

# TOMORROW'S VOICES

## Tomorrow's Voices advocates for more resources to be made available

By Robyn Bardgett

**B**ringing awareness to the community about autism is the mission of Tomorrow's Voices. And as the charity celebrates Autism Awareness next month, in October it will also celebrate five years since it opened the doors of its intervention centre.

But while the charity can look back and see how far they have come, there are still plenty of milestones they hope to reach in the future.

"Being around for five years is a huge milestone for us," says board member Erica Smith. "People didn't think there was a need for a centre or that we would be successful in creating a centre. We've always been clear that until a gap remains in services for developmental disorders our services will be needed."

While the charity has been lucky to have generous donations from its key supporters including Lancashire Foundation, Capital G and Bank of Bermuda Foundation, they have not escaped the brunt of the economic challenges facing the community.

"Every time I walk into the centre I see why we are still here and why we are needed," says Thea Furbert, Tomorrow's Voices founder and board chairman. "Our first priority is to give these children a better chance at being in a normal environment - we give them the tools to do that. We get calls on a daily basis from parents whose kids can't go back into mainstream schools because of a developmental disability. Where do they go? Until we are happy that under Government policy things are getting done, we will be here."

Currently, the charity subsidises their services by 75 per cent but there are still parents who are struggling and unable to keep their children at the centre.

"We wish we could do more and wish we had the resources to do more," says Ms Smith. "This is an underserved community and they need as much support as possible. The earlier we can intervene, whether for behavioral, mental or physical reasons, the better the outcome for that child and for society."

The board are currently lobbying insurance companies on the Island to help cover the cost of the intensive intervention used by Tomorrow's Voices.

"Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) is a well-researched practice and therapy. Insurance covers speech therapy, occupational therapy, physio - we are advocating and lobbying for coverage today," Ms Smith says.

But Ms Furbert adds, "There is hope. There is a resource with Tomorrow's Voices and each child has the ability to grow."

She also adds that her son, Cire, who has developmental disabilities, is the funniest person she's ever met.

"It's not all dreary and drag. Cire is the funniest person and he can't even talk to me. If more people can have that and have that laughter in their lives it would be for the better," she says.

Although, Ms Furbert admits that there were times when she thought it would be easier to just focus on her son.

"I know it's all for the best and not just for my child. While it would have been easier to just deal with Cire that's just not the way I was bred. I don't want people to have to travel down the road that I had to travel. Now, people know who to call when their child is diagnosed."

As Ms Furbert looks to the future for her son, who is now 14, she is hoping to help make a difference for other parents and raise awareness about getting intervention for their child as early as possible.

"We are hoping to raise awareness with parents to un-



Thea Furbert and a volunteer sell Eat Shop Give cards for the charity's fundraising event.

derstand that as early as two years old they need to be looking out for things developmentally."

"Many parents fight against the idea of their child not being in a typical school but the goal is to eventually go on to mainstream schools. Parents should not be scared to get intervention now so that later there is less need for assistance and less need for a paraprofessional. Get kids at two, three, four, and get necessary intervention to change their life for the better. A lot of people have gone down the same road and you are not alone in this journey. Every child that has gone through Tomorrow's Voices programme has learned and grown and met challenges and they now have a better quality of life because of the intervention we provide."

As Cire's aunt, Ms Smith says she has been along for the journey of a lifetime with her sister. But she says as Cire ages it has become clearer how important it is for Tomorrow's Voices to ramp up their efforts.

"These children do become adults and we can provide them with the tools they need to make a better life for themselves," she says. "We teach them tangible things so they can lead an independent life."

**"Being around for five years is a huge milestone for us. People didn't think there was a need for a centre or that we would be successful in creating a centre. We've always been clear that until a gap remains in services for developmental disorders our services will be needed."**

~ Erica Smith

"When they turn 18 they need to be able to contribute to their own lives as well as to society and the list goes on. The point is there is a lot of work that still needs to be done."

Next month the charity will celebrate Autism Awareness month with several events. Throughout the month of April, people can raise money for Tomorrow's Voices by purchasing an Eat Shop Give card, which will afford them discounts and promotions to several businesses across the Island.

"People will have the opportunity to save on clothing and supplies or get a discounted price on dining out. We're really appreciative of businesses for participating in these stressful times," says Ms Smith.

The charity is also hoping to raise awareness through social media with their 1000 Voices for Autism campaign on Facebook.

