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# FOOD FOR THE POOR

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## **SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION PROJECT**

Wakefield Infant School



Wakefield District/P.A. Trelawny

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***“As often as you did it to one of the least of my brothers  
and sisters, you did it to me.”*** *Matthew 25:40*

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## **Overview/ Background**

The Wakefield Primary School was established in 1934, approximately 85 years ago, in the community of Wakefield, Trelawny.

For years, the institution received students from Infant Schools that were not properly equipping students to handle the grade one curriculum, which caused a problem for their entire educational journey. To eliminate this challenge, in 2017 the school started its own infant department. However, they faced major space issues, which led to overcrowding.

Confronted with this situation, Principal as of January 2019, Mr. Michael James, spearheaded the request for an infant department building to Food For The Poor while serving his eight years as Guidance Counsellor.

He mentioned, “We thought that with our own infant department, we would have the majority of our children entering the Primary School properly equipped and ready for the curriculum. We wanted to groom the students from early, making the transition from infant to primary easier and if there were any challenges, we could identify them early on and work with the children accordingly.”

Mr. James explained that, “Another thing we realized was that parents could not afford the school fees required by the basic schools in the community, so students attended school irregularly and because of that, children were not performing at their best when they got to the Primary School. One cannot be inconsistent in sending their children to school especially in the early years and expect them to be excellent academically. We knew setting up our infant department would be free of cost and that would change the game in how parents responded to education for their toddlers, as well as how the students would perform academically.”

Now that a new self-contained infant department has been constructed things are looking positive for the school, so much so that, “As of January 2019, we have actually been turning away students because approximately 46 students are now enrolled but based on requirements by the Ministry of Education (MOE)\*, we cannot accommodate more students unless we have more teachers and caregivers. We actually have requested more staff.”

*\*The Ministry of Education (MoE) is the government entity responsible for the management and administration of public education in Jamaica. It was first established in 1953, and currently, carries out the Government of Jamaica's mandate of ensuring a system which secures quality education and training of all citizens of Jamaica to optimize individual and national development.*



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*Completed structure of the Wakefield Infant School*

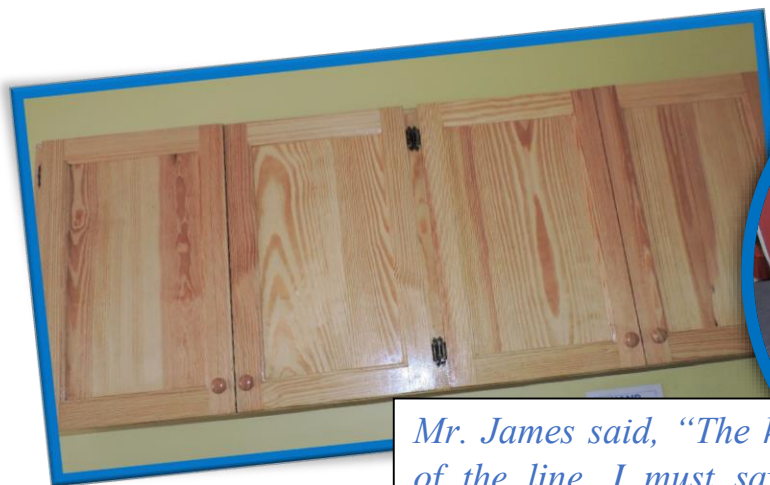
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## Impact Stories

✚ Speaking of the challenges prior to getting the building, Mr. James said, “The classroom that the infants occupied was a small, chalkboard divided space. It was simply inadequate for the students and teachers, and the noise level was beyond what the teachers should have been dealing with. There were parents whose children had spent their full school year in the grade one system and were asking us to have their children repeat because the children were having issues identifying letters and letter sounds. So, we really decided the best thing to do is have a facility to assist students the minute they enter the education system.”

He continued, “I have seen a lot of improvements since the construction of the new facility and we have moved up tremendously in our enrollment. When we started out, we had only 15 students. Today, we have 45. We officially started using this building in the first week of January 2019. At first, people were very doubtful about the construction but when the first phase started and the workers came to set up and the trailer was delivered with the items, people began to realize that something was actually happening. The doubt was present because we had applied to another entity for assistance some years ago and nothing happened, but when we saw that Food For The Poor would fulfill its promise, we were all overjoyed. When we signed the completion letter and officially started using the building, it was an overwhelming experience. The property was fenced, the building was constructed in little to no time, sewage system and utilities were all installed. We have adequate space, child-friendly furniture and desks for teachers. We also received our brand-new, four-burner stove, with a proper oven and a fridge. We received more than enough equipment.”



