

TUFTON VISITS THE MENTALLY ILL & HOMELESS FOR WORLD MENTAL HEALTH DAY

In honour of World Mental Health Day on October 10th, Minister of Health and Wellness, Dr Chris Tufton visited the Marie Atkins Night Shelter, which provides food and shelter to more than 200 people. The shelter provides critical assistance to those who are homeless due to being abandoned because they are mentally ill which only further exacerbates the condition.



Once it is discovered that a person is mentally ill, friends and relatives may shun or abandon the affected as mental illness is typically misunderstood and stigmatised in Jamaica.

One of the shelter's residents, Nikoa Wilson, shared her story on the challenges she faced as a result of her mental illness, "My family didn't understand what was going on with me; they told me I was "mad". They kicked me out on the streets and I was homeless until I came to the shelter. Here, I get treatment, daily food and a place to sleep. I don't want what happened to me to happen to others. If your relative or friend is sick, seek help."

In de-stigmatising and shedding light on the challenges faced by those who are homeless and mentally ill, Dr Tufton used his visit as an opportunity to engage in conversation with the residents about the circumstances that led them to the shelter and the effects that their mental illness has on their lives. Additionally, the residents were encouraged and welcomed to offer their opinions on ways the government can better assist them which were duly noted.

"It is important that we have open dialogues to shatter the stigma that prevents people from seeking treatment and equip families, friends and communities to detect and deal with those who are mentally ill. In order to change our nation's mindset, we need to start talking about mental health and share our stories whether you are the one affected or a loved one is. There is no better way to help those we love to take the first step on their path to recovery," remarked Dr Tufton.

Dr Tufton's visit to the shelter was just one of the activities organized for World Mental Health Day 2019. Other activities included the launch of the Ministry of Health and Wellness' Mental Health Campaign, the unveiling of 14 new buses to transport health teams to communities to provide professional treatment and a public forum.

If you or someone you know may have a mental illness, call 888-NEW-LIFE or visit www.moh.gov.jm/mental-health for further resources.



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