

## Teen Mothers Empowered at ScotiaFoundations GEMS Conference



### **Caption 1**

*Yasheka Brooks (right) and Oshin Gayle (2<sup>nd</sup> right) are encouraged by Dr. Janice Lindsay (2<sup>nd</sup> left), Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Culture, Gender, Entertainment and Sports. Both girls had shared their journeys as teenage mothers at the ScotiaFoundation's recently held Girls Empowered for Motherhood and Success (GEMS) Conference. Sharing the moment are Dr. Zoe Simpson (left) of the Women's Centre Foundation.*

### **Caption 2**

*Entertainer Alaine (right) takes a moment to pose with award recipients Oshin Gayle (left) and Yasheka Brooks (2<sup>nd</sup> right) after her performance at the Scotia Foundation's Girls Empowered for Motherhood and Success (GEMS) Conference on October 6, 2017 at the Jamaica Conference Centre. Oshin and Yasheka both shared their experiences as teenaged mothers at the event. Also in the photograph is Scotiabank Vice President Marketing, Yanique Forbes Patrick (2<sup>nd</sup> left).*

**[October, 2017]** From as far as Westmoreland girls gathered to be part of the Scotia Foundation Girls Empowered for Motherhood and Success (GEMS) conference held on October 6 at the Jamaica Conference Centre. It was a heart rending yet inspirational affair that included testimonials shared by two teenaged mothers and a young father.

Since 2015, ScotiaFoundation, in collaboration with the Women's Centre of Jamaica Foundation, and Junior Achievement Jamaica have partnered to take action to change the perspectives of young girls, whose lives have been interrupted by adolescent pregnancy, by inspiring them to remain strong and positive about who they are.

Executive Director of the ScotiaFoundation, Joylene Griffiths, welcomed the attendees and encouraged the young mothers to set goals in their lives, and to never give up on themselves. "You are not less than anyone else. Things happen, life happens and a big part of life is how you get up, and that's what we want you to understand today" she said. For the girls who were not mothers she petitioned "we want you to listen to the challenges that you face when you become a teenage mother. And we want you to consider that before you step into parenthood".

The day was divided into segments that included inspirational testimonials from young women who shared their own stories of overcoming as they continue to pursue their dreams despite varied financial and emotional challenges. There were also breakout sessions on confidence building, soft skills and other abilities necessary for career development. Both Yasheka Brooks and Oshin Gayle brought persons to tears as they shared the testimonies of their own journey through teenage pregnancy. Stories of disconnection from family support especially financially; alienation within communities; and constant struggles to move beyond their present circumstances by completing high school, and continuing their education.

An emotional Dr. Janice Lindsay, Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Culture, Gender, Entertainment and Sports, brought greetings on behalf of Minister Babsy Grange. She encouraged the ladies to take the lessons shared and think about the day's offerings as an investment into building their own personal brand. "The worst part of your life is sometimes when the best is born" she said as she implored them to focus on self-development. But it was guest performer Alaine who topped off the day for the students, singing a variety of her popular songs while intermittently encouraging them to keep rising and to speak encouraging truths over their lives like - I believe in me, I'm strong, I'm capable, I am a champion.

Girls with their babies in tow, or on the way, were accompanied by members of the Women's Centre of Jamaica Foundation and joined by other teenagers from Holy Trinity High School, the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) and Homestead Place of Safety. In an open forum they shared with each other, with some of the mothers expressing 'How could I give up when I had someone calling me mommy' and 'I'm not proud to be a teen mother, but proud to be a mother' or 'this has motivated me to know that this is not the end'.

As part of the Scotia Foundation's charge to never give up, presentations were made to the two young women who shared their testimonies. Both received trophies and a contribution towards their continued educational development.