

Building Dreams through Sports

A real life story from Trinidad & Tobago

Out of school youth gather from as early as 8 o'clock each morning and sit at the roadside in the Speyside community. This is a typical male behaviour for many adolescents in the community who may be drug abusers with some even actively participating in illicit drug trade in marijuana, heroin and cocaine.

Kurland, a 26 year old male is the elected vice president of the newly formed Speyside activity club. The club is one of several initiatives with the *Nurturing Child Friendly Communities* Project in Speyside, Tobago which mobilizes children, adolescents and community members using various sporting activities. Kurland confesses that, " I have younger sisters coming up and I must make a better way for them." Having dropped out of the *Let's Dance – Revolution* Project, Kurland wanted to make a difference and so decided to participate once more when the activity clubs came on stream.

The *Nurturing Child Friendly Communities* is a UNICEF supported project that aims to improve the lives of children and adolescents in the Speyside community in Tobago. Kurland dreams of building a Speyside centre for youth on an old recreational ground in the village. Here he envisions a centre where youth can play and learn at the same time. As he carefully monitors the younger children that surround him each evening at the club football and netball practices, some of the children even being as young as 3 years, Kurland admits that, "If it weren't for this project there would not have been so many people coming out on the streets to participate in sporting activities."



Many children, adolescents and young persons participate in the activity club initiated under the *Nurturing Child Friendly Communities* Project. Franka, a vibrant and energetic 11 year old from the community and faithful netball practice attendee adds that the project and the sports are "very exciting". A student at the Speyside Anglican Primary School, Franka confidently calls out to the Project Coordinator, Cesar Vilar, (affectionately known as "Caesar") as he makes his regular visit to the village primary school.

UNICEF in collaboration with the Trinidad and Tobago Alliance for Sports and Physical Education (TTASPE) have initiated a project to protect vulnerable and at risk children and adolescents in Speyside. The project promotes healthy lifestyles for children, adolescents, youth and other stakeholders through the use of sport for development activities; with the opportunities to learn and practice life skills and increase their access to sports and channels to gain awareness on human rights, HIV and violence prevention.

Since its inception several workshops and sporting activities have already been implemented to mobilize community leaders and foster youth commitment and learning, including the establishment of the Eastside Dynamic Achievers Cultural Sports Club (EDACSC) in October, 2007. In addition to mobilizing sports teams, the EDACSC has organized an Executive Committee to meet regularly to deal with management and administrative issues and there are some 125 registered club members.

The Club was also invited to participate in the Tobago House of Assembly's Youth Conference and the International Sport and Physical Education Convention (ISPEC) 2007.

Tobago is the smaller state of this twin-island republic and while Trinidad outnumbers Tobago in violent crimes involving youth, Tobago is increasingly affected. Most of the young people involved in violence are young men, but girls are also implicated. A study of schoolchildren between the ages of 10 and 18 in nine Caribbean countries showed that 20 per cent of boys and 12.5 per cent of girls had at some time belonged to a gang. HIV/AIDS is also a substantial concern in Tobago with a high prevalence rates among youth. AIDS remains one of the leading causes of death among people 25-44 years in the Caribbean.

UNICEF recognizes that sport can play an important role in the development of communities, children and youth. It is widely accepted that the practice of sport is essential for the complete development of children, as it promotes their physical, social and emotional health. Participating in physical activity and sport at an early age develops healthy lifestyle habits. When children and adolescents develop these positive social behaviour patterns through sport participation at an early age, these behaviours are more likely to become habits for life. Furthermore, the values promoted through sport provide a natural starting point to nurture child friendly communities by addressing issues such as violence, drug abuse and HIV/AIDS.

UNICEF, Trinidad and Tobago continues to work with the government, civil society organizations and other local partners to advance children's rights

**Not their real names*

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