

School for the Blind and Visually Impaired – Jamaica

The Salvation Army is the sole provider of a school for the blind and visually handicapped children in Jamaica. Provision is made for 110 children on a secure Campus, which includes a varied expression of Salvation Army ministry, namely a children's home, a residence for blind adults, a Salvation Army Corps and basic school. This engenders a sense of community.

The students from the time of enrollment are taught to see with the eyes of the heart so that they absorb hope and achievement as opposed to doubt and despair. Positive self-esteem is a vital lesson. Students are aged 5 to 18 and during term time they remain as boarders at the school, returning home for holidays. Those who live locally are encouraged to return home at weekends. In this way the family links are maintained. Where children do not have homes to return to the statutory Social Services have a duty of care and assign a caseworker to the child. The comprehensive provision by The Salvation Army can be used to provide care outside term time. The advantage and co-operation of the wider Campus is acknowledged.

The need of a child for special education for the visually impaired is confirmed by an ophthalmologist. Common conditions that present themselves include congenital cataracts, glaucoma, macular degeneration and corneal scarring.

The school was established in 1927 and until 1956 remained as a voluntary and private provision with no government help or recognition. The high standards of academic competence and equality with sighted students resulted in government recognition. Students where possible are integrated into high school and we have seen notable achievements with some receiving university education. Past students have become qualified in numerous disciplines including physiotherapy, teaching, audio typing, clerical work, music and other professional careers.

The School for the Blind offers a curriculum commensurate with primary schools for sighted children. Studies augmented with instruction in compensatory skills including life skills, mobility, orientation, keyboard and computer skills and Braille. We are proud that our library contains the largest selection of Braille books in the Caribbean. Since 1969 a deaf/blind unit has been in operation providing for the sufferers of rubella, which is sadly not uncommon in the Caribbean.

The current campus has housed the school since 1972 and benefits from ample walkways and guide rails, which assist orientation, mobility and confidence. Spacious classrooms and building are constructed to withstand disasters in terms of hurricanes and average earthquake, which is part of Caribbean life.

With regards to high school students the school offers a dual stream:

- **Integration**

Where possible opportunity is given to attend mainstream schools while continuing to board at the school. This is positive for the student and also we believe for the school they attend. By way of support a teacher from the School for the Blind visits the schools involved to give additional aid to both teachers and students.

- **Vocational**

The school continues to improve and implement a vocational skills training program and offers four components to this relevant stream: agriculture, home economics, industrial arts/woodworking and music. This program is a vital pre-vocational scheme allowing students to prepare for future training at other vocational skills training centers. Currently, lack of funding in the agricultural program has resulted in the closure of this component.

The staff at the school covers numerous disciplines but the team focus is essential. The practices are determined by the statutory Education Code.



School for the blind continued...



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