

Recycle Phone, Save a Child

Mobile provider Digicel decided to innovate, not by selling new phones, but alleviating the toll of HIV/AIDS on children, by selling old phones.

Yesterday marked the launch of Digicel's 'Help A Child, Recycle Your Unwanted Phone' campaign at their Tropical Plaza, St Andrew, outlet.

In true Jamaican fashion, hardly a word was spoken without the jangling of ringtones, and the occasional 'man in the street' - who would walk in, turn in the old mobile, then distract patrons with "Call mi back, I jus' buy a new phone. Hello?" - before strolling out.

Cellphones lying around

"We know that there are thousands upon thousands of old cellphones lying around in people's homes and offices," said Mark Linehan, CEO of Digicel Jamaica. "Digicel is pleased to be working with a recycling partner to recycle these old mobile phones for sale. The proceeds from the sale will be donated to the Jamaica AIDS Support for Life (JASL) to help orphaned and vulnerable children affected by or infected with HIV/AIDS across Jamaica."

Linehan explained that the phones would be auctioned off in bulk to businesses in the Far East and Africa which deal in reconditioned handsets. There, depending on the condition, a handset will sell for anywhere between US\$1 and \$5.

Seventy Digicel outlets, of the 183 across the island, will accept unused handsets and, Linehan added, "a handset is a handset". He noted that the handset, not the chip, was being recycled and the network of the cellphone was irrelevant.

The idea

The campaign is the brainchild of Marcia Forbes, permanent secretary in the Ministry of Energy and Mining, who said she proposed the idea last year after noticing a housekeeper with three cellphones.

UNAIDS representative Miriam Maluwa was on hand to pledge support for the initiative and to monitor the impact of the campaign.

"This worthy programme will go a long way to achieving HIV/ AIDS-related United Nations development goals and also contribute to achieving universal access to commodities and services for HIV prevention, treatment, care and support."

JASL Executive Director Stacy-Ann Jarrett noted that about 1,500 Jamaican children are directly affected by HIV and, statistically, 83 per cent of the 15-49 age group are at risk. Jamaica Gleaner