

SPECIAL REPORT: CONFRONTING COVID-19

NATION, BUILDING

BY JOEL HENRY

UWI St Augustine has embarked upon a project to locally design and manufacture essential equipment for patients, medical professionals, and the general public to help in the fight against COVID-19. The project brings together manufacturers, the business community, scientists, private citizens, and even nationals abroad, in a collective effort to produce ventilators, face shields, N95 face masks for medical personnel, and cloth masks.

Professor Brian Copeland, UWI St Augustine Campus Principal, said the project was set up to “ensure that Trinidad and Tobago has a healthy supply of medical equipment should the crisis intensify, and the capacity to manufacture these items so that we are not dependent on the international market”.

The project, he said, shows that UWI is more than an educational and research institution: “We are committed to the well-being and prosperity of the Caribbean. We are committed to making a positive impact. This manufacturing initiative – along with our other activities supporting our region during COVID-19 - reflects that commitment.”

In an April 20 press briefing, Health Minister Terrence Deyalsingh revealed that UWI, working with the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers' Association (TTMA) and the Label House Group would produce 1000 face shields for the Ministry.

“We are getting 1,000 visors from UWI for those who are most at risk, and UWI must be commended,” said Minister Deyalsingh.

UWI and TTMA are raising funds for 50,000 face shields for frontline workers.

One of the most exciting aspects of the project is the unusually high level of mobilisation and partnership of several organisations and individuals. The TTMA has been a vital force, not only reaching out to its members for manufacturing and materials, but also in fundraising and advocacy. The Caribbean Industrial Research Institute (CARIRI) has provided testing for the effectiveness of items and their material components.

For the face shields alone, manufacturers like Thermoplas and Fakoor's provide plastic, Peake Technologies supplies foam, textile businessman Gregory Aboud donates elastic, and Label House does the actual production at their plant. The Ministry of Health's medical specialists advised on the safety and effectiveness of the designs and allowed The UWI team access to its medical personnel and hospitals who tested the prototypes.

“All of this is happening,” says UWI engineer Jeevan Persad, “because we have unprecedented cooperation and willingness to work together.”

Persad, Senior Engineering Technician in the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering (DECE) within the Faculty of Engineering, is the leader of the team at the heart of the manufacturing project. The team operates under the directives of Campus Principal Copeland and the authority of the St Augustine Centre for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (StACIE).

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 4)

A member of the Label House Group manufacturing team models one of the 50,000 face shields being produced for medical professionals in response to the global pandemic. The face shield is a truly collaborative effort, representing designs, prototypes, materials, manufacturing, testing and certification from several companies, the TTMA, the Ministry of Health, CARIRI and UWI St Augustine. PHOTO: ATIBA CUDJOE

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UWI nurses in national contact-tracing exercise



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Life on hall during campus closure



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Health
Economics
expert
Professor
Karl Theodore



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How the deaf community is underserved during crisis





JOIN UWI AGAINST COVID-19

Staff, alumni and students of The UWI St. Augustine Campus, across several disciplines and in their personal and professional capacities, have been joining the fight to stem the spread of COVID-19 locally. Now, we call upon companies and the general public to join us in a special initiative to locally manufacture medical equipment to protect the public, as well as health workers, from the COVID-19 pandemic.

PROJECTS IN PROGRESS

Campus Principal, Professor Brian Copeland challenged a team of engineers from the Faculty of Engineering to come up with a way to produce items in short supply internationally. **This list has been updated to include the following:**

1. Production of face shields, respirators, face masks, laryngoscopes and aerosolisation hoods.
2. Manufacturing of UWI-Vent-a low-cost ventilator-system to aid medical professionals treating COVID-19 patients with acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS).

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Since work began in mid-March 2020, the project has received support from the Ministry of Health, the Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers' Association (TTMA), CARIRI, local manufacturers and a **growing list of companies** such as Label House, Advanced Foam, ACE Printery Fed-Traders, Lensyl Products, Daisy's Exclusive, TYE Manufacturing, MIC, Peake Technologies, Thermoplas and V&S Pharmaceuticals; as well as individuals such as Wendy Fitzwilliam, Gregory Aboud and Angela Hordatt.

However, there is much more to be done!

Collaborate

We need plastics, foam and elastics for face shields, textiles for face masks and respirators, and mechanical and industrial components for ventilators, as well as other in-kind resources and appropriate connections in the fields of procurement and manufacturing. If you believe you can support us in this initiative or require more information on what is needed, please email **UWlagainstCOVID@sta.uwi.edu**. In your correspondence, please indicate your name, organisational affiliation (if any), contact information and how you think you can help.

Donate

To donate to the #UWlagainstCOVID19 initiative, visit our website **<https://sta.uwi.edu/covid19/campaign.php>** and choose from among three easy options:

- Donate online using your credit card;
- Transfer funds from your local bank;
- Wire funds from your international account.

STAY CONNECTED

For more examples of how the UWI community has been stepping up to fight the global pandemic, look out for our next issue of UWI Today at **<https://sta.uwi.edu/uwitoday>**, follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram using the hashtag **#UWlagainstCOVID19**, and get information on how to keep yourself and your family safe at **<https://sta.uwi.edu/covid19>**.

FROM THE PRINCIPAL

Help Others, Help Ourselves



In the midst of this ongoing state of upheaval caused by the global pandemic COVID-19, Trinidad and Tobago received news reports in April of plummeting global oil prices. The full impact of this, like many other aspects of life at this time, we do not know. We do know, however, that this does not bode well

for the future of this nation. For decades Trinidad and Tobago has dealt with an almost existential fear of our dependence on oil and gas. A dependence we have been infuriatingly unable to break. The concern now is that we might finally have arrived at the point where we must face the consequences of that dependence.

I began this message not to strike a note of pessimism, but of urgency. As much as Trinidad and Tobago is an exceptional country with an enviable legacy in its short history, we have for years been hampered by a lack of collective urgency. I say “collective” because individually and in groups we have produced ultra-performers in the arts, sciences, business, community service and governance. But collectively, when massive action is required to move us forward together we have too many times been trapped in a malaise. Well COVID-19 is staring us in the eye and daring us not to take it seriously – like a bully, jutting out its chin at us, holding a big stick over our health, economy, and way of life as if to say, “go ahead, you skylark”. It has pushed us against a wall and the only way out is through massive action.

Admittedly, we have been acting collectively in our national response to the pandemic. I am particularly quite pleased to note that the Government has established a post-COVID-19 “Roadmap to Recovery” team. Some of UWI’s own experts in business, foreign policy, and health economics have been appointed to the team. As mentioned in the last issue of UWI TODAY and featured in this one, members of our campus community are also taking action, many times at personal risk, to help the society in this fight.

Most recently, the School of Veterinary Medicine’s Molecular Biology Laboratory has begun working with the Ministry of Health to process samples for real-time testing for COVID19. This is to increase the national capacity for testing. The undertaking is being done under the purview of the Trinidad and Tobago Public Health Laboratory (TTPHL) working closely with scientists, medical experts, and technical staff from our Faculty of Medical Sciences.

Still, I believe the collective can do more. One of the positives to come out of this experience has been a better appreciation of the work it takes to keep society functioning and the workers themselves. I am referring not just to our medical professionals and protective services, but also those citizens who drive taxis, work in groceries, provide our utilities, pick up our garbage, run our pharmacies and many more. For them, work means real risk for themselves and their families. Still they do it.

The question which arises is what more can be done to support our citizens on the COVID-19 battlefield. I am not asking or advocating for any citizen to put themselves in any unnecessary risk or defy our national policy of social

distance. I am asking if we can be more creative in our support of others. Even small acts can make a difference. There are many people in this society that were barely surviving before the pandemic but who are now at the edge of an abyss.

As our own Makandal Daaga scholarship winning Law student Kareem Marcelle said in the course of his own efforts to provide food to people in need: “You realise how hard people have it in this country, regardless of the community they come from.”

Kareem is a great example of social conscience during this crisis. With little support outside of his family, he has purchased and delivered food to many people, braving the risk of COVID-19 and many times using his own money. If you are looking for a way to contribute to our national community I would recommend supporting Kareem’s work (see back page story for contact details).

I recommend as well, contributing to our project for the local manufacturing of medical equipment for our health professionals and citizens to protect them from this coronavirus (see frontpage story). You can find more information at our UWI Against COVID-19 website: <https://sta.uwi.edu/covid19/campaign.php>.

But really, any way you see fit to help, big or small, can be of value. Even to yourself. This experience is taking an enormous toll on the mental health of many people. But as an article from the Harvard Medical School states, “Studies have shown that volunteering helps people who donate their time feel more socially connected, thus warding off loneliness and depression”. This research shows that the act of giving makes a positive impact on our thoughts and emotional well-being. And that sounds like the medicine we all need.

Brian Copeland

PROFESSOR BRIAN COPELAND

Campus Principal

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UWI'S COVID-19 TASK FORCE

In February, The UWI triggered its quick response COVID-19 Task Force to assist the Caribbean in its response to the virus outbreak, mindful that the region's best defence is a coordinated and collaborative approach.

Just as four years ago when the Zika virus required a quick action response, UWI's Task Force is drawn from all five campuses and comprise multi-discipline specialists, scientists, researchers, and public health professionals with combined expertise in virology, epidemiology, laboratory diagnostics, critical care, respiratory medicine, veterinary medicine, tourism, trade, international relations, and communication. Stepping up too is our incoming quadrant of nurses pursuing the Post Registration Diploma in Health Visiting.

The Task Force is committed to providing clear and accurate information, sharing its research across The UWI campuses and the region.