"People are invited to sign up or at least friend us on Facebook," says Ms Furbert. "We'll also be designing an autism awareness logo that we'd like people to use as their picture on Facebook throughout the month of April."

On May 12, Tomorrow's Voices will be hosting their first speaking event, which will feature autism advocates Sean Barron



Autism awareness: Dr Kim Mills, left, Tomorrow's Voices executive director, along with other charity volunteers wave to passing motorists on East Broadway at the end of Autism Awareness month last year.

and his girlfriend Barbara Protopapa, who consider themselves "healed" from autism.

"Their story is very inspiring and it's a story of hope that will hopefully change people's minds about autism," says Ms Smith.

And in an effort to continue to raise awareness about autism even after April is over, Tomorrow's Voices volunteers will be on East Broadway at the end of April with signs to remind motorists that although Autism

awareness month is over autism is never finished.

"We want to raise awareness for the country that there are people in our population that have a whole host of things going on with them that are not as apparent as one might think," says Ms Smith. "We need to show more compassion, empathy and tolerance and seek to understand what drives a person, whether they be a child or an adult."

## Raising the standards for Tomorrow's Voices

By Robyn Bardgett

**T**his year a number of new initiatives have been started in order to bring the intervention programme at Tomorrow's Voices up to international standards.

The centre is hoping to receive accreditation for their work as a non-profit to continue to build their reputation as an excellent resource for intervention for disabilities.

"We are aiming for the next level by increasing and expanding our training opportunities in general and becoming accredited," says Dr Kim Mills, executive director of Tomorrow's Voices. "It will elevate the level of our work and continue to raise the bar."

Dr Mills has also been invited this year to participate in re-

search for the National Autism Centre.

"It has been one of the highlights of my career being asked to participate in this group. It's a great way for us to stay tied into the research by this most prestigious group of autism researchers," she says.

The charity has continually expanded its training institute on the Island, which works closely with professionals from the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health, providing professional development hours for teachers as well as occupational therapists, speech therapists and paraprofessionals. They have also recently launched a consulting service within schools.

"We teach in schools to high-functioning kids in both public and private schools," says Dr Mills. "We provide individually

designed programmes to target goals specifically for each student. We only stay as long as we are needed - sometimes it is brief and sometimes it is longer."

Through the creation of the Bermuda Association of Behaviour Analysis (BABA), Tomorrow's Voices hopes to raise awareness about autism throughout the community and not just with people who deal directly with developmental disabilities.

The BABA mission is to increase the knowledge base related to Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) in Bermuda and to help integrate applied behaviour analysis practices into daily operations of the country's service delivery to people with disabilities, as well as to those with challenging behaviours and everyday problems.

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# Staff at Tomorrow's Voices speak about their love for their work

**T'Neil Dickinson**

**W**orking with special needs children, as with all children, takes patience and kindness.

While it may be a challenge, especially trying to communicate with children who are not always able to vocalise their wants and needs, it is a challenge that T'Neil Dickinson is more than willing to take on.

The assistant verbal therapist says that working at Tomorrow's Voices has affected her tremendously.

"I've been able to witness the children learn and grow, which is a huge asset. The children have definitely made a big impact on my life."

Days when a child at the centre does something out of their normal pattern are a huge and important step for a therapist to see.

"One of my favourite memories is when my client and I were playing the piano together," Ms Dickinson explains. "She must have been tired of playing so she randomly said to me - within context - 'Come on, let's go'. She proceeded to close the piano, got up from her chair and directed me to another activity. It was shocking to me because I had never heard her speak within context. I was very impressed."

Ms Dickinson, who has a Bachelor of Arts in Honours Psychology from Saint Mary's University since last September. She had volunteered for the charity at their annual Bounce for Autism event and later applied for the assistant verbal



**T'Neil Dickinson**

behaviour therapist position. The job affords her plenty of on-site training, as well as challenges.

"One of the main challenges I face at Tomorrow's Voices is gaining a complete understanding of the children's wants and actions. Most of my clients are not vocal so it is sometimes difficult to determine what they want, or why they are acting out. It definitely gets easier as I begin to get to know the children more, which allows me to understand their needs substantially," she explains.

As one of very few Bermudians in the field she says it is a field of work she'd like to see more Bermudians get involved with. But, she advises, you must love the job in order to make it work.

