



THE OFFICIAL COMMUNIQUÉ ON THE SAFETY AND EDUCATION OF THE CHILD WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Signed in Lagos, Nigeria at the 2019 School Safety Summit on the 1st of June, 2019

About 400 parents, teachers, school owners, government MDAs, representatives of security agencies and concerned citizens met under the umbrella of the School Safety Summit (SSS) in Lagos on June 1st 2019 convened by Ugochi Obidiegwu, Founder, The Safety Chic. This third edition of SSS was built on the dialogue that begun in 2017 with the flag off edition themed “**Protecting the child in school**” and continued in 2018 on “**Emergency Response Preparedness in Schools**” with present focus on the need to have safety systems put in place which will cater for children with special needs. The Summit unfolds informed knowledge that empowers how to manage children with disabilities, how to help children with disabilities harness their potentials, and putting certain policies in place to ensure that they get more than education.



Kenneth Mims, Merih Woldu, Ugochi Obidiegwu, Monica Nwosu, Olaide Bakare, AVM Femi Gbadebo, Hon.Hakeem Dickson, DG, Lagos State Safety Commission

The Safety School Summit proposed actions under the following four-point panel group discussions on:

1. The Rights of the Child with Special Needs
2. Preventing Abuse in Children with Special Needs
3. How to Teach a Child with Special Needs
4. Health Management of the Child with Special Needs.

1. The Rights of the Special Needs Child

Adelola Edema, SEN Educator and Convener SNC, shed light about the ignorance on the certain right of children with Cerebral Palsy and special needs in general. She said the rights of children with special need is equated with the general rights of every child ranging from right to freedom, expression, dignity, respect, education and plan on how children with special needs should learn. Adelola added that *“There should be alternatives to how children with special needs should be educated as there is a curriculum for each child, which should be planned strategically and properly followed at different stages in order for the child with special needs to become fulfilled”*.

In addition to the legal rights of children with special needs, Ifechukwu Enweani, a Safety Officer, affirmed that *“they are first children and then they are special so all rights is applicable to them with some extras because they are special”*. Ifechukwu said, there are four basic categories to the right of children namely rights to life, to development, to participation and to protection. The right to life covers every area and opens up all other rights. It makes the parents to expect of them what to expect from every other children. The safety of the child is emotional, psychological and physical.

Bukola Ayinde, Founder, P4:13 Foundation, discussed about the way she was able to prevent others from stamping on the rights of a child with needs. She was of the opinion that most people who do not understand what disability is will always insinuate things due to ignorance. While using her child as a case study, Bukola stated that, greater responsibility and percentage of issues with children with disability rest on the parents whereas, denying that they do not exist or hiding them will worsen the situation. According to her, *“my child has cerebral palsy and it affected her limb and breath control. She is very intelligent. CP children have issues with movement but it doesn't mean that all of them have intellectual disability”*. For inclusiveness, Bukola added that it is important for parents to advocate for their children in other to help them defend their rights, the principal and head teacher schools must be in tune with inclusive education, as well as the need to have a caregiver for certain children with disability because of the danger of exposing these children to the wrong people who may want to take advantage of them because of their disability.

ACC Emma, Officer, Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC), gave safety tips for children with special needs. According to her, FRSC teaches on the issue of safety because kids have a right to life and movement. ACC Emma added that the FRSC makes safety classes all inclusive especially with those who aren't blind. *“We go all inclusive and we are practical with them on how to use the road and how to behave on issues that will ensure their safety and the danger of traffic and choice they have to make. We also teach the teachers who will also teach the students safety”*.



Barrister Taiwo discussing the child protection right

Barrister Taiwo Akinlami in discussing the child protection right stated that, having 13.5 million of Nigerian children out of school shows that we have the highest number of out of school children in the world: it begs the question as to the hope of children with special needs. Barr Taiwo proposed three major areas of focus namely, belief, legal framework and system. The belief system needs to change as the problem is not ignorance but misinformation, there is need for the implementation of law in its totality especially Section 16, Subsection 2, filled with quantum facilities that validates the provision on the Child Right Acts Policy, the educational system of putting all the children with special needs in a classroom with a teacher without prior expertise or knowledge in teaching them should be discouraged.

Recommendations such as training of teachers with the awareness of children with special needs, creating of a modified system into a policy, policy that ensures the training and retraining of teachers on special needs, importance of parents to ask questions on the child protection act in school, proprietress or owners of schools buying into inclusion of children with special needs among others were made.

2. Preventing Abuse in Children with Special Needs

In defining safety and child protection in respect to children with special needs compared with their counterparts, Dr Princess Olufemi Kayode opined that *“everything is a work in*

progress”. While she canvassed for schools to put safety plans that particularly address the abuse of the child, Dr Princess stated that there is a need to plan and teach them in ways that they can understand privately, especially for children who cannot express themselves, thereby making it difficult especially if they are confronted with scenarios of sexual abuse. She proposed that there is need to develop societal incorporated tools that will help teach children with special needs privately, the need to teach and introduce safety education early enough which will help these children overcome emotional, physical and sexual abuse or neglect.

