



# **HAIR DISCRIMINATION IN SXM: BREAKING THE STRANDS OF BIAS**

**PAGE 8 & 9**



# MY IB JOURNEY

BY SANA AGNANI

*The International Baccalaureate (IB) is a global educational program that encourages students to think critically and be open-minded. It is known for being vigorous and challenging because it focuses not only on academic subjects, but also on personal growth, creativity and community service. IB aids students in preparing for life beyond school by teaching skills like research, time management and independence.*

Several IB students were interviewed on their personal high school experience (specifically 5th form) and their upcoming IB journey:

• **NIHAL CHUGANI**

My IB journey has been good so far. I like my class because they are all fun people to be around, and my subjects are relevant for the career path I plan on taking.

In IB year 1, I started studying much earlier than I did in high school. The day the topics were taught, I tried reviewing everything my teacher taught. However, in 5th form, I never attempted to.

I will try my best to complete all tasks given so that it isn't very stressful. This year, I am looking forward to learning new things since IB is known to improve your overall skills and I also look forward to enjoying the years with this class.

Even though this program feels a bit stressful because of the workload, I will enjoy it to the max.

• **LARA ABDALLAH**

My journey in IB is fun so far, I love making new friends. Having to experience new subjects and learning time management properly is a new thing.

In 5th form, I used to procrastinate a lot, and I'd leave everything for the day before. For this new school year, I am looking forward to doing my best on everything assigned and to manage all the subjects I took, as IB is a difficult and different system.

I will take my work more seriously and ensure that I focus on time management so that I can have a healthy sleep schedule and

not have a lot of workload on my back.

• **SHARDAE ROMBLEY CONNOR**

So far, my IB journey hasn't been too bad. Last year in form 5, it felt easy for me because I would study about two or three days before the test date; but this year I will have to study a small portion every day to ensure I know my content. I'm looking forward to the new challenges that IB might throw my way, and I am ready to give it my best to have a successful school year.

• **AIDAN WILKIE**

IB has been great so far. I have gotten to meet my new teachers and learn about what is to come. In 5th form, I typically studied a few days prior to a test through notes and PowerPoints. I would procrastinate and end up leaving little to no time for myself. I plan on changing this by reading ahead of time and preparing my notes efficiently.

This year, I am looking forward to trying new things and learning about my new subjects such as Computer Science and Environmental Systems and Societies, as well as going on class trips.

• **AANYA SETHURAMAN**

The IB journey has been calm so far. We haven't started with a lot of work yet and have only gotten as far as Introductions to IB and the various subjects, but I am excited to learn more.

In 5th form, I procrastinated with my work a lot – more than I should have – as it worked better for me. Even though IB is nothing like CXC, I aim to be on time with all my work and finish my assignments beforehand.

I will try my best to take things more seriously and prioritize work over activities. For this new school year, I'm looking forward to being more open towards others and building stronger relationships.

• **VERONICA DESTIN**

So far, the year has been nice. I am very excited to experience this journey, and I feel

like I am already learning a lot from the course work. In form 5, my study habits were not consistent and that's what I really want to change. Instead of scrolling on TikTok or other social media platforms, I want to do my work in a timelier manner – so no procrastinating.

I know it's possible because I've done it before, but I just must be more consistent instead of leaving things for the last minute.

For the upcoming school year, I am looking forward to making new memories with my classmates and learning a lot. For IB, we must complete CAS (Creativity, Activity, Service) so I am excited to put myself out of my comfort zone and try new things as I am always up for a challenge.





# THE AI SHIFT: WHY CXC'S DECISION TO EMBRACE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE MATTERS TO US

Two weeks ago, the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) made a decision that could change education in our region forever: Starting in 2026, students will officially be allowed to use artificial intelligence (AI) in their school-based assessments (SBAs) for CAPE, CSEC, and CCSLC.

To some, this announcement might feel like the beginning of the end for traditional schooling. To others, especially those of us growing up in the age of ChatGPT, Midjourney, and countless other AI tools, it feels more like the beginning of something we've been waiting for – the system is finally catching up to the way the real world already works.

## Why this is bigger than just exams

AI is no longer just “the future”; it's the present. Universities around the world have already started acknowledging this by creating policies that allow students to use AI, as long as it's properly referenced and doesn't replace critical thinking. Some institutions even allow a certain percentage of thesis papers to be written with AI assistance, treating it the same way they once treated citation software or grammar checkers.

Think about it: If higher education is adapting to this reality, why should our regional exams be stuck in the past? To stand against AI is futile, like standing against the calculator when it was first intro-

duced in classrooms. Banning it won't stop students from using it; it will only make the system outdated and disconnected from how knowledge is actually being produced and applied in the world today.

## What CXC is actually saying

At the ceremony in Cayman, CXC's Director of Operations, Dr. Nicole Manning, explained that AI use won't just be a free-for-all. There will be clear “Standards and Guidelines for the Use of Artificial Intelligence in CXC's Assessment,” which focus on ethical use, data privacy, and proper referencing.

This matters, because while we all know AI can generate amazing things, it can also be misused. Students need to learn how to cite AI the same way we cite books or websites. We also need to be taught about protecting our personal information when using these tools, since AI platforms often collect data without us realizing it.

By creating a structured framework, CXC is making sure AI is a tool for learning, not cheating. They're showing trust in us as students, but also holding us accountable.

## Why this change feels personal

As a teenagers, we can say this shift matters because it acknowledges how we actually live and learn. Whether it's writing essays, doing research, or

practicing math problems, many of us have already turned to AI in some form. For years, we've been told “don't use it, that's plagiarism” or “that's cutting corners.” But in reality, using AI responsibly can enhance our work – it can spark ideas, help us explain complex topics in simpler terms, and give us tools to improve our writing and research skills.

To us, what CXC is doing feels like recognition: It's saying, “We see you, we know the world you're growing up in, and we're not going to punish you for using the tools of your generation.”

## The bigger picture: Literacy still matters

CXC's Registrar and CEO, Dr. Wayne Wesley, made an important point, though. He said that AI is only powerful if students are literate and numerate. This is key, especially since only 36% of candidates passed math in the 2024 CSEC exams.

What good is AI if you don't understand the basics? If we can't read well, think critically, or do basic calculations, then AI will just be a crutch instead of a tool. That's why CXC is pairing this new AI policy with an AI-powered literacy and numeracy system, to make sure students have the foundation to really benefit.

## Why schools need to catch up

Here's where things get real. Many schools in the Caribbean still don't have enough computers, reliable internet, or teachers who are trained to use digital tools effectively. It's not enough for CXC to allow AI in theory – schools need to catch up in practice.

Teachers need support and training, classrooms need better technology, and parents need to understand why AI isn't the enemy. Otherwise, this new policy will only widen the gap between students who have access to digital

tools and those who don't.

## The teen takeaway

From our perspective, this is more than just a policy change. It's a turning point. CXC has officially admitted that the old way of doing things isn't enough. The world is changing, and education has to change with it.

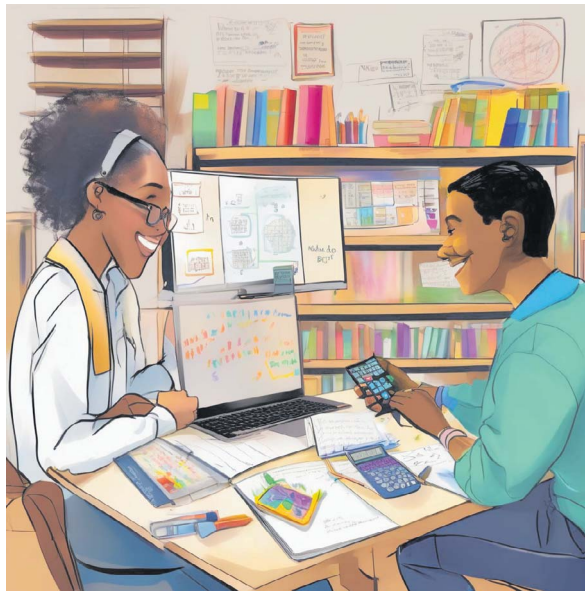
For teens like us, this means our creativity, adaptability, and digital skills are finally being taken seriously. It also means that instead of fearing AI, we get the chance to learn how to use it responsibly – skills that will matter not just in exams, but in jobs, businesses, and careers we haven't even imagined yet.

So, yes, this is the end of CXC as we knew it. But maybe that's a good thing – because in the age of AI, we don't just need to be tested on what we memorize, we need to be prepared for the future we're about to inherit.