"The best candidate for this line of work firstly has to look at it as more than a job; they have to put their heart in it. Secondly, working with children is difficult in itself, therefore working with special needs children is more of a challenge. One needs to be up for the challenge, bringing patience and a kind heart."

**Emma Martin**

**B**ringing new ideas to the work done at Tomorrow's Voices is essential for the centre's continued growth.

Emma Martin, who worked at the prestigious Jigsaw School in London, UK is the latest part of the puzzle.

The Jigsaw School is one of the few in the UK offering a structured programme of intensive intervention based on the principles of Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA), which Tomorrow's Voices provides for local, non-typical developing children. It's what drew Ms Martin to the school.

"What they are doing at Tomorrow's Voices is similar to the way I worked in the UK," she explains.

Ms Martin brings with her the specialised work from Jigsaw in the Comprehensive Application of Behaviour Analysis to Schooling (CABAS), which is a research-driven system-wide approach to providing individualised programmes for children and young people with and without disabilities.



**Emma Martin with Tomorrow's Voices student Exodus.**

Her background and training has been an asset. Tomorrow's Voices not only at the centre but as the therapists have started to work with children in Bermuda's schools. It is part of the job as senior behaviour therapist that Ms Martin has enjoyed.

"My main role is to supervise but I have also been teaching and it has been great to build good relationships which does come quickly when you get to work more regularly with the children," she says.

All of the children come with differences but behaviour is behaviour and the work we do we can apply to each child and make changes in their lives regardless of what their differences are."

While things are constantly changing in the field of ABA, Ms Martin says her contacts with the Jigsaw School and her mentors remains.

"We have to keep up with the best practice standards and keep up with research and knowledge all of the time," she says. "Things are changing all the time in the field and it's great to have that contact."

Eventually she would like to see the centre grow and possibly do more work with adult services, which she says are currently quite limited on the Island.

**Omar Dill**

**C**oming to work every morning to work with the children at Tomorrow's Voices is a great feeling.

For Omar Dill, assistant verbal behavior therapist at Tomorrow's Voices, the job may pose challenges but the centre provides a laidback environment where he can often times act like a kid on a day-to-day basis.

"Everyone wishes they were a kid again and we get to come in to work and do that every day," says Mr Dill. "This is not a stressful job to me. I am not up all night worrying about deadlines."

The graduate of Saint Mary's University majored in psychology and found that he was not inclined to a business job working at an office.

"A lot of what I studied wasn't specifically for working with children with autism. The behavioral techniques that we use are not just applied to children with autism," he says.

Tomorrow's Voices provides onsite training for the therapists to help them keep up with all of the changes that are ongoing in the field of Applied Behaviour Analysis.

"No two children are alike and we do a lot of onsite training. You have to be open to asking questions in this job. We try and brainstorm and give feedback to each other. It's a very open environment and not like a boss giving orders."

In the end, he says, it's about seeing each child succeed.

"You have to really want to see the kids succeed in this job."



**Omar Dill**

It's not just a job and you really have to apply yourself no matter what. Children will pick up on every clue."

And in his field of work gaining trust amongst his clients is paramount.

"It's about becoming the kid's best friend and being the best person in the world to them." However, watching his clients advance over time is definitely the highlight of his day.

"It takes away any stress you might have," he adds. "I am grateful for the opportunity to take what I have learned in school and apply it to a meaningful career path. Shaping behaviour in order to create positive, long lasting effects on children's behaviour makes waking up every morning worth it."

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## 'The highlight of my career'

Continued from Page 7

"ABA is not just for those in the disabilities field," explains Dr Mills. "We're hoping to encourage anyone that is interested in the science of changing behaviour to participate, whether that be teachers or politicians hoping to come up with ways to solve community problems."

BABA will be an affiliate chapter of the Association for Behavior Analysis International (ABAI), which is a non-profit membership organisation with the mission to contribute to the well-being of society by developing, enhancing and supporting the growth and vitality of the science of behaviour analysis through research, education and practice. ABAI affiliated chapters have more than 17,000 members around the world.

The charity's efforts, she says, will hopefully show the strength and commitment Tomorrow's Voices has to intervention and

will hopefully see insurance reimbursement for the intensive therapy that the centre provides.

"We need that reimbursement so that we can provide these services to more people," Dr Mills says.

"We work with kids across the disability spectrum and the biggest thing is our reputation in the community. Tomorrow's Voices has always been an expert institution and we want to really help the community understand how excellent we are."



