

Renewable energy powers Verdun House



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The Substance Abuse Foundation, which operates drug treatment facilities at Verdun House and Marina House in St. John, has embraced renewable energy as it seeks to sustain its operations in the long term.

Chief Executive Officer Marietta Carrington said while the organization receives 60 per cent of its financing from a UK-based benefactor and some \$150,000 is raised each year from a golf tournament, "that main benefactor's health is declining now, so we are working towards becoming more self-sufficient".

So, with a grant from the United Nations Global Environment Facility's Small Grants Programme, the foundation set up a photovoltaic energy plant at Verdun House exactly a year ago. It is used to power a farming project. The foundation plants vegetables and keeps 1,000 chickens, including 400 layers, and 150 sheep, said Carrington. "All the food we produce is organic and free of chemicals, and we use it in our kitchen and bakery to feed our residents and we sell the excess produce to "friends" of Verdun House", she added.

The renewable energy plant has already begun to pay for itself, said Carrington. "We have received substantial cheques from the Barbados Light and Power Company after selling our excess capacity back to the national grid, and ideally we want to install more photovoltaic panels at Verdun House and also at Marina House, where future plans include establishing a farm specializing in root crops like potatoes and cassava."

Verdun House has been in operation for 21 years and currently caters to 30 males, while Marina House, which was established two years ago specifically for women, now has 17 patients.

Contrary to popular belief, drug addiction is not the only addiction problem we deal with here," said Clinical Director Angela Sealy. "We have seen patients with gambling, sex, and other addictions, some of whom check themselves in, sometimes employers or relatives send them for help, other times they come through the courts. They range from as young as 18 years old to people in their 70s and 80s, and Verdun also provides outpatient care.

"The rehab process is harder with women because in many instances they have children, so they worry about their children's welfare if they require long-term treatment for their condition. Not only

that, women tend to hang onto their drug habits longer because they 'hide their stuff' better; that is, find different coping mechanisms to sustain their addictions," she added.

Barbadians "still do not fully understand mental health issues; there is still a fear associated with it, but the important thing is help is available for people with these challenges, and unlike the Psychiatric Hospital, we have no permanent residents here. People only come for a few weeks to at most six months, and we make provision for relapses since mental illness is considered a chronic condition," said Sealy.

(DH)

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