Mrs Abolaji Gbadamosi on her part discussed about the complaint measures for children with special needs when they are being abused. According to her, some of these children with special needs, disability or developmental problem want love, they want attention, and they want to do what the normal child wants to do. However, people have the notion or belief that children living with disability have nothing to offer. It is important to spell out that children with disability want love; they want to feel among their mates because they have similar organs like them. *“They are very vulnerable to sexual abuse”*. Mrs Gbadamosi added that there is need to treat children with special needs according to their situations as children with disability varies, thus, one pattern or strategy cannot work for all of them. She recommends the creation of initiatives for children with special needs in a way of specialized body safety education training for them. Other measures includes showing these children pictures that will aid their learning, parents and teachers should seek for help, and a tailored made intervention approach should be advocated for parents, while schools should not just take children for therapy as and off approach and ends.



From left-right Obianuju Nwadiolor, Dr Princess Kay, Abolaji Gbadamosi, Lola Aneke, Joseph Ibeh and Omotoke Olowo

Furthermore using the tenets of the behaviorist learning theory, Mrs Lola Aneke, Educator, spoke about special ways to teach children with special needs. She said, *“We should have individually built curriculum to soothe a child with disability or special need as there are different kinds of special needs and the category of teaching we use in communicating with them matters a lot”*. She expressed that when teaching a child; the peculiarity of the child should

determine whether to teach the child on behavioral therapy or educational therapy or physical therapy, occupational therapy, affection, etc. Mrs Aneke added that for the child with special needs to be independent, the child should be made to undergo some educational plans using scaffolding or shadow building. She counseled on the use of social stories to help the child corrects certain behavioral anomalies that is being displayed by the child in public. The use of pictures to teach the child, teaching the child with role play which actually helps the parents or teacher to show the children what to do, showing the children what to do using both the positive and negative consequence to make them learn, and the aid of Apps that can be used to help the child learn faster.

Joseph Ibeh, Senior Editor for Space in Africa talked about the use of sign language to teach safety. He lamented on how the schools for the deaf in Nigeria are not managed by professionals and the sign language is not documented and therefore advocated for the need to bridge the communication gap. He pointed out factors such as the unwillingness in teachers to be trained in acquiring more knowledge in sign language, inadequate security of students which is leading to their vulnerability, the use of exact English language in sign language by teachers, lack of enough volunteers to bridge the gap between the teachers and students, among other broad challenges that remain unaddressed. In his closing remarks, Joseph stated that *“our project is focused on the linguistic aspect of community and we have incorporated advocacy and early intervention programs. We tried to involve the government through the help of our partners but they are nonchalant about it, therefore, we have moved our focus to engaging the parents”*. According to him, the issue of security within the deaf must start with communication because we all have a role to play in the deaf community.

Obianuju Nwadiolor who discussed about safety measures for children with special needs categorized it into the role of parents and schools. She said that parents need to accept and research on the particular special need of their child, carry out proper assessment of the school before sending them to school and accessing the facilities they take their children to in order not to endanger the lives of children with special needs. For the schools, Obianuju advised that schools should incorporate a safety management system for children with special needs. Carrying out risk assessment routinely, provision of evacuation system procedures in cases where there are challenges which can endanger the lives of children, and network with fire services by telling them the peculiar challenges they have as regards special needs.

3. How to Teach a Child with Special Needs

Basirat Razaq-Shuaib started by discussing about how teachers can improve on the curriculum in other to carry children with special needs along by dwelling on the need for teachers to understand the situation they find themselves as regards the needs of the students. She added that *“it is important for teachers to understand the learning barriers of a child as the teachers are*

the eyes and ears of children with special needs". Furthermore, pointing the need for every child to attend a mainstream school, while not every child with special needs should attend a special needs school, Basirat advised on the need to first consider the degree of severity of the child's special needs. She added that *"Some of the children with special needs can do well in mainstream school while others may not."* Adding to this, Basirat recommended that there is need to create a curriculum that is adaptable and can be modified to cater for the need of the students in the class, thus, making it inclusive, thereby creating an IEP for each child depending on their peculiarities. She said *"For the mainstream school, the difficulty of the child should be made known to the teacher so that the teacher can incorporate in his own plan and come up with additional requirement for the child."*

In the same vein, Kenneth Mims discussed about some of the best tips that could help teachers to teach children with autism to foster an adaptive curriculum. He said *"this is a challenging topic from the educational point and from whatever perspective we are looking at the child with special needs either from the medical, clinical or educational point, there's a need for us to educate the child differently."* He added there is need to understand the gifts of these children in order to respect the children by finding out their interests which is the easiest way to develop a relationship with them and create a safe environment for them. Similarly, teachers need to set their expectations high in order to give them a chance for them to develop quickly and progress faster. Kenneth while affirming the aim of helping each child reach true potential advised that there is need for caregivers and teachers to focus on developing the trust and empathy of the parents in their model work, create tool that will help in documenting the growth of a child with special need, and also ensure that the child is growing emotionally and academically.



