**The Literacy Initiative For Empowerment (L.I.F.E.) at Chaguanas South Secondary SLMC**

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**Abstract**

School violence has become an alarming fixture at many of our nation’s schools in Trinidad. In support of School Administration’s objective to curb the growing number of incidents, the Library Department implemented the Literacy Initiative For Empowerment (L.I.F.E.) within the school population to integrate traditional library services and resources with technology to become ‘change adopters.’

The Core Values of the School (Equality, Teamwork, Encouragement, Nurturing, Integrity, Fairness, Harmony and Respect) guided this initiative. Working together with the School Administration, 706 Forms 1 to 5 students and 81 staff members over a period of one academic year, ensured our service delivery meshed with the expectations and needs of our users.

Despite the challenges, L.I.F.E.’s impact was significant and highlighted our library’s objective in ‘creating an exciting, flexible, student-centered and energizing environment for a wide range of learning activities.’ Education leads to Understanding leads to Compassion leads to Empowerment.

**Keywords**

Secondary Schools, Caribbean, Literacy and learning, Trinidad, Education

**1. The Literacy Initiative For Empowerment (L.I.F.E.) - an avenue of hope from a place of feeling hopeless**

 School violence has become an alarming fixture at many of our nation’s schools in Trinidad. In support of School Administration’s objective at Chaguanas South Secondary School to curb the growing number of incidents, the Library Department implemented the Literacy Initiative For Empowerment (L.I.F.E.) within the school population (students, parents/guardians, teaching and non-teaching staff and their families) to integrate traditional library services and resources with technology to become ‘change adopters.’

The SLMC’s goals included:

- Creating a 21st century digital learning environment

- Enhancing students’ literacy and digital literacy skills development

- Improvement of students’ generic skills including creativity and

communication skills

- Accelerating students’ understanding and holistic development

Research Design included:

· Qualitative, quantitative, descriptive, and interpretive in nature

Ethical Considerations - Informed consent from participants with anonymity if requested

a. Primary Sources:

· Observations, survey data

· Interviews, stakeholder meetings and discussions: with community stakeholders and School Administrations

· Audio-visual recordings and photos

b. Secondary Sources

· Review of published research studies/ Literature: scholarly works

· Archives and media sources: historical records, government reports, documentaries, newspaper articles, online videos

**2. Creativity and Collaboration are key!**

 The Core Values of the School guided this initiative. Working together with the School Administration and the school community, especially the 706 Forms 1 to 5 students and 81 staff members over a period of one academic year, ensured our service delivery meshed with the expectations and needs of our users.

Teaching and learning at our school is built on the partnership with all stakeholders especially parents through our active P.T.A. and the community via our School Board, effective discipline structures and processes and strong instructional leadership in a nurturing and caring environment. These are key success factors to guarantee the holistic development of our students.

**3. The Power of Programming in L.I.F.E.**

Our Administration, staff, students, past pupils and by extension their families benefitted from this life-changing initiative focused on gamification (game-based learning) and interactive activities to introduce and reinforce specific language elements via our literacy and life skills sessions.

Gamification bolstered English language learning within in-person classes and online sessions with children and adults. Games like puzzles, video games, role-playing, board games, learning with movement/mindfulness were completed with all involved.

We also incorporated our Word Tree to promote *Vocabulary Building and The Power of Words! via:*

- Power of ONE Campaigns and Kids Read With Friends Campaign – Promotes students’ self-confidence and tied in with Reading Rockets Initiative in encouraging students in their journey to be life-long learners/readers

- World Read Aloud and Literacy Days – Small-scale pop-up read aloud sessions, presentations, acrostics, poems, jingles, competitions and verbal book reviews

- Reading Circles, Read Alouds and Storytelling segments- Featured Stories and Audiobooks of the Month – Folklore stories, Poetry, Children and Young Adult Reads