Task Force Chairman, Pro Vice-Chancellor for Undergraduate Studies Professor Clive Landis, believes “it is right that The UWI should deploy its full expertise as a public academy to help Caribbean communities cope at this instance of the COVID-19 epidemic. Armed with good information and strong partnerships, we will get through this viral outbreak as we did for 'swine flu', Chikungunya and Zika before it”.

Amid a wave of misinformation and speculation, its website www.uwi.edu/covid19 provides a trusted and helpful repository of shared resources from a range of partner agencies as well as regular updates, all relevant to the Caribbean's response to the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Task Force experts are available to provide commentary or media interviews about COVID-19. Requests should be sent to universitymktgcomms@sta.uwi.edu.

THE UWI COVID-19 TASK FORCE MEMBERS BY SPECIALISATION

Broadcast & Public Outreach

Ms Janet Caroo

Cardiovascular Research

Professor Clive Landis (Chairman)

Clinical Counselling & Psychology

Professor Donna-Maria Maynard

Clinical Psychology

Dr Katija Khan

Continuing Education & Public Outreach

Dr Veronica Simon

Counselling/Child Development/Social Development

Mrs Ceceile Minott

Ethics

Dr Anna K. Perkins

Emergency Medicine

Dr Harold Watson

Gender Affairs

Dr Gabrielle Hosein

Health Research

Professor Julie Meeks

Hotel & Tourism Management

Dr Michelle McLeod

International Relations & Economics

Dr Don Marshall

Marketing & Communications

Dr Rhonda Jaipaul-O'Garro

Mental Health/Public Health

Professor Wendel Abel

Molecular Genetics and Virology

Professor Christine Carrington

Neurosurgery and Health Leadership

Dr Carl A. R. Bruce

Pulmonology

Professor Terence Seemungal

Veterinary Virology

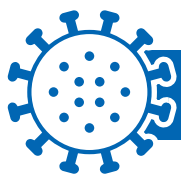
Professor Christopher Oura

Virology

Dr Joshua Anzinger

Youth Advocacy

Mr Caleb Gardiner



SPECIAL REPORT: CONFRONTING COVID-19

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

National partnership mobilised to face the crisis

Professor Copeland sees the role of The UWI is to “bring science, best practice and expertise to the table”, says Persad. The team is responsible for the design work and prototypes for the ventilators and personal protective equipment (PPE). In the early stages (mid-March), they also reached out to business, industry, government and academics for support. After the designs and models have been approved, “our job is to then transfer that knowledge to, for example, the manufacturing sector who can mass produce,” he says.

Since those original days of the project, there has been a building momentum, driven by campus’ formalisation of the work as well as their partners in Government and the private sector.

Dr Arvind Singh, Lecturer in the DECE and member of the medical manufacturing team, says there has been a “great response from the manufacturing sector with many companies donating time and resources to the effort.”

Ventilators and PPE

The four main items initially undertaken by UWI St Augustine are at various stages of completion:

Face shields: Completed and currently being mass produced.

N95 respirators and surgical masks: UWI is working with MIC Institute of Technology to make an injection mould to mass produce respirator masks that will be equivalent to n95. At the time of writing, they were also seeking donors to purchase a piece of equipment for CARIRI to test the masks and make sure they provide the equivalent protection.

Cloth face masks: TTMA has reached out to its garment manufacturers to source bulk material, which has been tested and certified by CARIRI, and die cut to produce masks based on an optimised prototype. The plan is to make the die cut material publically available to seamstresses who can then sew the masks on approved designs.

“It’s a win-win,” says Persad. “Many people can make but the masks will be based on the best designs.”

He says they were considering putting “patriotic messages” and visuals on the masks.

Ventilators: Working under the designation “UWI-Vent”, the ventilator system is far along in the design phase. Work is ongoing but the UWI engineers are challenged by a scarcity of parts.

“As you can imagine, we are experiencing global supply chain challenges that we are working arduously to overcome,” says Christin Parma, UWI alum and electrical and computer engineer at design company FaSove.

The team is exploring alternatives such as industrial components from the food and manufacturing sector which are equivalent in grade and functionality. The next step is to build the prototype and work with doctors to test it.



Members of The UWI team say there is great demand for not only the four items but also additional medical equipment.

DECE instructor Azim Abdool notes that even as they are working, “doctors, are bringing up other pieces of equipment that may be necessary – such as syringe pumps and oxygen hoods”.

They have already completed prototype aerosol hoods and are currently testing a video laryngoscope in hospital. As hard as they work, there is always more to do.

“Work is Sunday to Sunday, approximately 18 hours a day,” says UWI lecturer Dr Sean Roche, who also has his obligations as an educator to meet, as his classes have moved online. “Considerable time is spent reaching out to persons who want to help to see how they can assist. This is perhaps both comforting as well as difficult based upon the extent and number of the interactions. People want to help but you have to direct them to ways that they can help.”

Elizabeth Persad, wife of Jeevan and also an engineer, says, “His phone starts ringing sometimes by 7am or 7.30am. By 10pm he is still getting calls.”

Apart from the long hours, the Persads have the added risk of possible infection. Jeevan is the designated member of the team that makes the site visits to the hospitals and manufacturing plants. They are concerned, but Elizabeth consoles herself with the knowledge that they live alone and are not in the high-risk category for COVID-19 infection.

“She’s patient,” he says. “She is providing moral support. Without her support, it would have been a lot tougher.”

Yet they are all committed to the project. Many of them saying it is because of their desire to help society and their respect and concern for healthcare workers.

“We just want to do our part to help out.” Lynda Sirju, development engineer at FaSove adds: “We may not have the financial resources as some do but we are engineers and we can use our knowledge to help improve the working conditions for the healthcare workers and other essential services who have to carry out their jobs.”

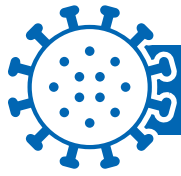
For more information on
The UWI St Augustine manufacturing campaign, visit
<https://sta.uwi.edu/covid19/campaign.php>
For other COVID-19 related work and news, visit
<https://sta.uwi.edu/covid19/index.php>

Support for the healthcare system



Members of the UWI Engineering Team

Azim Abdool	Craig Ramlal
Kevon Andrews	Sean Roche
Ravi Deonarine	Arvind Singh
Christin Parma	Lynda Sirju
Jeevan Persad	



SPECIAL REPORT: HEALTHCARE

Caregivers at the Frontline

UWI nurses conduct COVID-19 contact tracing on behalf of the Ministry of Health

BY GILLIAN MOORE



Idi Stuart (front row, centre left), President of the Trinidad and Tobago Registered Nurses' Association, Health Minister Terrence Deyalsingh, Chief of Operations of the T&T Office of the Inter-American Development Bank Carina Cockburn, and Campus Principal Professor Bran Copeland pose with the UWI student nurses taking part in the national contact-tracing exercise.

Registered nurse and midwife Aisha Roberts Belcon has always felt devoted to her profession. So when she was called on to participate in a countrywide coronavirus contact-tracing exercise last month, she was fully prepared for the mission.

Belcon, who is studying to become a District Health Visitor at the UWI School of Nursing (UWISoN), was one of 50 nurses who received scholarships from the Ministry of Health and were called to assist with the effort to track the spread of COVID-19.

Health Minister Terrence Deyalsingh announced the collaboration with UWI during a March 28 media briefing. The deadly pandemic has infected over 3.5 million people (at the time of writing) around the world.

UWISoN Director Dr Oscar Noel Ocho, also a

registered nurse (RN) and a graduate of The UWI's Mona and St Augustine campuses, defines contact tracing as – “the process of identification of individuals who have had direct contact with someone who is diagnosed with an infectious disease, and making contact to ascertain their health status or recommend actions to remain disease free or seek help if they develop symptoms.”

“Since COVID-19, the virus associated with the coronavirus, is highly infectious,” he says, “it is important that individuals, exposed to persons who have tested positive, be contacted and quarantined.”

Internationally, evidence points to the effectiveness of contact tracing. Taiwan, which enacted a stringent regime of testing and tracing upon detecting its first case of COVID-19, recorded fewer than 400 cases and six

deaths after three months. By contrast, the UK pivoted away from contact tracing to focus on containing disease spread in mid-March. Thousands of UK nationals, who had returned from vacation in hard-hit Italy, were not tracked. Britain has since seen some of the highest infection and mortality rates in Europe.

A national effort

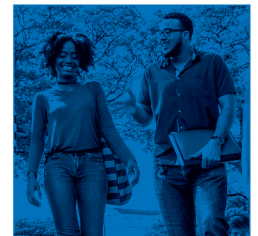
In terms of the Trinidad and Tobago initiative, Dr Ocho notes, “All persons involved are already qualified registered nurses and most have some level of post-basic qualification.”

Nurse Belcon and her cohort had their studies suspended in order to participate in the contact tracing exercise. (CONTINUED ON PAGE 6)



THE WORLD
UNIVERSITY
RANKINGS

TOP
RANKED



UWI RANKED Caribbean's #1 | Latin America's Top 2% | World's Top 4%

We've risen from last year's debut positions in both the **Latin America** and **World Rankings**, while maintaining our position as the only Caribbean university to be ranked among best in the world.

The prestigious **Times Higher Education (THE) University Rankings** are regarded as the definitive lists of top universities. For more on The UWI's ranking performance <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/university-west-indies>

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5)

For the married mother of two, contact tracing methodology was “not a new skillset, just a new situation. The process of (monitoring) and processing patients” was already part of her training with regard to “any outbreak – like dengue, measles, or any communicable disease that you want to control very fast”.