*Mr. James said, “The kitchen is top of the line, I must say I am most impressed with it and the quality of the cupboards.”*



The Infant Department also received a water harvesting system. In explaining how it will be used, Mr. James said “The tank from the system is connected to the entire school. Although, it is not a normal thing for us to have water issues, should there be a water lock-off in the community, we will always have water at the school.”

Though the majority of the building is being used a few spaces aren’t yet. “The office is not yet being utilized but the plan is to do so when it is fully equipped with filing cabinets, to store student/teacher-related documents. Presently, if approval is given for another Caregiver, as well as another Teacher, we will be able to use another classroom for more students and I believe we will have more things to populate the office area. For now, it is used as a storage area along with the sick bay. The sick bay will remain unused until we are able to utilize the office space. That way, we can always have someone supervising a child that is not well. I also have hopes to transform sections of the store room into a mini library.”

With a broad smile, expressing his appreciation to the donors, Mr. James said, “I hope to give the donors something tangible. I mean, Food For The Poor didn’t just give us a school, because when the team of donors came, they brought stuffed toys, colouring books, knapsacks and other helpful items for the students. I want to say a big ‘thank you’ for being involved in this project. We are immensely grateful and we are overjoyed. The community is also appreciative. We have seen progress at Wakefield Primary and Infant School. If we didn’t get help, we would still be struggling in a classroom, packed and divided by chalkboard and the children would not be learning as they should, so a big ‘thank you’ to all. Change has already started. For example, we have some of the infants, ages four and five, who are reading already. Once we continue in this vein, by the time our infants get to grade-one, the teachers will not have to re-teach certain concepts, because they would have already gotten a great foundation.”

He ended by saying, “I believe if students attend school regularly, their academics will improve, and we will be getting better passes. In the long term, students who leave from Wakefield will be better able to acquire decent jobs. Once again, to the team, ‘thank you’.”



*Staff at Wakefield Infant School all smiles. From right, Principal- Michael James, Tamara Vickers, Shanell Hamilton and Cheryl Wynter.*

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**Ms. Shanell Hamilton started teaching at Wakefield when the Infant Department was established. Some of the struggles in the clustered environment were, “The classroom was hot. Infants had to use the same bathroom as the older students and the distance was a struggle. When going to the bathroom, students had to be supervised because their safety, as well as the state of the bathroom, would always be in question. Also, the older children can be mischievous and I wouldn’t want them to lock up the babies inside the bathroom stalls.”**

“The noise level was also very terrible! Terrible! Terrible!” exclaimed Ms. Hamilton. “What added to that nightmare was that playground which was directly behind our classroom. When the older students were playing during their lunch break, the infants would be in class so it would be a struggle to concentrate and teach. The behaviour of the older students, was just very upsetting at times. It was unbearable. Sometimes I felt like giving up but because of the interest of the students, it pushed me to continue.”

In 2015, Ms. Hamilton taught grade two students at Wakefield Primary, “during my eight months, I encountered students who were not yet ready for grade two so I had to provide extra guidance. I believe that once students have a good foundation, they will excel. Similar to building a house, if it doesn’t have a good foundation, then it will crumble. Likewise, for the infants, if the standards are not set from early, when they grow older, students too will crumble.”

Sharing how she felt when news broke that FFP was on board to construct a new building, Ms. Hamilton happily exclaimed, “I couldn’t wait to see construction start! I was like ‘yes’! When the building was finally completed and we moved in, I was so joyful. We kept class on the first day and all the teachers prepared from early. I was at school approximately 30 minutes before school started. The feeling was similar to getting a new house...being able to turn the key and enter my new classroom was overwhelming. If I want to take them outside to play, they can play without interference from the bigger kids. Going to the bathroom now is much easier, as it is less work for us although we still supervise them...it is much easier. We supervise them at the play area because we can supervise everyone at once. Academically, I have seen changes. They are more excited to learn, and I do believe it is because the environment is much more conducive to learning. The furniture I have now is better.”

Giving thanks, Ms. Hamilton said, “Thank you! Food For The Poor, you are sent from God, you have made our lives better. I am proud to say I have a school built by Food For The Poor and I am just excited! We are all excited! This is the best thing that has happened to Wakefield, you have been such a great help. Without the help, we would have a longer wait to get somewhere more convenient for teaching. My favorite space is my classroom. Now, I have more space to move around, I can put up my charts properly, I can build more things and teaching/learning is much better.”



