

Don't poison their minds or bodies

Children's Advocate reminds caregivers of their duty to protect their wards

TYRONE S REID, Jamaica Observer staff reporter
Monday, June 04, 2007



Children's Advocate Mary Clarke (right) accepts a token of appreciation from Yvonne Reid, project manager of the Caribbean Poison Information Network (CARPIN), at Saturday's awards luncheon at the Knutsford Court Hotel in New Kingston. (Photo: Lionel Rookwood)

CHILDREN'S Advocate Mary Clarke has appealed to Jamaicans to properly store and dispose of chemicals and other harmful substances so as to keep the nation's children safe from the risk of poisoning.

Clarke made the call on Saturday at an awards luncheon put on by the Caribbean Poison Information Network (CARPIN), at the Knutsford Court Hotel in New Kingston, to bring the curtain down on Poison Prevention Week (May 26 to June 2).

"It is very important to ensure that our environment is safe for our children at all times. We have to ensure that things such as insecticides, other household chemicals, medicines and other pharmaceuticals are properly locked away," Clarke said.

"We cannot be too complacent as adults when our children are at risk. We have a responsibility to keep them safe," said Clarke, who was the guest speaker at the awards ceremony.

In addition to public education, the children's advocate said, "we have to encourage those who produce pharmaceuticals and medication to ensure that these items are properly labelled because accidents happen in the household and you can't be too careful."

She also emphasised the importance of labelling plants in the home, noting that many popular plants found in Jamaica contained harmful poisons.

Clarke also called on mechanics and garage operators to bear the children in mind when they dispose of used batteries, noting that incidents of lead poisoning in children was not uncommon in present-day Jamaica.

"We have to constantly look around in the environment to see how best we can protect our children from dangerous substances. It is our responsibility. The Child Care and Protection Act lays down some very heavy sanctions where the safety of our children is concerned," Clarke explained. She said the law imposes a heavy responsibility on adults to protect children from any danger that may arise through neglect.

Clarke also addressed what she termed 'the poisoning of the mind', noting that the actions of adults impact negatively on the children around.

"As parents and adults, even as we pay attention to the physical poisoning, we also have to bear responsibility for the mental poisoning of our children, which comes through the music videos, the TV shows and some of the conversations that they are often exposed to. We have to put a halt to this. It is getting quite serious in this country. Each of us have a part to play," Clarke said.

She also used the opportunity to congratulate CARPIN on a successful week of activities, and encouraged the body to continue its work of educating people about poisons.

Chairman of CARPIN, Michael Tucker, said the three-year-old organisation has been successful in its bid to spread information about poisons in society, and hopes to gain momentum in the coming months.

"We have been making strides in engaging the Jamaican public about the effects of poisoning and how it affects the Jamaican population, especially the young. We see public education as very essential for the work we do. Instead of just speaking to the young, we hope to get them involved," Tucker said. "We must congratulate the participants who are receiving awards this afternoon. We also hope that the competition will go from strength to strength," Tucker added.

In the meantime, awards were presented to the top participants in the competitions - poster and performing arts (skit and dub poetry) - which were put on for Poison Prevention Week. The week of observances was held under the theme 'Poisons, Keep Your Distance: It's the safest thing to do'.

Esher Primary in St Mary emerged national winners in the poster category, Bridgeport Infant topped the skit category while St Joseph's Infant topped the dub poetry category. West End Primary in the Cayman Islands, Holy Childhood Prep and Westwood High also took home trophies.

CARPIN, set up in 2005 and based at the University of Technology (UTech), is a multi-agency institution that aims to reduce poisonings in Jamaica and the wider Caribbean by engaging in poison prevention campaigns, poison control information and advice and collection of data related to poisons.