

WES Strengthens School's Anti-litter Patrols

While many Guyanese children are almost each day confronted with violence, they are battling against another menace- bad garbage disposal and poor hygiene practices.

Often referred to as WES, the Water and Environmental Sanitation (WES) partnership between the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Ministry of Education included workshops held along the densely populated Demerara Coast has equipped many of the children with tools to bring littering to an end.

Environmentalists have pin-pointed bad garbage disposal habits and poor maintenance of the drainage network as reasons why the unavoidable flood during January and February 2005 worsened.

The several feet high water washed up proof of bad habits- literally tons of rubbish floating up but nowhere to go to other than in yards or on the roadside.

But, hopefully, all this will eventually turn around, as children enforce the 'No-Litter' policy.

At De Hoop Primary School, located in the predominantly farming community of Mahaica village, about 20 miles east of Georgetown, formed an environmental club to pass on the knowledge they got from the WES workshop held in August, 2005.

"We learn that we mustn't throw garbage on the road and the drain," says nine-year old Bibi Barakat.

When the De Hoop club gets into full gear, it will follow in the foot-steps of F.E. the *Health Patrol* at F.E. Pollard Primary School in Kitty, about three miles east from central Georgetown, and *The Ambassadors* at Graham's Hall Primary School, Cummings Lodge, about six miles east of Georgetown.

"I watch that the children don't throw paper in the yard and when I see them throw garbage, I tell them to pick it up," says Tamika James of F.E. Pollard Primary School.

James, however, laments that at times it's tough going to change old habits although she tries her best to enforce the rule. "But they don't listen. They still continue doing it."

But *The Ambassadors*, now stronger since the workshop, not only targets schoolmates but also teachers, ready to upbraid those who do not wash their hands or refuse to use garbage bins.

"Anybody they see littering- teacher or child- they tell you that it is wrong," says Teacher, Kateri Joseph. "They are like environmental policemen."

UNICEF and the Ministry of Education hope that the skits, poems and songs will be indelibly printed in the children's minds as are their experiences with the Great Flood.

Should another similar disaster, unfortunately, strike, they'll almost certainly begin mapping the danger zones and the safe zones in their quest to find immediate solutions.

"We had to draw the school and put the bad parts in red and the good parts in green and some of the red parts turn green," remembers 10-year old Mark Johnson of De Hoop Primary School.

Johnson says he also mapped his home and pointed out the bad areas to his parents, brothers and sisters so that they could have made danger zones safe.

Chairman of the De Hoop Primary School's Parent Teachers Association (PTA), Rabindranauth Lakhan, notes that parents, teachers and children still value the information they got during a WES workshop in August, 2005.

"We didn't have that kind of knowledge until the WES workshop. Only then we know. The community was ignorant of the fact," says Lakhan.

But back in Georgetown, Bert Simpson, whose child attends F.E. Pollard Primary School, still fears that little is being done to maintain the environment especially since some areas flood after a brief rainfall.

"I don't see the drainage being maintained and they need to get inspectors. Some parts of the city are still plagued by rats," says Simpson.

Nevertheless, he believes that communities have greater knowledge and are now better geared to grapple with environmental and health threats caused by floods.

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