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Montego Bay to get first Child and Adolescent Guidance and Wellness Centre

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National Security, the Hon. Dr Horace Chang is to lead the charge for the construction of a Child and Adolescent Guidance and Wellness Centre in St James.

The Security Minister last Friday (October 13), visited the site on Humber Avenue, Montego Bay, where this first-of-its-kind Centre is to be constructed.

The intent is for the development of an integrated service delivery space in St James, as part of the larger plan which involves Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services.

“The work to help our children must be tirelessly undertaken. High-risk children and youth will be our focus,” Minister Chang said.

He stated that there is a great need to tackle the emotional challenges and abnormal behavioural patterns of the nation’s young people, to intervene and intercept them and prevent the young men in particular, growing into a life of violence and criminality.

According to the Security Minister, resolving some of the crucial social problems means pulling wayward youth from their usual circle of influence by training and counselling them and getting them involved in new, productive activities.

“The need for this kind of service is critical and I am going to move to get it done quickly; I am confident that with an expanded service across the island, we can effect meaningful behavioural change that we are looking for in our young people,” reasoned Minister Chang.

“The Centre is envisaged not only to be novel and new but will also be a sustainable addition to the suite of social investment that the government now has in place to serve the people of Jamaica,” Minister Chang added.

Communities in which these Centres will be located are already identified based on statistics from the Planning Institute of Jamaica (PIOJ) and include the Corporate Area, St Catherine, Westmoreland and St James.

The decision to establish this Child and Adolescent Guidance and Wellness Centre was driven by a needs assessment undertaken in 2022, with the help of the European Union, which indicated that approximately 22,600 children have been identified as needing therapeutic counselling as a result of having some kind of mental and or behavioural issue. This may be caused by exposure to trauma or acts of violence.

This programme is being established to handle this number in over 100 communities identified by the PIOJ as having severe social deprivation circumstances and requiring special intervention.

“Other data correlates with that, not just the homicide rates, but in terms of the general criminal activity and the housing conditions among other serious issues, so the idea is to pull all of this together as a government response in a wholistic way,” Minister Chang said

Renovation of the existing building on site is estimated at \$24 million Jamaican dollars and will include furnishing and computers. An additional \$28 million is being earmarked for staffing costs.

“This initiative is not only a necessity; it’s an investment in the well-being of our children and adolescents,” stated Minister Chang.