Future





*Imagine walking into school your first day of class, but it's not to look at new ideas, it's to prepare you for your next test. Instead of schools encouraging us to think differently, they hand out the same notes, the same assignments – and teachers have the same expectations of every student, although – simply put – every student is a different student.*

Education is supposed to help students with their imaginative thinking, and for them to show their potential for growth. How are students supposed to thrive and show their individuality towards colleges, while schools are expecting them to follow the standardized system made years ago, with no dramatic changes in curriculum or teaching styles? While technology is advancing rapidly, we are still stuck in this mindset that everything should be taught the regular black and white way, with no chance of mixing in colour.

#### The problem with memorization

One of the biggest problems with standardized education is rote memorization. Teachers provide notes and expect students to spew out those same words on the exam paper as if they were built radio machines. While memorization might help in passing a test, it's just not substantial in the long run. Memorization especially doesn't help with critical thinking skills, which is crucial for this generation.

Students might often feel less than their peers if memorization is not something they are good at. I've often found myself cramming notes right before the test, only to forget them the next morning or in the next few days. This repetitive cycle of rewarding short-term memory rather than deep understanding of the content leaves students unable to apply concepts in the real world later on.

#### Ignoring different styles

Another flaw is the assumption that all students learn the same way. In reality, people absorb information in different ways. For example, some learn through visual representations, others

through hands-on practice, and a few others through discussion. Yet in classrooms, the only approach is note-taking, memorizing, and a few videos here and there. Schools that fail to acknowledge diverse learning styles often disadvantage students who may excel if taught differently. Instead of singularity, the system tries to make it "the one size fits all" standard, as I like to call it.

This student has transferred from a school that offers "the one size fits all" standard of learning, to another school with versatile ways of learning, teaching and classes that offer insight into real-world careers and skills. This student described their previous school's approach to learning as a mundane, monotonous, and overall useless way to teach students – because while handing a child a worksheet in class might show proof of them being given a task at school, it doesn't equate to what's going on in a classroom.

Many students have complained about this teaching style, describing it as an easy way out for teachers. They are scared to voice their concerns, and can't speak out about it, because most likely they will not be heard. In contrast, this same student – when allowed to attend another school where the learning approach was more than merely sitting at a desk while a teacher droned on about a subject – felt that the new approach builds teamwork as well as communication skills.

This is because the new method of teaching involves immersing the student into life-like situ-

# THE ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL EDUCATION STANDARD

BY ADITI RAJPAL

ations and asking what they would do, or constantly conversing with other students on classwork. Students feel that this builds teamwork as well as communication skills. Another positive aspect of their current school is that it offers weekly electives such as a fun lesson of tennis or a useful class like sewing. This ensures that students can have a chance to recover each week from their rigorous curriculum and avoid burnout.

#### Pressure and stress

The pressure to perform on the standardized test adds yet again, another layer of harm. Students are told their worth is defined by their grades and ranking, or rather, they are led to think that. This constant stress can discourage creativity, because creativity requires the initiative to explore without fear of failure. When the school's focus is only on what they think is right for the test, this limits students – they stop taking risks, stop asking questions, and stop experimenting with new ideas. Education to them just becomes: "Okay, memorize this, get 100, done."

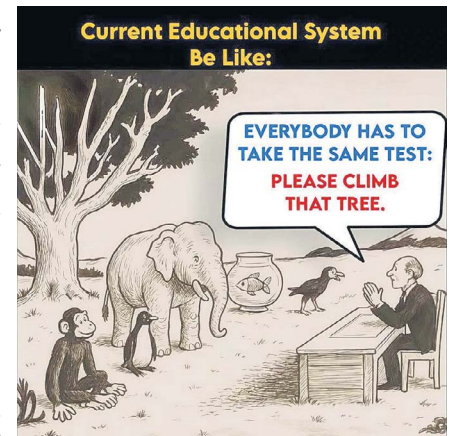
#### Loss of creativity

When students, especially at a young age, start to lose their creative spark, it can cause so many problems in the long-term. Innovative thinking, problem solving, and imagination are the crucial things students NEED for the real world. When the system pulls the rug of opportunity from under

their feet, it discourages students. You strive for students to follow the "traditional way" of teaching, but in the past, some of the greatest thinkers in history thrived not because they memorized facts, but because they were allowed to question, explore, and create. If schools continue to prioritize being comfortable in the traditional way of learning and teaching over individuality, they risk raising newer generations of students who know how to take tests but struggle to think independently.

#### Change

School can be seen as more useful for preparing students for real-world challenges by focusing on the application of knowledge rather than on how well they remember it. Above all, schools should support a diverse range of learning styles. Allow students to make mistakes without feeling the guilt of "how will colleges accept this?" Mistakes are how we all learn and what we as humans all share in common.



## TRANSFORMING EDUCATION WITH

One-Size-Fits-All

Outdated Assessments

Personalized Learning

Lack of Insights

Avoiding Aid

Sumant

Actionable Insights





## WHY FINANCIAL LITERACY BELONGS IN OUR CLASSROOMS

*Picture this: You graduate from high school, diploma in hand, feeling ready to take on the world. You can recite Shakespeare, solve a quadratic equation, and maybe even debate global politics. But then you get your first pay check, your first rent bill, or your first credit card statement, and suddenly you're lost. The truth is, too many of us leave school unprepared for the financial realities of life.*

Money is something every one of us will deal with, whether we dream of starting a business, going to college, or just moving out of our parents' house. Yet financial literacy – the ability to understand and manage money – rarely makes it into our classrooms. That's a problem, especially for a generation like ours that is stepping into adulthood in an era shaped by globalization, artificial intelligence, and digital change at lightning speed.

Think about the kind of world we are inheriting. Jobs are shifting faster than ever as AI transforms entire industries. Some careers are disappearing while new ones are popping up in tech, digital media, and the gig economy. Unlike our parents, many of us may not have steady, traditional jobs for decades at a time. We'll have to learn how to manage unpredictable income, plan ahead, and make smart decisions about saving and investing. Without financial literacy, we'll be navigating this new economy blind.

math or language.

This isn't just about helping individuals – if young people are financially literate, society as a whole benefits. Fewer of us would fall into the trap of predatory lending or spiraling debt. Economies would grow stronger because people would spend and invest more wisely. More teens would have the confidence to become entrepreneurs, driving innovation instead of fearing risk. Financial education also helps close the inequality gap, giving every student, no matter their background, the same tools to build stability and independence.

For those who say financial literacy can be learned outside the classroom, think about who gets left out. Not every teen has parents who can guide them through bank accounts, investments, or mortgages. Not every family talks about money at all. Relying on chance means that only some young people will get the skills they need, while others are left behind. Schools are supposed to be the great equalizer, and this is exactly the kind of knowledge they should deliver to everyone.

We, as teens, are always told that we are the future leaders of our countries, the ones who will inherit the challenges and opportunities of a rapidly changing world. But how can we lead if we don't understand the very basics of money? Financial literacy isn't just a personal benefit, it's a national necessity. To ignore it is to send an entire generation into adulthood unprepared.

For us, the stakes are high. We can't afford to leave financial literacy out of our education system any longer. In a globalized, AI-driven world, understanding money isn't optional; it's survival.



At the same time, the cost of living is rising almost everywhere. Food, rent, and transportation are more expensive than they used to be, and young people are already feeling the squeeze. If we don't understand how to budget, how to avoid debt traps, or how to make our money work for us, financial stress could become the norm for our generation.

And when you add in the rise of digital finance, from mobile banking apps to cryptocurrency, the stakes get even higher. For many of us, money no longer exists as cash in our wallets but as numbers on a screen. That shift brings opportunities but also risks. Without proper guidance; scams, poor investments and bad habits could cost us dearly. So why isn't financial literacy part of the school curriculum?

We spend years learning abstract theories, yet the one skill guaranteed to affect our everyday survival is left for us to figure out on our own. A proper curriculum could teach us how to create a budget, understand loans and credit, explore savings and investments, and make sense of financial tools that are now as common as social media apps. Instead of treating money as something taboo or too complicated, schools could treat it as a core life skill – just as essential as

Future

# STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES TRANSITIONING TO UNIVERSITY IN THE NETHERLANDS

BY ARTI BULLAND AND ADITI RAMCHANDANI



*Every year, many students from St. Maarten leave their homes and embark on a new chapter of their lives in the Netherlands. For many, it is their first time living away from family and adjusting to a different culture and lifestyle. Yet, it is an exciting opportunity, filled with growth, independence and the pursuit of dreams.*

The following are the shared experiences of three students who recently embarked on their journey and the challenges they experienced, as well as some advice they have for others who plan on furthering their education in the Netherlands.

