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Scotiabank's Debating Competition Helps Schools to Implement Education Ministry's HIV/AIDS Policy

The Scotiabank National HIV and AIDS Debating Competition which got now underway with approximately 90 primary schools across the island has been instrumental in getting schools to implement the Ministry of Education's National Policy on HIV and AIDS in schools. Even though the Ministry had mandated all schools almost fifteen years ago to include HIV and AIDS education in their curriculum, not many schools had the resources and the staff to teach the subject matter to its student body.

"Each school has received the national policy and are aware of what should be done, however, not all of them have guidance counselors who are the chief persons who will cover the area as a subject matter. Parents are encouraged through PTA to discuss issues related to HIV and AIDS with their children: they can help in heightening their children awareness regarding the challenges surrounding the epidemic, explains Mavis Fuller, Guidance Education Officer in the Ministry of Education.

The Ministry's National Policy on HIV and AIDS is intended to promote effective prevention and care within the context of the educational system. The policy speaks to the protection of rights of students and employees within these institutions and particularly to education on HIV and AIDS. *"A continuing Health and Family Life and HIV/AIDS*

education programme must be implemented at all schools and institutions for all students and school personnel. Age appropriate education on HIV must form part of the curriculum.”

The Scotiabank National Primary School competition has prepared over 15 moots which span the subject of sexual health, children rights, sex education, relationships and HIV and AIDS. The competition organizers have found that knowledge levels fluctuate in different schools, and so the Debating Competition has acted as a catalyst in encouraging school to thoroughly research and instruct students on matters relating to sexual health and HIV and AIDS.

“While some schools and students seemed to have a more active HIV programme and the students were more aware of the subject matter, others found the subject area new. We found that in preparation for the debates, the students needed a longer time frame to research and clearly understand the subject,” explains Joylene Griffiths Irving, Director of Public, Corporate and Government Affairs at Scotiabank.

Mrs. Griffiths Irving noted that the debates have also provided resource material including books and videos for schools, which helps the students to explore the various subject areas under the guidance of their teachers, co-ordinators and guidance counselors.

“Our teachers are very grateful for the Debates as it has helped our students to get further exposure, to research the topic and understand the different areas. The Debate has not only helped us to teach the subject in our school, it has also given it a little more excitement. We take the ideas we have formed in preparation of the moots, amend them according to age group and take them to the different classes. All those who didn’t know much about HV and AIDS know a lot now, explained Janet Walsh Davis, Debate Coordinator of the Naggo Head Primary School. Mrs. Walsh Davis also added that the stories, books and videos provided by the Bank have helped in the discussion process in and outside of the classroom.

The Scotiabank National Debating Competition, which is being hosted under the theme, "Speak Up! Speak Out!" is aimed at raising awareness levels among young children and changing attitudes towards persons living with the disease, by fighting stigma and discrimination while promoting healthy lifestyles. The debate will culminate in a grand final in May 2007.

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