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Inmates benefit from Skype Initiative

The Department of Correctional Services has launched a Skype Initiative to benefit all incarcerated juveniles and adults.

The launch took place at the Tower Street Adult Correctional Centre on Friday, December 9, 2016.

During the launch of the programme, inmates at the facility had the opportunity to see and talk to family members anywhere in the world using Skype. Skype is a free app which allows for video calls over the Internet. The programme is another element in the renewed push of the Ministry towards rehabilitation with a purpose.

Speaking on the benefits of the programme, one participant said ***“I believe it is a good programme and if it is a case where more computers can be set up then it is better than even the phone booth.”***

Another inmate said, ***“Mi like dis wah dem a do. This betta dan the visit because sometime we can hardly hear in the booth and it get too emotional.”***

The family members contacted similarly praised the initiative. Gloria,* who lives in the United States was elated at getting the chance to see her husband for the first time in five years. She praised the initiative and only asked if the calls

could be made also in the evening after the children are home from school so they too could speak to their father.

The Skype Initiative is to be in all correctional facilities by the end of 2017. As part of the programme, each month an inmate or ward of the state will be allowed between five and ten minutes to speak with a family member who will call at a specific time, established by an authority at the facility. Callers are aware of all the rules including that all calls are recorded and that a correctional officer will be in the room for the duration of the call.

State Minister in the Ministry of National Security with direct responsibility for the Department of Correctional Services, Senator Pearnel Charles Jr. said *“Using Skype technology to connect family with inmates is an important step forward in our efforts to achieve successful reintegration. Our goal is to rehabilitate and reintegrate positive contributors in our communities. Allowing inmates to communicate with their family through Skype technology will promote rehabilitation and ensure that inmates are motivated to transform their lives in a positive way.”*

“Inmates who maintain contact with their families and positive influencers are less likely to reoffend and are more likely to be accepted in their communities,” asserted the State Minister.

Project Manager at the Ministry of National Security, Dr. Marc Thomas stated, *“The decision to use technology to connect family members was an easy one as the benefits were significant. The discussions I had with inmates revealed that many never see their children or spouses due to the cost associated with visiting from overseas or from rural parishes to Kingston or Spanish Town where the largest correctional facilities are located. The state is not punishing the children or families and therefore the ability to have them maintain those bonds prompted the use of technology. Further, as part of our implementation of*

the National Rehabilitation Programme, we are expanding the mentorship programme and this is a cost effective way to connect inmates and wards to positive role models across the country.”

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*Name changed for confidentiality