LEHAR MARATA

## 1. Can you tell me a bit about yourself and what you are studying in the Netherlands?

My name is Lehar Marata, I'm 19 years old, and I'll be pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Biomedical Sciences at Maastricht University.

## 2. What made you decide to study in the Netherlands rather than going elsewhere?

I was really drawn to the Netherlands because of how safe and organized it is, and I also loved the idea of being able to travel so easily across Europe. Beyond that, Maastricht University offers a strong Biomedical Sciences program that fits perfectly with my future goals. I also felt that moving from a small island to a smaller, student-centred city like Maastricht would make the transition much easier and less overwhelming than going straight into a large city.

## 3. What was your first impression of life in the Netherlands when you arrived?

I was honestly so impressed by how systematic everything is. Public transportation runs on time down to the minute, which was a huge change from what I'm used to. The city also felt incredibly clean and well-kept. And something that really stuck with me was how kind people were when I needed help to figure out the transportation system.

## 4. What were some of the biggest culture shocks you experienced?

The bicycles! I knew the Netherlands was famous for cycling, but I didn't realize just how much it's a part of daily life here. Bikes have their own traffic lights, their own lanes, and their own set of rules. It was shocking to see how dominant biking is, compared to back home in Sint Maarten, where we mostly rely on cars.

## 5. What has been the hardest part of adjusting to life in the Netherlands?

For me, it's been the long summer days. The sun sets so late (sometimes after 9:00 or 10:00pm) that I'd look outside and think it was still afternoon when it was actually night-time. The weather has also kept me on my toes. One moment it's cold and rainy, and the next it's sunny and warm. I've quickly learned that a jacket and an umbrella are absolute essentials before leaving the house.

## 6. How different is the academic environment compared to what you were used to in Sint Maarten?

While I haven't officially started classes yet, from my introduction days and ori-

entations, I've already gotten a feel for how different the academic system here is. Maastricht University uses problem-based learning, which means instead of just sitting through lectures, you spend a lot of time in small groups, actively solving cases and teaching each other. It's a more independent way of learning and really pushes you to prepare ahead of time. I've also noticed that everyone here is very ambitious, most people are working toward similar goals in medicine or science, so I can already tell it's going to be motivating, but also a bit competitive in a healthy way.

## 7. Were there any unexpected challenges you wished you had known about before moving?

The reality of independence is a challenge no one can really prepare you for. You suddenly have to handle everything at once, from sorting out bank accounts and insurance to cooking, cleaning, and managing your own schedule. It hits you how much you're fully responsible for yourself now. It's definitely a challenge, but at the same time, it feels empowering to realize you're capable of handling it.

## 8. What advice would you give to other students who are considering moving to the Netherlands to attend university?

Even though I've only been here a short time, I already feel like it was one of the best decisions I've ever made. My advice would be to stay open-minded and put yourself out there. Don't be afraid to talk to people – students here come from all over the world, and hearing their perspectives is such a rewarding part of the experience. And when things feel overwhelming, remember that the challenges teach you just as much as the classroom does. Homesickness is real, but it doesn't outweigh the growth, independence, and opportunities you'll gain here.

RIDDHI RAMCHANDANI

## 1. Can you tell me a bit about yourself and what you are studying in the Netherlands?

My name is Riddhi Ramchandani and I'm 17 years old. I'm originally from Sint Maarten, and I moved to the Netherlands to pursue my studies. I'm currently studying Hotel Management which has been a really exciting and challenging experience. I enjoy the opportunity to learn in an international environment and to meet people from so many different backgrounds.

## 2. What made you decide to study in the Netherlands rather than going elsewhere?

The Netherlands felt like a natural choice because of the historical and cultural ties it shares with Sint Maarten. On top of that, many Dutch universities are well ranked, and a lot of programs are offered in English, which makes it more accessible. Compared to other countries, the tuition fees are also relatively affordable, and it's easier to adjust since there's already a large Caribbean community here.

## 3. What was your first impression of life in the Netherlands when you arrived?

My first impression was that everything was so well organized, from transportation to how cities are structured. It felt very safe, clean, and efficient, but also a

bit overwhelming at first because of the fast pace. I also immediately noticed how much people rely on bicycles, which was very different from life back home.

## 4. What were some of the biggest culture shocks you experienced?

One of the biggest shocks was how direct Dutch people can be in their communication. At first, it felt blunt, but over time I came to appreciate the honesty. Another was the weather – it's often grey, rainy, and cold compared to the Caribbean sunshine. The food culture was also different – meals are simpler and lighter, and people don't spend as much time sitting around the table as we do back home.

## 5. What has been the hardest part of adjusting to life in the Netherlands?

Definitely the weather and being so far away from family. Adjusting to independence, managing studies, and balancing part-time work at the same time has also been a challenge.

## 6. How different is the academic environment compared to what you were used to in Sint Maarten?

The academic environment in the Netherlands is quite different from what I was used to in Sint Maarten. Here, the teaching style is much more independent. Professors expect students to take responsibility for their own learning, manage deadlines, and do a lot of self-study. Classes are often more interactive, with group discussions and projects being a big part of the coursework. Back home, things felt a bit more guided and personal, whereas here it can feel a bit overwhelming at first because of the larger classes and fast pace. That said, it really helps you develop critical thinking, time management, and problem-solving skills.

## 7. Were there any unexpected challenges you wished you had known about before moving?

I didn't fully realize how much paperwork and bureaucracy there would be – from registering with the municipality to setting up health insurance and bank accounts. It's a lot to manage all at once, especially if you don't speak Dutch. I also didn't anticipate how expensive housing would be in some cities.

## 8. What advice would you give to other students who are considering moving to the Netherlands to attend university?

My advice would be to prepare well in advance, especially for housing, since it's very competitive. Learn some basic Dutch, even if your program is in English; it makes daily life much easier. Build a support network by connecting with other Caribbean students or international groups, because having a community makes the transition smoother. And finally, be open-minded and patient with yourself as you adapt to a new culture.

SUHANI NATHUMAL

## 1. Can you tell me a bit about yourself and what you are studying in the Netherlands?

My name is Suhani Nathumal, and I'm 19 years old. I recently graduated from St. Dominic High School, where I completed the International Baccalaureate program. I am now pursuing a Bachelor's degree in Biomedical Sciences at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. After university, I plan to attend medical school and become a doctor.

## 2. What made you decide to study in the Netherlands rather than going elsewhere?

Honestly, one of the main factors that influenced my decision was the cost of studying abroad. Tuition fees in many countries can be extremely expensive, but in the Netherlands, I am able to pay a fair tuition fee since I have a Dutch

passport. Additionally, I am eligible for DUO financing, making student-life a bit easier. At the same time, the Netherlands has many top-tier, highly ranked universities, including VU Amsterdam, so I get access to excellent education while keeping it affordable. For me it is a win-win situation.

## 3. What was your first impression of life in the Netherlands when you arrived?

My first thought was how different life here is compared to St. Maarten. The city is much larger than what I was used to. It felt as if my world suddenly expanded overnight. However, living in the Netherlands has been amazing. It truly is such a beautiful country with lots of variety to offer. There's always something to do such as going to the local markets, walking in the gardens, and discovering new neighbourhoods.

## 4. What were some of the biggest culture shocks you experienced?

One of the biggest culture shocks for me was definitely the student drinking culture. It's very common for students to casually have a beer, and smoking is also much more normalized. Coming from a place where I wasn't really exposed to that, it was a bit of a surprise at first.

## 5. What has been the hardest part of adjusting to life in the Netherlands?

The hardest part of adjusting has definitely been leaving my parents behind. You have to manage everything on your own like doing grocery shopping affordably, cooking meals that are actually healthy, keeping up with chores, and learning how to eat nutritiously. Being alone is a big change, but the key is learning to enjoy your own company. It also teaches you practical skills, like budgeting, opening your own bank account, handling insurance, and making sure bills and rent are paid on time. You basically grow from being a "child" into a young adult quite quickly. It has also made me really appreciate my parents and everything they've always done for me.

## 6. How different is the academic environment compared to what you were used to in Sint Maarten?

I would say the biggest difference is that the university is much larger compared to what I was used to in St. Maarten, and you are really expected to take responsibility for your own education. The professors here seem very helpful and approachable. However, your education is in your own hands. Since classes haven't fully started yet, I haven't experienced everything, but I can already tell that a lot is expected from you as a student. There are also many opportunities and resources available here that weren't in St. Maarten. It really comes down to the point that what you put in is what you get out.