**Dr Kim Mills, executive director of Tomorrow's Voices.**

## Raising the voices of tomorrow.

Capital G is proud to support Tomorrow's Voices and applauds all the work they do as Bermuda's Early Intervention Centre for autistic members of our community.

Tomorrow's Voices is designed to meet the individual needs of children who are diagnosed with Autism or on the Autism Spectrum between the ages of 2 and 21 years of age. The overall goal of Tomorrow's Voices is to provide clients with the skills to assist with their reintegration into their neighbourhood schools with minimal supervision and to provide them with a better quality of life through intervention.

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# Don't let fear hold you back from seeking help

By Robyn Bardgett

**H**aving a child diagnosed with a developmental disorder can be frightening for any parent.

That fear can sometimes cause parents to delay getting the proper therapy needed to help their child.

For Cyrelah Raynor, while there was some trepidation about getting her daughter Exodus, 4, therapy for the genetic disorder fragile X syndrome, she couldn't be happier with the results she has seen from her daughter since she started working with Tomorrow's Voices.

"I had never heard of the syndrome (fragile X) and part of the recommendations for her therapy was occupational therapy and ABA (Applied Behavioral Analysis). I had never heard of any of that and didn't really have any

confidence in finding that in Bermuda," says Ms Raynor. "But I found out that it is available and was given a list of different places. I started off looking into each place but I wanted her to be in a regular school and Tomorrow's Voices just seemed so far from that. I weighed up the pros and cons and sat on it for about three months trying to come to terms with it all."

Fragile X syndrome has many symptoms similar to autism. Behavioral problems associated with the syndrome include speech and language delay as well as hyperactive or impulsive behaviour, and tendency to avoid eye contact.

Ms Raynor spent many months trying to get to the bottom of her daughter's developmental issues and it was clear that Exodus needed some form of intervention. Ms Raynor eventually was able to get her daughter in for an assessment at Children's Hospital in Boston where

last April she received the diagnosis of fragile X syndrome.

"She wasn't reaching the milestones she was meant to be reaching at her age. She wasn't talking much at all and was a very quiet child," she explains.

"Before coming to Tomorrow's Voices Exodus would start off the mornings and stand in my room and just cry. She had no speech, she wouldn't point there wasn't anything that I could do."

"Within the first two to three month of her being at Tomorrow's Voices there was definitely language development. Every day has just been a tremendous increase in her language and what she can do physically. She used to fuss a lot but there's not much crying and whining anymore."

Eventually Ms Raynor hopes that Exodus will be full time in mainstream schooling.

"She may have to start later and require a paraprofessional at least to begin with but every

day I still underestimate her capabilities."

Ms Raynor says she has started an education fund with the intention that Exodus will one day make it to university.

"One of my motivational factors is for her to go away to university," she says. "I want her to learn best so she can take advantage of what she can do in the future."

While she originally started off worried about how her daughter would fare at Tomorrow's Voices, she says today she is one of the charity's biggest advocates.

"I am the complete opposite today and I know that the therapy is definitely working. You have to be living it - that's the only way to understand the importance of Tomorrow's Voices."

"We are like a family here. It's opened my eyes to a whole other world for people with additional needs and the work they have to do."



Proud parent: Cyrelah Raynor with daughter Exodus, four.

## Raising awareness about Tomorrow's Voices to a younger audience

By Robyn Bardgett

**G**rowing awareness about autism among the younger generation is the drive behind Day After Tomorrow (DAT), the junior board members of Tomorrow's Voices.

The group of young Tomorrow's Voices volunteers is aiming to educate their peers about the developmental disorder.

"The Tomorrow's Voices board wanted to have a younger generation to raise awareness to people our age about how autism can occur as well as general awareness among under-30s about the charity as a whole," explains Jenna Viera, one of the DAT founding members. Ms Viera, along with Julia Gibson, Alex Lindo and Barnaby West are behind the DATs.

Last year the DATs put on their first event with a party held at Rumber, and they hope that this year they will be able to stage at least two events.

As Autism Awareness month gets into full swing next month, the DATs have their next event planned for April 28, this time a scavenger hunt which they are hoping will draw younger members of the community.

"With the generosity of the Bermuda

Bistro, DATs will be hosting Get Puzzled, a scavenger hunt in and around the City of Hamilton. All proceeds will benefit Tomorrow's Voices," says Ms Gibson. "We're hoping that this might turn into an annual event that people can look forward to every spring."

