

Volunteering To Enable Others To Shine

A productive citizen is one not afraid of volunteering their services for the greater good of the nation. A person who goes all out for others and their country selflessly and sincerely. When the National Competitiveness and Productivity Council hear about individuals giving of their time and effort freely to back a productive cause, we feel obligated to highlight their efforts. Shelly-Ann Noon is one person we felt had to be recognised due to her efforts in helping to bring about the attainment of 42 educational scholarships for 42 young St. Lucians in London England. Here she captures her experience in her own words.

‘As I continue to receive updates and photographs from the 42 students who are actively pursuing their dreams in the UK, I marvel at the difference that three months have made in their lives.

I remember with all clarity March 31st, when we sent out our first press release. We were thrilled at sharing this amazing opportunity but also anxious about the time line within which we would have to work. BPP University in the UK had extended 50 Full Tuition Scholarships to St. Lucian nationals in the disciplines of Business and Law. These scholarships were for their May 2015 intake. We had 6 weeks.

After 48 hours we had received over 50 emails; before the end of the week we had crossed the hundred mark. Students were requesting additional information, some seeking support and guidance through the application process. We were truly grateful when the university offered to send a representative down to St. Lucia to expedite the sign-up process. Mr Jose Castro, the director of Admissions, flew down a week later and spent three days at the SALCC interviewing and signing up students.

We now had less than a month for those who qualified to resign from their jobs, move out of their rented apartments, and tie up all loose ends, even before they had been issued their Tier 4 student visas which came with rich criteria. This proved to be our greatest challenge yet.

A plethora of emails danced between RISE, BCCC, BPP and the St. Lucian Government. Pre-existing bonds had to be deferred, financial institutions had to be endorsed by the Ministry in order to be accepted by UKVI, employers extended reduced mandatory notice to their employees, banks worked tirelessly with the limited resources of the students and the students themselves continued to support and encourage each other. It was no easy feat.

Faith, endurance, perseverance and eventually gratitude, become the pillars of their character as their learned to brush off one rejection after another and continue pushing onward. There was an abundance of paperwork, footwork and prayer.

Now, every day I receive messages from one or two of those remarkable young people, with updates on the progress that they continue to make in their new lives; and every so often there is an image attached of their faces bright with promise. I especially love noting the incredible backdrops- amazing views of London, a true sign that they have accessed a whole new world.

It would be remiss of me to not mention and extend heart felt gratitude to those who held the torches along the dark and challenging trails: Juliette Wagner James of BPP University who created and extended this opportunity, Jose Castro and his assistant Rebecca Charlton who worked 7 day weeks and 14 hour days so that the students would meet deadlines, the Ministry of Education and Government of St. Lucia who opened closed doors, the financial institutions (especially FICS) who worked with the

students and found light, however little, and made it enough to convert opportunity into reality. Hibiscus Travel and Virgin Atlantic Airlines for extending group rates for travel, Bay Gardens Hotel and the staff of SALCC who offered spaces for us to meet as often as was necessary, the staff of FEDEX and their Customs officers on duty when those returning travel documents were needed in short time. The members of the British Caribbean Chamber of Commerce who remained throughout a phone call away, always willing to assist. The members of RISE (St. Lucia) Inc. who never missed a meeting, a call or group chat detail, and the staff of the British High Commission with special thanks to Mrs. Debbie Worrel here in St. Lucia and Dr. Ernest Hilaire in the UK, who made the impossible possible and today continue to offer a support system to the students. Finally, those individuals who went into their personal wallets when all resources had been exhausted before all needs could be met - Mr. Mandish Singh, Mr. Matthew Beaubrun, Mr. Boo Hinkson, Mr. George Alcindor, Mr. Leevie Herelle and Dr. Jacqui Bird.

Coming through to the other end of this initiative, it is evident to me that our young St. Lucians really do have a thrust for knowledge. It was heart breaking to see those who, through no fault of their own and certainly no lack of effort, were unable to avail themselves of what was sure to be a legacy altering opportunity.

It is my prayer that those 42 students who triumphed will continue to embrace the light, make rainbows of the UK rains and illuminate the path for those hopefully only temporarily left behind'.