

The Honourable Floyd Green, M.P.
Minister of State in the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information
April 4, 2017

INTRODUCTION & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Mr. Speaker, as I rise to make my contribution to the Sectoral Debates of the 2017/2018 Financial Year, I am moved to reflect on the young man who stood here just under a year ago to present in these halls a game changing vision for youth and children of this nation. I was motivated by the pure desire to see a prosperous Jamaica energized by our future nation builders.

I am even more committed today that that day when I first rose in this House to speak as I am more convinced that God has called upon us at this time to truly set Jamaica and our youth on a path of prosperity.

I have learned Mr. Speaker, that leadership and learning are indispensable to each other. In the times of great difficulty, which are plenty in leadership, my circle of support has been vital to my success. I want to first acknowledge my partner, Kerida and son, Nathaniel for sacrificing many family outings, for being patient and for being forgiving.

My parents continue to be pillars of strength for me, and as I reflect Mr Speaker each time I speak in the House I think of all the times my maternal grandfather, Arthur Neil, assured me that I was destined for great things.

I dedicate this presentation to his memory; his story of a hard working man from south St Elizabeth who stuck by and cared for his family of six children and many others in the community; a man fondly called "Roots" who first showed me how a smile can conquer every fear.

I am forever grateful that my Minister, Senator The Honourable Ruel Reid continues to give me tremendous guidance and support. I am blessed to have a hard working team throughout the Ministry starting with PS Dean - Roy Bernard and CEO Dr. Grace McLean and all the other members of the Executive Management team. My teams at the youth division, NYS, CDA and OCR may tell you that I really drive them hard to get the job done but they have answered the call and the successes I announce today are a result of their hard work. The world knows that my core team at the Ministry are gamechangers and it is they who keep this ship afloat, My Advisor Brittany Singh -

Williams, Executive Assistant Gabrielle Hylton and Senior Secretary Shanique Ebanks. Proudly the average age of my team is 26.

I stand here extremely proud to call Andrew Michael Holness my Prime Minister. He has set the bar exceedingly high and we simply try to keep up with his pace. He has lead by example and as a young politician I am extremely happy that my PM is relatable to our youth, inspiring and different in his approach. I thank him for being genuinely concerned about education and our youth. I thank him for the foundation he has laid in education that Minister Reid and I benefit from and seek to build on and I thank him for always being there when we call to lend real support.

Each year we try to showcase the work of our most talented Youth. This year I want to thank Kenia Mattis, and the team Listen Mi Jamaica for the work you will see displayed here today.

I welcome my student leader corps who are in the House today and all our international partners. Additionally we are honoured to have students from Newell High and Black River High both of which are in my constituency. Finally Mr Speaker this day would not be complete without paying homage to the 2017 School Challenge Quiz winners from my alma mater. They too are in the House. They have made us extremely proud and as their captain said: "We proceed with humility and honour."

The Best Place on Earth - South West St Elizabeth

There is an undeniable fact Mr Speaker, I could not be here were it not for the faith and confidence of the people of South West St.Elizabeth, They have invested their hopes and dreams in me Mr Speaker and I can guarantee them that the returns shall be significant. I thank my Management Team and my Executive for their advice and guidance as we manoeuvred the first year of representational politics. Last year Mr Speaker when I spoke I mentioned 2 out of four councillors this year I can proudly mention three (3), including a Mayor. I thank Jeremy Palmer, Mayor Derrick Sangster and the new star 25 year old Whitney Smith who for the first time in the history of South West St, Elizabeth won a contested local government elections for the JLP in the Brompton Division. My Executive team with Vice Chair - Krishan James, Secretary - Jennifer Mullings, my new assistant secretary - Carol Mitchell, New Treasurer- Marcine Witter, and my new PRO - Lorna Baker. I thank my office staff led my Office manager Jodian Jones, Secretary - Tracey Myers, Newsletter coordinator Karen Parchment, my office attendant Miss Millie and watch man Skenga.

The investment of the people of Southwest has already began to pay dividends. We have been able to undertake a number of infrastructure projects especially focusing on remedial actions for our non existent road network. We have increased our focus on education and housing and sports have returned to our constituency. Agriculture has rebounded and we are now back to our rightful place as the breadbasket. Our community tourism product is second to none and one of the things the Tourism Minister forgot to mention in his list of accolades yesterday is that the Pelican Bar has been listed as the world's coolest bar by a well renowned travel website. I will give a full report in the State of the Constituency Debate. I will however say now, that I represent the proudest and hardest working people in the word, all they require is infrastructural support, our road and water network must be addressed. As we speak the Mountainside to Fullerswood Park road and the Slipe to Lacovia roads are almost impassable and Government must organise itself in a way that our response can be quicker in these instances. Our farmers in Flagaman and on the plains only need irrigation and they can make 5 in 4 a reality in the next two years. They know that first and foremost I am MP and will always represent their interest

NEW LEVEL: ELEVATED YOUth

Mr Speaker,

Today I welcome the opportunity to draw the attention of this House to the plans and programmes being implemented by this Administration to showcase the platform of prosperity for Jamaica's youth and children from 0 to 29.

Mr. Speaker, we have found the formula for energizing our Youth; $E=MC^2$ which means (E) Energizing the (M) Mass of youth through (C) Creativity and (C) Culture. This is our call to action; ensuring that youth are provided with more avenues to leverage their innovation and creativity, and partner with Government in the formation of policies and programmes so as to unleash the energy of youth in the drive to create a prosperous Jamaica.

Our youth Mr. Speaker represent the hopes and dreams of our nation. They are in the words of the late, great Sir Alexander Bustamante "the trustees of posterity" and permit me to add Sir that they are the trustees of prosperity. My interactions with them continue to inspire and reassure me that our nation is in good hands but, we must continue to harness this power to electrify Jamaica for greater endeavours. That is the mission of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information and it is the foundation on which my presentation will be laid today .

Our mission this year is vested in the theme **NEW LEVEL: Elevate YOUth.**

ELEVATING OUR EDUCATION SERVICES

Mr. Speaker, education still remains the critical component for our youth as we seek to elevate them to a new level.

Elevating access

We have spent a significant time last year trying to re-establish gains the country made in relation to access to education during 2007 to 2011 when we removed tuition fees from our secondary schools. To this end Mr Speaker, we have stridently put forward the position that no child should be unable to attend a public educational institution because they cannot afford to pay.

Every member in this House Mr Speaker is acutely aware that only education can truly transform our country, our people. In fact the vast majority of us would never be here were it not for the transformative power of education. We cannot and will not countenance a Jamaica that a mother or father feels the need to keep home a child because they cannot afford the auxiliary fees. I am therefore pleased to report to this House, Mr Speaker that despite the fears and the challenges, our implementation of the policy of non-mandatory fees has been a tremendous success. **Five point three billion dollars** (\$5.3 B) was provided last year which allowed us to increase the secondary school grants per child from \$11,500 per student to \$19,000 and provide additional support to schools...

Additionally because of a deep understanding held by this side and the Minister who marshals the portfolio, the payment schedule to schools was adjusted to ensure that institutions had the money when they needed it - just in time to ensure a smooth start to the school year. Mr. Speaker the schools got their first tranche in June, following this, they received another in September and November. The final payment for the school year is this month, April 2017. This, Mr. Speaker is prosperity. **We are taking our schools to a new level.**

This year Mr. Speaker, while continuing to support the secondary schools through an increased allocation of \$7.2 billion, we are also focusing on our Primary Schools and Early Childhood Institutions.