Fifty of UWISoN’s qualified nurses, along with 50 trained volunteers from the Trinidad and Tobago Red Cross, were assigned to County Medical Officers of Health, and received instruction specifically geared toward battling the coronavirus. The trainees were then assigned to various health facilities, in order to trace patients and their contacts in different geographical areas.

Belcon was put to work in the St George Central region, encompassing Morvant, Laventille, Barataria, San Juan, and Aranguez.

She says patients become known to the health system through varying methods. “Some show up at the hospital, or they call the hotline or even the police station.”

Others were identified by border control agents monitoring international travel.

“If you’ve been exposed to someone who tested positive for COVID-19, it’s possible you picked it up. I can’t let you go out or go to work for the next 14 days,” says the RN.

Finding contacts on the ground

Belcon has so far monitored the contacts of some four COVID-19 patients, “some who may have more than 50 contacts,” mainly adults, of all ages.

It is up to her to track down, call and visit them. When she cannot go in person, she reads a “legally binding” agreement over the phone and commits them to stay confined. She remains in touch with all of them by telephone.

Contacts receive certification, “such as a sick leave form, to show they did not abandon their job but were quarantined. Or, I call their bosses.”

“The main challenge,” she says, “is trying to convince people to do what they should do simply because it is the right thing to do. If need be, we can get the police involved, but we don’t want to do all that.”

“You will find that people have different levels of education, different levels of understanding, and people deal with things differently.”

But for the most part, contacted parties “have been compliant, even if they may have no symptoms”.

For those who do become ill, she advises they “take paracetamol, remain hydrated, stay away from others,” and occasionally get a bit of fresh air – alone – outside.

“But often, people are just lonely,” she says. “It’s ‘Moms’ and ‘Pops’ at home alone. Their children or grandchildren cannot come and see them, and they’re bored to tears. So sometimes your phone call is not just about health. You chitchat, you make little jokes and talk with them. Often, they are confined to one room. Their family may put in a TV, a fan, for them. They pass food inside for them, and they go and bathe at odd hours. So they are isolated. Some have young children who can’t understand why their parent can’t come out and play with them.”

Frustration does build up. She hears the complaints:



Nurse Aisha Roberts Belcon at the office of the County Medical Officer of Health in El Socorro, where she works as part of a team conducting contact tracing for COVID-19. Nurse Belcon is one of 50 UWI nurses providing crucial service to the nation at this time.

“You may feel you can go out, smoke a cigarette, drink some beers. If you do catch it, it may be like a normal flu. Maybe so – for you – but it might not be so for others. It could be a matter of life and death for them. You never know – the shopkeeper could have it. And, because you had to get a pack of cigarettes, you could lose your grandma.”



UWISoN Director
Dr Oscar Noel Ocho

‘I’m locked up so long, I want to go outside!’ Those are the times that she plays on their emotions though some take more convincing than others. “You have to coax them, because you can’t force them. You try to get people to think and be responsible, not just for themselves, but for their family and the country too. In many homes, people live with extended families. And it’s your granny, grandpa, your mom, or your aunt who will feel the brunt of it.”

Belcon cautions against taking chances: “You may feel you can go out, smoke a cigarette, drink some beers. If you do catch it, it may be like a normal flu. Maybe so – for you – but it might not be so for others. It could be a matter of life and death for them. You never know – the shopkeeper could have it. And, because you had to get a pack of cigarettes, you could lose your grandma.”

Online shoppers are also at risk. “When you buy something off the internet, you have to interact with the delivery driver.” She adds with a wry laugh, “You may end up paying \$19.99 for COVID-19!”

Compassion makes the difference

For Belcon, nursing is an indispensable part of healthcare. Some people think it’s all about medicine and technology. She knows first-hand that it is the human aspect – caring and compassion – that can make someone’s day or make the difference for their outcome.

The work is emotionally demanding, especially when “juggling parenting with the oath you made to patients”.

Add in “the lack of opportunities” for advancement in Trinidad and Tobago, especially when compared to colleagues whose nursing careers have blossomed abroad. “Friends encourage you to come up. They say, ‘Girl come, we can organise for you and the family.’”

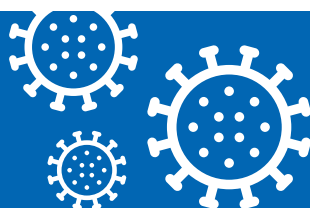
But despite the allure of bigger salaries and better benefits, she is determined to remain in the country of her birth and to give her best right here at home: “If we all go, who will stay?”

She is hopeful with regard to the nation’s fight against COVID-19.

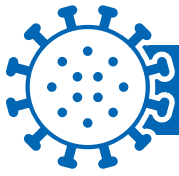
“I pray that people hold strong long enough for it to be effective, because it can become more stressful as time goes on. The fact is that most people survive. There is no need to panic if we stop it from spreading so that the vulnerable don’t get it.”

Dr Ocho is also cautiously optimistic, saying: “the current (small) number of persons who have been identified with community spread of the virus may be as a result of the effectiveness of the contact tracing, as (it may have led to) more persons who have been exposed quarantining themselves. This may account for the numbers being so low.”

He said the nurses “are expected to be engaged with the tracing effort (in the first instance) up to June 2020”.



Members of the public can contact the **Ministry of Health’s COVID-19 Hotline at 877-WELL (9355)**. More information, including advice dispelling common myths about the virus, is available at the Ministry’s web page: <http://www.health.gov.tt/>



CONFRONTING COVID-19: AGRICULTURE

The Caribbean imports most of its food - not just the basics for our survival but also luxury food items.

It is estimated that Trinidad and Tobago currently imports just over 80% of its food, costing around TT\$5 billion annually. That is an increase from just about 60% in 2000. Globalisation and free trade allow us to easily import food, including products high in preservatives, loaded with fats and sugar and, in some cases, tins that are near or past their expiration date. We gravitate, unsuspectingly, to foreign products, in part due to marketing, and in part to the thinking that “foreign” means better than local.

This is our opportunity to change our tastes for foreign foods, for the sake of food security and for national health reasons.

Trinidad and Tobago’s food security plan is not generally well-known. Some say we have none. Others say we do not need one. Locally, the food response to COVID-19 has been reassurances of temporary measures – two months of food cover in-country, two months in the supply chain, and two months on order. Panic buying has become prevalent across the region – quickly decimating stocks.

I ask: should we focus on how many months of imported food stock we have, or should we have a narrative that speaks to how much food we have on farms, how much in storage, and how many inputs - such as seeds, seedlings and fertilisers - are in country waiting to be utilised? That would have been more comforting to the population, if not to our major food importers.

Food security depends on consistent activities that result in the continuous cultivation of crops and rearing of livestock; sufficient quantities of grain, peas and beans; livestock feed; and frozen value-added products in storage for a few months; plus adequate planting materials. These are the requirements for a steady supply of food.

We must carefully determine the types of food for crisis times. All foods we presently consume cannot be made available. Therefore, these types must be what is needed to keep our bodies nourished and largely based on maintaining a measure of control over our food system. Food sovereignty must be the driving force. It will keep farmers and farm families employed while producing safer and healthier food for the population.

Our farmers in the region can produce small livestock, a range of staples, and a wider range of fruits and vegetables with increased production using a variety of technologies: hydroponics, micro irrigation systems and fertigation methods. Land is no longer a main limiting factor of production with the development and promotion of intensive crop and livestock systems. The need to incentivise farmers is the major limiting factor. Technology is usually costly and both traditional farmers and emerging entrants will need support, entrepreneurs more so. It is critical that the agricultural sector find imaginative ways to encourage them – particularly younger persons – to get into production. The age profile of farmers in the region shows an average age in the mid-fifties which is the vulnerable group for COVID-19. However, young persons will need appropriate incentives and other support mechanisms to engage in food production. In addition, the marketing and transportation systems need a total redirection.

Support from UWI’s Faculty of Food and Agriculture

Our local and regional leaders can find support from The UWI to achieve food sovereignty objectives. Many of our staff members are experts in key areas and can offer advice.

The Faculty of Food and Agriculture is the oldest and first faculty (1960) on the St. Augustine Campus –

Move on food security now

BY PROFESSOR WAYNE GANPAT



A young farmer in the field. Local agriculture needs to attract and support a new generation of food producers. PHOTOS: TERRY SAMPSON

dating back to the establishment of the College of Tropical Agriculture in 1921. It continues to educate well-trained agri-technicians who can ably support our primary producers or enter the sectors as specialised producers.

The launch of an MSc in Value Addition for Food and Nutrition Security in September 2019 was perhaps one of the FFA’s most important initiatives in recent years towards promoting the development of the sector. This programme empowers its students to extend the shelf life of food and to develop innovative products from local foods.

In October 2019, the FFA supported the “Food For Life” initiative and planted 105 breadfruit trees at our farm in Orange Grove. The Faculty recognises that breadfruit has vast potential to sustain us during a crisis and seeks to develop a demonstration model at the farm. Breadfruit has

been underutilised in the region even though vast research is available for its production and post-production practices.

Home food production must be a definitive element of national action going forward. In 2018, the FFA added just such a short course for the public. As it is usually well-subscribed, this may be the time for grant funding to allow us to roll out many more of these courses at a subsidised cost and, perhaps, even an online course. Further, it should be made a co-curricular course at The UWI for access by students across all campuses.

Dr Wendy-Ann Isaac leads another forward thinking FFA project- the RDI funded Save Our Seeds project. The project’s main objective is to ensure food and nutrition security for thousands of households in the Caribbean. This will be achieved by improving the diversity of key vegetable food crops, developing, and promoting the growing of crop varieties suited to the changing climate in the region.

