

Cynthia Shako Early Childhood Education and Daycare Centre Marks 30th Anniversary

UTech, Jamaica Broadcaster

Wed 14/06/2023 01:04 PM



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L-R: Miss Michelle Silvera, Supervisor, Cynthia Shako Early Childhood Education and Daycare Centre, Mrs. Cynthia Shako, Professor Colin Gyles, CD, Acting President, University of Technology, Jamaica and Professor Sonia Richards-Malcolm, Acting Dean, College of Health Sciences, participate in the cutting of

the Cynthia Shako Early Childhood Education and Daycare Centre's 30th Anniversary cake at a ceremony held Friday, June 9, 2023, Shared Facilities Building, Papine Campus.

University of Technology, Jamaica's Cynthia Shako Early Childhood Education and Daycare Centre marked its 30th anniversary with an afternoon of celebrations and reflections at a special ceremony held June 9, 2023, at the Shared Facilities Building, Papine Campus. Current and past members of staff who served as caregivers over the life of the institution, including pioneer Mrs. Cynthia Shako, after whom the Daycare is named, as well as present and former students, parents, and members of the University community, turned out for the celebratory occasion.

Acting President, UTech, Jamaica, Professor Colin Gyles, CD in his greetings, heartily congratulated current and former leadership, and staff on reaching the significant milestone, noting that many individuals have contributed to the growth and development of the Daycare Centre over three decades. Paying tribute to Mrs. Cynthia Shako, who served as Head of Health Services at the former College of Arts, Science and Technology (CAST), Prof. Gyles stated that "the name Cynthia Shako at UTech, Jamaica is synonymous with a tradition of caring and nurturing," adding that "through her pioneering work and lobby efforts with then President, Dr. Alfred Sangster, the Centre was established on June 9, 1993 with the mission of operating as a non-profit unit providing full day and aftercare for infants of students and staff."

Affirming that the progress on the Daycare's mission has been remarkable, Prof. Gyles noted that the Centre was also established as an important practical training ground for students in the Child Care and associated courses of study in the College of Health Sciences.

The Acting President also highlighted the historical significance of the current location of the Cynthia Shako Early Childhood Education and Daycare Centre, noting that the building was once the home of the Farm Manager at the Hope Farm School formerly located on the campus and which was a part of the Hope Estate. The Daycare was relocated from its original location next to the Facilities Management Department (FMD), on the campus, in 2012 to its current location in the vicinity of the northern end of the Campus, and was constructed as part of the UTech, Jamaica Enhancement Project. At that time, the name was changed from Cynthia Shako Daycare to Cynthia Shako Early Childhood Education and Daycare Centre, underscoring the Centre's evolution in keeping with national standards for early childhood education.

Acting Dean of the College of Health Sciences, Prof. Sonia Richards-Malcolm, under whose portfolio the Daycare Centre resides, commended the Cynthia Shako Early Childhood Education and Daycare Centre team for their steadfastness in positively impacting the lives of the children of UTech Jamaica employees and its students.

"Let me commend the team of the Cynthia Shako Early Childhood Education and Daycare Centre on this milestone of 30 years" Prof. Richards-Malcolm stated adding that "the Cynthia Shako Early Childhood Education and Daycare Centre continues to live by their goal which is to positively and systematically influence all aspects of the development of the children of our employees and children of our students." She further lauded the team for their "consistency and exceptional work" which has resulted in "social and emotional growth" as well as "good physical health and intellectual development" of the children over the years.

Mrs. Cynthia Shako, visionary of the 30-year-old old institution, shared snippets of the Daycare Centre's genesis and evolution. She also acknowledged then President of CAST, Dr. Alfred Sangster who approved the establishment of the Centre – a move to meet growing demands from students and employees for an afterschool and childcare services facility for their children. "As the college nurse, I became closely involved with welfare of some of the students and some staff members of the college" noted Mrs. Shako. She explained that "as the college population grew, the need for aftercare for small children of staff, as well as care for babies of both staff and students were recognized...some were nursing mothers but had nowhere to leave the child during lectures." She said that after presenting a good case to Dr. Sangster "he consented and gave his approval for me to do what was necessary to establish a daycare centre."

