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DPP CHAMBERS Press Release: National Protocol on Child Advocacy Centres (CAC) Multi-Disciplinary Teams

The Director of Public Prosecutions, Madam Shalimar Ali-Hack (DPP) in collaboration with five other Heads of Multi-Disciplinary Teams/Agencies (MDT), including the Ministry of Social Protection, in December 2015 signed onto a National Protocol for the establishment of Child Advocacy Centres (CAC) countrywide.

The 12- page Protocol states that the objective of the CACs is to provide services for sexually abused children and their families. It explained that CAC is a child-focused, facility-based programme in which representatives from various disciplines will collaborate to conduct interviews with children who have been sexually abused and for them to make team decisions about the ***investigation including forensic interviews, treatment, management and prosecution*** of child sexual abuse cases.

The other MDT Agencies involved in the signing of the Protocol are the Guyana Police Force, the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Public Health, and two Non- Governmental Organisation Groups, Blossom Inc. and ChildLink Inc.

The signed Protocol issued by Ministry of Social Protection states that there is a general agreement among the stakeholders, in both state agencies and non-state agencies together with the international community that child abuse and violence against children is a matter of grave concern in Guyana. The Government of Guyana in its 2010 Report to the United Nations (UN) Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), identified violence against and the abuse of children as a key area of concern. The GOG reiterated then its commitment to the protection of children in Guyana.

In 2009 the GOG passed the Childcare and Protection Agency Act which enabled legislations for the establishment of the Childcare and Protection Agency (CPA), an arm of the Ministry of Social Protection. The CPA states that while its collaborative work with other agencies and organisations to address maltreatment and abuse of children in Guyana has resulted in an increase in the number of cases being reported and an improvement in services to children, there are still challenges in data collection, treatment of children who have been abused and the investigation and prosecution of child abuse cases.

The CPA will be the oversight body for the operations of the CACs and will provide a safe, child-friendly location where children are interviewed by a trained forensic interviewer about sexual abuse that they experienced. The interview will be recorded and will serve as a visual record of the child's statement.

While the interview is in progress, it will be observed on a screen in an adjoining room by the Forensic Interview Team (FIT).

The CAC model has been adopted from a USA model and aims to increase the successful prosecution of perpetrators and to offer therapeutic services to victims and their families and to reduce the chances of the victim suffering any repeated occurrences. The CAC Protocol will serve as guiding principles for all CACs in Guyana and is mandatory when developing and building CACs and MDT in various communities.

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