*Ms. Hamilton enjoying the spacious classroom. “So far it has been great no disturbances, no distractions, the privacy is beyond phenomenal. I can do whatever activity I want to do with my students.”*



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**Tamara Vickers, the sole caregiver at Wakefield, has been in her role for the last two years. In my role, I see to it that the children get their lunches, I help feed them and I assist them with using the bathroom. Doing all this by the primary school was tiring. Although the teachers assist at times, it was my responsibility. The journey to the bathroom from the classroom involved climbing approximately three flights of stairs and making multiple trips per day.”**

Continuing to share her duties, Ms. Vickers said, “When a handful of students wanted to use the bathroom at once, it was a challenge, but I managed and had them waiting turns. In terms of their food, I was responsible for taking their lunches to them from the canteen.”

As it relates to construction, Ms. Vickers said, “When I saw the material being dropped off, it was a great feeling because it showed that the building would start soon. I was happy because, as a caregiver or even a parent, one cannot be comfortable knowing that students are in an infant department clustered in one room. The need for more space was prevalent.”



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*Ms. Vickers, Caregiver sits in with the students while their teacher steps out. She said, “Now the children are happy, and they are free. Before, they were nowhere near to being like this.”*

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Ms. Vickers was happy to share that moving into the new building was the best part. “When we moved in it was a joyous feeling knowing we had our building, a place more convenient for the students, and the bathroom was attached. Now, we store the children’s fruits and juice in the new refrigerator, so they have it daily. The stove is not used as often because most of the cooking is done by the primary school. We have used it on multiple occasions, when there were issues with the stove by the primary section.”

Regarding the water harvesting system, Ms. Vickers said, “There have been times when we experienced water lock-offs and relied on a tank at the back of the school. There have been instances, however, when that tank was out of water and we had to go outside to catch water and transport it to the bathroom to flush the toilets. Now, we have our very own water harvesting system and should we encounter water problems, we have this backup system that will help us tremendously. I am extremely happy to have this system because I am cleaning bathrooms now at least three times per day to prevent the children from catching germs and getting sick. We now have two stalls for girls and one for boys because we have more girls than boys here at Wakefield Infant.”



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*Now that the infant students have their own bathroom facilities, teachers and the caregiver are not required to accompany them to the bathroom as they would in the past when they shared facilities with the bigger Primary School students.*

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Sending her thanks to the donors, Ms. Vickers added, “To the donors, I want to say ‘thank you’ for being so generous and for making our lives much better and easier. You (FFP and donors) are doing a great job and I pray the Lord will continue to bless you because you have blessed us tremendously, so we can help this community. Teachers, students, and parents, we all enjoy the spacious classroom because the children are in an environment where they can move freely. The bathrooms are comfortable, the kitchen is great, everything is great. Thanks a million! We are grateful for the play area, which is much bigger, safer and more comfortable.”

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**Cheryl Wynter, teacher for the four year olds, started her tenure in 2017. “Being by the primary school, we were not able to perform at our best. The intercrossing and the noise level with the other teachers were overpowering. Thanks to Food For The Poor and the Donors for doing great work. You have been a great help for the community and the fact that the district of Wakefield is a poor farming community, an infant school that doesn’t require tuition has been and will continue to be a great help for the majority of parents.”**

Speaking more on the challenges, Ms. Wynter added, “The heat was almost unbearable, the children were miserable and there was no fan. It was easy to tell that they were miserable because it was hard to get them settled. They also said it. Multiple times they said, ‘Teacher, I am hot’ and they would constantly complain.”

*Ms. Wynter and students enjoying their spacious classroom.*



“I knew they also felt miserable about the small space because they often complained about another student disrupting their work, which resulted in them making mistakes. Now, I have 15 students who are still sharing their space but it is a much bigger one, which offers comfortable seating.”

As a result of using the building for a month and two weeks (as of February 15, 2019), Ms. Wynter explained, “I can happily say that they are more settled, they have conformed to their new environment, and they are utilizing their space, especially the play area. They have the space to eat comfortably, and I would like to say they are performing at their best. Over by the primary school, the students had lunch in their classroom but now they sit in the dining area built by Food For The Poor. Back then, eating was a challenging period because you had children interfering in each other’s lunches. Cleaning up is also much easier because there is less spillage and things are done more orderly. Teaching has also become easier, and quiet time is now more effective. The students participate more in discussions because there is less distraction.”

She continued, “I am very comfortable coming to work in the mornings, and the parents are very excited. We want to thank you (FFP and donors) for this wonderful gesture. Before, it was very uncomfortable and distracting but now we look forward to greater things. We have already seen improvements in ourselves and the children. There have been a few requests from the primary school teachers who jokingly ask to trade places with us because they like what they see. To the donors, I want to say ‘thanks’ though ‘thanks’ is not enough. The enrollment has already been improved. In fact, we feel like we may even need more space. We have a lot of parents who want to register their children, but we are already fully occupied for the 2019-2020 school year. We are already seeing an overflow of students based on those who have already registered.”

