

# BARBADOS

## Child Care Board

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In presenting the case of Barbados, I will make specific reference to the Public Sector Agency, the Child Care Board, whose mandate is to promote children's right, while continuing to lobby for changes in legislation that would promote the optimum development of our children.

The Prevention of Cruelty to Children Act and in particular, Part II of this act deals specifically with Child Protection. Efforts are being made by this Government Agency to combat child sexual abuse in Barbados.

The history of the Child Care Board has its origins in the 1930's, and is directly linked to the legislative, philosophical, political and economic concepts, which existed prior to its establishment in 1969. The period 1969-1972 saw the Government of Barbados consolidating specific plans for its nation's children, which were revealed in the development plans for the country.

These proposals culminated in the establishment of the Child Care Board on September 1, 1969. The Board was empowered by the Child Care Board Act, 1969 Section 46. The Child Care Board functioned as a division of the Welfare

Department from its inception in 1969 to May 1978, when it obtained its autonomy.

The Child Care Board is a Statutory Body established by the Child Care Board Act of 1969 and amended 1981. The Board's functions are:-

(1) To provide and maintain Child Care Centres for the safe keeping of children in need of care and protection.

- (2) To provide counselling and other services to meet their special needs
- (3) To place children in Foster Care.
- (4) To register, license and regulate Private Day Care Services.

### CHAPTER 145

### UNDER THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO CHILDREN ACT - PART III

#### Child Protection

7. (1) A constable may take to a place of safety any child in respect of whom an offence under this Act or any of the scheduled offences has been or there is reason to believe has been committed.

(2) A child so taken to a place of safety and also any child under the age of sixteen (16) years, who seeks refuge in a place of safety, may there be detained and brought before a magistrate within twenty-eight (28) days, after being detained and that the magistrate may take an order under subsection (3) or may cause the child to be dealt with as circumstances may admit and require until the charge made against any person in respect of any such offence with regard to the child has been determined by the committal for trial or conviction or discharge of such person.

(4) The Child Care Board must provide for the reception of children brought to places of safety in pursuance of this Act.

10. (1) Where it appears to any magistrate, on information made before him on oath by the Child Care Board or any person who in the opinion of the magistrate, is

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bona fide and acting in the interest of a child under the age of sixteen (16) years, that there is reasonable cause to suspect that such child has been or is being assaulted, ill-treated and neglected in any place within the jurisdiction of such magistrate in a manner likely to cause the child unnecessary suffering or to be injurious to its health or that any scheduled offence has been or is being committed in respect of such a child, the magistrate may issue a warrant authorizing:

- (a) the Child Care Board or any person named therein to search for such child and, if it is found to have been or to be assaulted, ill-treated or neglected in such a manner or that any such offence has been or is being committed in respect of the child, to take it to and detain it in, a place of safety, until it can be brought before a magistrate; or
- (b) the Child Care Board or any person to remove the child, with or without search, to a place of safety and detain it there until it can be brought before a magistrate.

**NOTE:** This Act also provides for offences committed against children under the offences Against the Person Act, Chapter 141 and the Sexual Offences Act, Chapter 154.

Foster Care, Day Care and Residential Care are provided for at Chapter 381. The Child Care Board Regulations, Section 3-8 (Part I) Foster Care, Section 9-18 (Part II) Day Care and section 19-26 Residential Care.

### **A. Residential**

The Residential Programme was one (1) of the Board's first programmes; in that, it was acquired from the Welfare Department. Through this programme any child who is in need of care and protection is taken into a Home, in which there is affection and per-

sonal interest, stability, respect for his/her personality and regard for his/her self esteem.

Children are admitted into care because of the following reasons:-

1. No parents or guardians
2. Abandonment
3. Illness and incapacity (whether short or long-term) of parent(s) or guardian(s)
4. Eviction
5. Victims of Child Abuse

Every effort is made to keep admissions at a minimum. This is a phenomenal and demanding task, which is achieved through preventative casework and by placing children wherever possible with individuals within the community. Residential Care is always the last resort.

### **b. Child Abuse**

One of the on-going implied functions of the Board is to improve the circumstances of children in Barbados. To this end, there was consistent lobbying over the years to relevant ministries for changes in the legislation affecting children. The recommended changes in the legislation and treatment were to include the:

- sanctioning of parents or guardians who refuse to co-operate with the Child Care Board or the Police Department (its aim is to break the conspiracy of silence which is common in child abuse)
- use of a multi-disciplinary approach to treatment
- reviewing of care orders

From the inception of the Child Abuse Unit, the Board has engaged in educational programmes to increase public awareness and to sensitise the general public to the problems of child abuse. As with any co-

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ordinated and aggressive promotional drive, there was an apparent increase in the number of child abuse referrals to the Department.

