

MINISTER'S SPEECH FOR INTERNATIONAL DOWN SYNDROME DAY

Today the Ministry of Health and Environment observes International Down Syndrome day locally and worldwide on March 21 under the theme “**My Voice, My Community**”. International Down Syndrome Day promotes awareness to the needs and attributes of individuals with Down syndrome. In December 2011, the General Assembly declared 21 March as World Down Syndrome Day. In order to raise public awareness of of this condition, the United Nations General Assembly decided, with effect from 2012, to observe World Down Syndrome Day on 21 March each year, to be observed by all Member States, relevant organizations of the United Nations system and other international organizations, as well as civil society.

Down syndrome exists in all regions across the globe and commonly affects learning styles, physical characteristics of individuals

Approximately 1 in 100 persons inherit the condition from their mother or father because of a genetic anomaly. The chance of a baby being born with Down syndrome increases with a mother's age particularly after 35 years. Many Down syndrome persons live long healthy lives. They have a life span of 40 to 60 years.

Currently in Dominica there are approximately fifty (50) persons living with this condition in Dominica

This year's theme is a call to action for the recognition of the rights of person who live with Down syndrome. It must be recognized by all that persons with Down syndrome have the same basic human rights as other members of the community.

Their voices are unheard therefore this year there is a call for advocacy from all persons within every strata of society for these our children and our brothers and sisters. We need to advocate for:

- An end to stigma and discrimination of persons with Down Syndrome and by extension their families
- Recognition of rights to inclusion, education, training and health care for these individuals
- Community and government support for activities and programs for individuals with Down syndrome
- Increased the understanding of health care workers on the unique medical needs of individuals with Down syndrome
- Provision of opportunities for application of the skills, talents, and unique attributed of individuals with Down syndrome

This year the Ministry of Health and Environment in collaboration with the Down Syndrome Society Inc. will conduct activities to help raise awareness on Down Syndrome among the population. The goal will be to provide a voice this voiceless population and to facilitate the integration of these into the wider national economic agenda.

As Minister for Health and Environment I further urge the nation to recognize that:

Down syndrome occurs in families regardless of social, economic, cultural, religious or racial backgrounds.

Persons with this condition need to be treated with dignity and respect as citizens of our beautiful country.