## 7. Were there any unexpected challenges you wished you had known about before moving?

I didn't expect how challenging it would feel emotionally at first. Being away from family and friends and having to create a new support system is definitely not easy and it takes time. It really teaches you how to be independent.

## 8. What advice would you give to other students who are considering moving to the Netherlands to attend university?

I would say be as prepared as possible when it comes to all the bureaucracy. Things like choosing a bank, getting your BSN number, finding housing, picking the right health insurance, and making your appointment at the municipality are really important steps. Don't leave them until the last minute as building a new life in a different country is already hectic. Having these things sorted out in advance makes the transition so much easier.



# LATE FOR SCHOOL IN SXM: AN INTENSIFYING ISSUE

BY ALISHA RABESS



*In Sint Maarten, the scenario remains the same for mornings. The alarm clock rings, families scramble, cars wait in a long queue, and students rapidly board school buses – all in a bid to capture the singular objective of the day, especially for the youth. However, attaining this objective is a little more challenging for some to accomplish. Students on the Dutch part of the island are increasingly causing concern among their parents, peers and school administrators for their consistent tardiness to school.*

While coming in late to school might appear to be a trivial issue, the long term effects it brings are anything but small. Tension arises, lessons get interrupted, and the basic order that schools strive to nurture begins to wither. The culture of slacking off is a result of constant lateness. Over time, the tendency to arrive late can alter one's social behaviour, education, and even the willingness to work in the future.

## Causes of student tardiness

Sint Maarten students cite traffic delays and transportation systems as their main excuses for being late to school. This includes overcrowded roads as well as the delayed arrival of buses and taxis. The same can be said for public transportation, it is often unpredictable.

An 18-year-old male student stated: "It's not always my fault. I get marked late by the time I get to school because of traffic or a delayed bus."

Personal habits also come into play. Some students get up late, take too long getting ready, or become side-tracked by social me-

dia and phones. Being on time is made more difficult by family obligations as clarified by a female high school student:

"I have to take care of my siblings before school. I don't really want to be late."

Other factors include poor weather conditions, unanticipated traffic accidents, and even health issues in the morning. These cases illustrate that tardiness is often not due to laziness, but to factors beyond a student's control.

## Student complaints

Many schools treat tardiness as a discipline issue, but numerous students feel the penalties are harsh or unfair. Some have reported that even when they had good reasons, they were denied entry to class or sent home. A male high school student said:

"We don't want to be late, but it just happens. We only miss more lessons when we are sent home."

Students have also pointed out that the rules about lateness are not always enforced consistently. While some agree that a certain level of discipline is necessary, others believe the policies are too strict. One high school student noted: "Stronger consequences might help students take it seriously, but maybe the school should be more understanding."

This issue highlights how complex the situation is. While students understand the need to learn responsibility, they also seek empathy.

## The viewpoint of teachers

Teachers believe that being late has real consequences. Every late student slows down the class and forces teachers to repeat instruc-

tions, disrupting the lesson flow. Both students who arrive on time and those who come late are affected by this.

Teachers emphasize that forming good habits is essential for being on time. Being punctual builds discipline, accountability, and respect for others, which are important life skills for adults.

## Effects on students

What personal effect does being late have on students?

Some have admitted to negative impacts: Arriving late causes stress, conflicts with teachers, and falling behind academically. One female student said: "I feel like I'm already behind when I walk in late, and it causes conflict with teachers."

Frequent tardiness can result in missing important lessons and creating knowledge gaps that are difficult to bridge. Over time, this can affect graduation, self-esteem, and overall engagement in school.

## Morning difficulties in real life

Beyond the numbers, real events show why students struggle to be on time: Common issues include delayed taxis, broken buses, and morning traffic jams. Some students face unpredictable weather or illness. Others have to help younger siblings get ready or manage family responsibilities.

A punishment system that treats everyone the same seems unfair to many because of these situations. Students argue that instead of punishing students for being late, schools should consider these challenges.

## Suggestions for change

Students have offered the following ideas for reducing lateness:

- **Better transportation:** Coordinating buses and taxis to ensure reliability.
- **Staff understanding:** Teachers and administrators showing flexibility when delays are clearly unavoidable.
- **Balanced discipline:** Enforcing rules without overly punishing students, focusing on patterns of repeated tardiness instead of one-off incidents.
- **Adjusting school start times:** Starting classes

slightly later to accommodate long commutes. A male student emphasized:

"Adjust school start times and understand that traffic is a real problem,"

## Moving toward a balanced approach

The debate over tardiness highlights the need for balance. Being too strict can push students away, while being too lenient can create bad habits. Both teachers and students have valid concerns.

A balanced approach could involve the following:

- Allowing late students to quietly join class instead of sending them home.
- Tracking repeated tardiness for discussion with students and parents.
- Encouraging parents to enforce consistent morning routines and teach time management.
- Government actions like providing more school buses, improving roads, or staggering start times to reduce congestion.

By focusing on both discipline and compassion, schools can promote punctuality while still supporting students.

## Conclusion: Turning annoyance into constructive action

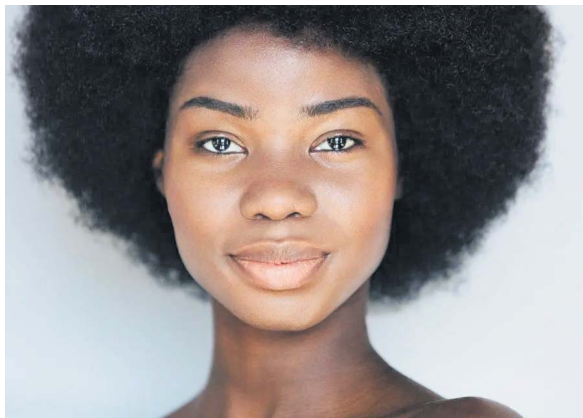
Being on time means more than just arriving before the bell; it also shows respect, responsibility, and readiness for life after school. According to the feedback from students, they are not asking for a pass; they are calling for fairness, practical solutions, and recognition of the real challenges they face every day.

It will take more than school notices and penalties to effectively tackle tardiness. Families, schools, law enforcement, transportation companies, and government planners need to collaborate.

Better roads, reliable transportation, and sensible schedules must go hand in hand with compassion, if Sint Maarten wants to raise young people who are ready and on time.

*Every morning, time keeps moving. That movement can signal the start of a successful school day instead of a missed opportunity if we take coordinated action.*





*Hair is more than looks; it is identity, heritage, pride. On an island so culturally steeped in beauty as its natural landscapes, you would think hair in all styles and textures should be treasured. However, hair discrimination is one of the key issues in Sint Maarten.*

Many – including women, men and children – continue to be discriminated against because of their African descent. Hair discrimination is not just a distant issue; it's something students right here in Sint Maarten have experienced. Many young and older people shared their feelings and personal experiences.

Female respondent: "Yes, I was judged at school because of my hair. People made verbal comments and teased me. It made me feel like I didn't belong."

Another shared how they were directly told their hairstyle was "unprofessional," even though they were simply wearing their natural hair.

Male respondent: "They said my hairstyle wasn't professional enough. It was frustrating because it's just how my hair grows."

Many more desire for their braids, af-

ros, cornrows, long hair, afro twists, and locs to be seen as "professional" and "acceptable" at school, work and church, as youths are being pressured based on their hairstyle/ hair.

Within schools, workplaces, and even in activities like pageants or award shows hosted within community spaces, some residents and students of Sint Maarten have been on the receiving end of hair discrimination.

Hair is much more than just aesthetics. It is identity. It is heritage. It is pride. On an island so culturally rich as its interior landscapes, one would expect that hair in all its styles and textures would be celebrated. But hair discrimination is one of the problems ailing Sint Maarten. This includes women, men, and even African descent students who now go to school with their natural hairstyles and receive such bad judgment. Others mentioned the impact these experiences have had on their confidence.

One explained: "I actually changed my hairstyle just to fit in. Sometimes I avoided opportunities because I was worried people would judge me based on my hair."

For many youths, hair becomes a



# HAIR DISCRIMINATION IN SXM: BREAKING THE STRANDS OF BIAS

BY ALISHA RABESS

source of pressure, judgment, and even exclusion. The way one wears their hair should never determine how they are valued in society, yet the reality in Sint Maarten shows otherwise.

These rules, whether written in dress codes or enforced by bias, harm children and send a dangerous message that who you are is not acceptable. As Christians, we know that God created every person in His image (Genesis 1:27). That includes our hair. To deny a child their right to wear their natural hair is to deny part of God's creation.