Mrs. Shako expressed that she was pleased with the overwhelming support from committee members who helped to steer the initial operations for the construction of the facility. She thanked the Ministry of Housing and the then Minister, the late O.D. Ramatallie who facilitated the donation of construction materials, Mr. Victor Patterson – an architect from the Ministry of Education who modelled the design for the centre, YP Seaton and Associates, and other sponsors, Cement Company, Victoria Mutual Building Society, the Past Students Association of CAST, Nestle Jamaica and past student, Mr. Noel Gooding for sponsoring the initiative. She also acknowledged the support received from the Canadian High Commission and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA),

“Today, I am pleased to say that 30 years after the establishment of this Centre, it is functioning so successfully. It has expanded to serve the needs of the University and it sets an example of what can be done when there is a will,” she noted.

Greetings were also received from Ms. Keshana Golding, Development Officer, Early Childhood Commission who noted that an early achievement of the Daycare was the registration of the Centre with the Early Childhood Commission in 2016. “This is a certified institution. It is among the first 300 schools in the island to be certified and this is evidence enough that it is providing quality education for your children,” Ms. Golding asserted. She thanked the team for providing a “nurturing and secure environment for children” and saluted them for their “dedication that has transformed this establishment to the sanctuary that it is today.”



*Ms. Keshana Golding,
Development Officer, Early
Childhood Commission*

Former Liaison Officer and Daycare Supervisor, Mrs. Marion McLarty in her reflections remarked that for the Centre to have been dubbed as “the ivy league of Early Childhood Institutions” having met all the requirements of the Early Childhood Commission was “a major, major milestone.” She paid special tribute to its conceptualizer, Mrs. Shako, noting that “it was she who had the vision for such a centre and worked tirelessly to make it come to fruition.” She offered much commendations to UTech, Jamaica indicating that the support over the years “is a testament to UTech’s interest and investment in nation building.”



*Mrs. Marion McLarty, former
Daycare Supervisor*

Guest speaker, Mrs. Heather White, Health Services Manager, UTech, Jamaica Medical Centre, pointed to the Daycare Centre's continuous journey of excellence, asserting that "The Daycare Centre has thrived because they have never settled for mediocrity. They have always pushed themselves to go above and beyond, seeking new ways to inspire, educate, and nurture the young minds entrusted to their care."

Mrs. White also praised the Centre for embracing a holistic approach to care and nurturing, expressing that "the staff understand that true excellence goes beyond feeding the children, bathing them, and keeping them clean. The approach encompasses the development of character, values, and social skills." Emphasising that the Daycare Centre has been "an instrument of guidance, love, and knowledge for three decades, she urged the Daycare Centre's leadership to continue to "aspire to be a lighthouse, guiding the children toward a bright and successful future, instilling in them a love for learning and a passion for making a positive impact on the world."



*Mrs. Heather White, Health Services
Manager, UTech, Ja. Medical Centre*

Testimonials by parents who spoke of the tremendous support provided by the Daycare to their children and by extension to their families over the years, were received from former and current parents Mrs. Novelette Mattis-Robinson, Mr. Howard Roach and Mrs. Carolla Russell who all noted the lasting bonds formed with the "aunties" who offered expert care and love to their children.

Former and current students of the centre regaled the audience with their entertaining pieces. Aftercare Student Aidan Rowe performed Cece Winans' *Goodness of God* while past student Gabrielle Jackson delivered a poem in honour of aunties: Ayden, Simone, Sheilah, Pat and others. Nyan Simpson showed off her singing skills to the tune of Cece Winans' *Never Lost*.



Former students of the Cynthia Shako Daycare Centre, Nyan Simpson (top) and Gabrielle Jackson perform their entertaining pieces.



Little Aidan Rowe performs his rendition of Goodness of God with the support of Master of Ceremonies, Mrs. Sherika Whitlocke-Ballingsingh, Poison Prevention Coordinator, CARPIN.

The programme was chaired by Mrs. Sherika Whitlocke-Ballingsingh, Poison Prevention Coordinator, CARPIN, UTech, Jamaica who also spoke glowingly of her past experience as a parent with the Daycare Centre. Daycare Supervisor, Miss Michelle Silvera led the presentation of gifts to members of staff who were honoured with valuable team player awards.



In a celebratory mood (from left) are Miss Ingrid Saunders, Housekeeper, Caregivers, Mrs. Fay Wray, Mrs. Petergay Miller-Daley, Ms. Donnet Martin, Mrs. Sherine Henry-Blairgrove, Programme Director, ChAD course of study, College of Health Sciences, Mrs. Therrian Davis, and Ms. Sheila Fender, Caregiver.

***By Corporate Communications Unit
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Photos: Learning Technologies Support Unit (LTSU)