

Visually impaired give Superior 'Crafts-manship'

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Gleaner Writer

WITH A new mandate including a workable business and marketing plan, Superior Craft and More Limited is providing employment for visually impaired persons.

With an increasing number of blind, unemployed persons living in Jamaica, there has been some concern for greater support of the group in the local workforce. Superior Craft and More Limited, a non-profit entity, manufactures and repairs caned, wicker and corded furniture as well as accessories. They employ 16 persons, 12 of whom are visually impaired and blind. However, due to varying constraints, which include inadequate production facility and lack of tools that are important in wood and furniture production, the company has not been able to respond positively to all enquiries.

JN LIFELINE

Recently, they were given a lifeline with assistance from the Jamaica National Building Society Foundation, with assistance from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) through the Social Enterprise Boost Initiative (SEBI) and the LIME Foundation. According to Ruth Chisholm, communications specialist at the JN Foundation, the aim of their intervention is to create and improve a stronger and more proactive business model for the company to increase its customer base.

"The aim is to provide more

employment for visually impaired persons," Chisholm said. "We have assisted in terms of personal development, networking and training the individuals who are here with regards to operating a business.

"It is important for us to ensure that the company's clients are buying into the concept so that the team here can sustain themselves after a while. We are also contributing to the social

development for an improved society," Chisholm added.

Through the JN Foundation and its



training consultants Strategic Management and Training Consultants Limited, the LIME Foundation also came on board to help the company. The LIME Foundation recently donated a laptop to Superior Craft that will be used in the administrative operations of the company. According to Courtney Bell, projects manager of

the LIME Foundation, they were happy to give the computer.

"Grant funding is dwindling and if the company has a solid base of operations they will be able to sustain their livelihood," Bell said. "All the profits will be reinvested for the social good of the company." Maxine McIntosh has been working at Superior Craft and More since 2000 and was

CONTRIBUTED

Ruth Chisholm, communications specialist at the JN Foundation, and Courtney Bell, projects manager of the LIME Foundation (centre), watch Alphonso Davis as he works on a chair at Superior Craft and More.

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LEFT: A seat and table made by the staff at Superior Craft and More.

trained at Creative Craft Plus to create chair-caning designs.

"Some of us were retrained and kept here for employment. Depending on the size of the chair, I can complete three to four per week. I am satisfied working here and I am more comfortable doing what I do here," McIntosh said.

MARKETING PLAN

It is mostly antique furniture that are repaired at Superior Craft and More, however some of the items are also custom-built. Dyntie Davis, manager of the unit, said they are hoping to increase their customer base once their marketing plan is fully activated.

"Our partners are teaching us to fish and within another year we will be

fishermen," Davis said. "We are hoping through these social interventions that we can employ more visually impaired persons."

Superior Craft and More Limited is located on the premises of the Jamaica Society for the Blind on Old Hope Road, St Andrew. For further information visit their page at www.facebook.com/superiorcraftandmore

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(For more on the Social Enterprise Boost Initiative, a project under the JN Foundation, visit Corporate Coffee Mornings at: www.jamaicagleaner.com, click on Videos, scroll to Corporate Coffee Mornings).