

**May 28<sup>th</sup> 2021**

## **EMPOWERING YOUTHS, PROMOTING EXCELLENCE**

### **Introduction**

A feature of this country's population that is becoming increasingly evident, is the level of excellence attained by our young people, who have and continue to take advantage of the opportunities afforded them by this Unity Labour Party administration. There is no shortage of examples of young people from varying backgrounds overcoming major challenges of poverty, learning disabilities, physical disabilities, abuse or other equally difficult situations and excelling. Two points should be made clear from the onset, 1) while much emphasis is usually placed on academic excellence, at the unfortunate expense of excellence in other areas of sports, music, technical vocational areas and entrepreneurship, these areas are full of such examples, and 2) there is no attempt at attaching any degree of significance to one area of struggle over another. What is being examined, is the level of access to opportunities provided for our young people to succeed, and the support offered to ensure the youth derive maximum benefits from those opportunities.

Within recent months, the very regrettable and unfortunate occurrences of violence, perpetrated against our youth resulting in alleged homicides, highlight an area of concern that requires specific attention. It is still unknown, (since these alleged crimes are under investigation), whether the perpetrators are themselves youths, adding a further disturbing dimension to this situation regardless of whether this is affirmed or not, we can admit that the youth and in particular young men are adversely affected.

It is against this backdrop that we should examine the benefits already experienced by thousands of young people of this country with a view of expanding these benefits to others seemingly more difficult to reach. It would require additional resources on the part of the government to expand certain programs and initiatives, but it would also, of necessity require greater partnership with all players

in society, especially the family, the church and the private sector. The current programs of the government are bearing fruits, positioning our young to be the next generation of leaders in every sphere, despite the many challenges, we continue to see the excellence of our youth.

## **Youth and Education**

There will be little disagreement that the education revolution continues to be a shining example of youth empowerment and youth excellence throughout this region. The policy of this government to ensure that education is not a privilege, but in fact a right that all should access, is transforming our Vincentian society in remarkable ways. The young people of this country are excelling academically at all levels, with consistently improved results at primary, secondary, post secondary and tertiary levels of education and training. The awards of excellence, obtained by our students at universities across the globe are innumerable with first class honours degrees becoming the norm. They then go on to occupy senior positions in various professional and technical fields and make their mark. One just needs to examine both the public and private sectors to find well trained, hardworking professional young people who are positively contributing to the continued development of this country.

## **Youth, Culture, the Arts and Sports**

The impact of the youth in these areas is undeniable and provides very tangible examples of youth excellence, especially to other youths because of their appeal to young people. Young people who participate in entertainment and sports continue to raise the bar, adding their element of diversity and freshness to their chosen areas. The new and youthful local entertainers, are making names for themselves and doing their part to expand the local music repertoire beyond what was traditional. These artistes have added their flavour to soca music, ragga soca and have even ventured into reggae/dancehall and the more North American style Hip Hop.

Young Vincentian vocalists have broken barriers and are now regular performers regionally and internationally. This is not unique to vocalists, but also musicians, renowned and requested soloists in their field delivering high quality performances, and productions to patrons. The number of young people, including teenagers participating in panorama, youthful creators of carnival costumes, the expansion of drama schools and school bands, all bare testimony to the increased role played by the youth in music and the arts. Finally, more and more Vincentians continue to pursue university education through sports scholarships. Both male and female athletes compete on behalf of their overseas colleges and perform well, making their mark and blazing the trail for others to follow.

## **Youth and Entrepreneurship**

Despite the inherent challenges to starting business, the young people of this country have not shied away from testing their entrepreneurial skills and many have achieved much success. The recent national exhibitions organised by Invest SVG offered much insight into the level of participation by this country's young people in starting and managing their own business. A significant number of the small businesses on display were owned by young people ranging from agriculture and agro-processing, arts and craft, technology and web based businesses. Young people are making clothing, accessories, wines, snacks, cosmetics and toiletries, and they are building websites, developing apps and starting money transfer services. Some of these businesses were beneficiaries of the CARCIP program, and the government's PRYME program has made available significant funding as grants, for many of these and other business to expand. The young people have taken full advantage of this grant program and hundreds more businesses have started as a result within the last year. This youth involvement in entrepreneurship is very positive and will contribute to the sustainability of the small enterprise sector in this country.

## **Conclusion**

The success of our young people must be acknowledged even as we recognise that a small minority of young people continue to engage in undesirable behaviour. The idea can never be, to ignore these youths, but instead to work with them as with all youths encouraging them to make use of the opportunities for self-development and empowerment. The positive examples are numerous, the policies; education revolution, pan against crime, sports against crime are at work, youth continue to benefit and excel, but we must continue to ensure that we reach more and more youth as we continue to build for the future.