

Help and Shelter takes child abuse knowledge to GNA

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The final session in progress

As part of its efforts to solicit support to address the problem of child abuse, Help and Shelter has been targeting frontline workers for a series of training sessions. Nurses drawn from the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation, St Joseph Mercy Hospital and Davis Memorial Hospital, were the most recent targets.

The venture came as part of a collaborative effort between the Guyana Nurses Association (GNA) and Help and Shelter, with support from the Ministry of Human Services' Child Protection Agency.

According to Help and Shelter Representative, Vidyaratha Kissoon, the move comes as part of the Non-Governmental Organisation's Child Protection Project, which has as part of its component the need to train frontline workers such as teachers, social workers and nurses to identify the signs of child abuse.

This, he said, is intended to help boost the capabilities of these workers to not only recognize the various forms of child abuse but also to be in a position to report such matters to the relevant authorities.

Kissoon highlighted that according to the law, every health care or social worker and teacher must make a report to the Child Protection Agency if they suspect that a child is being abused.

"In order to raise awareness among the nurses we went through four two-hour sessions which were aimed at defining child abuse, identifying the signs of child abuse and how the nurses can question children and even intervene," Kissoon disclosed.

On Wednesday, the last of the four-part training session, which was held at the Guyana Nurses Association Hall, came to an end.

The existing project, which commenced this year, stemmed from a 'Pickney Project' that Help and Shelter had started two years ago, according to Kissoon.

"We started this new project and what we are trying to do is to educate the public....nurses are targeted because some cases of child abuse do end up in the hospitals. Some of the nurses we worked with were trained for the first time."

However, Kissoon anticipates that the collaboration with nurses across the country will be sustained. He revealed that plans are already in train to have similar sessions with nurses in Regions Three and Six.

Additionally, he revealed that other nurses who are desirous of learning more about the project, but may not have the time to devote to training sessions, can in fact access a specially designed Facilitator Resource Kit on the Help and Shelter's website www.hands.org.gy/nursesresresourcekit.

The purpose of the kit, according to Kissoon, is to provide facilitation resources to train nurses and other health care workers to make appropriate interventions when they detect that children in their care have been abused. The kit is built on the information which Everychild Guyana and Help and Shelter have.

And given the crucial role of the Child Protection Agency, Ms Concheeta Gray, Senior Child Protection Officer, was on hand at Wednesday's session and sought to highlight the functions of the Child Protection Agency and the role that the entity plays when reports of child abuse are made. She revealed that not only does the Agency conduct investigations into reports of sexual and physical abuse as well as neglect and abandonment of children, but it also seeks to intervene in such matters.

The Agency also has responsibility for dealing with adoption and foster care of children, Gray said. She revealed that the GPHC as well as hospitals in Region Three have been very prompt in the reporting of such matters.

"We hope to sustain this relationship because we have recognized that we cannot function in isolation, we need everybody on board if we are to protect our children...We need the nurses, the police; we need everyone on board."

Worth the while

The nurses in attendance were certainly in unison that the workshop provided them with vital information that

could be utilised in their respective hospital settings. Nurse Leslyn Joseph of the St Joseph Mercy confessed that "the programme was very enlightening; some of the things I have learnt I had never known."

Nurse Shellon Isaacs, a Health and Safety, Infection Control Officer, at St Joseph Hospital too, noted that as coordinator of the Police Wives' Club, she would be able to utilise the new found information. She explained that part of her duties entail continuous involvement with children from the Drop In Centre and Joshua Home as well as those in stable homes. She opined that she is now in a better position to enhance her ability to help protect children.

Nurse Pamela Allen, Junior Departmental Supervisor at the GPHC said that she could now improve her role as a supervisor with the knowledge she has acquired.

"The information that we received was enlightening and will particularly help me as a supervisor, because I am directly involved with children. I am working in the paediatric unit and it will surely be of benefit and an asset to my management of the ward."

The sessions, according to Nurse Althea Simon of the GPHC, was especially useful as she is now aware that she is not limited to detecting cases of child abuse in the hospital setting, but even in her neighbourhood and while walking on the street.