On further review of financials of our Primary schools Mr. Speaker, primary schools only received an average of \$800 per student to treat with the general running and upkeep of the school. This Mr. Speaker, is a problem we intend to fix. Effective this year, our primary schools will receive a regular grant of \$2,500 per student an increase of over 200%. This is in addition to the maintenance grant that was increased from \$30,000 to \$50,000 for this school year. **We are taking primary schools to a new level.**

Of course there are still significant challenges across our school system. Of course there are always needs for additional resources. In fact the education budget is only now recovering after significant cuts at the hand of the former Minister of Finance. In the budget laid in 2013, the education allocation was cut by 3 Billion dollars, with significant cuts to primary and secondary education. At that time our inflation was 9 per cent. In fact Mr. Speaker it is no wonder why the auxiliary fees became so prominent over the past four years as the schools had to try to find creative means to survive.

Our mission now Mr. Speaker, having dealt significantly with access, is to accelerate the pace at which we treat with quality. We have some of the hardest working, most talented teachers in the world. We have studied our education system time and time again. We know what today's world requires of our students; critical thinkers, capable of analysis and with strong interpersonal skills. We know the methodology to get there and we have set about the task in earnest.

Minister Reid will treat with a number of substantive education matters in the State of Nation debate, and as such I will treat with a few matters before focusing strongly on our youth and children.

DE-SHIFTING OF SCHOOLS

Mr Speaker, there has been much debate in recent weeks about the number of schools that are either still on the shift system or slated to be removed in the next academic year.

It is an unfortunate, unfair and an absolutely unnecessary exercise to bring the removal of schools from the shift system into the political fray. On our entry into this Ministry we found existing programmes to remove schools from the shift. We reviewed the budget and could have determined to scrap those plans or halt those in train, but we have long passed that in our educational system. Instead we continued the drive and we were able to list 10 schools that we took off shift during our first year in office. Mr. Speaker, there are no plans to halt this process.

The proposed plan for the elimination of the shift system is structured in phases to facilitate the acquisition of the required resources. The first phase running from 2017/2018 to 2018/2019 at an estimated cost of J\$350.5M, is to see 13 schools taken off the shift system, that is seven (7) High Schools, four (4) Primary and Junior High schools and two (2) All-Age schools. Of this number, data shows that eight (8) institutions which include John Mills and Green Park Primary and Junior High will require no additional facilities due to declining population and the gradual phasing out of the grade 7-9 enrolment. The remaining five (5) schools which include Pembroke Hall and Cedric Titus High Schools will require additional facilities at an estimated cost of \$130M. This amount is allocated in the 2017/2018 Capital A Budget.

In addition, we are not simply focusing on taking schools off shift, because the reality is that there are a number of schools that operate for the entire day that are in need of additional resources to treat with overcrowding. Six of those institutions have been earmarked for intervention at a cost of J\$220.5M which has been provided for in this budget. **We are taking them to a new level.**

CAREER ADVANCEMENT PROGRAMME (CAP)

Mr. Speaker, while there has been continuity across administrations, there are points of departure. In 2010, the Most Honourable Prime Minister who was, at that time, the Minister of Education, introduced the Career Advancement Programme. This programme was so designed to ensure that we weren't losing our children who, after five (5) years of secondary school did not perform optimally. The reality members, is that as we continue to reform quality, increase resources and change methodologies of teaching and engaging our students, we continue to have students who underperform and fall out of the system. A lot of those students often end up "pon di corner". We all know them; we pass them every day and unfortunately they provide fertile ground for unsavoury elements. The CAP was therefore so designed; to reduce the number of students we were allowing to leave the system without a skill or at least the basic core subjects.

In 2010, Mr. Speaker, when CAP was introduced in 11 schools, we were able to assist 1,500 students. In 2011, CAP was expanded to 77 schools catering to over 8,000 students. Unfortunately in 2012 the funding for the programme was cut by 50%, from \$800 million to \$400 million and hence the enrolment was significantly reduced to fewer than 5,000 students. This also led to the closure of a number of centres.

Fortunately Mr. Speaker, the team at the Ministry did however seek to work on the quality of the programme and continued to strengthen delivery. Since this administration took office Mr. Speaker, the funding has been increased to \$800 million and enrolment of some 10,000 students under different modalities in 110 institutions has been activated. In this new year, we expect to increase the enrolment to over 10,000 students and to increase the number of institutions to some 120. We are taking CAP to a NEW LEVEL

In fact, Mr Speaker, for this 2017/2018 financial year, we have provided a total of \$7.67 Billion for training programmes targeting our young people through CAP, JCTE and HEART operated entities, apprenticeship and other projects. This is how we elevate our youth to a NEW LEVEL.

NEW LEVEL TERTIARY EDUCATION

Our Administration, Mr. Speaker, is committed to supporting our students at all levels of the education system to achieve their career goals. We know from our own experience that a solid tertiary education is a channel for upward social mobility. We understand the challenges that our young people face in financing tertiary education. I for one Mr. Speaker had to lean on the Student's' Loan Bureau to finance my first degree at the UWI - Mona.

It is for this reason Mr. Speaker that the Government has increased funding support for students at the tertiary level. Never mind the alternative facts. The allocation from the Ministry of Finance for the bureau was the same as the year before ensuring that the Student's' Loan Bureau is adequately funded. Additionally we applaud the move by the Minister of Finance to lower the burden of repayment on our students by:

- Reducing the pay as you study interest rate from 9% to 6%;
- Reducing the postgraduate interest rate from 13 % to 9% and introducing a preferential interest rate for a number of courses directly aligned to the growth Agenda.

Mr Speaker this is in addition to the announcement last year that interest is now calculating using the reducing balance method. That is how we Elevate Youth

Over the past two years HEART has also supported the loans to TVET programmes through an allocation to the Student Loan Bureau. It was always our intention to continue that support whether through the provisions of Student Loans or the provisions of grants through our other tertiary support programmes such as JAMVAT. After

deliberations by the board Mr Speaker and in line with the surplus generated by HEART TRUST /NTA last year, the entity has actually increased its provision to the Student Loan Bureau by 100%, moving from the 100 million provided last year to over 200 million to assist students pursuing TVET programmes. This is a new level of commitment Mr. Speaker tied to our new approach to Elevating our Youth.

JAMAICA VALUES AND ATTITUDES PROGRAMME (JAMVAT)

Another avenue of support to our students who qualify for tertiary education is the Jamaica Values and Attitudes Programme (JAMVAT) administered by the National Youth Service. The programme provides up to 30% tuition assistance to Tertiary Students while helping them to develop the spirit and the willingness to contribute to national development through volunteerism. Last year we provided 130 million dollars, and we were able to help 1,300 youth realise their dream of attaining tertiary education. That is how you Elevate youth.

ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP PROGRAMME (AHEPP)

Additionally the NYS utilizing a partnership model in providing tuition assistance to pursue tertiary studies in national priority areas, continued its partnership with Caribbean Maritime Institute, College of Agriculture Science and Education, Brown's Town Community College, Northern Caribbean University and added the Montego Bay Community College. One hundred and twenty three (123 youth) were assisted

Alignment of Education System with Industry needs

Mr. Speaker, part of the drive to grow our country must be our Ministry's move to closely align our education system with industry needs. This is being done through several initiatives:

1. The establishment of a committee to guide the Ministry in the determination of programmes in the institutions.
2. Utilization of labour market demands information to determine the subject offerings from grade 10 to 13 at the secondary level.
3. Realigning the tertiary institutions to offer courses in line with labour market demands.

