

FOCUS 2020



A Tribute to the wonderful women who rise to the challenges bringing up a nation.

Women Empowerment



Who are we?

We, BEYOND IYANOLA, are a group of enthusiastic citizens of the world, based mainly in overseas territories, creating a movement for development by harnessing the collective might of our people and well-wishers. With a focus on the island of Saint Lucia, we recognise that true progress can only come from a process of reflection, infused with a healthy dose of realism and integrity running throughout. In-keeping with the

theme of reflective learning and both International Women’s Day and Mothering Sunday being observed in March, we thought it fitting to explore the idea of ‘Women and Empowerment’ with a few of our friends. As you read the contributions outlined throughout this write up, I am sure you will agree that though womanhood may seem synonymous with motherhood, women are so much more and we salute them all.

We Hope You Remember

You are not alone.

*We hope we
remember the type of
people we are; kind,
strong and reliable.*

*Don’t let the distance
tear us apart.*

*Through all the
phones and screens;*

UNPRECEDENTED TIMES #STAY AT HOME

When we released our first publication back in February, the world was a very different place. Yes there were slight rumblings of ill-health from far reaches of the globe but our respective communities felt far removed from it all. Now, we are all wedded to our homes with major restrictions having to be placed on our liberty in a bid to save our lives. Though this is an understandably challenging situation, we must all play our part to beat this pandemic, wherever we are.

Modern day life has thrown key developments our way which, if used appropriately, can help us through this all. With the advent of the world wide web one can use their internet connection to tap into organisations and media sites in order to keep abreast of how this situation is shaping up and to keep in touch with family and friends. There is a lot of misinformation being spread as well, so please use only official sources for information whether overseas or in Saint Lucia for example - <http://www.govt.lc>. Apart from the governmental links, there are several news houses, television and radio stations with online connections which can be relied upon for official information.

FACT—Life as we know it has changed immeasurably.

FACT—We don’t have to change the core of who we are in order to survive this new world.

As a community we can all do our part to keep our spirits up. Connect with us via beyondiyanola@gmail.com, Twitter or Facebook.

SPOTLIGHT 'IN CONVERSATION WITH... MARY.'

In our spotlight today is Mary Phillip, a Saint Lucian mother of 5 living in Bristol in the United Kingdom. Mary has fulfilled a range of roles throughout her careers and we will explore her current role as a nursing practitioner in subsequent issues of **Focus 2020**. With her years of experience and growth-filled journey, Mary's parting view leaves us all with worthwhile reflections on our own journeys. "I am learning how to accept my identity as a woman by exploring these three questions — Who am I? Where do I come from? and Where am I going?", she contends.



"My St Lucian upbringing is the catalyst for my today." *Mary Phillip, Bristol*

Woman, Mother, Aunt, Grandmother, Sister, Friend

Outlining her views on various facets of being a woman, Mary stated "the most important thing that matters to me is for me to justly represent my Creator in a world where there is so much confusion. I am learning how to accept my identity as a woman by exploring these three questions Who am I? Where do I come from and where am I going? I am comforted that I am fearfully and wonderfully made in the image of a perfect God. Therefore, I am learning to embrace my God-given attributes to develop into the being that I am created to be. I would love to think that I have done everything that I possibly could for the children I birthed as well as those who I mothered for short or long periods. Also, to be a true friend and a confidante [to the women in her life]."

With a strong sense of purpose in developing those around her, she aims to always look for opportunities to encourage them in their journey. This includes, being a friend and guide along the way; encouraging them to make good choices. Thus allowing them to grow to be assets as opposed to being a burden to the community, society and the world. From organic juice sampling at a 'Health Hub' event to 'Open Doors' church session, Mary can be found using her knowledge, skills and experiences in a compassionate way to support others. We wish her the very best in her continued efforts to make life that much better for those around her.



'Adopt A Student' meeting.

Left—Mary Philip at an initiative she spearheaded in 2018 after approaching the University of the West of England to support Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) students, who need psychological and moral support.

