

NiNa

Young Women's Leadership Programme

Choices:
Supporting
Girls in
Transition

A TOOLKIT

CHOICES: SUPPORTING GIRLS IN TRANSITION

ABOUT THE TOOLKIT

The aim of the toolkit is to share the lessons, challenges and methodology used by the NiNa Young Women's Leadership Program to support young women in transition. Transition in this case include transition from state care at the age of eighteen into mainstream society. Transition from at risk situations and poor choices.



GIRLS-IN-TRANSITION: WHO ARE THEY AND WHY DO THEY NEED SUPPORT?

Young ladies who have been under state care for a period, upon reaching the age of 18 – the legal age of an adult- are no longer wards of the state and therefore no longer under state care.

Many of these young ladies under state care would usually reside in State managed homes until the age of 18 and it has been seen that upon leaving State care these young women seem to fall into unhealthy situations for example, abusive relationships, living in unsupportive environments, prostitution, drugs and drug trafficking, teenage pregnancy and dead end jobs.

Young ladies who are desirous in leaving their present environment wanting to transition. These young ladies are without the tools and resources available to do this.

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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.



ABOUT THE SPOTLIGHT INITIATIVE

The Spotlight Initiative is a global, multi-year partnership between the European Union and the United Nations to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls by 2030.

It is the world's largest targeted effort to end all forms of violence against women and girls.

The Spotlight Initiative is responding to all forms of violence against women and girls, with a particular focus on domestic and family violence, sexual and gender-based violence and harmful practices, femicide, trafficking in human beings and sexual and economic (labour) exploitation.

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

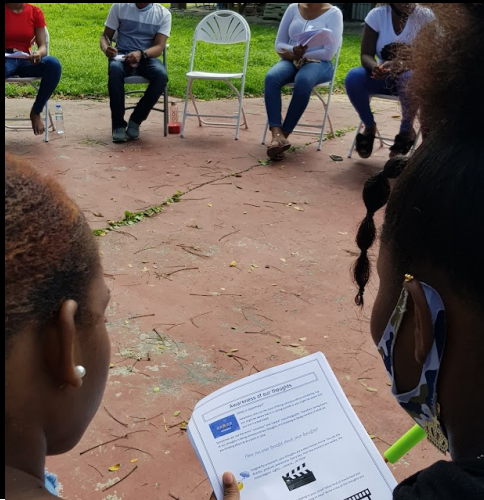
NiNa has several activities under four streams of work:

- **NiNa Secondary School Programme**
- **NiNa St. Jude's Home for Girls Programme**
- **NiNa Summer Programme**
- **NiNa Transition Programme**

HOW TO SUPPORT GIRLS-IN-TRANSITION – OVERVIEW

Choices: Consequence is No Coincidence – A 5-part Workshop Series

The aim of the workshop series is to introduce the participants to the Power and Implications of Choice. What are the consequences of poor choices and the steps to making better choices?



WORKSHOP TOPICS

- Choices and Relationships
- Choices and Money
- Choices and Sex
- Choices and Career
- Choices and The Power of Thoughts

Included in the workshops are yoga sessions, art therapy all anchored around a licensed child psychologist who guides the discussion in an open informal safe space. Specially invited experts are invited to share their stories and lessons in a safe open space allowing the ladies to ask questions, interact, learn and share. There are 4 rotating mentors who are previous graduates of NiNa who are now in first- and second-year University Degree programmes on site to provide support, take notes and mentor the younger members of the NiNa family.

OBJECTIVES OF THE CHOICES WORKSHOP SERIES

1. To engage and meet experts who can assist, support and guide in making informed choices.
2. To collect information on coping tools and methods for girls in transition from state care and how to make choices when dealing with family violence in the home.
3. Documentation of methods used to support young ladies in transition and dealing with family violence.
4. Dissemination of information to the young ladies on the tools and methods to ensure informed choices are made in the areas of relationships, sexual health, finances, and career.

LOCATION

The location of the workshops played a key role in the execution of this activity. The idea was to ensure that the young ladies were exposed to beautiful spaces that promote green and a connection to nature.



Growing Independent Resilient Ladies Sustainably App (G.I.R.L.S App)

The NiNa programme developed an app which is featured on both the Apple and Google Play platforms. The G.I.R.L.S app born out of the NiNa Programme seeks to provide resource networks, safe physical and psychological spaces, personal healing, growth and development and will facilitate education for young women aging out of state care.

OBJECTIVES OF THE APP

Developing and sharing a free app is one of the best ways to reach the young ladies particularly during the pandemic. The app gives the user an outlet to share their feelings on any matter including documenting the incidences of family violence in a non-intrusive manner. Contact information and location of support services is offered.

The ladies chose the name of the app and is the face of the app.

CURRENT APP FEATURES:

Journaling- The app provides a platform for the young ladies to share their feelings through a journal option. This is one of the first features users will meet on the app. It is linked to a Calendar that allows the girls to note how they feel, and list their highs/lows on any given day.