4. The integration of STEM and TVET into the formal education system. This is far advanced in all schools at the primary and secondary levels. Over \$400 million was spent in the previous year to provide equipment, training and materials needed to implement programmes in the schools.
5. Continuous monitoring and support for schools to offer training at the required level.

Mr Speaker, as we focus and realign our tertiary education system, part of our focus is to ensure that the poorest among our children can obtain a tertiary education. We do recognise that it is still too difficult for some of our students who qualify to access tertiary education. It is for this reason this administration is formulating a policy to ensure that at least one student from every PATH household in Jamaica, receives a scholarship to a public tertiary institutions in the country.

VALUES AND ATTITUDES

Mr Speaker values and attitude are fundamental to the growth and health of our Jamaican people. You will agree with me that the school is the only institution where all Jamaicans pass through at one point or another. The Ministry has embarked on the development of a National Values and Attitude programme. This is being spearheaded by a broad based National committee. The committee has so far developed a national strategic plan and it is expected that a soft launch of the programme will commence early in this financial year with a view for roll out in September 2017. The core values articulated are:-

1. Respect (for self, life, property and law)
2. Honesty & Truthfulness (in word and deed)
3. Love & Compassion (for self and others)
4. Self-Discipline
5. Being Productive (working individually, co-operatively and knowledge driven)

Mr Speaker as a country we all must get on board and chart a positive path for all Jamaicans to follow.

EARLY CHILDHOOD COMMISSION

Mr Speaker, for years in this House we have spoken about prioritising Early Childhood Development. We know the research, the statistics and the undeniable fact that Early Childhood Education is the most critical part of the educational journey.

Over the past year, new life has been brought into the functioning of the Commission. I commend the Chairman, Trisha Williams - Singh and her hardworking team. We have implemented a paperless system and sought to further strengthen internal efficiencies by ensuring that critical positions are filled. These posts include an IT manager, a Manager for Community and Interventions, a Research Officer, Development Officers in Region 6 and 1 and 3 inspectors across Regions 1, 2 and 5.

The Commission launched a new website in September 2016, which provides a more interactive medium to disseminate information to our primary stakeholders and the general public on the role of the ECC in the sector. As at March 2017, a new web page dubbed **Support an ECI** platform was created for stakeholders both locally and internationally to support an ECI's targeted needs and in particular, those ECIs on the path to Certification.

Certification

Drive

For the first time in our history, last year, we were able to certify an early childhood institution. Certification is an indication that the institutions have fully complied with all 12 standards. Mr. Speaker, we now have to quicken the pace of certification. This has taken far too long. This has been our message to the team at the ECC and they have set very ambitious targets. The team has embarked on certification fairs to bring the message to the communities and the services to the practitioners. These fairs serve as a one stop shop to where practitioners can go and have police records process, sign up for food handlers permit and learn more about the 12 standards. Mr Speaker when we started the drive we had four (4) schools certified, as of March 31, 2017, we now have 30 certified, and over 300% increase in certified institutions.

Partnership for Certification

We still have a far way to go, We have approximately 2,700 early childhood institutions in need of certification. Mr. Speaker, there is still a lot of ground to cover to attain an acceptable level of certification. We all know that the major issues halting the process of

more early childhood institutions attaining certification is a lack of resources. While this looks daunting, I find that it is when faced with the most daunting tasks we, Jamaicans are at our best.

I call upon all Jamaicans to partner with the Government to take our ECC's to a new level. I challenge all Members in this House to obtain the ECC reports for the schools in their respective areas; identify those that are close to certification and channel some of our constituency development funds to get them certified. I invite NGO Partners to do the same. Kiwanis and Rotaract members, your record of service is unquestionable; help an ECI to get certified. Private Partners this is a key way in which you can help us transform Jamaica. We have been making the call and we have had some answers:

The Digicel Foundation - has pledged 15 million dollars to help five early childhood institutions from the parishes of St. Elizabeth, Manchester, St. Catherine, Westmoreland and Hanover to attain certification. The schools have been identified and the work has started.

One Jamaica Foundation - has already provided the resources for the St. Margaret's Basic School to attain certification and is now working with the Hounslow and Mountain Side Basic to gain certification.

Breds Foundation and Crayons Count are working to have the EI's in the Greater treasure Beach Area Certified.

National Bakery, through the Little Leaders Programme has committed \$70 million towards Early Childhood Education. Every ECI that has registered for certification receives learning kits. The contents of these kits help to promote and develop specific skill sets necessary for this pivotal learning stage. Additionally, the programme features a mobile classroom named 'Training Wheels' which hosts workshops across the island, led by a full-time education consultant. Educational content in the learning kits are in Mathematics and Science.

The latest one Mr Speaker, is our far advanced discussions with Restaurants of Jamaica owners and operators of Pizza Hut and KFC who are going to provide the financing to ensure that 35 early childhood institutions will be provided with a hot nutritious meal aligned with Standard 7 considering the nutritional requirement at that level.

There are also many other unsung heroes, organisations and groups who are helping in this process and I thank them and urge them to enhance their work as we elevate our early childhood institutions.

Early Stimulation Programme

Mr. Speaker, during last year we laid the foundation for the reintroduction of The Early Stimulation Programme. The team has met and framework has been arrived at including the Parenting Programme in Health Centres – ***What You Do With Baby Really Matters***. It is expected that for the upcoming financial year the equipment needed will be procured and the programme will begin in earnest in the health centres and then expanded to homes.

ECI Rationalisation

Mr Speaker we will continue on our drive to bring more early childhood institutions under the direct control of government through the establishment of infant departments .**Fifty Million Dollars (\$50,000,000.00)** was allocated in last year's budget for renovation or modification works in primary schools to create Infant Departments in thirty (30) schools.

Contracts were awarded for thirty (30) schools at a cost of forty-nine million and fourteen thousand, one hundred and fifty dollars (**\$49,014,150.00**) with their status as follows:

- Twenty-eight (28) were completed
- Work is in progress on two (2) which are 80 % and 90% completed

Another **fifty million dollars (\$50,000,000.00)** has been programmed in this year's **budget** for renovation or modification works in primary schools to create Infant Departments .

CHILDREN SERVICES

Mr Speaker, I now turn my attention to the Children Services Division .This year the CDA, having received increased allocations, directed support towards the provision of additional human resources to treat with the tremendous work load that is faced by the agency.

Children in the Care of the State

Mr Speaker, as at December 31, 2016, the total number of children in the tertiary child protection system stood at 4,574. Fifty six per cent (56 %) are living in familial setting and 44% are living in residential child care facilities. This means that approximately six (6) out of every 1,000 children in Jamaica are in the care of the State. The Child Protection Sector has 51 Children's Homes and nine (9) Places of Safety. The Government through the CDA owns and operates nine (9) homes.

Mr Speaker, last year we embarked on an island wide consultation with our Residential Child care home owners and our Foster parents. We thought it important to hear first-hand their recommendations for how we could help them, help us take better care of our children .

The children for which they care want what every child wants to be loved, accepted, supported. As one young man said, "I am looking for parents who will stick around."

At this time Mr. Speaker I want to take the time to say THANK YOU, to men, women , and families who have opened their homes to children in need and for caring for them. And I wish to encourage more persons to join them. You don't have to be perfect to be a perfect parent. There are thousands of children in state care who will take you just the way you are—imperfections and all. I want to also thank the administrators of our Homes and all our staff for their tremendous service .

Strategic Review and Re-positioning of the Child Protection Residential Sector

Mr. Speaker last year I indicated that we would conduct a Strategic review of the residential sector. A consultant was employed to undertake the project which among other things is aimed assessing current service offering, effectiveness of such offering to meet individual needs of each child being served, identify the gaps within the sector and to assist in classifying the service offering to assist in matching child to location that is equipped to meet needs.