STRENGTH OF A WOMAN

We are sure you know many wonderful women whose stories are not written on their faces. After reading this story, we are also sure you will agree that Andrina Prospere-Lloyd-Smeath is one of them. Here is her story in her own words.

Before the age of 30, I was told that with polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOs), I may not be able to conceive children. After marriage, I suffered one miscarriage and one ectopic pregnancy. We were living in China at the time and had jokingly said that we would name our children according to Chinese numbers...yi, er, san, si, wu,...etc. So when our first daughter was born we named her Sandrah and our other daughter Serenah, as a way of remembering the first two unborn children. I feel blessed and lucky to have my daughters and to experience this immeasurable love that comes with being a mother. I have the experience of being in both a large and small family. Being raised by two very different but yet extremely similar (when it came to their expectations for me) mums; I feel motivated and inspired to do the same for my daughters.



Andrina Prospere-Lloyd-Smeath

THE FINANCIER

Meet Shazia who works in finance and banking, as passionate about travelling as she is about good food. Of being a woman she says it *'is a blessing and a privilege. As women, we are graced with an innate quiet strength that allows us to unapologetically be ourselves. In doing so, we can wholeheartedly love and support those special people in our lives.'*

Though not a mother herself, Shazia has nieces and nephews, and feels *'it has been amazing watching them grow into amazing individuals, with their distinct personalities. It takes a community to raise a child and our kids, even those that don't belong to us, need us women to help them understand who they are, how they fit into the beautiful tapestry that is our community and in doing so, how they can go on to live their very best lives. I have been shaped by many strong women in my life, first and foremost, my mother, but so many other women (sisters, aunts, cousins, friends). I hope to be able to do the same for all the children in my life.'*

Of being a woman in Saint Lucia she says, *"The vision (I previously expressed) has been defined by my St. Lucian heritage. It defines how I interact with the world as a woman whether I am back home or elsewhere."*



Shazia Toussaint

ALL THAT SPARKLES

We initially met Yana in our first issue of **Focus 2020** where she introduced us to the world of gemology. Based in Northern Ireland but as a Retail Manager for Starboard Cruise Services which is a subsidiary of Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessy Group of Companies, she travels the world working with exclusive brands such as Cartier, Bulgari, Tiffany. In charge of all the shops on board she works with a team of between 12 to 38 team members, at onboard shops selling goods ranging from jewellery, watches and clothing to fragrance, cosmetics, tobacco and souvenirs. Of her passion she says, "It is learning as much as I can and teaching as much as I can about my industry. I know for some people it's a little shallow or fickle, I get it but if you can love what you do and be passionate about it then it's not work, it's really just a pleasure. I am passionate about training and developing my teams ... when I have a new hire who comes on board and I can train and develop them into jewellery specialists, watch specialists or assistant managers ... I love that about my job." To Yana being a woman is synonymous with being strong, strong enough to know her mind and work hard to get whatever it is that she wants. She further explained, "In the society that we live in it's challenging for women but especially for strong ethnic minority women and in my profession to be honest we don't have a lot of retail manager women and we especially don't have a lot of retail manager women who are black Caribbean."



Yana Croft-Dominguez

"... see what you want, work hard for it and get it ..." Yana Croft-Dominguez, Northern Ireland

As a strong, determined woman with such a focused attitude towards her chosen profession, how then does she balance her professional life and having a family? Yana described a journey of growth, learning and self exploration where she collaborated with her ex-husband to ensure their children were well cared for whilst she forged a path into her chosen career. Not only does she find time during her sea voyages to keep in touch with her family, but also helps with tasks such as homework. Yana described being a mother as "a mix of so many beautiful things and it's especially difficult [being] away" from her children. "We do what we have to do in order for us to survive... for our kids,". Developing a co-parenting relationship with her children's father; finding a way to mesh ideas of how their children should grow and learn, has strengthened her family unit.

Reflecting on the development of women Yana says, "I am so proud to see so many of our colleagues or women in these positions; the teachers, the lawyers, the doctors, the CEOs, the business owners, the entrepreneurs. I am just super proud to see our people moving in this direction where anything is possible. They've come a long way and I'm super proud to see that."