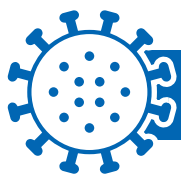
Only this year, The Faculty refurbished its Tissue Culture facility and now has the capacity for the rapid multiplication of plants to ramp up production across the region.

If we want food and nutrition security, we must invest heavily in the sector and do so every year until it can sustain itself. Regrettably, the annual budget allocations for agriculture will serve to keep us at subsistence level. We need an enabling policy framework now, one that provides appropriate support and incentives for farmers while revamping approval procedures for access to land, loans, etc, so as to get action on farms. Trinidad and Tobago has a sufficient cadre of experienced farmers, well-trained agriculture graduates, idle lands, and appropriate technologies to get this done. We need leadership that takes advantage of a crisis to emerge better and stronger as a region. Who will take the lead?

The FFA stands ready to support with education, training, and research results.



Crops under controlled environment farming. Technology is making agriculture less labour intensive, require less land and more attractive for new farmers.



CONFRONTING COVID-19: CAMPUS COMMUNITY

**MARCH
12**

Thursday, March 12 was the last day of normalcy for me. Despite there being a flurry of activity, including a three-hour lecture, back to back engagements for the observance of International Women's Day 2020, and a *Holi* celebration with The UWI Hindu

Society, in the grand scheme of things, it was a normal day.

I left the TGR Car Park, all covered in powder, only to have my fears materialise as I took my phone out of its protective covering (a Ziploc bag). Trinidad and Tobago had recorded its first case of the novel coronavirus, COVID-19.

In the weeks prior, the pandemic had begun spreading across the globe and it was only a matter of time before the virus would spread to the Caribbean. The UWI began taking precautions early on and by Friday, the next day, all Trinbagonian students (including my roommates!) were advised to return home. This was not a decision that came a moment too soon as the second case of COVID-19 was reported in the country. There would be no classes the following week.

I wanted to remain hopeful that this virus would not hijack the state of normalcy. For that reason, I saw this week as an opportunity to refocus on my studies that I had been neglecting due to my immersion in the post-election conundrum in Guyana (and well, Carnival, but don't tell my lecturers that!). Little did I know, eh?

**MARCH
17**

By Tuesday, March 17, life was anything but normal. One of my favourite persons had returned to Guyana the day before, with barely a few hours' notice. My home, Freedom Hall, was practically deserted. And social media was becoming a thorn in my side with its overload of information.

By this time, regional students like me were "strongly advised" to return home but a myriad of factors prevented a few of us from doing so. For me, it was financial constraints. This was exacerbated when, later that same day, the announcement was made that Guyana would be closing its borders to all international flights by midnight, Wednesday. With just over 24 hours before those borders closed, there was little hope for me to get home.

As you can imagine, the realisation that I would be staying in Trinidad, almost all alone during a lockdown, was mentally taxing. Even so, I found titbits of kindness and happiness. Not to be schmaltzy but, if there is one thing that has remained constant throughout the entire COVID-19 experience so far, it would be the kindness that surrounds me. Whether it was my Grenadian sister making cocoa tea and soup for all the *Milnerites* on Freedom Hall, my Bajan sister baking cookies, or the *Milnerites* who left their groceries for us as they departed, my campus family ensured that I did not atrophy in bed and kept me well fed.

**MARCH
23**

It wasn't too long before the decision was made to house all of the remaining students on campus in Canada Hall. Naturally, being bonafide *Milnerites* and all, we weren't enthused at leaving our home (nor packing up our belongings and moving), but I knew that it was necessary. By Monday,

March 23, there I was settling into my new room in Canada Hall.

With the emergence of COVID-19, global authorities like the World Health Organisation (WHO) underscored that there will be a "new normal". This may perhaps include a greater focus on personal hygiene, a shift in the way we engage in social interactions, or even, just learning how to "get by" daily. For me, it was more of the latter.



Returning to Canada Hall with our groceries for the week from YOU WEE Supermarket, just outside of the South Gate on campus.

BY VISHANI

Adapting to the situation meant that I had to strike a delicate balance between ensuring that I took care of my mental wellness while remaining committed to my studies. The swift shift to online classes provided me with a necessary distraction from the constant worrying over the safety of my loved ones and the fate of final examinations. And,

Adapting to the situation meant that I had to strike a delicate balance between ensuring that I took care of my mental wellness while remaining committed to my studies. The swift shift to online classes provided me with a necessary distraction from the constant worrying over the safety of my loved ones and the fate of final examinations. And,



The spoils from the Easter Monday Social Distancing Scavenger Hunt.



The view from the Sir Arthur Lewis (SAL) Hall of Residence early in the morning after staying.



An international student journals life on the near-empty campus

R A G O B E E R

it was a blessing to move with some of my *Milnerite* family and meet up with familiar Guyanese faces!

At Canada Hall, I had a single room and they placed us in rooms that were a safe distance from each other, but that didn't stop my friends and me from making the most of the situation. Let me just say, cricket and pool are sporting activities that are

**at I had to strike a delicate balance
are of my mental wellness while
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raction from the constant worrying
and the fate of final examinations.**



ing up all night cooking.

perfect while social distancing (even at 2 am, when assignments should be finished instead). Cooking has also been a way of keeping spirits high and bringing people together. Luckily, my friends find joy in cooking and, well, I find joy in being fed.

While at Canada Hall, too, I made a new friend who shared a bit of his own COVID-19 experience so far. Joshua Morton hails from St Kitts and Nevis and, when regional students were advised to return home, he had to put more thought into that decision.

To get home, Joshua would have to stop in at least two different airports since there is no direct flight from Trinidad and Tobago to his country. That, he believed, increased his susceptibility to contracting the disease. He also had to consider that a majority of his immediate relatives were aged and more vulnerable to COVID-19. Finally, he had to consider jeopardising his academic progress, should he have to self-quarantine upon return to his country. This was his conundrum but his decision was made easier when Campus Principal Professor Brian Copeland indicated that regional/international students would be accommodated if they had to stay.

And so, equipped with sufficient supplies for the time being, he stayed here with the rest of us. "I believe that I have made the best decision by considering the safety of others above my own while doing everything in my power to ensure my personal safety," he said.

We were starting to adapt to our new normal but the unravelling pandemic disrupted this normalcy.



On Friday, March 27, we were told we would have to pack our things and move, once again, to the Sir Arthur Lewis (SAL) Hall. I'm sure you can understand how frustrating it was having to contend with another move while still having online classes, exams, and assignments.

Dr Deirdre Charles, Director of the Division of Student Services and Development (DSSD) was there as we were informed of the decision and, though she was met with our evident frustration, she spared little effort in making us aware of the bureaucracy that underpinned every decision The UWI makes to ensure our safety. It's hard to feel completely frustrated when you hear about the work going on behind the scenes to ensure our well-being.

Later that night, we were shuttled to the Curepe Junction where we had our fill of Sami's and our last social outing (of some sorts) before we moved to SAL the next day.

Now the journey continues at SAL Hall, where, hopefully, we won't be moving unless it's to get back to our home countries. I give full props to Olivia Ramkissoon, SAL's Hall Manager, and her team, for trying their best to ensure that we're not only safe but also happy and active.

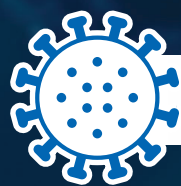
Right now, I'm penning these final thoughts just a few hours after enjoying myself in Olivia's Easter Egg "Social Distancing" Scavenger Hunt, on Easter Monday. Due to the lockdown, I imagined Easter would just be another mundane day, save for my friends preparing some good food. But it was a pleasant change, exercising my brain and legs (after weeks) running around SAL. And the prizes? Grocery essentials and snacks. Talk about the best of both worlds!

There isn't much that I can do aside from keeping the faith and pulling myself out of bed each day to get some amount of work done. For now, though, I give thanks for the kindness around me and hope to weather this storm with grace (and also with stellar grades!).

Vishani Ragobeer is a journalist from Guyana and a first year student of Leadership and Management. She is the winner of the 2018/2019 Young Journalist of the Year award.



Two Guyanese making authentic roti and chicken curry while on lockdown.



CONFRONTING COVID-19: ECONOMY

After the Storm has Passed

BY AMY L I B A K S H

Former Director and now Adviser to the Faculty of Social Sciences' HEU, Centre for Health Economics Professor Emeritus Karl Theodore on our post-pandemic future

We are living through strange times. As the COVID-19 pandemic changes the world before our very eyes, governments and experts are trying to work out how to deal with a crisis the likes of which we have never seen — and to prepare for what comes after the pandemic containment.

At The UWI, HEU, Centre for Health Economics Professor Emeritus Karl Theodore and a research team have been working with the government of Trinidad and Tobago and agencies across the region to manage the healthcare and socio-economic response to the virus, and to get an idea of what its impact will be on our countries in the long term.

“The way this virus is affecting the economic systems is different to anything we’ve seen. It is not only stopping you from getting the kind of supplies you need to carry on your production, but also stopping your people from coming to work,” says Professor Theodore. “As fast as the epidemic reduces the capacity of the economy to actually spend money, we have to find a way to put money back into the system. If we don’t, the economy will grind to a halt.”

Professor Theodore is the former Director of HEU and was instrumental in its establishment in 1995. He has spearheaded the HEU’s contributions to health sector reform across the region. On April 16, he was appointed to Trinidad and Tobago’s post-COVID-19 “Road Map to Recovery” team established by the Government.

