

Air Jamaica spreads its wings for autism

NATIONAL carrier Air Jamaica has gotten firmly behind the effort to improve the lives of Jamaican autists, as the airline will be the national carrier for a team representing The Maia Chung Autism and Disabilities Foundation that will, between October 19 and 25, be visiting Manhattan, New York to solicit help for autists.

Chung will solicit help from the diaspora community, specifically in the areas of raising awareness about autism, obtaining books about autism for a reading corner to be established in collaboration with the Jamaica Library Service, as well as get funding to help meet education costs for autistic children in Jamaica. The trip came about in part due to Chung's award-winning philanthropic work as recognised by First Global Bank which named her First Global's Woman of Vision 2009. The award took Chung's work to the international level where it was noticed by Rosetta Jamieson-Thomas, author of the autism romance *A Margin of Hope* - a fictitious tale about a Jamaican couple's struggles coping with their autistic son. "Right now the education matters affecting the autists are the most crucial, despite [Government's] allusion earlier this year that some of the schools offering private care for autism would have gotten grant aid status," Chung said. "This promise was not kept." This has seen the expulsion of several seven and eight year old autists from their schools. "In this vein, instead of lying down and letting go of all hope, I am determined to see what we can do for ourselves. I am a great believer in helping ourselves. The trip will mean me taking time off from my job but I am compelled to do what must be done. If we get even one child some help. my philosophy is the Foundation will be successful," Chung said. Copies of *A Margin of Hope* are available for loan from The Maia Chung Autism and Disabilities Foundation by calling 876-578-3079.