The exercise is also intended to determine the true cost of care which will be used to provide a blueprint to drive service improvement and inform governmental support. The

consultants have already completed a draft and the review should be finalised and submitted by the end of this month.

Residential Child Protection Sector

Mr Speaker, as committed last year, we took immediate steps despite the budgetary constraints to increase the disaster management grants and to extend for the first time those grants to our private homes. We also spent over 80 million dollars renovating a number of our children homes and places of safety. We have earmarked for this year an additional \$43,244,183.00 to undertake work at Granville Place of Safety- St. Augustine Place of Safety-, Summerfield Child Care Facility- Muirton Boys' Home, Maxfield Park Children's Home-, and Homestead Place of Safety state care who are in need for medical care.

Additionally Mr, Speaker as promised, we have standardised the payment of all medical expenses for children in state run homes and private homes. We have taken further steps to treat with the issue of our children in need of medical care. It was a significant issue that was raised both in our meetings with our Private Home operators and our Foster care parents. In that regard Mr. Speaker we met with the Minister of Health Hon. Christopher Tufton in a bid to see how special provisions can be made for our children in state care. I am pleased to announce that plans are now being put in place to have a specific day allocated at all health centres for visits from our children in state care. Coming out of the discussion with the Ministry of Health we are also in the process of making special arrangements so that our children in State care can receive NHF cards which will help to offset cost for medications and specialized services.

Mr Speaker we have however gone further to serve our children. Over the last year the CDA has entered into arrangements with private doctors across all parishes to provide in each parish a doctor that our children can be taken in case of emergency or for check-ups, who will charge no fee but instead bill the CDA for the services provided. This is how we take our children services to a New Level.

Monitoring of Police Lockups

The matter of children in police lock ups is of high priority. We have continued to actively monitor these facilities ensuring that our team of children's officers carry out a series of visits and establish contacts with police lockups island-wide.

Mr. Speaker, at the end of December 2016, children's officers had conducted 1,333

visits. The actions of the team are further guided by the detention and court listing that is submitted by the Jamaica Constabulary Force team twice per week. During these visits, attempts are made to determine if children are being held, the conditions under which they are being held and to carry out intervention services for those children who are identified as in need of care and protection.

There has been a reduction in the number of children placed in lock ups. Discussions had started with the Police and the Minister of National Security regarding the offences for which children are being taken in, placing emphasis on the interactions between the Police and children.

There has been a slight increase however in the number of children deemed as “uncontrollable”. The CDA has been working with the Police and has conducted sensitization training as to how to treat with these children.

Foster Care

Mr. Speaker, a little over 800 families have opened their homes and hearts to caring for children in the foster care system. This is to be encouraged. Many of our young people have benefited tremendously from their interaction with foster parents. In August and September 2016 I met with over 400 Foster Parents, and coming out of that meeting concerns were raised about caring for children with disabilities and the increase in medical expenses for their foster child.

Mr Speaker we increased our back to school grants and Christmas grants to our Foster Parents. A number of parents Mr. Speaker pointed out the difficulty they were having getting their foster child listed on their health insurance policies so that the children could benefit. Mr. Speaker I committed to the parents that we would address this matter. I am pleased to announce that after meetings with both our major insurance providers Guardian Life and Sagicor. It was agreed that foster parents will now be allowed to add their foster child to their health insurance policies. We are taking Child Services to a new level.

Adoption Services

A new Adoption Board was installed during the period and the appropriate briefings and orientation exercises were conducted. The Adoption Board’s focus is the clearing of the backlog (processing of applications) and carefully considering children who can be made available for placement as soon as possible. We have committed to making the

adoption process easier and to ensure that where we have suitable persons who are willing to open their hearts and homes to our Children we will place them there.

In the past there was a two tiered application process where interested parties had to complete a Pre-Adoption form which would see applicants going through a screening process, before the actual application process could begin. This two-tiered system was problematic and time consuming and has been abolished.

This Mr. Speaker has allowed us to shorten the process. Up to March of this year we have found a home and a heart for 160 of our children. 118 children of those children have been placed in homes in our locale, while 42 children have been placed in loving homes abroad. A key accomplishment Mr. Speaker over last year is that we have significantly cut the time by which inter family adoptions can take place, with the majority of the cases now being resolved within six months.

We do still have a backlog Mr. Speaker as we have 264 persons awaiting children. We have begun the process of identifying all children who are qualified for adoption but some require interventions of the court. That is the next step Mr. Speaker, we are looking to make changes to the Act to ensure that where parents have clearly abandoned their parental rights that the Courts can act to make the child available to be placed

Transitional Living Programme for Children in State Care Project

Mr. Speaker, last year I indicated our appreciation of the continued assistance of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). I again express our sincere thanks for their significant support. Since I last spoke in the Sectoral Debate in this House Mr. Speaker, we have signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the USAID who have extended their support for to the Independent Transitioning Living Project that will now extend to 2020.

Under this new program Mr. Speaker I am pleased to advise that Friday of this week (April 7, 2017), we will be receiving two 15-seater minivans which will allow our children in the Southern and Western Regions to be transported to Court and other such critical appointments such as School and medical.

We have also been able to expand our Smiles Mobile Program. That Program, Mr Speaker, provides screens and interventions for our children in care who are exhibiting psychological problems. We have through the support of USAID procured a 35 seater

Bus which has been retrofitted and will be staffed with two clinical psychologists, one social worker and one driver. This additional Smiles Mobile will serve our Western region.

Currently there are 150 children in state care who are benefiting from vocational skills development. An additional 275 children in care between the ages of 16 to 18 years were assisted in applying for and receiving Jamaican passports and were facilitated in opening bank accounts, as deliverable under the Life Skills component of the project.

Life Skills Manuals for Trainers, Caregivers / Families and Children were developed during the period and are currently being produced. On completion, they will be used to drive a training development programme targeting, staff, and all primary caregivers and the children in their care.

Efforts towards establishing dwellings at sites on Lady Musgrave Road and Mona are underway pending approval from the KSAC.

Mr Speaker, the CDA also signed a memorandum of understanding with the Caribbean Child Development Centre, UWI Open Campus to signal the formalization of our working relationship under the project. The MOU makes provision for the CDA to assume full operations of the programme when the project comes to a close in 2020. The project is being funded to the tune of \$5,281,736.

National Exiting Care Exposition

Over 680 children in State care, ages 16 to 18 years benefitted from the Agency's second staging of the National Exiting Care Career Information Fair and Exposition held under the theme, *Waves of Change, Oceans of Opportunity*. The Expo which provided information aimed at helping youngsters to prepare for life after State care took place at the Jamaica Conference Centre, on Wednesday, March 9, 2016.

The event saw children from across the Agency's four Regions being engaged in a number of workshops. Children also benefited from a number of exhibits aimed at sharing information and services needed to assist the children in their preparation for independent living.

Research on Peer to Peer Abuse (Bullying) & Strategic Response Framework

The issue of bullying continues to be a concern. With the Help of UNICEF we have

undertaken significant research on its prevalence and cause. In response Mr. Speaker we have formed an Anti-Bullying Technical Advisory Committee. The Committee met and is finalising a response framework to commence implementation this year.

Modernisation of Child Protection Sector

Mr Speaker, implementation of Phase 1 of the Child Case Management System (SOHEMA) is complete. Approximately 80 per cent of phase II deliverable has been completed. It is anticipated that the Agency will complete full implementation of the system before July 2017.

