

EAG TALK

THE ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS GROUP

Disability group on a mission to improve food security



Members of the Association of Persons with Disabilities have been hard at work casting wheelchair accessible paths and floors, constructing raised beds and getting their hands dirty by planting food crops (Photos by Natalya Lawrence)



By Natalya Lawrence, National Coordinator GEF Small Grants Programme - UNDP

“Covid-19 hit our group hard, and many of our members were already suffering from poor nutrition before the onslaught of the pandemic.” These were the words of the concerned President of the Association of Persons with Disabilities (ABAPD), Mr Bernard Warner.

This was not the group’s first attempt at food security and improved nutrition. The efforts of a project implemented a few years ago were hampered by deaths within the project team and then, the passing of Hurricane Irma in 2017.

The group, undaunted, learnt from the challenges of their previous project and were sure to include new safeguards, including climate resilience into all future work.

The elation was tangible when the members of the group learnt of the successful outcome following a project proposal submission to the Global Environment Facility Small Grants Programme (GEF SGP).

The group’s project is entitled “The use of climate-smart technology to increase food production and improve food security for persons with disabilities living in Antigua



& Barbuda." The project is a timely one and from the get-go, the group was determined to "do this ourselves".

The tenacity and determination seen within the group, from the very beginning, was laudable and worthy of emulation by other aspiring groups. They persistently pursued funding, and though lacking the experience to formulate pro-

posals, they sought out the support of technical experts to guide them as they elaborated their project document.

From the moment the agreement was signed, and before the first tranche of funds hit their account, the project took off like a jet plane. Members worked into the night casting wheelchair accessible paths and floors, constructing raised beds and

getting their hands dirty by planting food crops.

Through this project, a number of agricultural skills will be taught as the members and their families plant a fruit orchard on their plot of land, as well as veggies in raised-beds. They will also produce crops through hydroponics.

This ambitious project also has a beekeeping com-

ponent. This component is slated to take place closer to the end of the project. However, recently, some members who decided to take a stroll off the beaten path, very quickly learnt that the bees and their boxes were already in place! Thankfully, the bees were mellow, and no one was stung.

In addition to the obvious benefits to be derived from the project, other important key issues are being addressed through this project. The group consistently speaks of Horticulture Therapy (HT) and Community-Based Rehabilitation (CBR). These, through this project, provide therapeutic treatment and equal opportunities for persons living with disabilities.

Two members, Jurmin Jones and Michael Baker, both expressed how the project had revitalised hope within them. Other members of the group expressed how the project has drawn them out of a state of depression. Treasurer of the organisation, Ms Wendy Valentine, is a thoughtful, stern, diligent person. Her smiles of satisfaction are enough evidence to prove that she is extremely pleased with the progress of the project.

While the ABAPD is the sole implementer of the project, they benefit from the support of key agencies such as the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Barbuda Affairs, the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture, the Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute, the Department of Environment, and the Boys' Brigade.

In a matter of a few months, the grounds of the ABAPD Secretariat have transformed from a sleepy, overgrown piece of land, to a productive area, bustling with life and activity, and punctuated by the bursts of laughter emanating from active members on a mission!