He says there are two economic issues on which we must focus to get through this crisis: “First, we have to try and get money back into the hands of people who don’t have any because of the pandemic. Secondly, we have to acknowledge that, when this is finished, the economy will be in a very bad way. Our deficit and public debt will be very high, and we have to come up with a plan to get the economy back on its feet.”

Essentially, the country’s two priorities are to - make sure people have access to the resources they need to survive right now, and plan for how we will rebuild the economy once this is all over.

Professor Emeritus
Karl Theodore



The Trinidad and Tobago government has already begun putting measures in place that will allow households access to money and food during the pandemic with such programmes as the salary relief grant. Across the world, many countries are implementing similar tactics. The concept of Universal Basic Income (UBI), where all citizens will have access to a basic sum of money every month regardless of their employment status, has been increasingly talked about as a solution to widespread poverty during this crisis, and versions of this policy have been implemented in places like Spain and the Netherlands. Our salary relief grant programme is in a similar category but, with our financial capacity, it is unlikely we can implement a proposal like this in the Caribbean region.

“We have to keep that in our minds as the sort of standard we have to aim for, but we have to be practical with our resource limitations to put conditions on who gets access,” says Professor Theodore.

“Part of the challenge is not knowing how long the pandemic will last. If it only lasts three months, we probably will get through - with some difficulty - using this type of proposal. But, when you start thinking about six and nine months, then the challenge is very different. I don’t think any Caribbean government has the kind of liquidity to sustain that kind of programme. They would have to come up with different measures. Perhaps, instead of cash, governments will have to get access to resources for themselves and have a number of distribution centres. Eventually, all of our governments are going to run out of cash. So they are going to have to access resources in a very direct way and share these resources among people. We are talking about a government that would probably have to introduce laws that would give them the capacity to access people’s property in a way where they could share those things with everybody.”

Before our governments get to the point of running out of money, there are measures that Professor Theodore suggests to manage the revenue we do have. “All the countries in the

region have this problem, where they don't collect all the money in taxes that they are supposed to. The average percentage of taxes not collected by governments of the region is probably about 30 per cent and [in one or two countries] as much as 40 per cent. A number of people and businesses in these countries have developed strategies of avoiding their tax payments." He recommends that governments start looking into making sure that those who have these resources are meeting their legal requirement.

On the other hand, our governing bodies have an issue with spending. "The literature tells us that the average level of waste in government spending worldwide is about 20 per cent. I suspect that we are above that number. Corruption may account for 20-30 per cent but spending decision-making is also a problem. The time has come for us to look at the studies that show how our money is spent and change the way we spend. If countries look at how they are collecting money and how they are spending money, that would be a major factor in closing the inevitable deficit once this epidemic has run its course. It will be a bigger deficit than we have ever had so we cannot address it as we have addressed deficits in the past. We must do things differently and that is my main message to all governments. Otherwise, the economy will not recover."

Naturally, this crisis will exacerbate societal issues with which we are already grappling. One such issue is dealing with the immigrant population, particularly from neighbouring Venezuela.

The HEU's Advisor says: "Should the Venezuelans have access to the same kind of assistance as our citizens and residents? Now, from a moral point of view, given the condition that the society is going to be in, the answer is a clear yes. They are human beings who are facing the same kind of problems as the rest of us. But, from a practical point of view, the answer is more complicated. I don't think the country has the resources now to do that. What I hope we are doing is coming up with a proposal to look after them. We have said they will have to depend on the kindness of our citizens but, as a government, once we have migrants like that in our midst, we have to come up with a humane solution."

Professor Theodore stresses that, while it will be difficult to manage this venture with our resources already spread thin, it is a moral imperative to find solutions that factor in our immigrant population. They are human beings with rights, just like the rest of us. And if we don't take this issue seriously, there will be rippling repercussions for us as well.

"If, because of our unwillingness, we didn't reach out to help, our healthcare system will be even more burdened than before." The mantra of 'flattening the curve' - reducing the rate of spread so that our healthcare systems can manage the influx of patients without being overwhelmed - and dealing with the vulnerable populations among us is not just the ethical decision, it is crucial for our collective welfare.

"I'm not downplaying the difficulty in reaching out to them, but we have to give it some thought. My father used to say, no matter how much you have, it could always split in two to be shared with somebody. That is the attitude we have to take. It's going to be hard, and a lot of people will object. But we must devise a strategy to ensure that those people who are among us are not just left on their own. That doesn't make any moral or practical sense."

Even though these issues must be dealt with by our leaders on the macro level, citizens also have to play a role in mitigating this crisis. Findings of Market Facts and Opinions based on Google's COVID-19 Community



Professor Theodore, centre, with an HEU contingent at a meeting with the cabinet of Antigua and Barbuda on national health insurance in 2019. From left are HEU associate Dr Anton Cumberbatch, and research fellows Patricia Edwards-Wescott, Dr Stanley Lalta and Charmaine Metivier.

Mobility Report dated April 4, 2020 show Trinidad and Tobago to be the least compliant in the region when it comes to staying home. If we are to make it out of this as soon as possible and with as little damage as possible, we must change that.

"People have to stop meeting and going out.

That is the basic message. It's hard but we

must hold some strain. The longer

we hold strain in our houses,

the more likely we are to

get out of this faster. If

we don't do that and

we let this pandemic

get out of hand, it will

do immense damage

to our health system,

while the damage to

the economy will be

drastic. This place will

become one where

nobody will want to

live anymore. If we

don't behave in a way

to get this pandemic

out of our country as

soon as possible, it will

do the kind of damage

that nothing has ever

done. We must behave

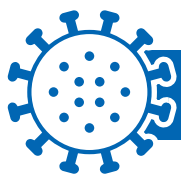
in a way that limits the damage to our health and our economy that sustains us."

The front lines of this battle are no longer in the wards of hospitals. It is in our homes and our hands, and we must make the collective choice to physically distance ourselves, for the sake of our individual and collective futures.



"As fast as the epidemic reduces the capacity of the economy to actually spend money, we have to find a way to put money back into the system. If we don't, the economy will grind to a halt."

PHOTO: MUHAMMAD ALI



CONFRONTING COVID-19: MENTAL HEALTH

Handling stress in a time like no other

BY OMEGA FRANCIS



Dr Katija Khan,
Clinical Psychologist

Coronavirus. COVID-19. SARS-CoV-2. Whatever you call it, we all know that it has changed our lives. A simple trip to the grocery now includes dressing for maximum protection (long outer wear and masks), choosing the time when the lines outside are shortest, as well as a serious decontamination exercise when you return home.

Simple pleasures, stressful. Now, we work from home. Now, we may not have a job to go back to. Now, we discover whether we are essential or not. In an instant we have become cooks, teachers, home maintenance, unemployed, underemployed... and the list goes on. How are we existing in this new world? How is our mindset, our motivation, our mood; our mental health?

"The first thing to understand is that this crisis is unprecedented," says Dr Katija Khan, Clinical Psychologist in the Department of Clinical Medical Sciences at UWI St Augustine's Faculty of Medical Sciences. "It is nothing like we have ever experienced so we are all at heightened levels of stress. We need to recognise how we are dealing with stress and what we need to do to help cope with it."

Dr Khan, who is also a member of The UWI COVID-19 Task Force, has stated that stress can have a range of effects including: psychological (eg mood changes toward anxiety, irritability and agitation), physical (eg body aches, fatigue, muscle tensions), cognitive (eg changes in concentration, attention), and social/behavioural (eg withdrawal from others, overuse of caffeine or alcohol). Given the pandemic-induced heightened stress levels,



Dr Khan suggests using the acronym HALT (Hungry, Angry, Lonely, Tired) as a way to determine the reason for elevated stress levels, and NEST (Nourish and hydrate, Exercise, Social Connectedness and support, Tweak the plan), as a way to focus on self-care and decreasing our levels of stress.

we may all need to take a mental health "temperature check". If these stress responses are taking a toll on several areas in your life, it is time to reach out and seek help.

"Getting help is a very brave and healthy thing to do in times like these," says Dr Khan. She recommends some strategies for people to assess their stress levels, and others to help them cope. She suggests using the acronym HALT (Hungry, Angry, Lonely, Tired) as a way to determine the reason for elevated stress levels, and NEST (Nourish and hydrate, Exercise, Social Connectedness and support, Tweak the plan), as a way to focus on self-care and decrease our levels of stress.

For those that thrive on social interaction, social distancing may have taken a greater toll on their mental health. Dr Khan gives some support strategies which include cognitive reframing (reframing isolation into something positive) as well as behavioural strategies (staying socially connected by using technology). There also needs to be a reassessment of expectations and notions about productivity for workers and employers.

"Working from home is not the same as working from home in a crisis," Dr Khan warns. Employers need to be aware of the potential challenges their employees may be facing and assess what is the best fit when it comes to standards of productivity. Make it easy for your staff to open up to you about the challenges they are having, taking care to being kind, considerate and confidential.

As we all live through this uncertain time, we should allow ourselves downtime to cope. Reach out to someone who can support you, or support someone you have noticed may be having a hard time. Humans are hard-wired for connection and being made to physically disconnect, not only from the things we love, but the people we love, can take some getting used to. Be kind. Seek help, and focus on getting through each day mentally healthy.

Omega Francis is a writer, editor and blogger based in Trinidad and Tobago.

Managing Thoughts and Emotions in Times of Crisis - Helpful Tips for Students

BY THE UWI ST AUGUSTINE COUNSELLING AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICE (CAPS)

Like the rest of the global community, in response to the rapid spread of the pandemic COVID-19, Trinidad and Tobago has been making adjustments to the country's medical, social and security systems in a bid to mitigate the consequences of the virus on the general population.