The Application software, when fully implemented will be used to enhance the operations of the Agency, improve information flow and strengthen its decision-making process. This turnkey solution will greatly enhance our ability to better track outcomes at the individual child level, while being able to identify shortfall in service delivery. One of the key elements is the software interface to be carried out with the Family / Children's Courts, the Office of the Children's Registry, the Centre for the Investigation of Sexual Offences and Child Abuse, Office of the Children's Advocate and the Ministry of Education, Youth & Information.

Exploratory discussions have begun to allow the Department of Correctional Service – Juvenile Services access to the system to manage its case portfolio. This interface will allow common information necessary to support the care of any child who interfaces with the child protection system to be shared across agencies.

Child Participation Programme ***Children's Advisory Panel***

Mr. Speaker, any organisation that serves our children must be willing to put the Children at the centre of the decision making process, not just in theory but in practice. Mr. Speaker we have a function of the CDA, the Children's Advisory Panel that comprises of secondary students, some of which are children in both foster and residential care. They have been instrumental in helping to share decisions on a number of programmes, one of which was the Transitional Project for Children in State Care. The Panel which has responsibility for spearheading our National Children's Summit has created its blueprint for the National Children's Summit to be held on August 23, 2017.

In keeping with rules of the Children's Advisory Panel Handbook, we are in the process

of reconstituting the Panel membership and have recently conducted an interview and selection process involving 14 children. The Panel will be reconstituted this month, April 2017.

Establishment of Children's Councils

We haven't stopped there Mr. Speaker, we have embarked on a drive to ensure our nine (9) residential care facilities have Children Councils who participate in the decision-making process as well as to provide them with the avenue to share their views and opinions on matters of importance to them. Current and past Children's Advisory Panel members played an active role in enabling this process. Between April and August 2017, the Agency will work with our young people towards the establishment of an additional eight (8) Children's Councils.

Street and Working Children

Last year Mr. Speaker I advised that the CDA would craft a concept paper to treat with the issue of Street Children . The reality Mr. Speaker, is that the matter is not free from difficulty. One of the real questions that we are yet to do significant research on are the actual profiles of our street children. Anecdotally the majority of children who are on our streets have homes and come out seasonally in an attempt to earn funds.

The CDA worked with the representatives of the Ministries of Education, Youth and Information (Children's Affairs & Policy Division) and Labour and Social Security (Child Labour Unit) to develop a Concept Paper to inform phased intervention process to address the issues impacting children working and living on the streets. The Concept Paper was finalized, submitted and approved. The terms of reference were developed to guide the identification and engagement of a technical expert to conduct a national study on the prevalence and factors that predisposed a child living and/or working in the streets. This initiative will continue during the 2017 fiscal period.

In the interim, discussions will be held to reenergize the Possibility Programme which would require increased funding. A Plan of Action is being developed to engage the parents and to hold them accountable as many of them are quite aware that their children are on the streets; this will be a collaborative effort between the CDA and the Police.

Break the Silence Campaign

Mr. Speaker, the Office of the Children's Registry, OCR's Break the Silence campaign

(launched in 2015) was extended in April 2016 through partnership with the Jamaica Social Investment Fund (JSIF) which supported key aspects of the campaign to the value of **\$4,479,579.00**.

As an initiative under JSIF's Basic Needs Trust Fund, six school tours were conducted in partnership with the CDA, the National Parenting Support Commission, CISOCA and the Community Safety and Security Branch. Schools visited were Ocho Rios Primary, Discovery Bay All Age, Old Harbour Primary, Christiana Moravian Primary and Infant, Browns Hall Primary and Mandeville Primary and Junior High.

These tours were aimed at not only sensitizing children about child abuse and missing children, but also targeted teachers, parents and other caregivers. Approximately 4900 persons were impacted by these school tours - *(4400 students, 300 parents and 200 prescribed persons)*. *A social media campaign was also embarked on reminding prescribed persons that they have a responsibility under law to report.*

In the coming year, the campaign will be further extended through partnership with the Edna Manley College of Visual and Performing Arts, where students will be creating and presenting drama pieces to be used to sensitize persons on the issue of child abuse in a series of Town Hall meetings.

OCR Child Ambassadors

In June 2016, the third cohort of OCR Child Ambassadors was officially sworn in to serve for a period of two years as champions in the fight against child abuse and promoting the reporting mechanisms. The 19 Ambassadors have been working hard in their schools and communities at various projects aimed at combatting child maltreatment and promoting child safety. I must commend the children from Westwood High and Jonathan Grant high, students from both schools have launched social media campaigns focusing on child abuse and missing children.

ANANDA ALERT

Search & Rescue and First Aid Trainings

Mr Speaker, the Ananda Alert systems has been used successfully to locate a number of children reported as missing. Fifty persons from the parishes of Kingston, St. Andrew & St. Catherine were trained in Search and Rescue and Basic First Aid in the past year. Training was provided by the Caribbean Search Centre of the Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF) and the Jamaica Fire Brigade to equip volunteers with the necessary

skillsets to assist in a planned police search if called upon to assist in the recovery of a child reported missing.

Study on Missing Children

Mr. Speaker, the Ananda Alert Secretariat recognizes the need for an in depth study on the phenomenon. In the absence of such a study, last year the Secretariat undertook a preliminary study titled “Child Disappearances in Jamaica: A Situational Analysis of the Ananda Alert System.” The study assessed the various factors accounting for child disappearances in Jamaica, identified service gaps in the Ananda Alert System, and posited recommendations for improving the effectiveness of the system. The scope of the study is currently being widened, but one key finding so far is that maltreatment is one of the main reasons for which children voluntarily go missing.

Ananda Alert-Facebook Partnership

Mr Speaker, I am pleased to announce that the Ananda Alert Secretariat has formed a partnership with Facebook. This Partnership will enable members to broadcast Ananda Alerts on the pages of all Facebook users in Jamaica as a measure to help us get our missing children home. A team from Facebook will visit Jamaica for the official launch of the partnership in May. We are taking the Ananda alert system to a new level.

The Child Protection Environment

Mr. Speaker, the number of cases of child abuse being received each year remains a matter of great concern and distress. For the 2015 calendar year, the Office of Children's Registry received over 13,000 reports, which means that as a country we are averaging over 1000 reports of child abuse per month. The numbers for 2016 are still being finalised but at last count we were at 11,000 reports.

The reality Mr. Speaker, is that with years of under resourcing and poor alignment of core functions, entities like the OCR and the CDA have carried a backlog of cases. The cases went as far back as 2015 when we took office. Through the use of GWEP interns we have provided a team at both the CDA and the OCR to treat with this issue. The high priority sexual abuse cases have been prioritised and I am happy to advise that we have cleared that backlog. The backlog however is not the only problem however, we all have heard significant questions about the efficiency, responsiveness and effectiveness of our child protection services. One such matter came to national prominence last year and it has caused me to ask both the Office of the Children

Advocate and the Ministry's internal audit department to investigate. I await both reports.

Merger of the Child Development Agency and the Office of the Children's Registry

Mr Speaker, part of what we have spent the year doing is looking at the weaknesses of the system. In the final quarter of 2016, we had alerted the entities that steps would be taken for them to be merged. In January 2017 we established an Oversight Committee chaired by Mr. Michael McAnuff-Jones. A series of working groups have been established to carry out key activities aimed at identifying the current state of the organization's operations and to ascertain the most desirable and practical state. We expect that most of the ground work will be completed this month, April 2017 and implementation completed by the second quarter of the financial year.

