

Child labour crisis in Savanna-la-Mar

published: Thursday | May 11, 2006

Monique Hepburn, News Editor

WESTERN BUREAU:

RESPONDING TO reports of an alarming number of children selling at the Savanna-la-Mar market in Westmoreland, the Office of the Children's Advocate is spearheading a drive to stem the practice.

Children's Advocate Mary Clarke told **The Gleaner** that her office had received calls from concerned residents notifying her of the widespread activity.

As a result of those concerns, investigators from the Child Development Agency (CDA) were dispatched to the town.

"The agency sent investigators to the Sav-la-Mar market on March 17 and found 23 girls and boys ranging from five to 16 years old in or around the market and working as moving vendors," Ms. Clarke said. "The majority of the children were from inner-city communities in and around Sav-la-Mar."

She explained: "The reasons given for their absence from school included 'Jeans Day' at school, suspension from school, no money to go to school, or 'my parents need my assistance to improve income'."

The parents in the latter category were subsequently contacted by CDA officials and made aware of the provisions of the Child Care and Protection Act regarding child labour and denial of education.

Several parents told investigators they were not aware that they were in breach of the law.

PUBLIC EDUCATION

"Several indicated that they would refrain from this practice, having received this information," the Children's Advocate said. "The team visited six schools in and around Sav-la-Mar one Friday and found attendance satisfactory. The team will be visiting schools, view attendance records, conduct public education for stakeholders who use and work in the market."

Investigators will be conducting weekly spot checks in the market over the next three months.

Ms. Clarke also noted reports of child labour and truancy at Winchester Avenue and Manor Park in Kingston.

"We are planning a stakeholders consultation for persons working with street children, to review our policy position. Children working is illegal," she commented.

"In Sav they did not have a clue that this was illegal. We are appealing to members of the public to contact us when they see this practice."

When contacted, Mayor of Savanna-la-Mar, Councillor Delford Morgan, said yesterday that he was unaware of reports of child labour in the town.

Copyright Jamaica-Gleaner.com