



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

Ministry of Social Development and Family Services



MEDIA RELEASE

Tuesday, 06 April 2021

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 Networks 9th Annual World Down Syndrome Conference at the Hyatt Regency on March 19th. The theme for the event was **#Connect** and also included presentations from the Vice President of People First Canada, Dewlyn Lobo, the President of the NDSC Diversity Committee, Shauntel Neal-Howe and the Chairperson of the International Disability Alliance, Diane Richler, Human Rights Lawyer and Disability Advocate, Ms Ria Mohammed Davidson and self-advocate 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.

Following 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.



Senator the Honourable Donna Cox, along with Chief Technical Officer, Mr. Michael Reid, Founder of the DSFN, Mr. Glen Niles and PRO of DSFN, Lisa Ghany wear colourful socks to help raise awareness and put some fun into the celebration.



Senator the Honourable Donna Cox chats with ambassadors of the Down Syndrome community.

-END-

For more information:

Corporate Communications and Education Unit
Ministry of Social Development and Family Services
(868) 623-2608; Ext 5405/5424/5432
Website: www.social.gov.tt
corporatecomm.msd@gmail.com