The Oversight Committee has set about their task with alacrity and, in keeping with our direction has taken a consultative approach to the formulation of the new entity. Mr. Speaker, the team has already met with the trade union, civic society groups, key partners such as the Guidance Counsellors Association and our international development (donor) partners. The plan Mr. Speaker is that once there is sufficient certainty as to how the new entity will look and operate we will return to our partners. Let me however make 3 points about the merger Mr Speaker:

1. The CDA/OCR Merger is not a cost saving merger. While ostensibly there will be focus on efficiency, roles and effectiveness. The motivating factor is to have a child protection sector that appropriately responds to the needs of our children.
2. It is understood that the registry function will be sufficiently ring-fenced in the new entity to guarantee the necessary legal protections providing in the reporting of incidents of child abuse. The bureaucratic red tape from report to action will be dismantled and a single case management system will ultimately be put in place to ensure a system of transparency and accountability.
3. The investigative capabilities of the OCA will have to be strengthened

The Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children Jamaica: A Pathfinder Country

As you are quite aware Mr. Speaker, in almost any thing we do, Jamaicans have the ability to lead the world. Over the years we have countless examples of how we have set positive benchmarks in a number of areas. We have identified the issue of protecting our children as one of the areas that we should lead the world. In July 2016 Jamaica was appointed as a Pathfinder Country in the global partnership to end violence against our children. With the support of our Prime Minister, we launched this initiative in November of last year.

We are a country with the goal to end violence against children at both the national and international levels. As part of our mandate, a national roadmap is to be prepared and implemented throughout all levels of society. In collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

and the Ministry of National Security, a decision has been taken to review and modernize the existing National Plan of Action for an Integrated Response to Children and Violence (NPACV) as a fundamental basis for our roadmap. Despite work being done over the years to formulate the plan, especially in 2002 and 2009, the plan has never passed draft stage and never made it to Cabinet during the last administration's time at the wicket.

A stakeholder consultation will be held, and the updated NPACV will reflect the current state of MDAs and other partners in the process. This Mr. Speaker, along with the work of the Joint Select committee in reforming our laws that affect women and children will allow us to raise the bar in our child protection services, taking child protection to a new level.

INCREASED SUBVENTIONS

Mr. Speaker despite the difficult financial times and the tight fiscal space that we have operate in, we have heard the cries of our Foster Parents and residential care providers. After discussions with the Minister it has been decided to make the requisite internal arrangements to ensure that we can provide our foster parents and residential home operators with an increase in subventions this year. We have earmarked 240 million for this increase and sign off from the Ministry of Finance.

ENERGIZING YOUTH

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry holds Jamaican young people within all categories as valuable assets to Jamaica's social and economic development. As such, we believe that investments in today's youth population can position Jamaica to achieve an accelerated economic growth. Given this, the Ministry is making every effort to ensure support is provided for youth development and for advancing the role of youth. This can only be done by actively engaging young people at the national and local levels in planning and decision making.

NEW LEVEL - AN INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

The understanding that youth are important agents for social change, economic development and technological innovation is being underscored by the Ministry's attempt to revise the National Youth Policy 2004; a solid institutional framework for our youth to attain their full potential. I thank the youths for their patience as I committed to them that I would spend the first year to review what was done, their comments on the Green Paper and to update the document.

We have completed that process and have outlined a vision, six policy priorities, the associated goals, and strategic objectives.

The policy priorities are:

1. Education and Training
2. Health & Well-Being
3. Employment and Entrepreneurship
4. Youth Participation and Involvement
5. Social Inclusion and Re-integration
6. Institutional and Youth Sector Arrangements

Members, Mar. Speaker, this Government is seeking to create ***“a nurturing and secure environment in which youth thrive and become empowered, achieve their full potential and understand their roles and responsibilities in making meaningful contribution to national development”***.

I am pleased to announce the Youth Policy was approved at the Senior Policy Committee of the Ministry on April 4, 2017 and is being submitted to Cabinet for approval through the Human Resource and Social Development Committee, followed by tabling in Parliament, with an anticipated finalizing date of July 2017.

Elevating Youth Leadership

Youth leadership and governance through inclusion and participation allow the voices of young people to be heard at every level irrespective of their social status. As such, student leadership and governance remains a major thrust of the Youth Division with the National Secondary Students Council (NSSC) and the Jamaica Union for Tertiary Students (JUTS) being the two programmes used to invoke this thrust.

The following activities were achieved for the 2016/2017 period:

Mr Speaker, for over the past five (5) years the JUTS constitution has remained in draft format. It was one of the priorities Mr. Speaker for the Division to finally ensure that the organisation has a firm organisational core upon which to build. I am happy to advise this Honourable House that the constitution has now been passed. The organisation just selected a new executive chair. Allow me to commend the work of former National Chairman Germain Bryan and his team. The organisation is now in the process of preparing comments on the financing of tertiary education.

The National Secondary Students Council (NSSC), Mr Speaker continues to maintain a high bar of leadership and this year was no different. The Division coordinated a myriad of National and regional training workshops in Leadership, Advocacy, Communication, and Child Rights, engaging over 730 student council representatives. Additional training for NSSC executive body was conducted to include Policy development, drafting of position papers, public speaking,

report drafting events management and social media management. Led by the astute and assertive Alnastazia Watson from the Queen's School, with strong support from a dynamic team, the group led significant initiatives that saw engagement of the Lister Mair School for the deaf, the engagement of an anti-violence campaign and an expansive Students Council week under the theme, "Energizing Youth Over Time".

ELEVATING PARTICIPATION

National Youth Parliament

Mr. Speaker, last year I stood in this House and made a commitment to you and the youth of Jamaica that the youth Parliament will be reconvened. After a six year break, the NYP was resuscitated in 2016. The revived NYP has been restructured to provide youth the opportunity to deepen their understanding of parliamentary democracy; develop their skills in research, policy formulation and analysis, advocacy, public speaking and communication; dialogue with national political representatives; and review legislation and policy toward advancing the youth mainstreaming agenda.

A total of 74 young people received training in parliamentary procedures, policy formulation and position papers, public speaking and argumentation and participated in the sitting of the National Youth Parliament (Nov. 14, 2016) where they debated pertinent issues such as ***climate change, youth unemployment and psychosocial care of youth within the education system***. We are serious that this is not a one off event. The Parliamentarians sit for a year and have continued meeting and developing projects. In fact Mr Speaker, some groups/members have launched various initiatives. Take Christina Williams who with other members of the Youth Parliament have launched the Education Access for Disabled Youth program at the Lyssons Primary School in St. Thomas; they seek to raise awareness and funds to assist youth with disabilities. Romario Simpson, another Youth Parliamentarian has launched the Destiny Hope Foundation which has fed 100 residents of the Open arms centre.

Mr Speaker, the Youth Parliamentarians have to be commended for their contributions to the matters debated and the conduct they exhibited. I have laid in the house today a summary of their deliberations and suggestions in the attached Ministry Paper. They really took Parliamentary presentations to a new level. As you said that day Mr Speaker, this House should take a page or two from our Youth parliamentarians.

