

**November 25<sup>th</sup> 2022**

## **CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTHS TO EXCEL**

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### **Introduction**

It is an amazing time to be young and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines as the present offers so many opportunities and the future promises so much more. Many citizens who came to maturity under previous governments often comment that they wish they were young in these times, a reference to the abundance of opportunities available compared to the extreme scarcity during their youth. The SVLP governed our country for one term after independence and could be credited with laying the foundation in several sectors, but the real neglect came in the 17 years that preceded this current period of ULP governance. It was during those years of the New Democratic Party that the most stagnant period of youth empowerment occurred as very little was done to prepare our young people for their roles in positions of leadership. For many their opportunities came late in life, but they had the discipline and commitment to recognize that it was not too late and take advantage. It is almost as if the more mature citizens were competing with the youths, but such was the situation as the adults had been deprived of real opportunities to excel during their youth. The many stories of parents and children working together, or completing the same courses at secondary, post-secondary or University levels, are relayed with pride and gratitude in appreciation of opportunities. It is generally accepted that the young voters of this country, overwhelmingly support the ULP and this has sparked a desperate attempt by the opposition NDP to try and lure the youth. Their attempt to paint this country as unsupportive to the aspirations of youth ranges between the absurd and the downright dishonest since it is far removed from the lived reality of tens of thousands of our country's youths. The ULP government with its youth focused policies and youth friendly programs, continues to be both the beacon of hope and agent of growth and development for every young person with hopes and dreams of a bright future. It is no wonder that the young people are attracted to the ULP both as supporters and voters, as well as potential leaders, offering themselves as candidates in service to country.

### **From 3 to 73**

The oft-used words calypsonian, the Mighty Sparrow that urge children to go to school and learn well, to avoid catching real hell later in life, will never get old, but will always serve as an encouragement and a reminder of the necessity of having a good education. Sparrow goes on to warn, that without an education in your head you're better off dead, as there is no room in the whole wide world for an uneducated little boy or girl. The sad reality was that regardless of the potential of our young people, before the ULP government,

the opportunity for many of our 12-year-olds to attain something as basic as a secondary education was denied. Post-secondary education was limited both in the spaces and number of areas offered and university education university education was a luxury reserved for the elite class and the few NDP politicians and their friends. It must be remembered that the NDP government after 17 years in office offered **2-3** national scholarships per year, a sign of both the substandard performance of our students and the unwillingness of that government to invest in the youth, specifically, the children of the poor and the working class.

Just this year, our ULP administration awarded **73** national scholarships, exhibitions and bursaries to students based on their CAPE and Associate Degree results. This number doesn't include the more than 900 awards of tuition assistance and the almost 100 bachelor and master's scholarships awarded to young people this year. Any young person comparing both periods, would undoubtedly choose this current time as the most ideal if he/she is interested in opportunities to pursue a university education. The young people of this country are rightfully attracted to the government of education opportunities and are ready and willing to protect the gains of our country that made it possible for their academic development. To them, the choice couldn't be clearer.

### **Soaring Like Eagles**

With the current cadre of well-certified, trained and energetic young people taking full advantage of the opportunities presented by the education revolution, young people in this country and taking on challenges in leadership in both the public and private sectors. In the public sector many Permanent Secretaries, heads of departments, heads of statutory bodies are young Vincentian professionals who perform their jobs with excellence. Our teachers continue to pursue higher degrees and are being appointed senior teachers, as well as deputy principals/headteachers and even the top positions in our schools and they must be commended. In the area of business and entrepreneurship young people are coming forward with innovative and creative ideas and being supported by policies of this government like the very popular PRYME program that awarded thousands of grants to young entrepreneurs. Examples of the fruits of the PRYME program were seen at the just-concluded Everything Vincy Expo 2022, where several the recipients of those grants exhibited their products proudly for the many patrons who visited the expo. Our new reality under a ULP administration is that a young professional is more likely to be the head of BRAGSA or the Assistant DPP under a ULP government, with not a chance of achieving this if the NDP were to be in charge.

Finally, the very important matter of home ownership while in one's youth is something that was hitherto unheard of, until this ULP administration introduced the low/middle income housing program and the 100% mortgage program through the then NCB. Gone are the days when qualified

professionals had to wait until they were well into their 40s to own homes, forcing them to be stuck with mortgages well into their retirement. Youth home ownership is at a record high, and this allows young people to have lower repayment rates on their mortgages as well as the ability to structure their mortgages to be paid off before they retire. No rational young person would be attracted to a party that refused to engage in a housing program that made home ownership possible for young professionals and that is the dilemma of the current opposition. The ULP has and continues to make it possible for Vincentian youth to excel academically, professionally, in business and in every material respect, we are the government of opportunities.