

COOPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA

**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST SESSION OF
THE TWELFTH PARLIAMENT (2020-2024)**

THIRD SPECIAL REPORT

OF THE

PARLIAMENTARY SECTORAL COMMITTEE

ON

SOCIAL SERVICES

**Report of the visit to the Sophia Care Centre, the Children and Family Centre,
and the Palms Geriatric Institution by the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee
on Social Services (PSCSS) on Wednesday, May 15, 2024.**

**PRESENTED TO THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY
BY THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE COMMITTEE**

ON

18th December, 2024

Report of the visit to the Sophia Care Centre, the Children and Family Centre, and the Palms Geriatric Institution by the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Social Services (PSCSS) on Wednesday, May 15, 2024.

Introduction

On Wednesday, May 15, 2024, the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Social Services (PSCSS) visited the Sophia Care Centre, the Children and Family Centre (Drop-in-Centre), and the Palms Geriatric Institution.

The Delegation

Members of the Committee:

Hon. Dr. Vindhya V.H. Persaud, M.S., M.P., (PPP/C) Minister of Human Services and Social Security	-	Chairperson
Hon. Pauline R.A. Campbell-Sukhai, M.P., (PPP/C) Minister of Amerindian Affairs	-	Member
Dr. Vishwa D.B. Mahadeo, M.P. (PPP/C)	-	Member
Dr. Bheri S. Ramsarran, M.P. (PPP/C)	-	Member
Ms. Dawn Hastings-Williams, M.P. (APNU+AFC)	-	Member
Mr. Dineshwar Jaipersaud, M.P. (APNU+AFC)	-	Member
Mr. Sherod Duncan, M.P. (APNU+AFC)	-	Member

Officers:

Ms. Koalla Robertson	-	Clerk of Committees
Ms. Jacqueline Harsham	-	Assistant Clerk of Committees
Ms. Leelawattie Panchu	-	Research and Analytical Assistant
Mr. Joshua Eastman	-	Production Technician

PURPOSE OF THE VISITS

The purpose of the visits was to observe the Institutions' conditions and operations and interact with the occupants and staff.

THE SOPHIA CARE CENTRE

The delegation departed the Parliament Office, on Wednesday, May 15, 2024, at 9.45 a.m. and arrived at the Sophia Care Centre at 10.15 a.m.

The Human Services Supervisor, Ms. Chabela Lord received the delegation.

The Chairperson of the Committee, Hon. Dr. Vindhya Persaud, introduced the Members of the delegation.



Figure 1 – Members of the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Social Services interacting with the Staff of the Sophia Care Centre.

Discussion in the Hallway

Ms. Chabela Lord, the Human Services Supervisor, highlighted that the purpose of the Centre was to provide a home for neglected, disadvantaged children who had been victims of unfortunate circumstances or came from abusive households.

The Centre currently houses thirty-two children: fifteen girls and seventeen boys. All the children were enrolled in schools and, in some cases, lessons. Transportation was available to take the children to and from school. In circumstances where a child may require extra lessons beyond school hours, transportation is also provided.

The delegation was informed that a child's admission to the centre required a medical examination, and each child was assigned a case worker. A psychologist would evaluate each child at the end of each month.

A team of doctors from the Children's Visiting Committee also visits all children's homes and centres in Guyana. This Committee is under the purview of the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security and reports to the Minister. The Committee engages psychologists, doctors, and teachers who volunteer their skills. A child is taken to the nearest health centre or hospital in a medical emergency.

During leisure time, a boxing coach visits every Friday and Saturday afternoon and teaches boxing. Dance classes are held on Monday, Thursday and Friday for both males and females. The children are also exposed to other recreational activities, such as football and cricket. They enrolled in swimming and cricket classes during the July/August school vacation.

Ms. Lord informed the Committee that one of the challenges faced by the Centre was the mental health of the children. Nevertheless, Dr. Persaud stated that the Government of Guyana was working on implementing additional methods to help with mental health awareness.

She stated that the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security was currently working in collaboration with the United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF) on several areas, such as policies, standard operating procedures, upgrading and protocol for Day and Night Care Facilities and Early Childhood Development (ECD). The Ministry of Human Services & Social Security intends to transform and remodel the Centre completely.

After the children complete their Caribbean Secondary Examination Certificate (CSEC) examination and enter adulthood, they would be placed in a halfway home. The purpose of the halfway home is to prepare these youths for adulthood. The preparation entails assisting them in finding jobs and housing and teaching them to care for themselves financially after leaving the system. Another option for the children was to utilize the Culture, Youth and Sport Training Centre located in the compound of the Sophia Care Centre and halfway home. The Training Centre offers training in plumbing, electrical installation, masonry, and carpentry, among others. Some children are sent to Carnegie, Government Technical Institute (GTI) and the University of Guyana.

Dr Persaud also mentioned that the Centre's residential facility was being renovated and rehabilitated, and in 2025, the children will have brand new quarters.



Figure 2- The Culture, Youth and Sport Training Centre located in the compound of the Sophia Care Centre.

Tour of the Sophia Care Centre

The delegation inspected the following areas:

- **The Female Dorms-** This section was located in the upper flat of the building and accommodated fifteen girls from ages six to twelve years old.