Youth Advisory Council of Jamaica

Another commitment we made to the youth of Jamaica Mr. Speaker is that we would develop a mechanism through which they could directly influence policy. In fact Mr speaker it was the young people themselves who said that as a Government we should

have a slate of youth advisors. Last year we indicated that this is an urgent priority and I am pleased to advise this house that this has been done. We have selected 16 of some of our most astute and involved youth to help guide the Government in decision making. They are :

Russell Barrett	Odell Marsh
Jerome Cowans	Tamara McKayle
Kemario Davis	Glenroy Murray
Sean Davis (Deputy Chair)	Camilla Parris-Campbell
Stanecia Davis	Christal Parris-Campbell
Keenan Falconer	Everton Rattray
Jerahmeel James	Aubrey Stewart (Chair)
Lerone Laing	Michelle Thomas

These young people are exemplary and as such, Audrey Stewart (Chair) and Jerome Cowans serve as a part of the Jamaica House Fellowship programme. Michelle Thomas was selected as finalist in the 2017 Commonwealth Youth Awards for Excellence in Development

They have hit the ground running Mr Speaker, already review and provided recommendations for our National Youth Policy; Sitting on Government committees such as the Youth in Agriculture Committee, the National Identification System Committee; producing a paper outlining research and recommendations regarding financing tertiary education. This is how you take youth participation and mainstreaming to another level. Next Up Mr. Speaker is working with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to see how we can establish a team of youth diaspora advisors so we can heave this generation of Jamaicans who live abroad incorporated in shaping the future of their island homes. We are taking youth to a New Level.

Jamaica Youth Ambassadors Programme

Mr. Speaker as the sojourn of our youth Ambassadors come to an end I want to congratulate them on most excellent service.

CARICOM:	Ms. Terisa Thompson and Mr. Andre Marriott Blake
Commonwealth:	Mr. Sujae Boswell and Mr. Tijani Christian
United Nations General Assembly:	Mrs. Rochelle Reid James and Mr. Jamar Howell

Our Youth Ambassadors have distinguished themselves in all the international bodies they serve, flying the Jamaican flag extra ordinarily high. We have had solid representation at the level of Caricom from Ambassadors Thompson and Marriott Blake including a push to establish a Youth fund. Youth Ambassador Rochelle James has spent significant time working on a mentorship program which was launched last year with the help of JPS. Ambassador Jamar Howell has been engaging unattached youths in Maxfield Park under the Next Generation Programme and Ambassador Tijani Christian in January of this year signed a MOU with his Russian youth Counterpart for youth exchanges. Ambassador Sujae Boswell only recently returned from Malaysia where he was part of the Commonwealth team for planning the next Commonwealth meeting of Youth Ministers. I thank them for their service and I am convinced they will continue contributing to creating a better Jamaica.

National Youth Council of Jamaica

The National Youth Council of Jamaica (NYCJ) is the umbrella organization for youth clubs across Jamaica, which seeks to foster youth participation at the community level. It is in need of revamping and revitalisation. Too many of our communities have no active youth clubs and as such have no positive model of engaging for our youth. Mr. Speaker increased participation of youth in decision making at all levels is a priority for this Government. This year we have committed ourselves to ensuring we do all that is in our power to revitalize our youth club movement .

The Ministry through the Youth Division is assessing the present operations of the existing youth clubs to determine the functionalities and gaps. Information gleaned from the assessment process will be used to inform the strengthening of existing youth clubs and or establish new clubs within communities. With the revamping of the clubs, the project will foster the development of an Operational Framework that will constitute the development of a Strategic Plan, Reporting Mechanism and Monitoring and Evaluation System that will guide the overall operations of the clubs. We have already began the process of carrying out an audit and a committee has been put in place that will drive the process to revitalize the youth club movement and the National Youth Council of Jamaica.

In addition to strengthening our movement Sir , we seek also to remove the barriers between the police youth clubs and other youth clubs by adjoining the police youth clubs to the National Youth Council.

Youth Information Centres (YICs)

Last year we articulated a new vision for our youth centres. A Vision which meant transforming our Youth Information Centres to innovation hubs for youth to develop their potential and creativity. One of the harsh realities that we have faced Mr. Speaker is that unfortunately, our YIC over the past 5 years were not provided with sufficient resources to maintain them and at least 7 of our 11 YIC's are in urgent need of repair. We have programmed in this budget 15 million dollars in that regard, Additionally last year we did estimates for all the ones in urgent need and have already sent to tender contracts to address issues at three with the others programmed for the infrastructure budget this year.

We have however continued to work to transform vision into reality. The team at the Youth Division has now completed a business model to position YICs as innovative, responsive, youth-friendly spaces that utilise positive youth development approaches to build self and harness the talents and creative potential of Jamaica's young people for wealth creation and active citizenship.

The Business model uses a Programmatic Framework that will employ strategies that are responsive to the dynamic needs of some of the most-at-risk youth populations, that will enable building and honing skills to engender sustainable businesses. The model further provides a framework for monitoring YIC initiatives and evaluating results and impact, while ensuring sustainability and scalability of YIC operations.

The Programmatic Framework consist of three components namely:

- **SPorts, ARts and 'Kreativity' (SPARK)** which utilizes creative arts and sports for promoting youth resilience and equipping socially excluded youth with competencies for personal development and empowerment. As part of this component, SOUNDTRACK will also be implemented in partnership with CUSO International. Soundtrack involves the retrofitting of a recording studio at the St. Catherine YIC and the utilisation of collaborative learning strategy to enable functional mastery of skills involved in song writing, audio recording and studio engineering.
- Social enterprise initiatives with a focus on experiential learning. These initiatives will allow youth to gain practical skills in business start-up, address community/social issues, and generate income. In partnership with the Jamaica Youth Business Trust the Youth Division of the Ministry will execute business/entrepreneurial initiatives to build the capacity of youth and finance youth business initiatives.
- **Grow Enterprise Through IT (GET-IT)** - Experiential learning opportunities to build competencies in coding, web development, mobile app development, animation and elancing. In partnership with Ministry of Science Energy and Technology (MSET), youth will be prepared to access paid contract employment at various skill levels in the digital economy.

We are set to launch our first innovation hub in the second quarter of this year and expect to have established three as a pilot during this financial year.

Another exciting move for this financial year Mr Speaker is that in collaboration with the Ministry of Health we are establishing a Teen Hub at the Transport centre in Half Way tree. The Hub will help us directly target our teens for intervention in the areas of sexual and reproductive health, crime and violence, education, entrepreneurship and employment. This is an Elevated approach.

Youth Month 2016

The theme for Youth Month 2016 was **E=MC2 #Energising Youth** and observed in the month of November and celebrated/showcase the talent and creativity of Jamaica's youth. The Youth Month 2016 activities were also anchored on the exploration of economic and personal advancement opportunities through Science, Technology and Telecommunications and the Creative Industries.

The planned activities that were executed at the Ministry level include the Official Launch, Church Service, Six 'Around the Table' Discussions (with business leaders), and revitalization of the National Youth Parliament, football and netball competitions. The overwhelming interest, enthusiasm and attendance of the youth community essentially contributed to the success of the Youth Month.

Of special interest were the 'Around the Table' discussions which provided a platform for young persons with an interest in entrepreneurship to engage with experienced business leaders and professionals for networking and knowledge transfer. Youth who have already started, or are interested in business start-up, were able to acquire first-hand information from some of Jamaica's key leaders in business. I take the opportunity to thank Joey Issa, Garth Walker, the National Baking Company, Adam Stewart, Jason Henzell, Nicole McLaren and Agent Sasco, for providing our young people with this tremendous opportunity, I invite our private Sector to help us expand this initiative for youth month this year.

Elevating Youth Employment through the NATIONAL YOUTH SERVICE

Mr Speaker, we have been strongly focused on reducing the level of youth unemployment. Through the National Youth Service we have sought to expand our programs that help our young people garner the needed experience that lay the foundation for gainful employment. In 2015, Mr Speaker the NYS placed 5000 youth in their Summer Work Programme, when I met with the team at the NYS last year, without changes to their budget I indicated the need to place at least 6000 youth, I advised the House that this was our direction. Last year Mr. speaker the NYS was able to place 6,076 youth Of this number Mr Speaker 289 of our youth placed hail from the disabled community.