Of particular relevance to The UWI student body, is the mandate to shut down all schools and universities for a period of five weeks (at the time of writing), and to limit social interaction in a bid to slow down the spread of the virus. The implications for students are significant. Trying to comply with this new system requires adjustments which may result in stress, anxiety, fear and general emotional disorientation.

MANAGING FEAR AND ANXIETY

It is helpful to understand the difference between fear and anxiety in order to manage their impact on your mental health. Fear can be defined as a response to a specific and imminent danger; anxiety is seen as a response to a vague and future threat. Most students' responses to COVID-19 fall in the anxiety category.

You may respond to "what-if" scenarios in the context of your life circumstances. Will the elder members of your family be more easily infected because of their advanced age? Will you need to avoid being around them during the period of social distancing to protect them from exposure to the virus? Could you have been exposed? Will you develop symptoms? What symptoms should you be looking for? If you are a student from another country, will you be able to get home to your family?

Anxiety can make you feel powerless and overwhelmed. The key to anxiety reduction is getting information and taking action



based on this information. It will give you a more realistic assessment of the actual "threat" and allow you to use your intellectual capacity to deal with the situation more effectively. Source reliable, reputable information about the virus from, for example, the World Health Organisation (WHO) at www.who.int (look at all the Quick Links for relevant updates). For Caribbean information, you can go to the

website of the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA) at carpha.org. For local information you can access the Ministry of Health at www.health.gov.tt. Remember to regularly check sta.uwi.edu/COVID19 for information and advice.

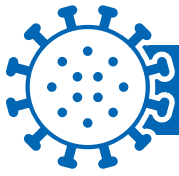
Armed with proper information, try to focus on what you actually know as opposed to what you fear. Concentrate on what you can do versus what you cannot. Understand what is in your control versus what is not. Once you feel confident that you have accurate information on this situation, you can limit your consumption of news from less reliable sources and unfollow people and pages that increase your anxiety.

The Counselling and Psychological Service (CAPS) offers a range of services including crisis intervention, diagnostic assessment, and therapy for students at UWI St Augustine.



SELF-CARE TO MANAGE ANXIETY AND STRESS

- Exercise
- Eat a balanced diet
- Stay connected with friends and family via social media, Skype
- Follow prevention guidelines from the Ministry of Health
- Learn new relaxation techniques
- (Students only) Make an appointment for online or telephone consultations only. There will be no walk-in appointments. Students who are having significant distress can email counsellor@sta.uwi.edu to arrange for CAPS to call them back.



CONFRONTING COVID-19: SOCIETY

COMMUNICATION DURING COVID-19: *Why are the needs of the Deaf not being heard?*

BY JEANNETTE GAWAI

Access to public broadcast updates about COVID-19 has become critical for Trinidad and Tobago. Imagine having to rely on a poor quality broadcast given in a completely different language to figure out what's going on during a global pandemic. This is what receiving communication during a crisis is like for the Deaf community.

You might remember seeing sign language interpreters on TV or your mobile device during the daily news and press conferences. They are usually present in a little box in a corner of the screen. Tutors and sign language interpreters from the UWI Caribbean Sign Language and Interpreting (CLSI) programme in the Department of Modern Languages and Linguistics (DMLL) share their thoughts on why this is a disservice to deaf people and why the Deaf community have been stepping up to help fill in the communication gaps.

Sign language interpreter Joel Jaggernaut, who is a child of deaf adults, wrote about his frustrations with the current broadcast format in a Facebook post that had 113 shares: "The WDF [World Federation of the Deaf] states that the interpreter must cover at least 25 per cent of the screen. As you can see, (for) both Jamaica and Grenada the interpreter is CLEARLY VISIBLE and is taking up 50 per cent of the screen, whereas in Trinidad it's such a joke.... Sign language interpreters are risking their lives for the Deaf community in this very critical time only to be represented like this? This is ridiculous!"

Tiny boxes are just one of the reasons the deaf in this country are not getting access to important public information about COVID-19. Coordinator of CLSI and UWI Lecturer Dr Benjamin Braithwaite explains that "There's lots of language variation in Trinidad and Tobago: some people use American Sign Language [ASL], others prefer Trinidad and Tobago Sign Language [TTSL]. Trying to provide a live interpretation which is accessible to everyone, especially given the length of the press conferences, is extremely difficult, sometimes an impossible task."

When it comes to providing the deaf with vital information, the consensus among the group is that it's best to let the deaf speak for themselves. Someone who knows this first-hand is Ian Dhanooolal. He is Vice President for the Trinidad and Tobago Association for the Hearing Impaired, President of the Deaf Empowerment and Advancement Foundation, UWI sign language and interpreting tutor for more than 10 years, and a member of the deaf community. He is also the recipient of the Laurent Clerc Cultural Fund (LCCF) Edward Miner Gallaudet Award in 2019 for his research over more than a decade and for promoting the well-being of the Deaf throughout the Caribbean.

A lot gets lost in translation when broadcast channels use hearing interpreters instead of deaf interpreters, Dhanooolal says. "Hearing people often underestimate the importance of the face in sign languages. Think of it like intonation. Without the appropriate facial movements, the message can be lost. Hearing interpreters have a tendency to place signs in the order they would come in an English sentence, but this is not the way a deaf person would sign. Sign languages have their own grammatical rules and different word orders. For example: 'What is your name?' A deaf person would sign, 'Your name is what?'"

If public broadcast announcements are not a good option, then one would think written messages in newspapers and social media would surely suffice. Unfortunately, the default assumption that deaf people easily comprehend their country's written languages is inaccurate. Dhanooolal and Braithwaite stress that deaf education in the Caribbean has been failing the hearing impaired. The Deaf here are multilingual learners. They learn TTSL, ASL, Creole and English. They do not get access to spoken English outside of school, and there are longstanding challenges in Deaf education which mean that very few pass CXC English exams.

CLSI classes here at UWI St Augustine stress the importance of meeting deaf people where they are. Students from different disciplines learn sign language, not just in the classroom, but by

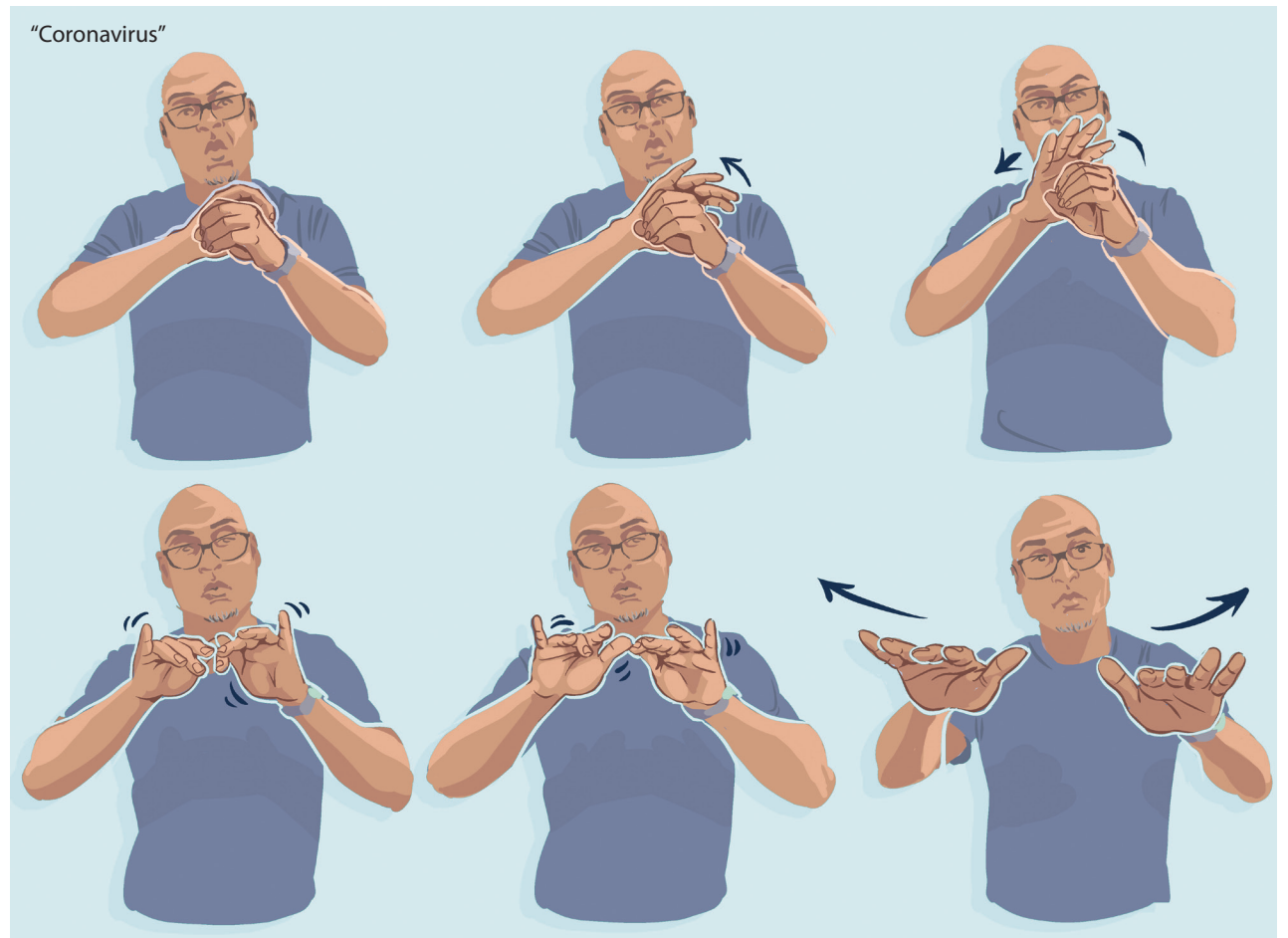


ILLUSTRATION: MAYA RAMESAR

building real relationships and exchanges between the Deaf and hearing communities. They go out and attend meetings, parties, and sporting events of the Deaf; and the Deaf community welcomes their willingness to learn. In these classes, learning sign language is more than just picking a new vocabulary; it is learning the language of persons who are often forgotten.