- **The Male Dorms-** This section was located in the lower flat of the building and accommodated seventeen boys from ages six to twelve years old.

- **The Kitchen-** In 2022, this area was upgraded with modern conveniences such as stoves, exquisite countertops, and heavy-duty ovens for baking and meal preparation. Meals were tailored to the specific dietary demands of each child, such as allergic reactions or religious preferences. Five meals were served per day:
 - (i) Breakfast
 - (ii) Mid-morning snack
 - (iii) Lunch
 - (iv) Mid-afternoon snack
 - (v) Dinner



Figure 3- The Sophia Care Centre's kitchen upgraded in 2022.

Committee's Observations

The Committee made the following observations:

- The female and male dorms needed new beds and mattresses.
- The kitchen needed an extractor fan.



Figure 4 –Members of the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Social Services, Parliamentary staff, the Human Services Supervisor and Counsellor at the Sophia Care Centre.

THE CHILDREN AND FAMILY CARE CENTRE

The delegation arrived at the Children and Family Care Centre at 10.45 a.m. and was welcomed by Ms Juanita Peniston, Manager of the Centre.

Briefing in the Administration Office

Ms. Juanita Peniston briefed the Committee on the Centre's purpose and the admission procedure. This Centre caters for children and families who have been abused, neglected or impoverished. In some cases, families may find themselves homeless and needing a place to stay until they can rent an apartment.

Ms. Peniston stated that this Centre was a transitional phase before admission into the Sophia Care Centre. Upon admission, each child receives a medical examination and has sessions with a counsellor to assess their mental health, after which a caseworker is assigned. Hence, a child was required to spend three months at the Center before being transferred to either the Sophia or Mahaica Care Centres.

The Rotarians visit the Centre once monthly, accompanied by doctors, for routine checkups for the children and families. The Centre could accommodate 80 children and eight families. However, at the time of the visit, there were only one family and forty-six children; thirty-four females and twelve males.

There were two buses available to take the children to and from school.

Tour of the Centre

The delegation inspected the following areas:

- The Kitchen- This area was a separate building in the Children and Family Centre compound. The amenities in this building included a spacious kitchen, dining area and classrooms for extra lessons.
- The Dorms- This section can accommodate eighty children and eight families.



Figure 5 – Family Quarters and Male and Female Dorms at the Children and Family Centre.

Committee Observations

The Committee made the following observations:

- The interior of the dorm should be repainted.
- The dorm should be provided with new beds and mattresses.
- The washroom in the dorm should be renovated.

The Delegation was informed that some of the above observations commenced in 2024 and would continue in 2025.

THE PALMS GERIATRIC INSTITUTION

The delegation arrived at the Palms Geriatric Institution at 12.15 p.m. and was welcomed and briefed by the following staff:

- Ms. Samantha Douglas – Administrator (ag.)
- Ms. Isha Bartrum – Assistant Administrator (ag.)
- Mrs. Abike Benjamin- Samuels – Deputy Director of Social Services (ag.)
- Dr. Garfield Bryan – Matron (ag.)

Discussion in the Ward

The staff briefed the Committee on the purpose and daily activities of the Institution.

The Facility provides the following services to the residents:

- Efficient and adequate 24-hour nursing care for the elderly residents, as well as free services to destitute Guyanese senior citizens. Medical, nursing and custodial care to indigent senior citizens.
- A hospitable physical, social and psychological environment for long-term care of residents.
- Dietary needs of the residents.
- Rehabilitative therapies for both residents and out-patients.
- Medical referral service for residents to the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation.
- Removal and burial of deceased residents.
- Recreational and social activities for residents.
- In-house and other training opportunities for staff to ensure the institution has highly effective and dedicated geriatric care practitioners and other staff.

The Palms Geriatric Institution had the capacity to house two hundred and forty (240) residents. However, only one hundred and forty-eight (140) residents were at the Institution. The Institution only admits residents who meet the criteria and are sixty years and older.

The following factors were considered when admitting a resident:

- Homelessness
- Poverty
- Victims of abuse and exploitation
- Must be sixty years and over.

The residents were given three meals daily (breakfast, lunch, and dinner) and two snacks (mid-morning and mid-afternoon). Two doctors were assigned to this institution and are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to care for the residents. The doctors also conduct daily checkups.

The medication for each patient was available at the pharmacy department. If there was a shortage at any given time, the Ministry of Health and Georgetown Public Hospital (GPHC) supplied the required medication.

Tour of the Centre

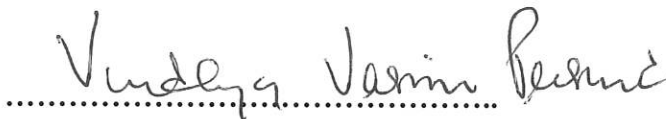
The delegation inspected the following areas:

- **The Male Ward** -This section consists of eighty-five males.
- **The Female Ward**- This section consists of sixty-three females.

Committee's Observations

The Committee made the following observations:

- The residents received excellent care.
- The environment was clean and tidy.
- The nurses and assistants were attentive and helpful towards the residents.



*Hon. Dr. Vindhya V. H. Persaud, M.S., M.P.,
Minister of Human Services and Social Security,
Chairperson*