

## **Children enjoy robotics camp**

By Hallam Hope

An inaugural four-week robotics camp for primary school aged children, organised by the Caribbean Science Foundation (CSF), has been hailed as a success.

Interim Executive Director of the CSF Professor Cardinal Warde said the camp was a “grassroots effort” by a group of dedicated Barbadians and one Grenadian who want to help Barbados catch up with other countries that are rapidly embracing STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) for economic development.

A key objective of the camp was to engage the minds of the children, aged nine to 12, in fun-filled activities where they collaborated to design and operate from simple to more complex robots. All the movements of the robots were run by software programming formulated by the students.

The camp was sponsored by the University of the West Indies, the Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Human Resource Development and City of Bridgetown Credit Union.

“By all measures, it was a tremendous success. It far exceeded my expectations for a pilot programme,” Professor Warde told parents and students at a closing ceremony and exhibition at the University of the West Indies (UWI) Friday. “The students turned out to be faster learners than the facilitators had expected. The students are the most excited bunch I have seen in a while,” he remarked.

The camp was carefully supervised by a team of coaches. The students were introduced to basic engineering and technology concepts. They were taught to design and operate simple devices such as catapults made from sticks and rubber bands and graduated to assembling mobile transportation vehicles and writing the software programming for their functionality to move and lift objects.

“While no previous experience in robotics was required of the students, this pilot targeted children who are passionately interested in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and enjoy hands-on work,” said Assistant Executive Director Lois Oliver.

The junior robotics camp is consistent with the CSF's primary goals of: (1) helping to increase the numbers of Caribbean students pursuing advanced degrees in science and engineering, (2) helping to diversify the economies of the region, and (3) helping to stimulate more technology-based entrepreneurship within the region, thereby raising the standard of living of the people.

Professor Warde expressed warm appreciation for the support provided by the partners and suggested the pilot project had laid the groundwork for an expanded 2016 camp.

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