Ian Dhanooolal (left) and Dr Benjamin Braithwaite co-teaching students on a field trip to Colombia.

The need to learn more about Caribbean sign languages informs the research done in the Linguistics department. Not enough is known about the structure of sign languages such as TTSL. In 2018, as part of their research project, Dr Braithwaite and Ian Dhanooolal took 12 students on a class field trip to Guyana to learn and document an indigenous Carib sign language spoken by the people there. The ultimate aim is to change the curricula and policy in the education system so children can learn in the indigenous sign language, building on what they already know to support their development, rather than trying to teach in a language they do not know.

He notes that, in places where the Deaf successfully receive the information and access they need, they put sign language first. The organisation that has been doing that and providing the deaf community with COVID-19 updates is the Deaf Empowerment and Advancement Foundation, an NGO where deaf and hearing volunteers make videos in sign language exclusively for the deaf. They discuss and summarise press briefings and translate the information using video and illustrations. They make adjustments for their audience while being guided by international standards on some of the newer vocabulary associated with the global pandemic.

COVID-19 has made clear the challenges that the Deaf face every day. It is our turn to listen and advocate for change when they need it the most.

Applications are open for the Undergraduate Diploma in Caribbean Sign Language and Interpreting. For more information, please email benjamin.braithwaite@sta.uwi.edu or visit the Department of Modern Languages and Linguistics website: <https://sta.uwi.edu/fhe/dml/CLSI.asp>.

MUSIC INNOVATION

The Language of Pan

UWI, NGC partner on music scoring project

BY DIXIE-ANN BELLE



Jessel Murray, DCFA senior lecturer and Deputy Dean for Distance and Outreach.

One of the joys of attending Panorama, the world's largest steel pan festival, is the chance to hear the arrangements of popular calypsos performed in distinctive styles of the different orchestras. Many a pan enthusiast has probably headed home humming these tunes. Enthusiastic musicians might want to take a shot at playing them.

There they might find themselves hitting an obstacle. Panorama could be the first and only time these renditions are heard by the public. After Carnival, the

performances may never be played again or enjoyed only through video recordings.

Many pan performers and arrangers, although masters of their craft, are not trained in scoring or transcribing music. They cannot write the notes in a form which other musicians can read and replicate.

Jessel Murray, Deputy Dean for Distance and Outreach and Senior Lecturer at the Department of Creative and Festival Arts (DCFA), respects the tradition of arrangers calling out notes and of section leaders learning their part of the music and “distributing” it to the players – but it can be time consuming. “It can take about six weeks to develop these eight minutes of music,” he explains.

There is a solution. DCFA has partnered with the National Gas Company (NGC) on a project to score steel pan compositions for NGC sponsored bands - Couva Joylanders, La Brea Nightingales and Steel Xplosion. The St Augustine

Centre for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (StACIE), through its Manager of Funds and Strategic Initiatives, Lois St Brice, served as the main conduit between The UWI and NGC.

Myles Lewis, Head of Corporate Social Responsibility at NGC explains, “A key NGC strategic pillar is that of strengthening its national contribution. Support for the national instrument is one of many ways in which we aim to do so.” NGC provided the funding while the DCFA provided the expertise.

DCFA Music student Natasha Joseph did a great deal of the leg work. She began visiting steel orchestras in 2019, recording several Panorama practice sessions. Then the process of scoring began.

Murray explains that scoring is transcription. “It’s taking music that is already present in an aural form... and making sure that it is captured on paper.” Joseph’s strong theoretical skills makes her one of the best people for this.

Using an advanced music notation system known as SILIEBUS, Joseph converted the recordings into files and scored the music. Once her tasks were completed, Senior Lecturer Dr Jeannine Remy listened to the recordings and made any necessary adjustments to the score. Satanand Sharma, Coordinator of the DCFA’s Music Unit, took charge of final edits.

The result is a resource of playable scores which anyone can use anywhere. In keeping with NGC’s goal of distributing music to performers at all levels, The UWI team not only created a professional version of the scores, but also renditions which could be played by secondary and primary school bands.

The work was not without its challenges. For example, one band that did not get past Panorama’s preliminary round had disbanded by the time the project began. It was difficult for them to meet, and The UWI team had to rely on less sophisticated recordings.

In the end though, six scores were produced, accessible through NGC’s website. Anyone can play *Fire in the Area* originally played by NGC Couva Joylanders, composed by Leston Paul and arranged by Stefon West. They can access *Party Start* by NGC La Brea Nightingales composed by Marvin “Swappi” Davis and The Ultimate Rejects, and arranged by Richard Gittens.

The benefit to the development of the steel pan could be considerable. Murray points out that “steel is one of the youngest instruments”. Since the repertoire of the music for it is still growing, we “must make our instrument as viable as possible”.

NGC President Mark Loquan looks forward to “a Trinidad and Tobago where pan lives beyond Panorama. Where bands play and audiences listen throughout the year, in concert halls and radio playlists, locally, regionally, and internationally.”

There are further plans for this project. Recordings were done for Panorama 2020 and are being scored. For Murray, the best possible outcome is for them to be played widely. NGC is also interested in introducing more innovation and sustainability to the industry. “It is our intent to continue to score our sponsored band’s music,” says Myles Lewis. “However, music literacy is a key component of our sponsorship. Ultimately we would love for this exercise to be done ‘in-house’ by the respective bands.”

Mark Loquan envisions a Trinidad and Tobago that is “a place of master pan makers, master pan tuners, accessible and in healthy supply, running competitive businesses which compel innovation in the craft. In that place, schools teach pan, but students can learn independently because they are literate in music and pan scores are readily available.”

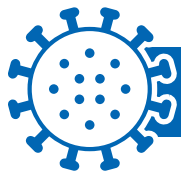
As the repertoire of the steel pan grows, the distinctive sounds of these compositions could become an instrumental part of performances at venues around the world.



NGC La Brea Nightingales pose with NGC Group President Mark Loquan (centre). To the front are soca artistes Ultimate Rejects.



DCFA music student Natasha Joseph.



CONFRONTING COVID-19: CAMPUS LITERATURE WEEK

Writer Vahni Capildeo featured at the first virtual Campus Lit Week

BY VISHALA CHRISTOPHER

“You cannot force yourself to be the kind of poet that you are not, unless you want to write worse than you would.” Being a creative can be a scary thing. While you are able to freely explore different avenues in your work, there is still a part of you that questions whether the path you have chosen for your creations is the right one, if deviating from the crowd and paving your own path is better. Well, Vahni Capildeo did just that.

For the 22nd Annual Campus Literature Week hosted by MFA students from the Department of Literary, Cultural, and Communication Studies (DLCCS) and MFA Creative Writing Co-ordinator Dr Muli Amaye, the featured writer-in-residence was none other than the brilliant Dr Vahni Capildeo.

Vahni Capildeo’s work explores different languages, places and cultures, crafting poems that are not always limited to the standard structures a poem may be perceived to possess.

Born in Trinidad and Tobago, Capildeo read English Language and Literature, Medieval Studies and Old Norse at Christ Church, University of Oxford. With the help of Fédon Honoré (teacher at the *Alliance Française*) she obtained a Dalf C-1 diploma to prove they spoke French, which nobody in the UK believed a Trinidadian could do.

Every writer has a unique trait that shines through their work. Capildeo’s poetry has a structure that is bold and immediately striking, mixing language and voices, places and cultures. Breaking the mould of traditional poetry, the poet writes freely and unapologetically, sometimes using all the space on the page to give shape to the words:

“I think the hardest thing is to write poems that don’t fit the structure of your mind. If the structure of your mind doesn’t resemble a conventional poem, then why would you pretend it fits?” For this poet, it is better to be your authentic self.

No Traveller Returns is her first book. Capildeo says: “I wrote the kind of book that came out of life experiences, both of encountering life, language and books, and life experiences of just being in the world.”

It reflects on the reality of people through various tones and voices while using surrealism and humour to explore how the reader can understand themselves and others. “I came up with this idea of writing an autobiography which was not about me, but in all different voices of real people and imaginary characters which could reflect experiences that I had had but their concerns wouldn’t be about me,” Capildeo says.

Measures of Expatriation was the novel Capildeo did not want to write. It seemed very similar to *No Traveller Returns*. Possessing the same tools of surrealism and humour used in that first collection, *Measures of Expatriation*’s anecdotes and more direct socio-political engagement, create a different tone throughout the various sequences.

While alienation and identity, in these poems Capildeo highlights issues such as the politics of the body, gender inequality, racism, and



cultures of sexual objectification. Language becomes that vehicle to voice the sad reality of everyday experience: “It is a much angrier book and it is much more grounded in the detail of every-day life.” *Measures of Expatriation* went on to win the 2016 Forward Prize for Best Collection, the 2016 Poetry Book Society Choice and was short-listed for the 2016 TS Eliot Prize.

