cox address participants at the Down Syndrome Family Network's 9th Annual World Down Syndrome Conference.*



*Minister Cox and self-advocate Ms. Christy De Souza speak after the conference.*



*Lots of Socks – Minister Cox joined by Ms Lisa Ghany of the Down Syndrome Family Network (DSFN) and participants of the DSFN's conference rock their socks at the Network's 9th Annual World Down Syndrome Conference.*



*Minister Cox and Chief Technical Officer of the Ministry Mr Michael Reid (L) take a photo with Mr Glen Niles, Ms Lisa Ghany and participants of the 9th Annual World Down Syndrome Conference.*

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**For more information:**

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