



NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Building Knowledge Through Reading

St. John's, Antigua. January 22, 2024. There was great excitement at two schools last week where students are now benefiting from the gift of books. donated through a partnership between Hands Across the Sea and CIBC FirstCaribbean, established to support libraries across the OECS.

Presentations were made on Wednesday 17th January, 2024 to the Antigua Girls High School (AGHS) and the Pigotts Primary School.

The partnership between Hands Across the Sea and CIBC FirstCaribbean started over five years ago. To date the FirstCaribbean ComTrust Foundation has made donations in excess of one hundred and ten thousand US dollars (US\$100,000) to this worthwhile project across the OECS.

During the presentations, Mrs. Vernest Mack, Literacy Link for the programme, noted that CIBC has been a major contributor to Hand Across the Sea for a few years.

“Their timely donations have enabled Hands Across the Sea to purchase books for libraries in Antigua and Barbuda. This is greatly appreciated. As representatives for Hands Across the Sea in Antigua and Barbuda, my colleague Hyacinth Gonsalves Barriero and I, ensure the books are in the schools and they are being utilized to the maximum. This we have been doing since January, 2020. We extend sincere thanks to CIBC on behalf of Hands Across the Sea, and look forward to continued support.”

Mrs. Mack also read a message from Amanda Sherlip, Executive Director of Hands Across the Sea who was unable to come to Antigua for the presentation.

“When the world shut down, CIBC never turned away from the power of the libraries as critical spaces for the children. And when the world re-opened, CIBC was still standing there right beside us, our Literacy Links, and the students and schools we serve. School libraries have not only remained stocked, but students and educators have been receiving the treasures of on-site support, mentorship, and transformational programs that would not be possible without trusting, dedicated partners. Our friends and partners have been right there beside us as we watch the light ignite in the children's eyes when they realize they get their pick of new books to not only read at school, but to bring home and borrow! It is a powerful and important reminder of the power of community, and how sometimes the simple things can be the greatest treasure.

I have been blown away by the leaps in progress we have made in working with schools throughout Antigua over these past several years. Children's literacy has become a central pathway for student well-being, family health, and the future of our Caribbean communities. We all love working with CIBC and here on island with country manager (and children's book author) Mrs. Ladesa James-Williams. We treasure the deep humanity the CIBC community brings to their spirit of giving. We celebrate the success and joy of our children, and we do so with deep acknowledgment that CIBC's trust has made it

possible for us to bring this mission to life for thousands of children through their shared commitment with Hands Across the Sea to the children in the OECS and our Caribbean communities.”

The bank’s Country Head, Ladesa James-Williams, also spoke at the presentations and encouraged the students to fall in love with reading.

“I am delighted and honoured to be here and bring greetings from the management and staff of CIBC. We are pleased to continue our 5-year partnership with Hands Across the Sea to improve literacy in the OECS and ensure that every child has access to quality books that are exciting and intriguing to read.”

“In Antigua alone, over 100 library projects, from pre-schools through to secondary schools and community groups, have benefitted.”

Ends



Presentation at Antigua Girls High School (AGHS) with Staff, students, bank and Hands Across the Sea officials.



Country Head Ladesa James-Williams presenting a book to a student at Pigotts Primary School.

About CIBC FirstCaribbean

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CIBC FirstCaribbean is a member of the CIBC Group. CIBC is a leading Canadian-based global financial institution with 11 million personal banking and business clients. Through our three major business units

- Retail and Business Banking, Wealth Management and Capital Markets - CIBC offers a full range of products and services through its comprehensive electronic banking network, branches and offices across Canada with offices in the United States and around the world.

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Media contact:

Debra King, Director of Corporate Communications, CIBC FirstCaribbean, Barbados Head Office
Telephone: 246 367 2248; Fax: 246 421 7148 and Email: debra.king@cibcfib.com

Ladesa James-Williams | Director, Retail Sales OECS and Country Head Antigua | CIBC FirstCaribbean |
PO Box 28 | Old Parham Rd. Antigua | T: 268 484 5126 | M: 268 764 5126 | Fax: 268 480 5140 |
ladesa.james@cibcfib.com