## A legacy of colonial beauty norms

The history of hair discrimination in Sint Maarten runs deep. Objective: During the colonial period, the ideological concept of beauty and the model of professionalized women were imposed on Caribbean societies from Europe. Straight hair, on the other hand, was praised as "neat" and "proper"; kinky and curly hair was regarded as "unruly".

This problem goes beyond fashion. It is about how identity, culture, and equality are valued collectively in a society.

These disparaging notions did not evaporate post-independence, and animate to varying degrees many people's conception of themselves and one another today. At schools, little girls might hear that their braids, or locs, are against the dress code. When asked whether hair discrimination is a widespread issue, the overwhelming majority said yes.

One student said: "I hear about it all the time. People don't even realize they're being discriminatory, but it's in the comments they make."

In workplaces, job candidates can feel compelled to wear wigs or chemically straighten their hair to adopt a particular "professional look." In social settings, too, natural hair is susceptible to unwelcome comments or stereotypes. The survey also revealed a common belief that schools need to take stronger action. Many students suggested that schools should **create policies protecting natural hairstyles and raise awareness.**

As Christians, we recognize something deeper: "God made each of us in His image, and we are all beautiful." Our hair is part of how He created us. To reject natural hair is, in a way, to reject the Creator's design.

## The true cost of hair discrimination

The implications of hair discrimination are far-ranging. For small children to be told that their natural hair

is "wrong" or "unprofessional" diminishes their self-worth and sense of identity. It sends the terrible message that who you naturally are is not good enough. In adulthood, it can stymie career options and lead to awkward moments on the job.

It's widely assumed this means that we should not discriminate against a person because of their skin colour. But the same is true of someone's hair or hairstyle when it is linked to their race or ethnicity. Interestingly, students had mixed views about the media. Some felt social media helped normalize natural hairstyles in positive ways, while others thought movies and advertisements still promoted unrealistic beauty standards.

And when asked what message they would give to people who judge others based on hair, the responses were simple but powerful:

"Stop judging."

"Let your hair breathe."

"What's the point of discrimination?"

Even still, thousands of children are subject to illegal discrimination and harassment at school for wearing their natural Afro-textured hair. It takes away their confidence and shifts the real focus of education, which is knowledge, growth, and opportunity.

In the words of Apostle Paul: "Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2). Our youths should not feel like they have to conform to worldly beauty standards for them to prosper.

Yes, students feel depressed or targeted by their hair textures at school. They may straighten it, cover it, or avoid school altogether to escape the judgment. Schools cannot show students the door based on their hair. They show up to school, dressed in crisp attire, hair combed back.

So, it's not that their hair gets them into higher education; it's the cognitive knowledge and understanding. These voices show that hair discrimination in Sint Maarten schools isn't just about appearance; it's about dignity, self-expression, and the right to be accepted for who you are.

Hair bias also perpetuates negative societal stereotypes, linking natural hair styles to laziness, defiance, and lack of self-control. Not only are these stereotypes inaccurate, they're also damaging. They erase the beauty and the strength of African heritage, and they make people hide and suppress things to be accepted.



But the Bible tells us our hair, like all of us, is made with purpose. “I praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvellous are Your works, and I know this very well” (Psalm 139:14). Our natural hair is not a mistake; it is part of God’s perfect design.

### A global and biblical call for change

It is a movement with a mother lode of potential reverberating from the Western Cape of South Africa, where the national Parliament is winding its way toward adopting the “The CROWN Act” – (Creating a Respectful and Open World for Natural hair) – a law protecting against hair-based discrimination, to the halls of Hampton University, a historic black college in Virginia that will soon offer a course on natural hair, after such a requirement became law in North Carolina, New York, and California.

In the United States, the Crown Act was enacted in several states, prohibiting discrimination on the grounds of a person’s hair. Elsewhere in Africa and the Caribbean, natural hair movements are gaining prominence, incentivizing more individuals to proudly show off their curls, kinks, and braids. Closer to home, in Jamaica and Trinidad, debates over school dress codes have sparked protests after students with dreadlocks or braids were excluded from classes. These regional examples show that the Caribbean is wrestling with the same questions of identity, culture, and equality.

Looking at the African American community, social change is one of the main things that come to mind. However, as a matter of faith, spiritual change is an even bigger deal. Coming from the Bible, we’re told not to judge people based on their physical appearances, “do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment” (John 7:24), and as God doesn’t judge us based on our hair texture, why should society?

Regarding our appearance, the Bible has a lot to say. In Matthew 10:30, Jesus says that even the very hairs on our heads are numbered. This is more than a physical characteristic of God; it shows that He knows and values every strand of hair He gave us. To put someone down or to make fun of someone else’s hair is basically an attack on God’s creation.

### The price of discrimination in schools

Hair discrimination is no small matter:

**For children:** Being told their natural hair is “wrong” shatters self-esteem and makes them feel inferior to their classmates.

**For learning:** If a child is more concerned with looking nice from the hair up than about working on their schoolwork, education will be the loser.

**For families:** Parents are subjected to pressure to shell out dollars on chemical treatments, wigs, or extensions to make their child’s hair “acceptable.”

### A call to every school on the Dutch side

Every school – public, subsidized, or private – has a responsibility to end hair discrimination. This is not just a school issue; it is a community issue. **1: Update school policies** Dress codes must be revised to al-

low natural hair in all forms. Clear statements should affirm that braids, twists, afros, locs, and cornrows are acceptable and professional.

#### 2: Teacher & staff training

Educators should be trained to recognize unconscious bias about hair. Instead of punishing children for their looks, teachers must focus on behaviour and academics.

#### 3: Celebrate cultural identity

Schools can host cultural pride days to highlight natural hair, Caribbean heritage, and biblical teachings about self-worth. Invite local speakers, pastors, and parents to encourage students to love their natural selves.

#### 4: Create safe spaces for students

Schools must ensure that no student is bullied or targeted because of their hairstyle. Guidance counsellors should openly discuss identity and cultural pride with students.

### Solutions for Sint Maarten

At the institutional level, schools may revise their uniform codes to make clear that at no time should there ever be a ban on natural hairstyles.

Businesses may articulate diversity and inclusion policies that should include cultural expression rather than its repression. The government may even go so far as to institute something akin to the CROWN Act, making sure that hair discrimination is formally recognized and prohibited.

But beyond laws and policies, it is also about changing one’s mindset. Parents, teachers, pastors, and leaders must teach the next generation to see beauty in every curl, twist and lock. Churches can play a key role too, by reminding people that natural hair is part of God’s wonderful creation.

It takes a multi-layered approach to address hair discrimination in Sint Maarten.

**Schools:** Dress codes need to be reviewed and revised. Nothing related to natural hair should keep a child out of learning. Schools should find diversity, not punish it.

**Workplaces:** Employers are required to adopt policies protecting cultural expression. A professional employee is defined by skills, discipline, and character – not by hairstyle.

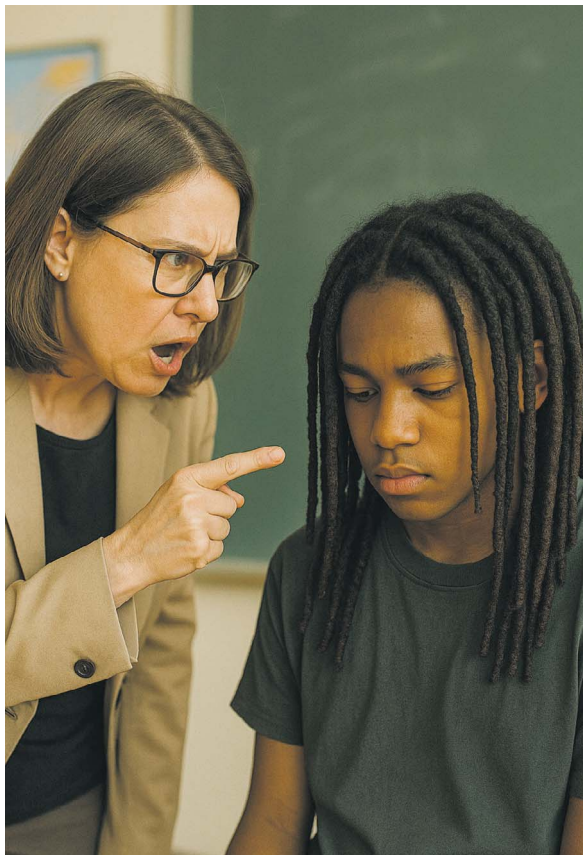
**Churches & Community:** We need faith communities to teach us how and lead by example, so we can all lean into God’s design. A special role that churches can play is in affirming and testifying to the belief that every child of God has been fearfully and wonderfully made.

