

October 2021

THE TRANSITION JOURNEY

CHALLENGES & ROADBLOCKS FACED BY
YOUNG LADIES TRANSITIONING FROM
STATE CARE

NiNa

Young Women's Leadership Programme

About Us

What is NiNa?

The NiNa Young Women's Leadership Programme (NiNa) provides financial literacy, entrepreneurial skills development and self management tools to build self-value in young women within the state care system and particular chosen schools in Trinidad and Tobago. NiNa has a transition programme for young ladies who leave the state care at the age of 18 to reintegrate them back into mainstream society, and has worked with girls from the St. Jude's Home for Girls to support their overall development.

Goals & Activities

NiNa goals

NiNa seeks to create a cadre of young female leaders in the Caribbean through training in life skills, leadership, self-belief, and entrepreneurship.

NiNa activities

NiNa has several activities under four streams of work –

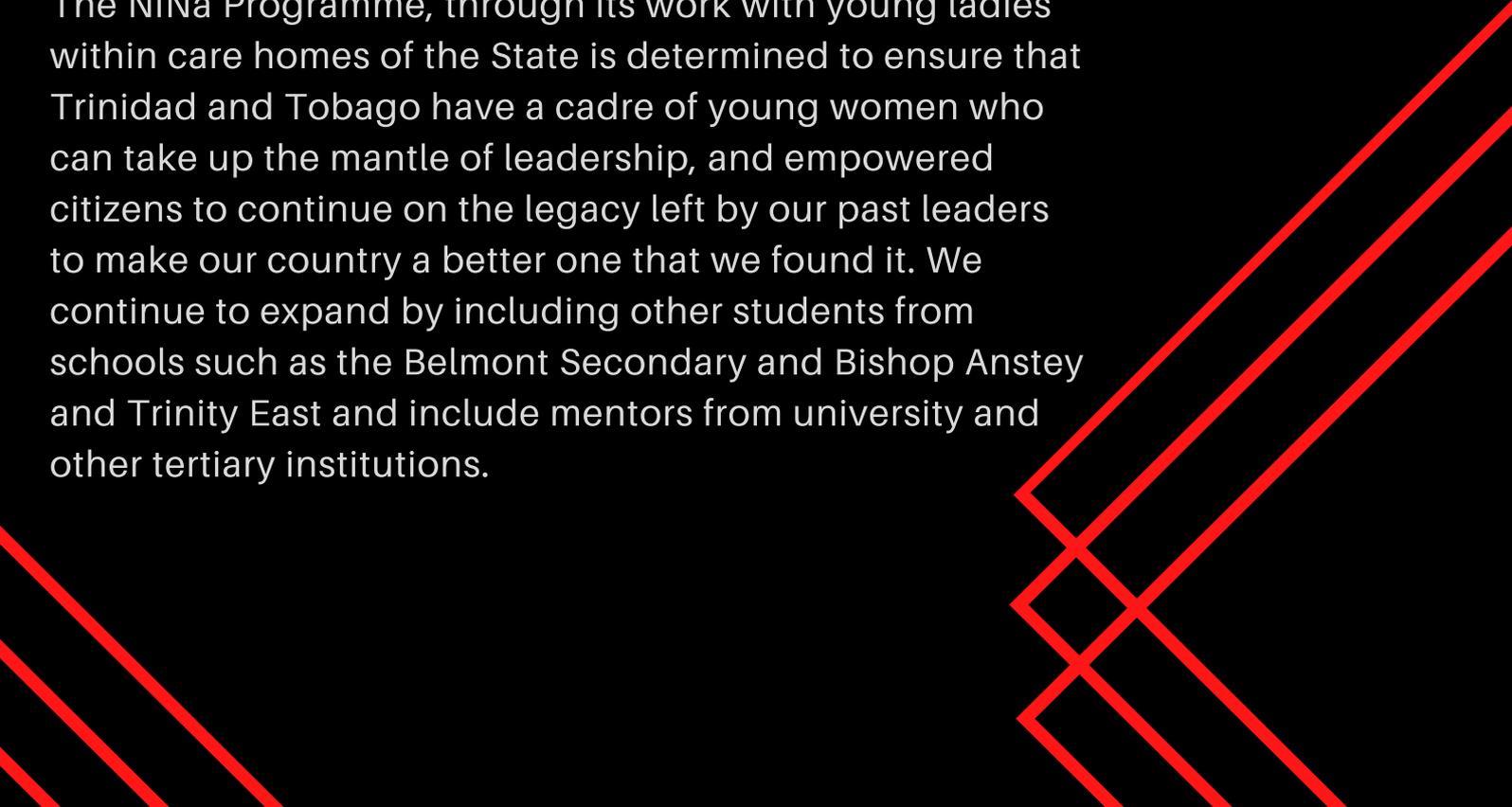
- (1) NiNa Secondary School Programme
- (2) NiNa St. Jude's Home for Girls Programme
- (3) NiNa Summer Programme
- (4) NiNa Transition Programme

