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PRESS RELEASE

DYS Launches Initiative to Support Students Suffering from Childhood Trauma

Belmopan, May 22, 2024.

The Ministry of Youth, Sports and Transport and the Department of Youth Services (DYS) announce the completion of a community initiative to support and nurture primary school students ages 14 and younger who have suffered childhood trauma. The initiative was targeted to deliver therapeutic interventions to 75 children in standards 5 and 6, addressing the psychological, emotional, and behavioral impacts of trauma.

The program started on October 2, 2023, and ended on May 21, 2024, and was conducted in six primary schools across Belize City. It included an eight-week counselling component designed to help students overcome grief and trauma. The sessions focused on addressing the emotional and psychological needs of children, ages 6 to 14, who had lost a close family member. Trained counselors from the Belize Youth Counseling and Wellbeing Services, a unit under the DHS, led this support group.

Another key component of the initiative was incorporating sports, specifically baseball, which is known to aid healing. Participants also had access to after-school homework assistance at the Yabra Community Hub, Port Public Library, and Community Rehabilitation Department.

Key objectives of the program included:

- providing a safe space for children to express their feelings and experiences related to grief and loss;
- teaching healthy coping skills and strategies for managing emotions;

- facilitating connections among children who had experienced similar losses;
- and educating children on the grieving process and normalizing the experience of grief.

Familial sessions through the Belize Police Department's Gang Resistance Education and Training Program (GREAT) extended support to the children's family dynamics and environment.

The project was made possible through the collaborative efforts of numerous institutions and stakeholders, including the National Committee for Families and Children, Port Alternative to Violence Program Innovators, Department of Youth Services, Grace Primary School, Muslim Primary School, St. Johns Vianney School, Lake Independence Primary School, Ebenezer Primary School, the Police Department's Community Policing Unit under Ministry of Human Affairs and New Growth Industries, Transformers Alternative to Violence Program and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology.

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