From left to right: Ugochi Obidiegwu, Merih Woldu, Basirat Razaq-Shuaib, Kenneth Mims

Merih Woldu discussed about the role of nutrition in improving the level of the performance of children with special needs where she advised that parents and caregivers should avoid certain

foods due to digestive issues peculiar to some of the children with special needs. She said *“when talking about children who are autistic, we should focus on what they are eating in order to protect their heart, consider their brain and identify what improves the child’s health and what does not.”* Merih added that research has revealed that avoiding gluten and milk will make it easier for these children to avoid certain complications associated with digestive systems. She recommended that parents should continue in their responsibility of showing love to their kids, while, every child has different diet needs which should be improved upon with vegetable and other necessary classes of food, not just for children with special needs alone, but for everyone.

4. Health Management of the Child with Special Needs.

In discussing about the major medical concerns noticed in terms of children with special needs, Dr Debo Odulana called for the necessity to understand the need and cope with the need. He said, *“Most parents of children with special needs have these inadequacies of services to help them make the diagnosis of what the problem is. So shortage significantly affects and you have parents tell you how they deal with multiple cases and how they’ve not been able to get solutions”*. Dr Odulana mentioned that a certain amount of energy is needed to cope with these needs and there are not enough structures. He also advised for the need to beef up on how to combat challenges relating to access and the coping mechanisms which are really difficult to come by.



From left-right Toyin Onigbanjo, Ugochi Obidiegwu, Dare Akinfosile, Blessing Ogu, Dr Debo Odulana

Furthermore, Dr Odulana discussed about how to handle seizures in children with special needs. He said supervision is very important. *“Basically when a child is having a seizure all you need to do is to pad the area to avoid injury, do not force spoon into the person’s mouth. Monitor the seizure and give them oral care that is required. It is important that parents identify some of these conditions and have basic first aid knowledge”*. Children can also experience compromised breathing when having a seizure due to rupture or secretion of saliva in the mouth. He encouraged schools to organize training and include parents. Dr Gbenga recommended that

students and teachers should learn first aid tips such as conducting CPR in case of respiratory issues which are common with children with special needs.

Recommendations/Proposed actions:

The following recommendations were arrived at from the Safety School Summit:

1. There is a need to adopt the recommendation of UNESCO on education which states that the budget for education in developing nations should be earmarked at 15-20% unlike the 2019 budget allocation for education in Nigeria which is 7%. With this, it will be easier to properly include special needs children and cater for them.
2. The public should be properly enlightened and orientated to see special needs children as part of us and not children that should be excluded because of the belief system of our society which has a negative mindset towards these children.
3. The government has a responsibility to ensure the safety and security of the blind and deaf community as well as other communities where these special needs children can be found by properly beefing up security and adequate sanctions implementation to caution those who have the intention of exploiting the vulnerability of these children.
4. There should be advocacy at different levels, which should include all the stakeholders to ensure that special needs children get counseling, are celebrated, are employed and trained on capacity building and also ensure that their rights are defended.
5. The teachers and schools should be properly trained in order to prepare an all inclusive learning environment for these children. The teachers should be trained on how to incorporate these plans into their activities in order to help the child achieve their goals.
6. The school curriculum should be strategically planned and properly followed to be adaptive and properly integrated to cater for each individual special need child based on the difficulty that they have and also depending on the problem they want to solve. There should be differentiated learning according to each learner because children with special needs don't all have the same requirement for learning.
7. Creation of a legal framework that will look at the proper implementation of the law in totality. Section 16: subsection 2 of the Child Right Act Policy should be improved upon in order to make it easier for special needs children to be catered for. We should create a system that must be modified into a policy which will ensure the training and retraining of teachers.
8. Bridging the communication gap that affects the deaf community and ensure that available resources and tools made available to ensure that a uniform mode of communication in the deaf community in Nigeria is made possible
9. Schools should incorporate a safety management system for children with special needs according to the peculiarity of their challenges.

Other recommendations excerpted from the key note speaker, Mrs Monica Nwosu includes;

10. The need for sufficient curriculum change that will include children with special needs.
11. The need to plan and carry out risk assessment on schools' facilities.
12. The need for public enlightenment through collaborating with the media in order for them to circulate this information on children with special needs.
13. Provision of well communicated and inclusive policy on how different emergencies should be managed.
14. Every school educator and administrator needs to employ a competent health and safety personnel. Without all this in place, it will be difficult to practice proper inclusion.
15. Nigeria must adopt current trend and practices by adopting the use of technology. Schools must have incident management reporting log. We should be able to understand the incidents that happen within the school premises and environment.
16. The need to collate data for detailed information.
17. The need for the public to volunteer with time and financial resources to groups that can champion the cause in favour of these children.