Continuing with her words of gratitude, Ms. Wynter said, “We really want to thank you from even the community level, because we know that Food For The Poor has done a lot for this community of Wakefield. There are Infant schools and Daycares close to us but since receiving this new building, their numbers have decreased. Students are sometime inconsistent in attending the other infant schools but at Wakefield Infant, students are happy to attend and even when it rains, they are always here. Parents are now eager to get them out of the house and during the last two summer breaks, parents wanted to know if we were having summer school. We look forward to greater things.”

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✚ Debroah Blissett, a parent at Wakefield Infant, was encouraged to register her daughter to the school by her mother. The mother also encouraged one of Ms. Blissett's siblings to register her son to the school as well. Ms. Blissett said, "My daughter was not doing well at the school she attended prior to coming to Wakefield and so I decided to move her in September 2018. Since then, she has been doing much better and I am also very happy to send her here because I live right next door, less than two minutes' walk. If the school calls, my mom or I can be here in no time."

Happy for the Infant Department's new building Ms. Blissett said, "The class was so clustered, there was no space and I couldn't get to be in the class with my daughter. When the Principal told us we were getting a new building, I was overjoyed and excited. Now, I am able to go inside the classroom and spend time with her inside her class, and I can walk around and see what is going on. Honestly, the morning I came and realized we would be using the new building, I was honestly happy knowing the students would be in a much better space. I am most grateful for the fact they have the security fence. I am confident that they are protected from being pushed or hurt by the older children and they have their own bathrooms. My daughter's grades have definitely improved, and she will continue her education at Wakefield until she is ready to graduate."

Expressing appreciation to the donors, she said "I want to say many thanks and may God bless you for what you have done. Without this building, it is possible that I would have moved my daughter again but it is just that the teachers are exceptional so I wouldn't do that. Only thing I am waiting on is for the computer room to be up and running."



*Students enjoying their spacious classroom*



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✚ Mrs. Ena McDonald-Clarke, grandmother whose four-year-old grandson is benefiting from the building donated by FFP, says she felt like her heart was so full of joy that it would burst when Wakefield infants got the building. “This is the first child from my family to attend Wakefield Infant. He started school in January 2018 and since then I have seen improvements. He is doing very well, better than I expected especially for his age. He is only four years old and his writing is not bad.”

Sharing her thoughts about the classrooms the infants were previously in, Mrs. Clarke said, “The classroom was crowded, small and uncomfortable. I do believe there was a fan inside the classroom, but it was still hot, and the children were miserable. I used to help out at times. For example, if a teacher had to step out, I would supervise them for a while. Though this was the case, it wasn’t a real problem for me as a parent because I knew soon my grandson and the other infants would be moving over in a new building in a short while.”

Hearing about the construction of the building, she said, “I was hoping the work would start on the same day I heard. When construction actually started, I was so happy. I was like ‘yes Lord, here it is’. When school re-opened in January and I realized we were going to be using the new building, I was even happier, and it was a joyful morning. It was an overwhelming feeling knowing the children would get a break from the heat and they would be able to play more and improve in everything.”

Mrs. Clarke’s grandson is doing well and is loving the building, “Most afternoons, when I come to pick him up, he is playing on the jungle gym and from time-to-time, I allow him. But sometimes it gets hard especially when he doesn’t want to leave because of how much he is enjoying himself. I also have another family member who I convinced to



*Students are all smiles as they enjoy the jungle gym.*

register their child at Wakefield Infant, and they are both doing well.”

To the donors, Mrs. Clarke said, “I want to say many ‘thanks’. I don’t think ‘thank you’ is enough to express how grateful I am. You (donors and FFP) are doing a great job in Jamaica and I am so appreciative for you because without you, we wouldn’t be where we are today. I hope that the Lord will continue to stand by you so you can keep up the good work. I am most grateful for the stove and the fridge. As a parent, I will continue to support the school. From time-to-time, I contribute bleach, disinfectant, toilet paper, wipes and those small things to help keep the school going. If I come and realize that the place needs to be cleaned, I will clean. If I come in the mornings and I am asked to do devotions, I will do it. I am here to help out when I can. Once again, thank you.”



*Grandmother, Mrs. Ena Clarke and mother Ms. Deborah Blissett are happy to have students attending Wakefield.*

**-END-**