We are not stopping there Mr Speaker, for this year we are looking to place 8,000 young persons in our Summer Work experience Program. More importantly Mr Speaker we are targeting the hardest to reach set and have set as a target 2000 unattached youth to engage. In this regard we have made a policy decision to remove the requirement that to qualify for the programme an individual would have to have three CXC's. Our youth who have no CXC's are most in need of our development model and work experience, we are not leaving them behind. We are also targeting 400 youth living with disabilities. When we say we are elevating youth we are elevating every youth across the length and breadth of Jamaica.

GRADUATE WORK EXPERIENCE PROGRAMME (GWEP)

The Graduate Work Experience Programme is designed to provide valuable work experience to tertiary graduates up to 24 years old who possess a first degree or an Associate degree (from a tertiary institution). It is a response to the dual challenges of graduates being unable to gain jobs without experience and who cannot gain meaningful experience without jobs. Participants benefit from six (6) months work experience in a practical work environment, personal and professional development workshops, volunteer opportunities and are supported by a stipend. Last year we challenged the team to increase our numbers and I am pleased to advise this house that we increase our placement by 67% moving from 300 graduates to placing 503 last year, What is most impressive Mr. Speaker is that of the 503 graduates

that we place, 42% or 213 have secured permanent jobs. For this year our target for 2017/18 is 600 youth, 33% up from the target set last year. We are unlocking a New Level.

EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMME

We are extremely proud of our Empowerment programme, which provides persons with mild intellectual disabilities with job coach support, six months of supported work experience, personal development training and are exposed to career options, voluntary and cultural activities. During the course of last year we engaged 80 participants, 41 were males and 39 females, which would have been a carryover from the 2015/2016 budget. For the year past we raised the numbers by over a hundred percent and in March launched our new program with 162 youth with mild intellectual disabilities, They are now participating in a three week camp with our job coaches. I urge more companies to open their doors to employ our youth with disabilities. We are happy that 21 of those trained last year have secured permanent employment but we want to increase that number.

VOLUNTEER PROGRAMME

Mr. Speaker, you will be pleased to know that we still maintain a volunteer corp. In fact during last year the NYS alone engaged over 3000 youth as part of their Volunteer corps. We conducted a Shoe drive that impacted over 700 families.

HEART TRUST NTA Re-imagined

Mr Speaker, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information is also advancing the work for the development of a re-imagined HEART Trust/NTA through a merger with the National Youth Service and the Jamaican Foundation for Lifelong Learning that will provide training and support services for over 120,000 persons on a yearly basis.

This merger will allow for alignment of remedial and skills training as well as lifelong learning training programmes for the Jamaican people. It will allow us to provide expanded services to young people across the length and breadth of Jamaica. The merger activates the capacity for full coordination of all Youth Clubs and programmes across the country while ensuring that a place is provided with which all our young people can be identified..

The young people can rest assured that their interest will not only continue to be our prime consideration but that we will have expanded reach and impact with the NYS programs. In fact the expansion in the work placement programs which I have already indicated is all as a result of an expanded budget as part of the reimagined Heart. This is only the beginning. Most of our young leaders and youth workers know that what has retarded our youth development model is

not a lack of ideas, it is a lack of resources. The Government that I am a part of is putting its money where its mouth is!

The model we are pursuing for the re imagined Heart takes the strengths from each entity and magnifies it.. Our preliminary discussions are towards the development of a semi-autonomous NYS body that will focus on apprenticeship schemes, work experience programs and of course volunteerism.

LEGS THROUGH HOPE

Mr. Speaker, it's against this background that we can no longer continue to use a piecemeal approach towards serving our youth , especially those that are below the poverty line and need support most.

This Administration has launched a number of programmes to benefit young people between the ages of 15 to 29 years old. To this end, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information, in collaboration with the Ministry of Economic Growth and Job Creation is working to ensure the full co-ordination of all the programmes to support young people.

Two new ventures being used as vehicles to drive this process are the Housing, Opportunity, Prosperity, Employment (HOPE) and the Work to Learn, Earn, Give and Save (LEGS) programmes.

The HOPE programme will provide the basis and legislation for the establishment of the eight national Corps under LEGS through the HEART Trust/NTA. We are excited by this and as you our young people have seeing this has the highest backing support and direction from the Most Honourable Prime Minister.

Mr. Speaker we are expecting that this will indeed elevate the young people in this country especially, as we ensure that all their needs are met in their efforts to contribute to the building of our country.

PM Youth Awards

Finally Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announced that this year, as we mark the 55th year of independence, we will reinstate, The Prime Minister's National Youth Awards for Excellence. In fact work is on in earnest, a committee has already been established and is being chair by one with significant experience and youth development work in Mr. Warren Newby. The Prime Minister's Youth Awards Selection committee is mandated to select the best cadre of Jamaican youth, representative of the excellence inherent in the Youth Population. For this reason, discussion has convened on the planning and execution of the Award Ceremony to be held in November 2017.

The committee will also continue to recognize, youth in the areas of Academics, Youth in Service, Arts & Culture, International Achievement, Leadership, Journalism, Agriculture, Sports, and Entrepreneurship. However, in light of the era in which we now exist, we will be adding two categories of 'Science & Technology' and 'Environment and Health'.

Mr Speaker, i have recognised that a number of our young people who do significant work in communities never come to national prominence. These youth often single-handedly marshal significant community projects, homework programs, feeding programmes, youth clubs but they have not been held up as models for other youth to engage that. They may not have made it to national leadership roles but their contributions are undeniable. It is for that reason Mr. Speaker that in this our 55th year we are going to recognise 55 youth across the length and breadth of Jamaica who have a proven track record of solid community service. We will take their light and shine it for all to see as we transform and elevate Jamaica from the ground up.

CONCLUSION

Mr. Speaker, the world is a potpourri of personalities, cultures and approaches. It is often said that some people see the glass half empty while some see it as half full. In our local context, some people see our culture, our music, and dancehall as something to be chastised and banned while some see it for the power to connect and touch the core of people and think about how we can use it for good such as teaching math in our school.

Some see our youth as deviant elements to be controlled, to be taught lessons, while some see the overarching potential talent and creativity of our youth, their dreams for better life and a better Jamaica and try to elevate those aspirations to a new level.

Some see Jamaica Mr Speaker as a den for crime on a path of failure, while others see the country that has produced:

Romain Austin - our special Olympian who won gold in ice skating from a tropical country,

Briana Lyton - a 12 year old who ran the 200 meters in 23 seconds

Janice Smith - a girl from St. Catherine who started in the kitchen and now is the first Jamaican to captain a Naval Vessel

Protoje - who leaves our country today to play reggae music in over 50 venues across Europe for the next few months

We see an amazing country of immeasurable capabilities with a people who were born to lead the world.

I am proud I am part of a team in Government who are made up of the second type of people.

We don't preach doom and gloom, we spread hope

We don't only highlight the problems in an attempt to score political points, we put forward solutions.

We don't preach a doctrine that attempts to portray poverty as a state of being that cannot be fixed, cannot be changed and cannot be elevated out of, No we speak and seek to elevate our people and our youth to a New level, a level of prosperity.

I thank each and every one of you, especially our youth who have recognised that this is our Jamaica to fix, we will wait on no one, we will craft the Jamaica that we expect, the Jamaica that we deserve. We will set Jamaica on a NEW LEVEL.