**Legal implications:** Following the lead of California with its CROWN Act, Sint Maarten might want to consider drafting identical legislation that effectively corrects hair discrimination in schools and workplaces. It would show a real commitment to the sense of cultural identity being protected by law.

**Representation in media & public:** Campaigns, fashion shows, and media platforms will also begin making a point to promote the beauty in natural hair rather than mistreat it because they are clearly not useful.

### A biblical perspective

From Samson’s power in his unshorn hair (Judges 16) to Paul reminding us that human judgments on appear-



ances do not determine intrinsic worth, Scripture tells us over and over again that what God made was intentional. Hair discrimination has been a spiritual error as much as it is a social injustice in the Bible.

It is a lie against the truth that God created us in His image (Genesis 1:27)! People send a message that God is not good enough by turning away or making fun of natural hair. But we are. We have to accept diversity, celebrate the Creator, and build each other up. First Peter 3:3-4: “Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewellery or fine clothes. Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is great worth in God’s sight.”

This verse express that true beauty is internal; it does not necessarily imply that we should despise our outward image. It is not vanity to wear your hair the way God made it.

### Conclusion: Changing minds, changing policies

Hair discrimination in Sint Maarten is not just about style; rather, it speaks to dignity, identity, and respect. No one should feel compelled to alter their natural hair to be accepted at school, the workplace, or within society.

Every braid, every curl, every twist speaks volumes about heritage and resilience. As the Bible says, “Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, but from the inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit” (1 Peter 3:3-4). Beauty is from within. However, God made us in His image and we should not despise our outward appearance which includes our natural hair.

So hair discrimination isn’t just a style issue, it is one of identity, culture, faith, and human dignity. Every Dutch-side school has the opportunity to set an example: To replace archaic policies with inclusive ones, to celebrate the diversity of its students, and to teach children that their worth isn’t determined by how “European” they look.

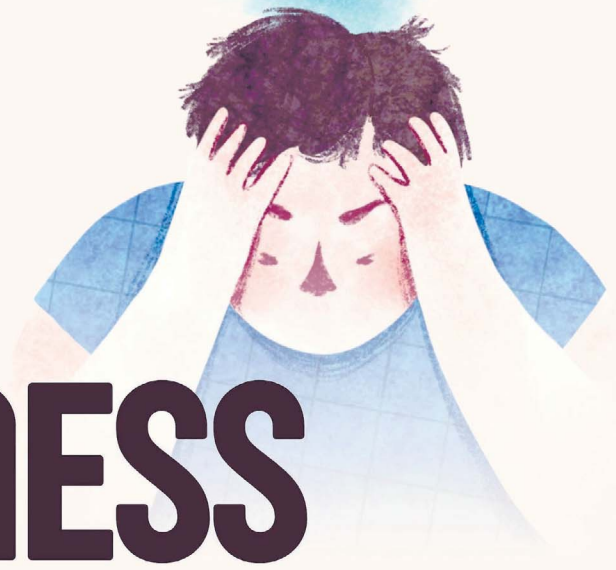
Each braid, twist, loc, or afro is a story of heritage and fortitude since, as the Bible tells us, God created us fearfully and wonderfully (Psalm 139:14), let no school, let no rule, let no one take that truth away from our children.

It is time for Sint Maarten’s schools to rise to the occasion. Teachers, parents, and church leaders must unite. Let every student, no matter their hairstyle, walk into their classroom with confidence, pride, and faith in who God made them to be.

# Feature

Your mental health is important.  
Let's raise awareness and  
support one another.

# MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS



Increased mental health awareness leads to early recognition and intervention of mental health issues, improving outcomes and preventing further distress.

Recognizing the signs early can prevent issues from escalating. Awareness leads to timely support and better outcomes

Mental health awareness involves understanding and recognizing the importance of mental well-being and the impact of mental health on overall quality of life.

Awareness helps break the stigma. Talking openly about mental health encourages others to seek help without shame.





# FRIENDS FIRST – WHY WE'RE THE BEST MENTAL HEALTH WATCHDOGS FOR EACH OTHER

**When people talk about mental health, the first solutions are usually the same: Talk to a school counsellor, reach out to a parent, or make an appointment with a professional. Those options are important, but let's be honest – most of the time, the very first people who notice when something's wrong aren't adults at all. They're us – our friends.**

We're the ones who sit in the same classrooms, scroll through the same feeds, share the same jokes, and sometimes even deal with the same struggles. We're the ones who notice when a group chat goes quiet or when someone's Instagram posts suddenly don't feel like them anymore. And because we live under the same pressures, we understand better than anyone what those signals really mean.

## Living under a microscope

There's no sugar-coating it: Being a teen today is brutally public. Every photo, every tweet, every comment can be judged not just by our classmates, but by people we've never even met. A simple picture can end up screenshotted and shared in a group chat that wasn't meant for us. A TikTok that doesn't land right can become the subject of whispers at school the next morning.

"It feels like you're on a stage all the time," one teen admitted. "Even when I'm not posting, I'm thinking about what people would say if I did. Like, will my hair look weird? Will my caption sound cringe? It's exhausting."

This kind of constant surveillance eats away at confidence. It's not just that someone might laugh at a bad haircut anymore; it's that the laughter can be recorded, spread, and never erased. The microscope is harsher, and the judgment is louder than any generation before us has had to deal with.

## Why friends see what others don't

Because we share that experience, we're often the first to notice the cracks in each other's armour. A parent might not know what it means when someone suddenly deletes their social media, but friends do. A teacher might not think twice about a student zoning out, but we know that it's not like them to sit in silence when they're usually the loudest in the room.

One student put it like this: "I noticed my friend stopped sending voice notes. At first I thought

it was nothing, but then I realized it was because she didn't want us to hear how sad she sounded. That was my sign to check in."

These aren't small things – they're lifelines. Spotting them early could be the reason someone finds the courage to open up instead of hiding their struggles deeper.

## The danger of "They'll be okay"

The easy thing to do is to brush it off. We've all said it before: "He'll be fine," or "She's just stressed." But those words – They'll be okay – can be dangerous. They close the door instead of opening it.

A teen who shared their experience told me, "When I told a friend that I was feeling empty all the time, they said, 'You'll be okay, everyone feels that way.' I laughed it off, but inside I was crushed. I didn't need them to fix me; I just needed them to understand."

Dismissing someone's feelings doesn't make them disappear. It just makes the person feel more alone. As friends, we don't need to have all the solutions, but we do need to take feelings seriously. Sometimes listening is more powerful than giving advice.

## Friendship as the first line of support

The truth is, friendship can be the first safety net. We're often the ones who keep someone from falling too far before they can get professional help. It doesn't mean carrying their problems alone; it means showing up, checking in, and reminding them that they're not invisible.

One teen shared, "I didn't even realize how bad things had gotten until my friend said, 'You're not acting like yourself. Do you want to talk about it?' That one question made me break down, but in a good way. It was the first time I felt like someone saw me."

These small acts matter – a text that says, "Hey, I'm thinking of you"; sitting quietly with someone who doesn't feel like talking; noticing when silence is louder than words – these are not professional therapies, but they can be the difference between isolation and connection.

## Knowing when to reach out for help

Of course, being a good friend doesn't mean we're therapists. There are times when the signs go beyond what we can handle. Talk

about self-harm, drastic changes in mood, or deep hopelessness aren't just hints, they're red flags. In those cases, the best thing a friend can do is loop in a trusted adult, teacher, or counsellor. It doesn't mean betraying your friend's trust – it means protecting them.

"It was scary to tell an adult," another student admitted, "but I knew I couldn't carry it by myself. If I didn't say something, I was afraid of what might happen. Now my friend thanks me for it."

Sometimes the bravest thing you can do as a friend is to admit you need backup.

## Why this pressure feels like the worst yet

It's important to understand just how extreme the pressure is for our generation. Adults often roll their eyes and say, "It's just social media." But for us, it's not just. It's where our reputations are made or destroyed. It's where friendships grow and end. It's where self-worth gets measured in likes, comments, and followers.

That level of exposure has never existed before, and the toll on our mental health is huge. Anxiety, depression, and stress aren't abstract medical terms, they're things

many of us live with daily. And the hardest part is that we can't just log off. Social media is our social world. It's how we connect, share, and exist – which is why being there for each other is more important than ever.

In the end, the best mental health advocates we have might be sitting next to us in class, or scrolling through our feed right now. Friends can't solve everything, but we can notice the things others don't. We can choose not to dismiss signs, not to hide behind "They'll be okay", and not to stay silent when someone needs us to speak up.