Creating quality citizens automatically lead to building a better Trinidad and Tobago.

It takes a village...The Transition Programme aims to provide resource networks, safe physical and psychological spaces, personal healing, growth and development and will facilitate education for young women ageing out of state care. The likelihood of these women disappearing, becoming statistics or perpetuating the cycles of abuse and neglect that they were exposed too is high. The aim is to support the transition.

Working hand in hand

The NiNa Programme, through its work with young ladies within care homes of the State is determined to ensure that Trinidad and Tobago have a cadre of young women who can take up the mantle of leadership, and empowered citizens to continue on the legacy left by our past leaders to make our country a better one than we found it. We continue to expand by including other students from schools such as the Belmont Secondary and Bishop Anstey and Trinity East and include mentors from university and other tertiary institutions.



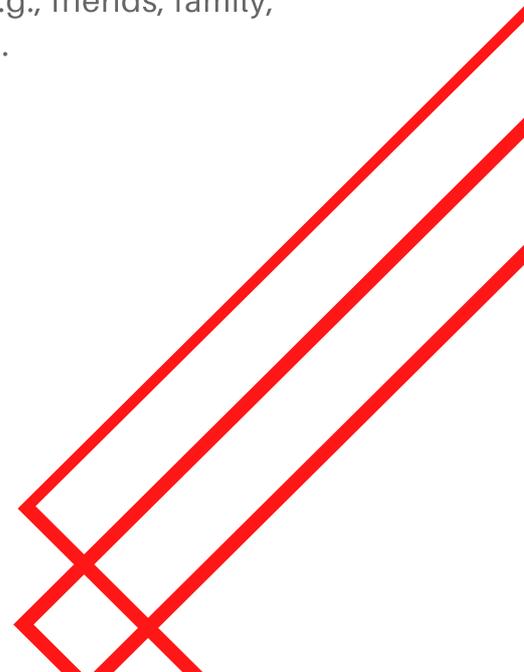
Challenges & Findings

Youth who are transitioning to adulthood need to have well developed self-esteem and self-efficacy skills

The transition arm of the NiNa program emerged after having mentored young women who resided at the St Jude's Home. Upon approaching their time to leave the St Jude's Home at the age of eighteen (18), these young women began showing signs of self-sabotaging behaviour, fear, and anxiety including reversing any progress made in preparation for entering the 'real world'.

Additionally, there were cases where the young women who left St Jude's at age eighteen (18) who were part of the NiNa mentorship programme requested financial support, and resources to assist with them navigating their new lives outside the St. Jude environment. Resources requested and required included housing, employment, money, and emotional support.

Youth who are transitioning to adulthood need to have well developed self-esteem and self-efficacy skills that equip them to manage relationships in multiple contexts, including education and employment settings, as well as with friends and family members. Often, youth in the state care system have lived through multiple traumas and disruptive events by the time they begin their transition to adulthood. This can include abuse and/or neglect, lack of continuity in education, and an array of losses of relationships (e.g., friends, family, and/or siblings).