A child abuse register was started during 1983-84 to keep a record of cases referred to the Department, and to monitor trends in the area of child abuse. The Board works closely with the Police Department on matters where legal proceeding have to be brought against perpetrators. Training has become an integral part of this programme. In-service training is conducted to help officers become more familiar with the problems of child abuse and with its legislation, as well as to help them to develop their ability to identify and conceptualise these problems. The Board is also looking at new and innovative ways of dealing with the treatment and prevention of child abuse and neglect.

In Barbados, the age of sexual consent is sixteen (16) years old. Yet statistics reveal that children as young as nine (9) years old are engaging in sexual activity. In some cases parents are knowledgeable of the sexual exploits of their children. In fact, evidence shows that there is parental acceptance of this behaviour as some financial gain is the result of these exploits.

Considering the importance of ensuring protection from abuse, exploitation and violence for future generations. The Barbadian public including the leaders and intellectuals have responded positively albeit somewhat

slowly to the expressed need to protecting the nation's children.

Non-Governmental Organizations as well as governmental social agencies and police pledge to do their part in combatting child sexual abuse. However, assessment shows that many of the challenges such as amendments to legislation, provision of ongoing counselling for abused children and

intervention in violent or aggressive behaviour in families which often result in sexual abuse of children need to be intensified. Some children who have survived violence, sexual abuse and poverty expressed the need to be heard and protected.

In response to this need, the Child Care Board facilitated a group of young people to attend the 5<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference on "Children and Social Policy" in the Americas. This conference was held in Jamaica, October 9-13, 2000 and allowed children and young persons to express their views and highlight their concerns.

An observed trend from referrals made to the Child Care Board (Barbados) over the past five (5) years has revealed that children from the age group five (5) to fifteen (15) years are the most vulnerable in matters of child abuse and specifically child sexual abuse.

### c. *Sexual Abuse*

Statistical data for the past decade are as follows:

<b>YEAR</b>	<b>AMOUNT</b>
1991	181
1992	152
1993	134
1994	190
1995	106
1996	142
1997	181
1998	184
1999	282
2000	264
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,816</b>

## School Based Project

As a result of this trend identified, the Child Care Board recognized the importance of sensitising the public on aspects of sexual abuse. The agency saw the need for the children to be knowledgeable regarding the issue of child sexual abuse, the referral systems and the resources available to these children and their families. The Board believes that emphasis should focus on school aged children.

In response to this need, the Child Care Board in collaboration with the Ministry of Education embarked on a pilot project **“Empowering the child in matters of Child Abuse.”**

The project primarily involved one hundred (100) primary school children between the ages of seven to eleven (7 – 11) years from two (2) primary schools. The project has as its focus issues that:

- ◆ made the children feel uncomfortable in relating to adults.
- ◆ attempted to increase and educate children on child abuse prevention methods.
- ◆ assisted children in understanding their bodies.
- ◆ taught children the concept of a “good touch” and a “bad touch.”
- ◆ taught children how to use the referral system and resources available in the community.

This project is now on-going within a number of primary schools in both the rural and urban districts. To date, over eight hundred (800) children have benefitted from participating in this project.

## Public Education Programmes

It is customary of the Child Care Board to disseminate information pertaining to issues which impact on the lives of children and their families. The Board participates in public education programme on a large scale and has been very effective and pro-active in combatting child sexual abuse in Barbados.

Officers speak at forums such as the schools’ Parent/Staff Associations, Career Showcases, Workshops, Seminars and other available forums.

### Results

1. Greater awareness by the public of the scourge of sexual abuse.
2. Awareness of the impact of sexual abuse on the family.
3. Marked increase in referrals regarding child sexual abuse.
4. Awareness and increased use of psychological and counselling services that are available.

### CONCLUSION

In Barbados, although there is unknown commercial sexual abuse/sexual exploitation of children, there remains the challenge of developing and implementing long-term programmes and legislation to protect citizens from any form of exploitation.

Despite the fact that some cases of sexual abuse are publicised little or no prosecution of child violators materializes, therefore, there is a need for increased prosecution of perpetrators.