Our generation is under pressures no one before us has ever faced. But maybe that's also why we're the best equipped to support each other. We understand the microscope, the judgment, the constant exposure. We get it, because we're living it. And in a world where everyone is watching, sometimes the people who really see us are our friends.

And that, more than anything else, can make the difference between someone staying silent and someone finding the courage to ask for help.



# THE PRESSURE TO BE PERFECT



***Nowadays whether it's in schools or our daily lives, there's a pressure on teens to be perfect or, in other words, to keep up or to follow the latest trends such as buying new and expensive products including backpacks, clothes, jewellery and accessories.***

This pressure to keep up often makes youths feel inadequate, like they're falling behind or even making them feel like they don't fit in. It encourages a mindset where self-worth is measured by appearance and

possessions rather than character and achievements.

In fact, worrying about how others perceive their clothes or appearance can lead to daily stress and anxiety. Keeping up with the latest of everything is hard and exhausting, and youth limitations can be tested. Imagine just updating your sense of style just to end up behind again because five more trends came out? So, in order for youths to keep up, it's common that some of them often steal items from stores or from other youths – just so that they can keep up in this teen-world filled with the fear of negative perception.

Stealing not only ruins one's reputation and gets them arrested, but it also worsens the chances of them ever fitting in. The pressure to fit in or to be perceived like everyone else can be tough, but the lengths youths go just to be a part of something is concerning. In the case of the pressure to be perfect, youths aren't the only ones to blame. The priorities of the parents are also a common factor.



When parents allow their kids to spend a great amount of money for one unnecessary item, it feeds into their need for more. So, instead of spending money on unnecessary expensive products, youths of today should better learn how to save their earnings or put their money towards something more useful.

Spending a vast amount of money on measly products teaches youths that when they come into money, it is better to go expensive or go home – resulting in bigger problems, especially when they're living alone abroad. In this world, putting pressure on yourself to fit in or "be perfect" is a system only designed for young people to exceed limitations that should not be exceeded.

Your style, your look, your confidence is all the perfection you need. It's your style because it fits you. Changing yourself to fit into a world where you'd be judged anyways is no reason to change at all, but to be confident with how you are already. Perfection isn't changing your features; perfection is being confident with your features.





# TRENDY TODAY, FORGOTTEN TOMORROW

BY ADITI RAJPAL

BUY  
OR BYE



***Fashion trends today change faster than ever. Social media like TikTok and Instagram can come up with new aesthetics overnight. So brands such as Zara, Shein, H&M, to name a few, rush to release fresh new clothing items to go with the rapid changing styles. What used to be seasonal outfit trends have now turned into monthly obsessions that are quickly moved on from.***

This leaves people, especially teens, feeling the pressure to be “perfect” and to constantly upgrade their closet to new items. At first, when you look at it, fast fashion may seem appealing – cheap, stylish clothes that are easy to access. But the low-price tags hide a bigger issue: The cost can quickly add up. You may think a \$10 top isn’t a splurge, but constantly overbuying can drain wallets fast.

Yet, money isn’t the only consequence. Trends start and end so quickly, caus-

ing cheaply made items to be rendered useless in a matter of weeks. Most of these objects are of terrible quality, which means they wear out quickly, or never get used because of the never-ending cycle of new trends. The overproduction of these wasteful goods has a heavy impact on our environment, adding to already packed landfills. This also doesn’t take into account the pressure on factory workers, who work under unsafe conditions and for low wages.

Many teens end up with overflowing closets, clothes being worn once, while still feeling behind on trends. This repetitive behaviour only shows teens that overspending is a good thing, but also brings fashion culture into a whole new light of

“disposable fashion”. For families, this adds more stress. Parents often work hard to earn money – living on an island, working pay check to pay check is already so hard. Kids are always seeing new trends online and wanting new things, but these trends are often forgotten by the next month.

It is disrespectful and unwise to spend money on new trends that are fleeting and easily disposable. In the end, what people fail to realize is that fashion was never supposed to be about what is the new, hot topic of discussion. It’s supposed to show you who you are as a person, your personality. Fashion can tell a lot about a person.



Feature





# THE BIG 'C' IN GOLD

BY SANYA JANDIAL

*The big "C" is one of life's greatest fears. Many believe that as the numbers on the birthday cake rise, cancer slowly begins to creep in, but that isn't always the case. September is Childhood Cancer Awareness Month, and it should not just pass people by. The gold ribbon is its symbol, because just like gold, children are precious. Yet when most people think of cancer awareness, the first image that comes to mind is breast cancer. Saving our mothers and sisters is vital, but so is saving our future. Awareness must expand to include everyone, especially on an island where we have such a tight-knit community.*

Every year, around 400,000 children and adolescents worldwide are diagnosed with cancer. The most common types include leukaemia, brain tumours, lymphoma, and solid tumours. There are many challenges associated with the very young having to go through such a difficult and incomprehensible illness – treatment options are limited, there are high medical costs, as well as the fact that

it takes a psychological toll on the family and the child. Even on St. Maarten, in order to get specialized care, people have to travel abroad to Curaçao, the Netherlands, or the United States, which adds financial and emotional stress. That makes awareness here at home even more important.

## What are some early warning signs of childhood cancer?

- Unexplained and persistent fever.
- Frequent headaches, often with vomiting.
- Lumps or swelling, especially in the neck, chest, abdomen, or arms/legs.
- Unexplained weight loss.

- Ongoing pain in bones, joints, back, or legs.
- Easy bruising or unusual bleeding.
- Frequent infections.
- Sudden vision changes, persistent eye or vision problems.
- Excessive tiredness or paleness.
- Persistent cough or difficulty breathing.

## What can ordinary people in St. Maarten do to make a difference?

- Wear a gold ribbon in September.
- Use your voice online (share awareness posts/ local stories).
- Donate, no matter the amount.
- Join or organize community fundraising events.
- Educate others.
- Paint the island gold (murals, art projects, etc.).
- Spread awareness on local radio stations.

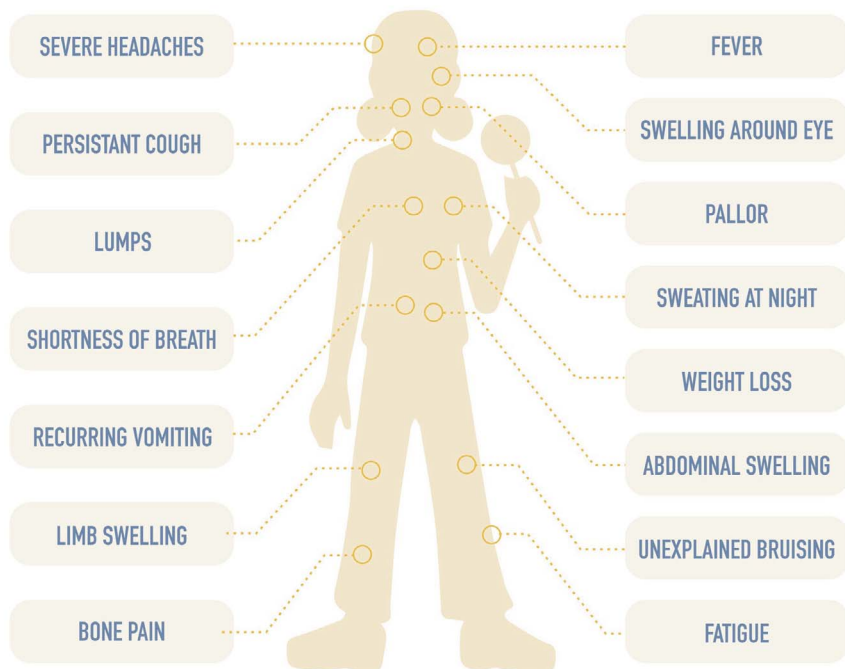
## How can awareness actually change things on a small island like ours?

- It puts pressure on leaders to focus more on childhood cancer in healthcare policies.
- It inspires more local fundraisers and events to help with costs.
- It makes it easier for families to speak openly instead of suffering in silence.
- Small actions spread quickly and lead to big results.

