

# Timeline

- **(1997)** Parents of special needs students meet to discuss how to address the educational needs of their children who are either at home or failing in their school programs. A research project is initiated by Dr. Sharon Kossack, professor at FIU, in conjunction with St. Francis de Sales Church, to assess the needs of struggling students in the Abaco area.
- **(1998)** Continued assessment by Dr. Kossack and other professors from FIU to identify children with educational handicaps. Began training sessions to teach local teachers diagnostic skills to assess reading skills and strategies to improve reading. Added one full time special education teacher who visited local schools.
- **(1999-2001)** The need for a full-time program for children with more severe disabilities became apparent. Full-time special education program begins with 1 teacher and 8 students in a renovated trailer at St. Francis de Sales school. Enrollment grows to 2 teachers and 22 students over 3 years and the program moves to a classroom after 2 years.
- **(2002-2004)** ECC moves to present location after Catholic Board of Education agrees to accept us as an alternative school under their umbrella. We are granted the use of the old Catholic school property and agree to raise all funds necessary to renovate, expand and operate the school.
- **(2005)** Gift provides funds for materials to build a second classroom building. Volunteers provided labor, including Youth on a Mission, a youth mission group from Vero Beach, Florida.
- **(2006)** ECC Campus grows to 3 buildings after Sochet Hall is built to house classrooms and administrative offices.
- **(2007)** At no cost, students are tested by our teachers to assess reading levels, provide strategies to improve, and determine who might benefit from ECC.
- **(2008)** Inception of vocational micro businesses and culinary programs; added two part-time job coaches to expand internship program.
- **(2009)** Small workshop built by volunteers and youth groups from the States. 17 students participate in job apprenticeships at local businesses; expansion of micro businesses for students who cannot live and work independently. Inception of discernment meetings for community residence.
- **(2010)** Initiated partnership with Dr. Shameka Johnson, Howard University, as a consultant to our language and Communications program.
- **(2011)** Began full time art program and soap packaging micro business.
- **(2012)** ECC is granted permission from the Catholic Archdiocese of Nassau to open a training and employment center for our older more challenged students who are not ready

to participate in community job placements and who could better thrive in a guided environment.

→ **(2013)** Prime Minister Perry G. Christie was the honored guest in June 2013 at the graduation of our founding students and others at St. Francis de Sales Church. Starfish Enterprises (ECC Training Center) opened its doors in Sept. 2013 with eleven full time trainees. Every Child Counts Documentary by Loten Media of Canada premiered in Nassau.

→ **(2014)** The Every Child Counts Story by Loten Media, premiered at the Fort Lauderdale Film Festival in the fall of 2014 and subsequently shown on TV Ontario in January and at various Abaco locations. Full-time music program initiated with the assistance of professional musicians and singers David LaDuca, William Gallo, and Koops Moss who volunteer their time to ECC. 2014 also saw renovations to our kitchen and the addition of an outside eating area.

→ **(2015)** ECC Teacher, Mrs. Vernelle Carey, was asked to join the National Disabilities Commission which has focused this year on implementing rights for the disabled across the Bahamas. Dr. Shameka Johnson Sanford expanded her communication program to provide weekly teletherapy services to the 12 most in need students at ECC who are evaluated by her graduate students and under her supervision set goals and targeted therapy for each student. The ECC CAET technicians then provide these therapies in the classroom. We were joined by interns from Rollins College, The University of Cologne in Germany and Ryerson University as interns and numerous volunteer groups and individuals including Youth on A Mission who provided the labour once again to reconstruct our playgrounds and outside areas. ECC has been asked by the National Development Committee and the Disability Commission for input as a model of special education in the Bahamas and has suggested consideration of an Alternative National High School Diploma in the future. Our Training Centre has steadily grown as have our school businesses.

→ **(2016)** Laura Franks joins the leadership of ECC. Our music program continues to expand the input of Chris Justilien from University of the Bahamas and Abby Lord, volunteer. Our transitional living program began in earnest with a full-time teacher and funds were donated for the renovation of the upstairs of the convent building to be used as a visitor's residence and respite care facility for the trainees of Starfish Enterprises. Our first group of interns - graduate students in language and communication from Howard University led by Dr. Shameka Johnson Sanford were the first guests in May of 2017. Baker's Bay Invitational Fishing Tournament raises \$176,000 which they designated for the building of the Assisted Living Facility.

→ **(2017)** ECC celebrated its 20th Anniversary. A donation of 55 computers by DLCF were put to use to initiate a computerized Philip Roy Special Education Curriculum in the Intermediary and Secondary Sections. The renovated volunteer and transitional living apt was put into use housing volunteers David LaDuca who assisted the students again with performing arts and producing two benefit concerts, Susan Diemer who will be replacing Laura Franks as Master Teacher, and Dr. Shameka Johnson Sanford and her graduate students from Howard University as well as individual volunteers as needed. Work began on the Transitional Living Assisted Living Residence in March and will hopefully be

completed by October '18. Through a donation from a private donor, our outside assembly area is now covered and our workshop is now air conditioned making it safer and more accessible for the trainees to keep business going in the summer. The TK Foundation has donated a new FUSO bus for the trip for our students to and from Cooperstown.

→ **(2018)** While the year was a productive one at ECC - teachers received ongoing training in Conscious Discipline and Behavior techniques, students benefited from more specialized curriculum, our transitional living facility was completed and our front and back yards were transformed with sod into extended playgrounds with a new basketball court; however, the year ended tragically. On Sept. 1, 2019, Hurricane Dorian devastated our campus just as school was ready to begin with 106 students registered to start the next day. School was closed for the year as ECC tried to regroup and restore.

→ **(2019)** All Schools on Abaco closed due to severe damage from Hurricane Dorian. The year was spent securing financial and physical assistance to rebuild ECC and our island. Some of our staff who evacuated to Nassau, remained working with displaced students All Hands and Hearts and Youth On A Mission stepped forward to lead the construction and work until they were recalled in March due to the Covid crisis. In July 2020, two staff of AHAH returned to Abaco to prepare the way forward for the return of volunteers hopefully in September. YOAM also returned with three volunteers but had to leave early due to increase in Covid cases in the Bahamas and subsequent slow down of visitors entering and leaving the country. The work continues with a local contractors hired by ECC temporarily until the NGO's committed to the reconstruction of ECC are able to return.

→ **(2020) Child Counts remained under construction as a result of Hurricane Dorian.** AHAH and YOAM along with GER3 supported by DCLF were hard at work on our campus and by August of 2021, the campus took shape. By August when AHAH departed, sod had been laid for playgrounds and our beautiful trees were growing. We had hoped to begin school again in a hybrid model in September but an upsurge in Covid resulted in returning to schools virtually. We had a total registration of 88 students and a new smart platform to assist with virtual learning.