Resources- There are links to different types of resources (video and written) on various topics like sex and relationship, lifestyle and mental health to further educate the girls.

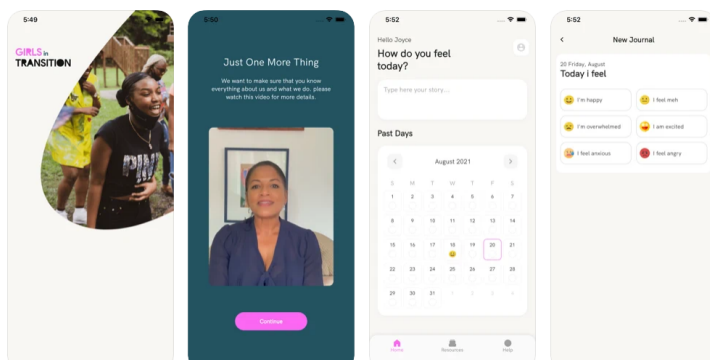
Emergency Contacts- In the 'Help' section, there are contact numbers listed for several protection units like crime stoppers, the domestic violence hotline, the suicide prevention hotline and for the programme's regular counsellor and other mentors.

FUTURE APP FEATURES:

Anonymous chat rooms- This will be an interactive feature where users would be able to chat anonymously with other girls about various topics posted on the app. It serves as an open and safe space for the girls to share and learn from one another about particular subject matters.

G.I.R.L.S Feed- Here, a news feed section of the app would be developed where the girls can receive daily updates on local events, trends and other interesting content that encourages educational growth and female empowerment. Also, the feed would include fun activities like voting polls, quizzes, and ratings on different topics.

Interactive Journal- This feature will add an interactive element to the already existing journaling part of the app. At the moment, when users are asked to select an emoji that describes, "How do I feel today", it leads to a page where the girls can journal. However, with the addition of an automated chat bot- when the girls select their mood for the day, they can have the option of expressing their feelings by answering a series of questions in a chat page. Based on their answers, specific resources would be suggested. For example, they may receive a link to a video on how to lift one's mood or an article to read about the benefits of exercise and mental health. This feature will mimic the experience of speaking to someone, and ensure that proper solutions/ advice is provided.



INTERVENTIONS

WHAT AND HOW

The **NiNa** interventions have all been informal and unconventional and included:

- Group Sessions with a Licensed Counsellor
- Yoga and Walking Meditation
- Sharing of stories by older women who have overcome challenges
- Journaling
- Spending time in Nature
- Qigong
- Exposure from Art and Theatre
- Dance intervention
- Workshops
- Mentorship
- Residentials
- Graduation
- Gala Celebration
- Peer Mentorship



All sessions are informal to create a safe space.

All venues chosen are chosen with care with the intention of having the ladies immersed in nature

All speakers chosen with the intention of exposing the young ladies to the best on offer. The best in the field is chosen.



NINA MENTORS



Mentors are sourced from the NiNa School Programme. The programme has been in schools for a number of years focusing on using entrepreneurial tools as an empowerment vehicle to young ladies aged between 17 and 19. Many of the participants go on to university after secondary school. This is the pool in which mentors come from.

Mentors are provided with an orientation before the scheduled weekly residential detailing the expectations of the program. The characteristics of the participant and how the program is executed.

Mentors are invited to all workshops to support, assist and build relationships with the participants.

CHALLENGES & FINDINGS

THE TRANSITION PROGRAMME

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 that 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.

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 behavior, 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.

**CHALLENGES AND
RECOMMENDATIONS
CREATING QUALITY CITIZENS
AUTOMATICALLY LEAD TO
BUILDING A BETTER
TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO.
IT TAKES A VILLAGE...**

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).

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.



**RESEARCH ON THE DEVELOPING BRAINS OF
ADOLESCENTS AND YOUNG ADULTS POINTS TO
THE IMPORTANCE OF UNDERSTANDING THE
“VULNERABILITY OF TEENS”**

**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 THESE CHALLENGES:**

1. 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.

2. 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.

3. Problems with physical health, behavioral health, and general wellbeing. 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.

4. 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.

5. 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.

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 THESE CHALLENGES:

6. 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.

7. 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.



RECOMMENDATIONS

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.

**MANY OF THE GIRLS
ARE NOT READY TO
LEAVE THE FACILITY,
HOWEVER, MUST LEAVE
AT EIGHTEEN (18)
YEARS,
ACCORDING TO THE
LAW**

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

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

You can help by:

Supporting our mentors:

Mentors require training, tools, and also mentorship.

Provide Financial support:

Donate to the efforts

Support fundraising efforts:

Bodacious Girl Gala provides our funds for the year. Held annually to showcase the program and the progress of the young ladies

Provide jobs:

Successful transition requires economic stability and independence, jobs assist in providing this.

Housing :

Subsidized housing



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.