

**PRESS RELEASE**

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**Contact (name):** Tammy Ebanks, Deputy Chief Officer (Administration, Agriculture and Lands)

**Contact email:** [tammy.ebanks@gov.ky](mailto:tammy.ebanks@gov.ky)

**Ministry and Department of Education’s Tribute to Joanna Clarke**

“The contribution that Ms. Joanna Clarke made to education in the Cayman Islands is immeasurable, her impact on the lives of thousands of students indelible. As an educator, a colleague, a citizen, a friend, she set a standard to which we all should aspire. We are all better for having known her and worked with her. She will be sorely missed.” – Hon. Minister for Education, Juliana O’Connor-Connolly.

Ms. Joanna Faith Clarke obediently accepted her call to Education in the Cayman Islands when she responded in 1964 to a two-year secondment from the Ministry of Education in Jamaica. On arriving in the Cayman Islands, she was welcomed by the late Mr. Clifton Hunter and Mr. Vernon Jackson. This began a 50-year relationship with the Cayman Islands which became her second home.

Her first appointment was at the George Town Primary School where she worked for three years in the Infant Department under the leadership of Mrs. Aileen Mc Field. In 1967 she was promoted to the post of Principal of Savannah Primary where she served for sixteen years. In 1983 she was again promoted to the post of Language Arts Curriculum Officer for Primary and Middle schools and was assigned to The Department of Education Services.

Ms. Clarke loved all her students; she had a voracious passion for teaching and learning and did whatever it took to ensure that her students were successful. Many of us would have heard numerous stories of students who were impacted by her passion for education. According to Dr. Martin Luther King, “Intelligence plus character is the goal of true education.” Ms. Clarke lived by this tenet and under her leadership, character building played an instrumental role in education. She engrained in all her students the highest ethical and moral principles which would take them through the journey of life. A vast number of the island’s notable professionals, too numerous to mention, have benefitted from the experience and expertise of this esteemed educator. As a testament to her inspiration, distinguished service and commitment to education in the islands, two of her past students have initiated scholarships and awards in her memory – the Joanna Clarke Awards Foundation which was introduced in 2007 and the Award for the Top Student in Language Arts at Savannah Primary.

Ms. Clarke was described as a very supportive and encouraging administrator who was diligent in ensuring that all young Caymanians who entered the teaching profession under her supervision were successful as future educators of the Cayman Islands. Ms. Clarke was well loved and valued by all parents particularly those of Savannah Primary where she spent an extensive period of time.

During her tenure at the Department of Education Services, she was considered a vanguard in Education as she vigorously reshaped the future of Language Arts teaching at all Primary schools. She introduced a new Language Arts Curriculum that was supported by the Simon and Schuster Reading scheme. The four strands of Language Arts were always dominant and included the importance of proper penmanship, fluent speaking with ardent listening, comprehensive creative writing and the importance of fluent reading. In those days there was no spell check, so spelling played a critical role in any student’s life and Ms. Clarke never forgot to remind her students about the importance of spelling in developing their future careers.

She also assisted her colleagues with testing and assessment as accountability for student performance was of utmost importance. As Education Officers, they were responsible for introducing the annual California Achievement Test (CAT) as well as the National achievement test (NAT) that was done annually. Colleagues recalled her hosting them for dinner at her home after a gruelling weak of testing. She clearly exemplified the spirit of an avid team player who included all friends and family in any education initiative whether it was her studies or a project that promoted and profiled the teaching of Language Arts.

Joanna Clarke’s outstanding contributions to education in the Cayman Islands included the introduction of Reading Week and the Annual Book Fair, the Annual Standardised Reading test and the introduction of Adult Education classes at the Department of Education Services. This initiative was later extended to various companies such as CUC and Cable and Wireless who responded positively and started their individual Adult Education classes to improve literacy in the workplace.

Ms. Clarke was a life-long learner who kept abreast of any developments in Language Arts and attended a myriad of annual International Reading Association (IRA) conferences to ensure that the Cayman Islands was always aware of any changes in this discipline. On her return, she held many professional development sessions to upskill teachers and give them new tools. Ms. Clarke also initiated the Cayman Islands Reading Association which was an affiliation of the International Reading Association.

This consummate professional worked diligently and dutifully for the Department of Education, for 30 sterling years under four Chief Education officers before retiring in 1994. She however continued to share her passion for shaping young minds while she served as Education Programme Coordinator at the Young Parents Programme for another 14 years.

According to Sachs, “To live in hearts we leave behind is not to die”. The Ministry of Education and the Department of Education Services celebrate the life of this exemplary educator. Joanna Faith Clarke has left a legacy for students, parents and teachers in the Cayman Islands to emulate. Her work will live on forever as we salute her for her untiring, committed, and outstanding service of 44 years in education in the Cayman Islands. May her soul rest in peace.

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