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Press Release

Ninety early childhood and special needs teachers from 43 basic, primary and preparatory schools across the island have been trained to identify and effectively teach students with language-based learning difficulties.

The workshops were initiated by Mandy Melville, the founder of Creative Language-Based Learning with training provided by Lindamood-Bell Learning Processes™.

Lindamood-Bell™ is an American company that has been imparting this know-how for over 30 years. The workshops, which are usually only available overseas, offered a unique opportunity for special needs teachers who practice in the area of language-based learning disabilities to further develop teaching strategies.

Mrs. Melville advised that the ultimate goal is to develop an island-wide network of early childhood and special needs teachers who are able to meet the needs of students with language-based learning challenges. With Lindamood-Bell Learning Processes™, teachers are trained in the early identification of language-based learning disabilities and how to provide systematic, research-based intervention. "Teachers are equipped with the correct tools to tackle these deficits using process-based instruction," she said.

Citing a survey conducted by Dr. Barbara Matalon in collaboration with the World Bank, Mrs. Melville noted that an estimated 15-20% of Jamaica's population, or one in every five students, has a language-based learning disability that may include problems with listening, reasoning, speaking, reading, writing and math calculations and problem solving.

"Dyslexia is the most common of the language-based learning difficulties, accounting for 70-80% of people with poor reading skills," Mrs. Melville advised. She added that without early identification and effective intervention, the negative impact of language-based learning disabilities could have significant and long-lasting effects on the individual and society at large. "The devastation caused by crime and violence in a society is often rooted in overlooked learning disabilities," she said.

The workshops were funded by the CHASE Fund and facilitated by the Sandals Foundation. The CHASE Fund has been supporting interventions in the early childhood education sector for 15 years and has begun to place more emphasis on training teachers to better provide for special needs students. The training was fully endorsed by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information as an opportunity for teachers to be able to reach those students who struggle with learning to read using the traditional methods.

Helping to educate the minds that are the future of our nation.

With CHASE financing, educators were provided with the necessary instructional kits and materials and having completed the programme were able to begin implementation immediately upon returning to their classrooms.

The programme is in its second year having been initiated in 2017. Fifty teachers from 24 schools participated last year and this year, 40 educators from an additional 19 schools received coaching, materials and kits. In addition, the 2017 teachers continued their development as local instructional leaders – with the ability to assess students and share strategies with their colleagues.

With glowing testimonials from teachers and children alike, alongside significant instructional gains, the programme is already a huge success.

Mrs. Melville said that she was appreciative of the Support from CHASE, the Sandals Foundation and Chukka Foundation that offered support for the 2018 Summer School Programme. She said that all the partners recognise that children's learning is an investment in the future and the development of teaching and learning and language skills is immeasurably important.