Ms Viera adds: "We want people to walk away from an event and hopefully remember that they did something for autism and learn a little something about autism at the same time," says Ms Viera.

The team also helps the charity by supporting other yearly Tomorrow's Voices events.

For Ms Viera the mission of Tomorrow's Voices hits close to home.

"My sister is special needs and there are not a lot of resources on the Island for her. The centre for intervention is needed for a different style of therapy on the Island."

The team is also hoping to encourage more people to join their efforts.

"It's always nice to have fresh, new ideas and everyone is invited to come and join," Ms Viera says.

Ms Gibson adds: "It's a great way to give back to the community and do as much as we can for Tomorrow's Voices."

To find out more information about the Get Puzzled scavenger hunt contact [dayaftertomorrow.tv@gmail.com](mailto:dayaftertomorrow.tv@gmail.com).

## Premier fundraising event back and better than ever

By Robyn Bardgett

**O**ne of the premier events on the Tomorrow's Voices calendar is the Eat Shop Give charity promotion.

The event has come back this year after a year's hiatus as it was cancelled in 2011 due to lack of interest.

However, it is back and bigger than ever with close to 50 businesses involved with more coming onboard every day.

"We consider this to be Bermuda's premier dining, shopping and giving charity event," explains Erica Smith, Tomorrow's Voices board member.

In order to participate, people make a \$10 donation, which in turn gets them an Eat Shop Give card. The card offers people the ability to receive promotions and discounts from merchants across the Island, including shops, services and restaurants.

From large businesses like Gibbons Company to smaller businesses like Dowling's service station, there are a variety of dif-



Shop: Autism awareness puzzle pieces decorate the window of Secrets during Tomorrow's Voices Eat Shop Give charity promotion event.

ferent ways that people can enjoy the savings the card affords them.

"This April there is a lot going on - Lime Carifta Games, Easter and the Ag Show (Annual Exhibition) where people will be look-

ing to get clothes and supplies," says Mrs Smith. "It's a great way for people to promote their businesses."

The charity event has a three-pronged approach that makes it more appealing than just a one-off charity shopping night, says Ms Smith.

"We raise funds for Tomorrow's Voices, the consumer gets the benefit of discounts and promotions, and businesses get additional business and traffic in their stores," she says.

The event runs throughout the month of April - Autism Awareness month.

"There will also be puzzle pieces with autism awareness facts displayed in the windows of several of the businesses," says Ms Smith. "We're also hoping to educate the public with this campaign as well."

Volunteers will be setting up booths around the Island to sell the cards, and several of the businesses will also be selling the cards on the charity's behalf.

For more information about the event, email [tomorrowvoices@northrock.bm](mailto:tomorrowvoices@northrock.bm).

**FACE TO FACE WITH AUTISM**

**Hey Peeps...It's me...Alex!**

You know me, you went to Warwick Academy with me, you're probably one of my 497 friends on Facebook, and I know you see me at Country Squire and Swizzle all the time...LOL! But what you may not know is that I am **Face to Face with Autism**.

My nephew Kevy has Autism. It hurts to see him sometimes 'cause he is eight, and doesn't really know right away, that I'm his Auntie Alex. I watch him go through hours of therapy every day, just to get him to say one word, but when he does, and that word is "Auntie" I feel better than any girls night in town I've ever had! The current rate of Autism is now 1 in every 110 births. You don't have to be special - to Autism you're just a number! We've got to be prepared Berry...with numbers like that, it won't be long before you are Face to Face With Autism too...Tomorrow's Voices is helping people like me understand Autism, and they are doing so much work to make sure if you need it, you will have somewhere to turn.

**Yo...It's Alex...and I am Face to Face with Autism**

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# Autism advocate to speak at Tomorrow's Voices event

By Robyn Bardgett

Tomorrow's Voices is hosting an event with well-known autism advocate Sean Barron in May. Mr Barron, along with his girlfriend Barbara Protopapa, were both diagnosed with autism at a young age but are now high functioning adults.

The couple has used their experience living with autism to educate people about the developmental delay.

"I was diagnosed in January 1967 at age five and had a myriad of speech and language delays, fine-motor problems, lack of eye contact and several other signs of classic autism," says Mr Barron.

He says it took him the longest to work through learning social skills and it wasn't until well into his adult years that he learned to make friends and get a grasp on proper social etiquette.

Today, however he says he is healed from autism but does not see it as being cured.