Challenges & Findings

Research on the developing brains of adolescents and young adults points to the importance of understanding the "vulnerability of teens"

Their life experiences can create additional problems resulting in mental illness, substance abuse issues, and a lack of confidence. These challenges impact their emotional and social development as they transition into adulthood.

Research points to the significance of this stage and highlights the importance of positive, supportive relationships in the context of the continuing development of the adolescent brain.

What the NiNa program has learnt over the years is that, ideally, the young women leaving St Jude's at age eighteen should have a place to call home upon emancipation from the child welfare system, with connections to caring adults who can provide support, including helping them access necessary resources and services.

Research suggests that youth in state care who have natural mentors during adolescence have improved young adult outcomes. Connections to non-parental adults through informal mentoring is reported to enhance the outcomes of foster care youth in education/employment, psychological well-being, and physical health. Youth who had the support of a mentor also demonstrated a decreased participation in unhealthy behaviors, such as unprotected sexual activity, alcohol and substance abuse, and delinquent activities.

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When youth "age out" of the child welfare system with limited connections or without the support of positive, caring adults, they may have an increased risk of facing the following challenges:

Challenges

1. Unstable housing or homelessness - Within the NiNa cohort of young ladies, upon turning eighteen, at least 40% of the young women had no stable place to call home. St Jude's played a role in securing housing for some of them through placement at hostels, the others who were placed in the care of relatives, after a few months, found themselves looking for a place to live due to poor adjustment to living with unfamiliar family members, being asked to leave, and getting involved in unhealthy relationships. The result is them being left without a stable place to live. Studies show a correlation between a history of state care and homelessness as well as the impact of emancipation from state care on young adults. More than one-fifth of state care youth experience homelessness for at least one day within a year of emancipation.

2. Lack of adequate elementary and secondary education. Youth emancipating from state care typically face many obstacles during their educational journeys, obstacles that can hinder their ability to graduate on time or receive CSEC passes.

Young ladies within the St. Jude's Home may have missed many days or even months of school. Participants within NiNa have been placed in programs such as Civilian Conservation Corp (CCC), Servol Life Center and MIC-IT Institute of Technology.

While these programs provide an opportunity to build skills, it has been observed that for the majority of jobs, the requirement is a full Caribbean Examination Council (CXC) certificate, bringing the young ladies to an immediate block in their search for employment or further education.

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Challenges ctd

3. Lack of employment and job training. Former residents of state care may have limited work histories and on-the-job training opportunities. Many lack the skills required to hold a steady job, or the incentive and academic preparation to attend a university program. Ladies who do obtain employment may find only jobs with lower paying wages, which makes them vulnerable to poverty, and the inability to establish complete independence. The lack of employment, independence and limited skills also leads to being exploited usually by older men who provide a false sense of security to the young ladies leading them to vulnerable living situations including gender based violence, unsuitable housing and even exploitation via prostitution and other criminal activities.

4. Problems with physical health, behavioral health, and general well-being. Young ladies leaving state care at the age of eighteen within NiNa without support and stability have encountered health problems including hospitalization due to illness, accident, injury, drug use, or emotional problems. There have also been cases of mental health disorders including depression, social phobia, alcohol abuse, alcohol dependence, substance abuse, or substance dependence.

5. Lack of access to health care. Young ladies within the programme who are not legal residents of Trinidad and Tobago have encountered challenges in accessing health care at the hospitals and health centres.

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6. Justice system involvement. Youth emancipating from state care may be at greater risk of becoming involved with the criminal justice system due to lack of support networks, low employment skills, and unstable living arrangements. Within the NiNa program there have been thus far two young ladies entering the justice system post-St Jude's.