- Storybites and Story Walks - short inspirational reads whilst staying healthy in mind and body - listen to an audiobook as you move or take a study break

- F*READ*OM and Drop Everything and Read (D.E.A.R.) Projects - special monthly features to encourage all to enjoy the right to read and free access to reading resources

- Word-Building Challenges, Word Wheel Challenges, Mindfulness Bingo, Library Pictionary, Spell-a-rriffic Competitions, Sign Language Fingerspelling Mystery Word Games, fun and challenging worksheets, Bookmarks and Presentations

- Sharing our work with NALIS’ Educational Library Services Division (ELSD) where our activity sheets, bookmarks and presentations reached a wider national audience as they were highlighted on NALIS’ ELSD Facebook Page

- NALIS Storytelling segments on i95.5 FM Radio by Librarian

- Promotion of NALIS’ Digital Resources alongside the library’s Digital Collection which offers e-books for Easy Readers, Young Adult Fiction, Inspiration, Self-Improvement, Leadership, Foreign Languages, and many other topics

- Virtual Gaming Arcade (via website) with Bookworm Adventures and World of Knowledge alongside Virtual Escape Rooms (via Social Media) like the more popular Percy Jackson Series and Harry Potter Series

- Me to We Mentorship Programme - collaboration with the Guidance Officer, Social Worker and the Volunteer Center of Trinidad and Tobago to provide support where necessary

- Development of small-scale in-house class libraries for the students of the Ministry of Education’s STARS Programme (Target audience – Reluctant Readers)

- RSC Tech Club with the heavily demanded eSports Initiative

**4. L.I.F.E.’s Impact and Significance over challenges faced**

 Despite the challenges faced with usability of online tools, availability of electronic devices, in-house networking capabilities, personal connectivity available to school members, space constraints, hours of operations, literacy levels of family members, school and family support, limited subscriptions to build resource databases where the use of NALIS’ One Search and Flipster supported in these circumstances, L.I.F.E.’s impact was significant when compared with the last academic period:

* User Traffic - 46,502 physical visits and 19,089 virtual visits
* 1067 students attended LILC sessions with family members (younger sibling and/or parent)
* 479 students and family members received Career Guidance Support (Resume/CV Writing and Interview Skills)
* Offerings of Sign Language and Basic Conversational Spanish Tutorials were welcomed
* 173 contributions to the NALIS’ ELSD Facebook Page (with 59 national community features)
* QR Code access to our website and social media portals (Scan, Share, Enjoy)
* Creative learning content via the School’s and Library’s official Website and Social Media Pages
* Homework and Research Assistance supported by our growing Digital Library collection of over 2800 electronic resources
* ‘Weekday WINspiration’, ‘AIM—Achievement in Motion’, 'Mentorship Mondays', 'Turn the Page Tuesdays', 'Wellbeing Wednesdays', 'Techno Thursdays' and 'Family Time Fridays' supported users’ information, educational, recreational and social needs

Additionally, there was:

* an overall increase of 794 in usage of the library’s collection
* 2557 queries answered with 19 informal Digital Resources sessions conducted
* 21,011 individual visits and 109 workshops with stakeholders
* 2630 activities and 206 displays to encourage the love of reading and literacy development

L..I.F.E. has highlighted our library’s objective in ‘creating an exciting, flexible, student-centered and energizing environment for a wide range of learning activities.’ Our services provide avenues for cognitive stimulation, connection, learning, socialization, and a creative outlet to reduce stress and anxiety post COVID-19. We believe that NO child should be left behind and by assisting one child or one family, we have created a ripple effect of difference makers. Education leads to Understanding leads to Compassion leads to Empowerment!

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**Author Biography:**

I bring dynamism with focus on developing and implementing innovative (creative) information, research and educational services. I have grown professionally in gradual promotions from Library Assistant to Librarian III (District/ Secondary Schools North Region; Head of the Primary Schools Library Services Unit; Public Libraries Division - North Region) with NALIS.