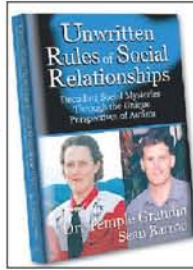
"I feel that autism no longer impairs my ability to function and live a neurotypical life," he explains. "Healing suggests a gradual, holistic process, which is quite accurate in terms of my battles with autism and my family's attempt to reach me. Cured, on the other hand, seems to imply a quick fix or panacea of sorts, which is not what happened to me."

Living with autism has also not held the Ohio-based Youngstown Vindicator news reporter back as he has written several books, including one with well-known high-functioning autistic Temple Grandin.

The book identifies social norms that are often common sense to typically developing people but may not be so for those on the autism spectrum, Mr Barron says.

"Unwritten Rules of Social Relationships is essentially a blueprint for giving those on the autism spectrum added tools for greater social skills success."

"We use research and personal examples to illustrate not only the idea behind the rules, but



**Unwritten Rules of Social Relationships by Dr Temple Grandin and Sean Barron.**

why they're so important for getting along in the world with others.

Mr Barron will be the key speaker at Tomorrow's Voices fundraising dinner event on May 12. Executive director Dr Kim Mills became good friends with Mr Barron after meeting him at an autism conference.

"I was so impressed and inspired by his story and I wanted to get to know him better," Dr Mills says. "I am thrilled that Tomorrow's Voices was able to bring Sean and his girlfriend Barbara here for this speaking event. It will be an inspiring evening for all Bermudians and in particular Bermudians who have friends and families with autism or other disabilities as Sean's and Barbara's stories are ones of overcoming challenges and beating the odds."

The couple will also get a chance to visit the Tomorrow's Voices facility and staff. He hopes that his message will bring a living example to those in Bermuda.

"I hope our story and message not only will resonate with our audience, but will help unlock a bit of the mystery of autism for attendees, give them added means to better understand those on the spectrum and further empower those who work with people with autism and Asperger's syndrome."

# Student volunteers make a big difference at Tomorrow's Voices

By Robyn Bardgett

Volunteers from the Island's middle and high schools have had a huge impact on children who attend the Tomorrow's Voices Saturday Social Skills group.

"The group is designed to help youth with autism and other developmental disabilities practice social skills and community exploration in a safe, therapeutic and supervised setting," explains Dr Kim Mills, executive director of Tomorrow's Voices.

Many of the Tomorrow's Voices students don't get a chance to get out on play dates on the weekends like most typically developing children, says Dr Mills, so the programme is a great way for them to interact with both non-typical and typically developing children.

While the programme is staffed by Tomorrow's Voices therapists it is the middle and high school students that make a world of difference to the programme, says Dr Mills.

The students have also reaped the benefits of their volunteer experience.

For year 11 Bermuda High School student Alex King-Ellison she has been able to develop her level of patience through her volunteer work.

"The increased patience is something I will always take with me and just learning to take things slowly and enjoy life," she says.

However for Mount Saint Agnes year 12 student Ashley Martins, she will use her time as a Tomorrow's Voices volunteer to develop her career skills.

"For my future career plans I want to work with kids. I wanted to do it (volunteer) for the experience," she explains. "What I've learned about reinforcement I will be able to use those skills in my future career. It will give me a better understanding for my psychology courses about why kids do the things they do."

But while she is gaining invaluable skills, she adds, "I've learned that no matter what predicament kids are in, they're still the happiest kids I've ever met. The benefit of being able to kind of be a kid again but use different styles of discipline and skill is the best part of vol-

unteering with Tomorrow's Voices."

The programme is also multifaceted and benefits both the children and parents, who are often always on the clock. While parents can join the group and learn appropriate intervention methods for when they are out in the community, it can also be a time for parents to get time away to rest or run errands, says Dr Mills.

And she says the student volunteers are invaluable to making the programme work.

"Having teenage volunteers from middle and high school to work with our kids is really fantastic," she says. "The research indicates that the modeling of appropriate skills by a competent person is very important for skills acquisition in youth with disabilities. Having a peer model is an ideal situation. These young people have given up many a Saturday to come to our centre to help our youth become better. Their passion and dedication for our students is truly to be applauded. We couldn't run the programme without their help."



**Taking time out:** Saturday Social Skills group volunteers from left: Alex King-Ellison, Paul Swan, Ashley Martins and Vivianette Vazquez-Nerys.

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