



The Paradise Children's Foundation (PCF) in partnership with the Public Hospital's Authority, the Princess Margaret Hospital Pediatric Department and the Princess Margaret Hospital Foundation blessed and opened its newly renovated classroom on Monday, July 1. From left to right: Sharon Johnson, PMH Foundation board member; Emily Osadebay, PMH Foundation board member; PHA Chaplain Father Sebastian Campbell; Children Ward's classroom teacher, Kimlyn Hanna; PCF board member, Charlotte Gibson; PCF volunteer, Paul Williams and Sonia Bastian Rose, acting hospital administrator.

PMH Christens Newly Renovated Children's Ward Classroom

When cancer survivor Mikela Gibson spent 11 months hospitalized last year, the Children's Ward Classroom at the Princess Margaret Hospital prevented her from falling behind in her schoolwork. Now, the same organization which funded a new prosthetic leg for the eighth grader has completely revamped the space to enable other students to better learn and grow.

On Monday, the Paradise Children's Foundation (PCF) in partnership with the Public Hospital's Authority, the Princess Margaret Hospital Pediatric Department and the Princess Margaret Hospital Foundation blessed and opened its newly renovated classroom enabling children to enrich their minds, while nurses and physicians administer to their bodies.

"I like it way better now. I like the details. It has more space and it's more organized," said the 13-year-old. "This class helped me. When I went back to school, I was able to keep up. I didn't fall behind."

After being diagnosed with cancer in her knee and having the limb amputated, the non-profit Paradise Children Foundation sent Mikela to Miami three times – for casting, leg fitting and adjustments. The total cost, including airfare and accommodation, amounted to \$15,000.

Nearly seven months after receiving her new leg, life for the rising ninth grader has returned to some degree of normalcy, having adjusted to life with her new limb. Although Mikela is home now, she's happy to know other students and even her teacher will benefit from the sweeping renovation.

"What I had before was functional but not stimulating at all," said Children's Ward teacher, Kimlyn Hanna.

The educator has taught at the hospital for the last 13 years working with students from grade one to twelve. Lessons are delivered daily, from 9:45 am to 12:30pm. Students attend class if their health allows.

For those not up to that task, Ms Hanna conducts bedside visits to meet students' educational needs. When necessary, she invigilates national and school exams from the hospital's classroom.

Students turnover fast here. On average most of her students stay for five days, although there was one case where Ms Hanna taught a patient for three years.

"Parents are elated when they come into the hospital and they find that there is a classroom here and it is run by the Ministry of Education," said Ms Hanna.

"The children will be happy to work in this wonderful space. It's just so beautiful. It's important to create the right environment for learning, not only for them, but for myself as well. I was very uncomfortable in the space before and now walking into this classroom is just unbelievable."

PCF board member Charlotte Gibson first stumbled upon the classroom on her way to oversee a monthly fun day hosted by her organization for young patients. The two-hour event features mascots, games, food and fun activities.

"Walking by, we could see the classroom was outdated and needed a facelift. I felt it was a project the Paradise Children's Foundation could manage and complete," she explained.

"We made it clear to the hospital, this was a testing ground. If we could complete the project to the standard that we expected, we would consider taking on a larger project which would be a family room, followed by a ward, but we needed to see this done before we could commit to anything else."

On May 20, the hospital commenced its clean-up. With the classroom completely cleared out the foundation had the blank canvas it desired to create its masterpiece.

To bring the project to fruition Mrs Gibson turned to clients of her app and website design business, Pure Salt, for contributions. Some gave time, others contributed their products and brought other businesses on board.

"The goal was to create a stimulating, happy environment where children really want to go and spend time there," said PCF volunteer, Paul Williams.

Three weeks and \$10,000 later the class is ready to welcome its first batch of students in September.

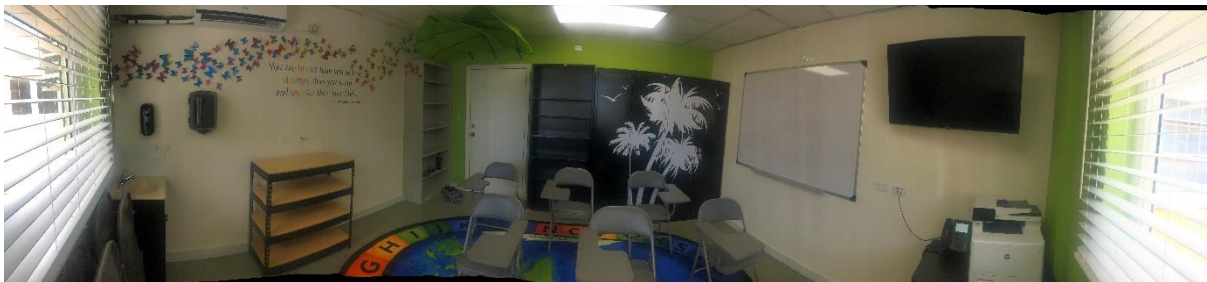
"This classroom provides a school away from school experience," said Thelma Rolle, Princess Margaret Hospital's public relations manager.

"We established the partnership with Paradise Children's Foundation over a year ago and it has transformed into what you see today. We appreciate persons who come forth to volunteer and donate. It makes a big difference for our team. There are many little projects in need of completion. The government cannot do it all."

With the successful completion of its first joint project with the hospital, the 10-year-old Paradise Children's Foundation, whose aim is to uplift Bahamian children, says its work has only just begun.



Children's Ward classroom before renovations.



Children's Ward classroom after renovations.