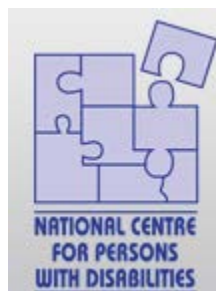FEATURE ADDRESS BY

MS SEEMA PERSAUD,

OPERATIONS MANAGER

NATIONAL CENTRE FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

AT THE

CHILD WELFARE LEAGUE OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

97TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

THEME: CARING FOR CHILDREN IN OUR WORLD OF TECHNOLOGY

CHILD WELFARE LEAGUE HEAD OFFICE

STEPHENS CLINIC BUILDING

BELMONT CIRCULAR ROAD, PORT OF SPAIN

SATURDAY 17TH SEPTEMBER, 2016

Salutations

Dr. Jean Ramjohn Richards, Patron of the Child Welfare League of Trinidad and Tobago

Mr. Clyde Joseph, President of the Board and Members of the Board

Ms. Bernadette McKie, Executive Director and Staff

Specially invited guests

Members of the Child Welfare League of Trinidad and Tobago

Members of the media

Good afternoon

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Child Welfare League of Trinidad and Tobago on this its 97th Anniversary of existence. We at NCPD, being a fellow NGO, understand and have ourselves gone through many of the challenges faced in this sector. Tell me if this sounds familiar: lack of resources, lack of funding, increased demand for services, and the list can go on and on yes?

And in spite of these challenges you have persevered. You have overcome. You have expanded your services and now operate day care centres, ECCEs and the very impactful and successful Adolescent Mothers Programme at multiple locations. You have remained determined and steadfast to your mission of ensuring that children's rights are protected. This, I think, deserves a round of applause.

The theme I was asked to speak on today is *"Caring for Children in our World of Technology"*. This is certainly a very timely topic for discussion. The generation of today is living in a very different world from when I was a child. When I was a child: computers, laptops and the internet were not very common. The fax machine was still king and mobile phones were as big and heavy as a brick and could only make and receive calls. Tablet devices and smartphones were still very much a dream.

But while the **technology** may have experienced fundamental and radical changes over the past two-three decades, I think we may agree that the fundamentals of **caring for children** have remained primarily the same. I say this because when I think about caring for children in Trinidad and Tobago, and anywhere really, I feel this means ensuring that children feel valued, loved, appreciated, encouraged, nurtured and **protected**. Children, especially vulnerable children, including children with disabilities, children from broken homes, children from low socio-economic backgrounds, children with different gender identities or sexual orientations **must** be cared for, and their rights protected.

The resources that exist in today's *World of Technology* can be helpful to a child's development. We are all aware of the many educational programmes and assistive technologies that exist. However, the technology also brings with it significant risks. These risks include:

1. Online predators - According to an *Edudemic* article, '*Children who use technology may unwittingly share information that can put them in danger. In 82% of online sex crimes against children, the sex offenders used social networking sites to get information about the victim's preferences.'*

2. Health risks - Health concerns linked to the overuse of technology include increased risk of obesity and could have harmful impacts on their eyes, backs, and wrists.

3. Cyber bullying – '*The anonymity of technology can also make it easier for people to bully others online. A <u>quarter</u> of teenagers say they have been bullied either by text or on the Internet. Sexting is another high-risk behavior of concern, with <u>24%</u> of teenagers aged 14 -17 having participated in some sort of nude sexting.*'

4. Reduced social skills – '*Excessive computer use may affect children's social development. By the age of about seven years, a child's interactions with family, peers, school, community networks, and media all play an important role in the development of interpersonal skills and social competence. Computers are now part of that mix, and concerns have been raised that children who form "electronic friendships" instead of human friendships might be hindered in developing interpersonal skills*'

5. Risks to their intellectual, social, and psychological well-being - *children may be exposed to violent, sexual, or commercial content beyond their years, with long-term negative effects.*

Because we are living in a technological world, we cannot simply cut the use of these technologies out. Our work environment relies heavily on technology – computers and tablets, and so it is important that children know how to interact and use the technology. Our Ministry of Education has recognised this which led to the establishment of computer labs in schools, the former laptop programme and the current revamping of the laptop distribution programme.

As adults with the responsibility to care for children, we must therefore understand these risks in order to protect the children from these risks. Some suggested methods to addressing these concerns include (source: Edudemic):

- Monitoring the use of technology - make sure to know how the children are using the technology. Some devices, including television, phones, tablets, and computers have

parental controls. This means you can restrict the viewing of certain materials, e.g. R rated movies, viewing of pornographic materials, or restrict calls or texts during parent-established times etc.

- Teaching responsible usage - talk with children about the long-range consequences of putting inappropriate information into cyberspace and encourage them to discuss tricky situations they may encounter online in order to help them work to a positive resolution.

- Become familiar with technology - Keep up with the online trends, currently there's Vine, Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook and a few more. Stay current so you can recognize and head off any problems early on.

In Jack Schaefer's book *Shane,* Shane the title character says, *'A gun is just a tool. No better or worse than any other tool, a shovel or an axe...A gun is as good or as bad as the man who carries it'.* Allow me to paraphrase it, technology is a tool, the good use or bad use of technology will be due to the person who uses it. This is what we must teach ourselves and our children who are growing up in this world of technology.

As I close, I once again congratulate the Child Welfare League of Trinidad and Tobago on celebrating your 97th Anniversary. This is a monumental achievement! A Forbes article in 2013 stated that average lifespan of companies on the S&P 500 Index is on average **15 years**. These are large multimillion dollar companies, only 15 years. So you are definitely doing something right! I hope you will share your secret to other NGOs so they too can make it on their way to their 100th anniversary.

I thank you.