7. Lack of social connections. Permanent relationships with positive adults are a powerful protective factor against negative outcomes and can provide critical support to youth as they transition to adulthood. Youth in state care often rely on adults who have provided professional supports through their roles in the child welfare system. Although an emancipating youth may desire autonomy from adult supervision, the transition is more successful when he or she has a strong connection to a trusted adult supporter. Establishing this relationship prior to emancipation is important, albeit not easy, given that many youths have had turbulent experiences with adults in the past.

Recommendations

Many of the girls are not ready to leave the facility, however, must leave at eighteen (18) years, according to the law

At the SECOND SESSION OF THE ELEVENTH PARLIAMENT (2016/2017) on the Treatment of Child Offenders at the Youth Training Centre, St. Michael's Interim Rehabilitation Centre for Young Male Offenders and St. Jude's Interim Rehabilitation Centre for Young Female Offenders Joint Select Committee - Human Rights Equality and Diversity, the recommendations for St Jude's also touched on the importance of a transition program.

The Committee recommends that remedial teaching methods adopted by St. Jude's and YTC need to be tailored to improve and encourage the transition into other mainstream education/vocational institutions upon exit of the institution.

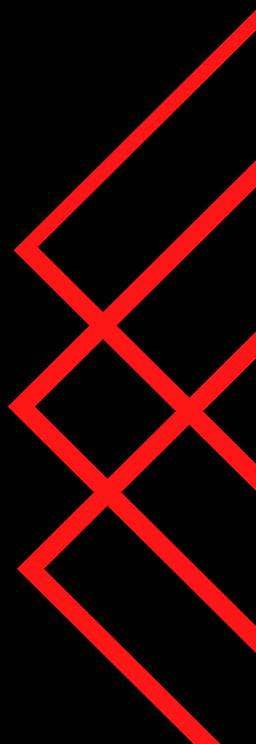
Many of the girls are not ready to leave the facility, however, must leave at eighteen (18) years, according to the law. Many of the girls housed at the facility do not receive visits or phone calls from their parents. Many of the young ladies cannot return to their homes upon leaving the facility. As such, the staff tries to assist by finding rooms at the Salvation Army Hostel and half way homes.

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NiNa Recommends:

1. Introduction of a mandatory transition programme to the young ladies who are within six to eight months of leaving state care. The program is to include life skills training: for example how to set up a bank account, how to apply and receive national identification; on the job training; and relevant social skills.
2. Linkages to safe and seamless transition spaces – spaces to include a safe and secure place to live, mentors, and peer counsellors. Different types of therapy ought to be made available and mandatory.
3. Partnerships with Government agencies such as Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, Family Planning, On the Job Training Programme, NEDCO, YTEPP, MIC Institute of Technology and other Technical Vocational Training Centres
4. Work in partnership with the Private Sector to support job training and mentorship opportunities.
5. There are many abandoned Government houses and quarters throughout Trinidad. Transition homes can be set up using these properties, particularly the ones in the areas of Trinidad that are conducive to holistic living and healing- Chaguaramas, Couva, Point A Pierre, Beach Camp.



Young adults exiting state care need emotional support as they navigate the transition to independent adulthood

Conclusion

Without the social and emotional skills to manage the stresses of emerging adulthood, youth often struggle to maximize the housing, education, and employment resources that are available to them.

Preparation in advance of leaving state care can go a long way in mitigating issues such as teenage pregnancy, falling into the judicial system, entering abusive relationships, poor jobs and housing choices and exacerbating mental health issues.

Adult mentors who stay connected with the young ladies as they transition to adulthood provide the emotional supports necessary for youth to achieve positive adult outcomes. Mentorships formed through informal connections (within the youth's life) or through formal programs will increase the likelihood of successful transitions to adulthood. Lifelong connections with positive adults are critical to success as youth begin to make decisions that affect their future.

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TRINIDAD & TOBAGO

NiNa - Creating the Next
Generation of Young Women
Leaders

www.ninaladies.com