

## **Barbuda: getting its groove back?**

CODRINGTON- 12 September 2018 - One year after devastating hurricane Irma ripped Barbuda apart, the still-scarred island is trying to recover its groove.

All across Barbuda's 62-square-miles many of the 1,600 residents, ordered to evacuate after the hurricane damaged or destroyed over 95 percent of the island's structures, have returned to rebuild their homes and their lives.

"I'm so happy to be back at school in my island. It's really good to be here with my friends," says 10-year-old Eden Beazer.

To Eden and the other 100 primary-aged children in Barbuda who have resumed school for the first time since Hurricane Irma destroyed everything in its path on September 6 last year, it does not matter that their school, Holy Trinity Primary, is temporarily being housed in the Barbuda Pentecostal Church. By the end of this week they are expected to relocate to temporary classrooms being constructed near the site of their damaged school building.

"Just to be going school at home is great. I enjoyed the year at school at TN Kirnon in Antigua but I always wanted to be able to start back school on my island," Eden says, as she and her classmates take a break from the psychosocial activities which formed part of their reorientation.

### **Things far from normal**

So far only just over 100 of the 235 children on the school's roll in the year prior to Irma have returned but principal Charlene Harris and teachers are determined to deliver quality education to the students under their charge. No figures were available for the lone secondary school, the Sir McChesney George, but a similar situation is expected there.

For the last school year, all Barbudan students were integrated into schools in neighboring Antigua and officials have no idea how many of them will choose to remain in Antigua. "Every day since we restarted we've seen more children turning up. I don't know how many we will end up with but the teachers are here, the buildings are being readied and we will be catering to all the children who come," the principal stresses.

For parents like James Gerald, it will not be until at least next school year that he will make an assessment on when his two school-aged children will return to Barbuda.

"The two of them – an 11-year-old girl and 12-year-old boy – settled in well into their school in Antigua and I don't want to disrupt their education. They are doing very well there so I will let them stay this school year and at the end of it we will decide on whether they will come back over to Barbuda," he says.

As he takes a break from supervising repair works to a council run pre-school in Barbuda, the contractor adds that there is still a lot of work to be done.

"I managed to complete repairs to my house but I still don't have electricity. Life is not what it was before Irma but we are getting a bit closer every day," he says.