CHILDREN—TO HAVE OR NOT TO HAVE?



Sherween's favourite picture of her family.

"I would not change my journey of motherhood for the world!" Sherween Gonzales, London

Becoming a mother isn't always a choice for some women and Sherween Gonzales gives her views on this most sensitive of topics.

"So I sometimes describe myself as the "reluctant mother" not because I don't want to be a mother because I absolutely love being a mother and I adore my children! It's just for the fact that I became a mother so young and I didn't know the world yet, I didn't know what I wanted to do, what I wanted to become in this world and so all I ever was, was a mother from a very young age. Now watching my children who are almost all grown up it's now I realise that being a mother is probably one of the most natural things to me and to any woman and that's my opinion!

"As much as I did not have all the means to provide them with everything I would've loved to give or to have given them, being a mother means that I have three beautiful children who are respectful, kind, generous, happy, loving and that did not come from me sitting and

planning for five years what I'm going to do, what schools are they going to attend, where are we going to live, or thinking I must have the house first. It came from me trusting in myself to know that whatever happened I would always be there to love, care for and protect them. So that's what I mean by saying it was just a natural process and it came from the love for my children! They were loved and loving is something that is so natural to me and I see it in my children everyday. I may not see it in myself but I definitely see it in them! Whilst I was a bit reluctant and God knows now I want to be able to say okay you guys are on your own, you guys are grown, I would not change my journey of motherhood for the world!"

"The most important skill that anyone can have is the ability to dust yourself off and bounce back."

Jacqueline Francis, London

THE HEALTH PRACTITIONER

Meet Jacqueline Francis, a Public Health Practitioner focusing on improving health outcomes for young people relating to sexual health, substance misuse and related emotional health.

Describing herself as a 'Jackie of all trades', Jacqueline's passions range from empowerment and writing to fashion and cooking. And having heard her carry a tune - singing and song writing. Here are her views in her own words on all things female – ***'For me, women epitomize life in its entirety. I strongly believe we as women underestimate our true worth and contribution to society.'*** As a woman, I have the responsibility to empower others especially women and the young people around me to help build resilience, increase self-awareness and esteem. We also need to celebrate our achievements and existence until such time when we are unable to do so.'

She describes her three daughters as her *'most treasured gems'* and agrees that *"there is no amount of advice or textbooks that can prepare you for motherhood. You just have to navigate your way somehow... From a very young age, I challenged societal boundaries and refused to conform to the norms around gender and dress codes etc. I believe the people and circumstances you encounter along life's journey can make or break you but the most important skill that anyone can have is the ability to dust yourself off and bounce back."*



Jacqueline Francis

Marcella Elva-Mortley

41 years old

London



BE ALL THAT YOU CAN

Meet Marcella Elva-Mortley, Part Time Exam Invigilator/Part Time Student/Full Time — mother, wife, sister, cousin, aunt, friend. When reflecting on her life as a woman she recognised that she wasn't just one thing. She has set a wonderful example for her son taking the decision to follow her dream of gaining formal tertiary qualifications by undertaking a BA Health and Social Care, alongside her other responsibilities.

Espousing a passion to work with children and youth with disabilities, Marcella wishes to focus on supporting the education of those with hearing impairments.

To her, "being a sister and friend means *giving and showing support. As a mother, it is instilling good morals and ethics in my son while he is still young and 'moldable'.* In this country it feels like you are being asked to give up the traditional role of being a mother but it is up to you to realise you

need to strike a balance. In St. Lucia, society constantly reminds you that you have that responsibility as a woman to maintain your dignity and as a mother to ensure that your role is fulfilled."

creative
Empowerment
hard-working
Female Confidante
powerful Nurturing challenge
strength
limitless challenger fulfilled
Confident resilient
non-conformist
fighter

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May your strength as women, continue to endure through the trials of this new world. May you continue to keep the home fires burning whilst being all that you can be.

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