



Ministerial Statement
To The House of Assembly

By

The Hon. Michael Dunkley, JP MP
Deputy Premier/Minister of Public Safety

AI's Pals Programme
A Cross-Ministry Initiative between the Ministry for Public
Safety and the Ministry of Education

15th February, 2013

Mr. Speaker, I rise this morning to update this Honourable House on the Cross-Ministry Initiative between the Ministry of Public Safety and the Ministry of Education that supports Bermuda's drug prevention efforts in "Stopping drug use before it starts", as highlighted in the National Drug Control Policy, Master Plan and Action Plan.

Mr. Speaker, Since 2009 the Department for National Drug Control, a department under the Ministry of Public Safety, has worked in collaboration with the Department of Education to

introduce a comprehensive curriculum and teacher training programme that develops social-emotional skills, self-control, problem-solving abilities, and healthy decision-making in children ages 3-8 years old. The *Al's Pals: Kids Making Healthy Choices* programme is recognized as an evidence-based, model, prevention programme. Through fun lessons, engaging puppets, original music, and effective teaching approaches, the *Al's Pals programme* aims to:

- Help young children regulate their own feelings and behavior, allowing educators more time for creative teaching by reducing the need for discipline
- Create and maintain classroom environments of caring, cooperation, respect, and responsibility
- Teach conflict resolution and peaceful problem-solving
- Promote appreciation of differences and positive social relationships
- Prevent and addresses bullying behavior
- Convey clear messages about the harms of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs
- Build children's abilities to make healthy choices and cope with life's difficulties

Mr. Speaker, Phase I of this initiative was conducted in March 2009 when sixty (60) educational professionals, including

pre-school teachers, para-professionals and school administrators in the public school system received training to deliver this tested effective curriculum based programme. Reports from the Early Childhood Education Officer at that time were positive. It was reported that the Al's Pals programme allowed teachers to be creative whilst delivering the individual lessons and is suitable for interacting with all students. It was also stated that the programme allowed the students to participate actively in the activities without difficulty and to receive long lasting and encouraging messages for positive decision making. Some teachers have noted that they have seen definite positive changes in children's behavior when using this programme. To date all pre-schools in the public system are using the programme and are reporting positive responses from our young students.

Mr. Speaker, on Monday morning, February 11, 2013, I had the pleasure of opening the 2nd Phase of the Al's Pals curriculum training programme for P1 and P2 teachers along with a refresher course for those previously trained in 2009. The goal of the Phase II implementation is to ensure the continuity and consolidation of healthy decision making and clear messages that "no use of alcohol, tobacco or other drugs is acceptable", throughout the Primary School levels (Kindergarten, P1 and P2). There were sixty (60) Education professional in the full course and another forty-eight (48) who

participated in the Refresher sessions. The full course included two full days of training focused on the research behind the Al's Pals curriculum followed by interactive, hands on training on how to effectively implement to curriculum to our young people. The refresher course which was for three (3) hour sessions, focused on a review of key elements of the programme; discussions on real classroom successes and challenges and further skills training to address identified challenges. The goal was for all participants/ teachers to leave the training equipped and competent in implementing the curriculum in their classrooms.

Mr. Speaker, The Department for National Drug Control (DNDC) has funded this training programme and provided each education professional with classroom kits that include the Al's Pals puppets, 48 lesson plans, a teaching guide, music dvds etc. with the goal of ensuring that our young students receive critical skills and knowledge to equip them to effectively navigate the numerous challenges that they are presented with in their young lives, especially those related to managing decisions around alcohol and drug use. The accompanying goal was to ensure that teachers can more effectively address classroom concerns such as:

- Managing Anger and aggression
- Managing Defiance and oppositional behavior

- Addressing the lack of social skills and
- Providing Age appropriate alcohol and drug use prevention education

Mr. Speaker, words cannot express the necessity of instilling pro-social values and supporting positive behaviors in young people as early as possible. Early anti-social behaviors are a key risk factor for future problem behaviours in children and the *Al's Pals Programme* is designed for professionals to intervene early when children are first forming attitudes and behaviors. By intervening early we can begin to address the issues plaguing our community involving drugs, crime and gangs.

Thank you Mr. Speaker