



'STRETCHED TO LIMIT'



From right, Bille June Langdon, PRO of Eden Lodge Youth Charitable Trust; (red shirt) Lauriel Small, Personal Banking Officer Scotiabank; Keisha Springer, Digital Marketing Executive Digicel Barbados; Marcus Myers, Marketing Manager, City of Bridgetown Cooperative Credit Union; Dwayne Grazette, President and CEO Edge Lodge Youth Charitable Trust; Pippa Challis, Trustee Sandy Lane Charitable Trust; Eddy Abed, Managing Director Abeds and students.

CORPORATE BARBADOS URGED TO STEP UP BACK- TO-SCHOOL SUPPORT

By Lourianne Graham

As the new school year approaches a business leader has made a public appeal to corporate Barbados to increase support for back-to-school initiatives, saying a growing demand for assistance from families in need has stretched his firm to the limit.

"Corporate Barbados can do more," said Eddie Abed, the managing director of fabric and clothing store Abeds.

"Corporate Barbados has a responsibility, apart from paying taxes, to assist those in this country who absolutely need help," he declared.

Abed highlighted that the need for help has not only persisted but has surged since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Regrettably, the level of need, especially in back-to-school, has not diminished since COVID," he said. "It keeps increasing, and we find ourselves every year having to increase our budget to try to accommodate the number of people asking for our help."

This year, Abeds has donated to more than 1 100 families, a marked increase from the 800 donations made in 2022. The store owner said his company's resources were being stretched to the limit.

"If I tell you, we still have more people asking, but we just can't physically do any more this year," he said, noting that the growing demand has been overwhelming.

Abed called on other businesses to contribute to community-led efforts aimed at assisting children as they return to school. He specifically urged companies to partner with reputable organisations such as the Eden Lodge Youth Charitable Trust, the Salvation Army, and the Prison Fellowship to ensure their contributions reach those most in need.

"I ask, I implore them, for whatever little they can help with, to reach out to these organisations so that children can go to school looking like their peers and not be in a position where they feel lesser," he said.

Abed also praised the Eden Lodge Youth Charitable Trust for its organised approach to distributing donations, ensuring the aid goes directly to the intended beneficiaries.

"We particularly like working with the people at Eden Lodge because they're very organised. They identify those who are most in need, so we know that the donation is going to the right place," he said, adding: "More importantly, they insist that the individuals make sure that uniforms go to the children and not towards home furnishings or something else."

During a presentation ceremony of school supplies to

nearly 500 students, Dwayne Grazette, the president of the Eden Lodge Youth Charitable Trust, echoed Abed's concerns, revealing that the need for support continues to rise.

"We started off with about 420 children, but now we are at 494," Grazette said, noting that more families are seeking help.

The Trust has set a \$400 000 budget for this year's back-to-school programme, with two-thirds of the funds already raised through the generosity of donors.

"I don't want to single out any donor because many do it for the purpose and the cause, not for the dollar value," Grazette remarked.

In addition to providing school supplies, the Trust also supports secondary school students with lunches, recognising the importance of proper nutrition for effective learning.

"We provide the lunches to them, and we also run a Christmas programme and provide vouchers for food and other essentials," Grazette explained. The Trust also assists families with utilities, helping them ensure that school uniforms are properly washed and pressed.

The presentation ceremony featured participation from several key sponsors, including Scotiabank, the Sandy Lane Charitable Trust, Cloisters Bookstore, Woolworth, Abeds, Digicel, the City of Bridgetown Credit Union, and Carib LPG Trading Ltd. These partnerships have been instrumental in helping the trust meet the rising demand for back-to-school assistance, according to Grazette.

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