*Every ribbon worn, every dollar given, and every conversation shared brings us closer to hope. This September, let us turn St. Maarten gold, because our children deserve nothing less!*



## CHILDHOOD CANCER EARLY WARNING SIGNS





# MY VISION: EMPOWERING, INSPIRING, AND CULTIVATING COMMUNITY THROUGH ART – TEEN TIMES PERFORMING ARTS CENTER

BY SAHELI KIRPALANI

*Throughout the years, it has always been important to us at Teen Times to advocate for a dedicated safe space that allows young people on our island to feel empowered in their creativity and talent alongside their academic endeavours. However, as the focus has become increasingly directed towards fulfilling academic pursuits, there remains a lack of opportunities on St. Maarten for young people to embrace their curiosity, creativity, and undeniable talent. Therefore, Teen Times would like to introduce the vision for building their very own Performing Arts Center, which will be a platform designed to foster and celebrate the performing arts talent within our diverse community.*

One of the key aspects to consider when constructing the Teen Times Performing Arts Center is the ideal location. In order to ensure the centre is accessible to everyone in the community, especially young people, it must be located in a very central area of Sint Maarten that is close to a cultural or school zone. One of the optimal areas is the Philipsburg region, which is central, vibrant, and filled with our unique culture that will ultimately inspire creativity and remain accessible. Furthermore, other nearby school zones, such as South Reward and St. Peters are also ideal locations as they are easily reachable, close to schools and residential areas, and are deeply connected to the youth community on the island.

Nevertheless, we cannot forget the purpose and the people for which this centre is being created. This platform should be open to everyone in the community, specifically young people between the ages of four and 21 years old. Within the centre, the various age groups can be categorized starting with beginners all the way to seniors, similar to that of a school curriculum. Additionally, I believe that all types of performers with a background in the performing arts that have the skill and determination to grow and learn are welcome – regardless of whether you are a professional or an

amateur at music, dance, or theatre. This should be a place where you can develop your skills with professional guidance, inspiration and dedication. Hence, any young person who is an aspiring performance artist in any capacity is invited to join the community centre and embrace their talent through after-school programs, workshops that focus on dance, theatre, and music, as well as cultural events and shows.

These workshops and events can be hosted by local and international professionals in music, dance and/or theatre, featuring the diverse cultural elements and backgrounds within our community. Moreover, certain studio spaces in the performing arts centre should be available for artists to rent. Furthermore, to celebrate the participants' performing arts journey and showcase the incredible talent within our island community, end-of-year shows, talent showdowns, as well as cultural events can be hosted at the Performing Arts Center. While the centre should be open to the public, including schools, local communities, and international cultural organizations, it should be preserved and protected with guidelines as it must be a safe space for the young people on our island to create and grow into a better performer.

When building this Performing Arts Center, it is incredibly essential to consider the elements of design that would be included, such as the type of rooms, technology, equipment, atmosphere, themes, as well as the accessibility of the spaces. In terms of the rooms, there should be dedicated space for at least one theatre, in addition to several rehearsal rooms to practice in and multiple classrooms to host workshops and classes for each of the performing arts – music, dance, and drama. Studio spaces should also be included to be used by artists and performers that would like to host events



and workshops throughout the year. Along with the designated spaces, the centre should be equipped with modern technology, such as computerized administration systems, smartboards, projector screens, musical instruments and equipment, as well as appropriate sound systems, which would increase the centre's efficiency, production value, and overall artistic experience.

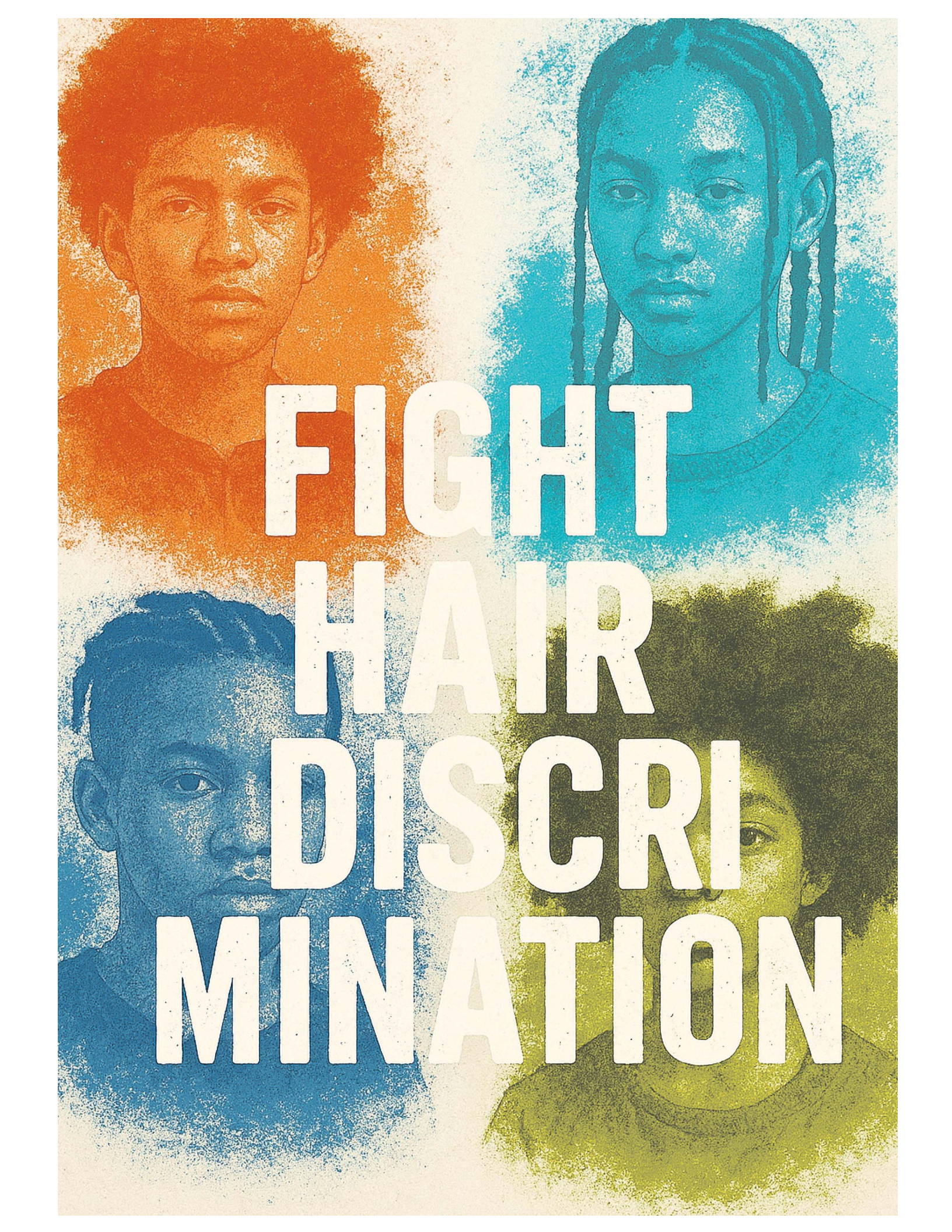
Additionally, I believe that having a community, recreational space close by or within the centre that is surrounded by nature – such as an outdoor patio seating area with a cute café – would be incredibly refreshing and contribute to creating a motivational artistic atmosphere. Overall, the design of the centre should captivate the multicultural themes of St. Maarten, visually demonstrating our resilience and diversity with the purpose to inspire the creativity, talent, and artistry that resides within our people. When people enter the place, they should feel a warm, inviting welcome that allows them to feel safe and confident to express themselves artistically. It would be very special to honour the work of our very own local artists and young people in the process of designing

the inside and outside of these creative spaces, further contributing to the inspiring and motivating energy of the Performing Arts Center. Moreover, it is also crucial to ensure that the entrance and exits to the building are accessible and safe for everyone, and potential insights from members of the community would be extremely helpful to enhance this vision.

Ultimately, the vision of this Performing Arts Center is driven with the purpose of inspiring young people by providing them with a voice and a platform to embrace their artistry, as well as contribute to creating a positive impact within our community. Introducing a Performing Arts Center would not only empower the youth, but would also create meaningful job opportunities, promote tourism, boost our economic sustainability, and improve the standard of living on St. Maarten. This would also reduce the crime rate and provide innumerable economic and social benefits to our island as a whole in the long run. Above all, it would bring our community together, building long-lasting and meaningful relationships in the process of celebrating our artistic talent. Therefore, I urge the Government of St. Maarten to help Teen Times make this vision of building a Performing Arts Center become a successful reality.





The background of the poster features four portraits of Black women, each rendered in a different color. The top-left portrait is in orange, the top-right in blue, the bottom-left in dark blue, and the bottom-right in green. The portraits are stylized with a grainy, textured appearance. The text "FIGHT HAIR DISCRIMINATION" is overlaid in the center in a large, white, bold, sans-serif font.

# FIGHT HAIR DISCRIMINATION