

International Network for School Social Work

<http://internationalnetwork-schoolsocialwork.htmlplanet.com>

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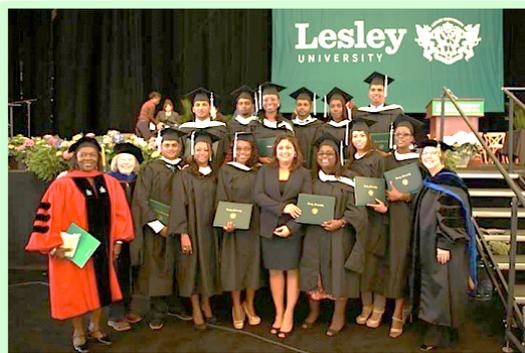
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School Social Work in Guyana

Guyana, a Caribbean country of 795,369 people on the north coast of South America, is focused on improving education as an important part of upgrading the country's well-being and economic competitiveness. Guyana is racially and ethnically diverse with about 9% of the population being indigenous peoples. English is the official language and most people speak Guyanese Creole. Indicators from UNICEF show that most children between 6 to 9 years attend school regularly. With this success in approaching universal access (including gender parity) to primary education, Guyana is focusing on universal secondary education, quality of education, improving access to education in the hinterland, training of teachers and improving attendance rates. http://www.unicef.org/guyana/children_5031.htm.

An estimated 33 per cent of children completing sixth grade have not acquired basic literacy skills. A sample survey done in 2002 of out-of-school youths aged 14-25 estimated that 20 percent was absolutely illiterate. Recognizing that multiple issues hinder children's success in school, the Ministry of Education is promoting a Child Friendly Schools initiative that includes the services of School Welfare Officers. During the last ten years the Ministry has recruited school welfare officers and guidance counselors to provide wide-ranging social support services throughout the education system.



Students graduate from Lesley University,
Ministry of Education, Guyana

The Ministry of Education, UNICEF and Lesley University in the United States recently collaborated to provide 13 of the leading school welfare officers with training, culminating in a Master of Arts Degree at the Lesley University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Local instructors, sessions with Lesley faculty via Skype and residencies in Boston were used to provide a full array of training in social work topics such as domestic violence, child abuse, mental health, cultural sensitivity, fine arts therapy, interventions and consultation. <http://www.lesley.edu/graduate-programs-guyana/?terms=guyana>

Frequent absence from school and the need for children to work to supplement family income are some of the factors that undermine academic success in Guyana. Improving attendance and punctuality has been a recent focus for the school welfare officers, and a major effort has been made to locate children loitering in the street, send warning letters to employers of these children, advise the parents about assistance available to them and report results to schools, so they can monitor the attendance of these children. <http://www.guyanatimesgy.com/?p=49584>

Schools in Jamaica need social workers

Jamaica is a large English-speaking Caribbean island of 2.8 million people. In response to the high crime rate, the Jamaica Constabulary Force conducted a study “*Education and Crime: Evidence from Prison Inmates in Jamaica*”. The study linked adult criminal behavior with earlier school problems such as poor attendance, cognitive problems, anti-social behavior and poor family support. <http://www.scribd.com/doc/201548051/Education-and-Crime-Evidence-From-Prison-Inmates-in-Jamaica>

Based on the findings of the study, the Minister of Education proposed a school-based solution to these problems involving identifying youth in targeted schools who need help, working to prevent them dropping out of school, providing preventative programs and involving the wider community in support for youth. <http://jis.gov.jm/media/MOECrimePreventionProg.pdf>

The JCF study was criticized by academics, social workers and teachers, in part because it singles out specific schools as needing intervention and because it over-simplifies the problem. However, the Ministry’s paper that followed the study “*A Preventative Initiative In Schools To Ameliorate Jamaica’s Crime Problem*” does propose some of the measures that the Jamaica Association of Social Workers and the Jamaica Teachers Association have been long asking for, including more support for the schools and for inner city communities where troubled teens live.

Meanwhile social workers point out that much more needs to be done than is proposed by the Ministry. *Eva Forde, president of the Jamaica Association of Social Workers, said a multifaceted approach is needed to assist schools, and the time for lip service has expired. "To be honest, this report, to me, is redundant. We already knew this," Forde stated, adding that for years, social workers and educators have been calling for intervention in these schools. She said the Government already has the solution, but whenever requests for assistance have been made for these schools, they have been told there are not enough funds to deal with these problems. Forde said the answer must start with social workers being placed in each of the schools identified as needing immediate attention.* <http://jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20140131/lead/lead5.html>.

The Jamaica Teachers’ Association has also been calling for social workers to be deployed to address students’ social and behavioral issues that teachers must deal with. Just this month, the Minister of Education together with the JTA announced that currently employed teachers already qualified in social work have been identified and will be placed in schools. <http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/latestnews/EducationMinistry--JTA-welcome-social-workers-in-schools>.