During the gala readings for Campus Literature Week, Capildeo debuted poems from a pamphlet-in-progress,

Savannah Sequences, inspired by walks taken with journalist and writer Judy Raymond around the Queen’s Park Savannah and up Lady Chancellor Hill in Trinidad.

The poems, in part, are about walking. People of different backgrounds, genders, or ethnicities may not walk freely outdoors without fear, despite having every right to occupy a public space. The importance of reclaiming public spaces was explored.

With the outbreak of the pandemic COVID-19, plans for this year’s Campus Literature Week had to be modified. Instead of the traditional structure, MFA students and Dr Amaye, with the help of DLCCS and Mr Rodger McFarlane, shifted the events to an online platform. Indeed, **Virtual Campus Literature Week 2020** was a perfect fit for the theme chosen for this year: *Creating Lit Worlds*.

Given the circumstances and the shift to virtual form, as much of Lit Week as possible was recorded for online viewers.

The crisis influenced Capildeo’s performance: “I made my gala recordings with death in mind and I went through all my books, in order, in a way I’ve never done. I said a little bit about each one. So it’s an archival recording.”

Capildeo felt it was crucial to look to a sustainable, local future, and invited Johnny Stollmeyer to perform on environmental themes as a Midnight Robber, and to introduce the audience to the practice of permaculture at home.

MFA students and prominent writers recorded lunch time readings that were uploaded each day during the week. Talks and performances by two Guyanese writers-in-residence, Scott Ting-A-Kee and Kevin Garbaran, were also uploaded, along with additional readings by Capildeo to accompany a collaboration with Johnny Stollmeyer. As tradition dictates, the week’s events ended with a Gala Ceremony.

Despite a slight disappointment in not being able to experience the buzz that comes with an in-person Campus Literature Week, Dr Amaye, the MFA students, and the DLCCS staff did a spectacular job of creating the virtual edition of Literature Week, while maintaining the excitement and anticipation of each day.

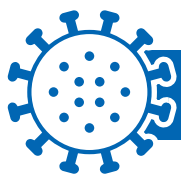


Vahni Capildeo with “Midnight Robber” and mas man Johnny Stollmeyer in an environmentally-themed performance.



Watch Vahni Capildeo’s Gala Performance and find other Campus Literature Week activities and information at <https://sta.uwi.edu/campuslitweek2020/>

Some of Vahni Capildeo’s Poetry:
<https://www.anthropocenepoetry.org/post/3-poems-by-vahni-capildeo>



CONFRONTING COVID-19: SOCIETY

Makandal Daaga Scholarship winner Kareem Marcelle HELPS THOSE IN NEED DURING LOCKDOWN

BY DIXIE - ANN BELLE

When lockdown measures to combat the pandemic were announced, many families in Trinidad and Tobago found themselves in need. Faced with a reduction in income, some of these families knew they would find compassion from Kareem Marcelle.

This is not surprising. Kareem, a UWI law student, is well-known for his community advocacy. He has served as Public Relations Officer of the Beetham Gardens Village Council and, in that role, organised inter-community sports and cultural competitions. As Youth and Education Officer of the Beetham Estate Youth Outreach Network Development, he has helped run after-school programmes. In recognition of his community outreach, UWI presented him in 2017 with the Makandal Daaga Scholarship in Law, an award for students with a strong record of community service or activism.

Professor Rose-Marie Belle Antoine, Dean of the Faculty of Law, notes that “he exemplifies the raison d’être of this scholarship, and the life and work of Makandal Daaga.”

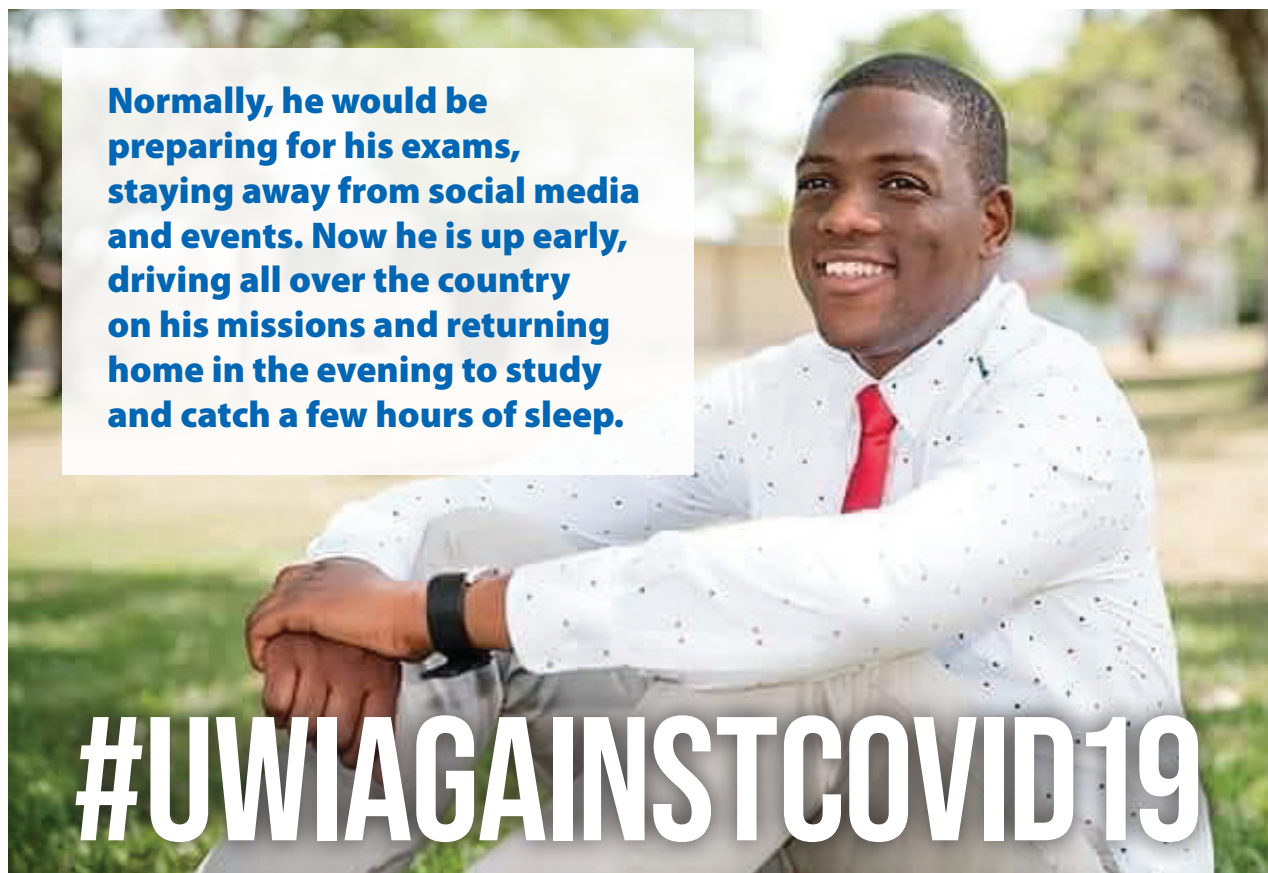
Even before he received the first calls, Kareem felt moved to take action. He knew there were struggling families in his community. Then requests began arriving from further afield.

“I have had a single mother tell me that she has nothing for her children to eat,” says Kareem. “She has four children, and she sells pholouries, pies, and so on to make ends meet... within a week or so everything was literally used up in the house,” he says. The woman was in Sangre Grande, and as news spread, he found himself fielding calls from over a hundred people seeking assistance.

He believes this is an indication of the difficult living circumstances of many people in Trinidad and Tobago. “You realise how hard people have it in this country, regardless of the community they come from”. For those working for minimum wage, the lockdown has been challenging since losing weeks of work can quickly put a family in crisis. “Our social fabric needs significant work.” Although the State has put systems in place to assist, families can potentially spend a few weeks struggling with almost no income before these resources arrive. Moved, he purchased supplies to distribute – oil, sugar, rice, flour, peas, macaroni, cereal, milk, and corned beef.

He noted though that people with low literacy were having difficulties filling in the application forms for Government grants and was pleased when the forms were shortened. Still, many of the applicants may not be able to easily access the references or the technology necessary to prepare the applications. So, once again, he dipped into his savings to purchase a printer, ink and paper, and he offers assistance in getting the forms filled in and submitted.

“Now it’s a matter of getting it to those persons. I



co-ordinate with my Councillor (Akil Audain) for this area (electoral district Beetham/Picton) who has been signing the recommendation forms and reach out to police officers who I know will assist.”

His efforts have become almost like a job. Normally, he would be preparing for his exams, staying away from social media and events. Now he is up early, driving all over the country on his missions and returning home in the evening to study and catch a few hours of sleep.

His family and a few friends help him pack the items for delivery though not many have yet come forward to assist him. He understands that many are afraid of endangering their health travelling around during a pandemic.

“I think that more organisations and individuals would have reached out were it not for the restrictions.” He takes as many precautions as he can to stay safe.

In his final year and within his final month of finishing his law degree, Kareem sees himself as an ambassador of the Makandal Daaga scholarship. He has maintained his GPA and still finds time to give back. It is his hope that others will join him.

“I encourage other students, members of staff, lecturers, anyone, to get on board. Try to be each other’s keeper and reach out to somebody in need.” People need to know that “we are here with you and that we are all in this together”.

If anyone wants to help Kareem in his efforts, they can message him on social media, call 371-9683 or e-mail kareemmarcelle17@gmail.com

UWI TODAY WANTS TO HEAR FROM YOU

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