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Step Out and Strive Programme Key Part of Effective Rehabilitation Says Minister Spencer

State Minister in the Ministry National Security, the Hon. Rudyard Spencer, has lauded the Step Out and Strive (SOAS) Programme which was implemented within the Department of Correctional Services (DCS), as a key contributor to effective rehabilitation and reintegration of the incarcerated population.

“I have left the same message at all of the institutions that I have visited. The boys, girls, men and women must not view their current state as a deterrent for brighter prospects. They must use all available resources to ensure that when the time comes for them to be released, they will leave better than they came. This Programme is a critical aspect of the rehabilitation that we are working assiduously to achieve,” the State Minister said.

He continued, **“The Step Out and Strive Programme involves a combination of interactive sessions with reggae music, geared towards meeting the needs of incarcerated persons who are approaching their parole eligibility date with at least six months remaining on their sentence.”**

The Programme was launched in September 2017 and currently has 67 participants across 3 institutions: New Broughton Sunset Rehabilitation Adult Correctional Centre (NBSRACC), St. Catherine Adult Correctional Centre (SCACC) and Tower Street Adult Correctional Centre (TSACC).

The Programme takes a three-pronged approach where the first module seeks to enhance the participant’s attitudes, values and belief systems. The second module is geared towards assisting the offender in recognizing the symptoms of his/her triggers as well as how to effectively manage them. The third and final module relates to empowerment where the participants are exposed to life-skills, information and resources from agencies. Inmates engage in a minimum of two (2) sessions per week for approximately forty-five (45) minutes to an hour. Guest presenters from agencies such as Food for the Poor, HEART NTA, Ministry of Labour & Social Security deliver presentations on their services and how the agencies can assist the inmates reintegrate into society.

Ms. Charmaine Holness, Coordinator for Community Service Order (Parole Programme) within the DCS, has indicated that the group sessions are facilitated by at least two Probation Aftercare Officers and span a period of twelve (12) weeks. Ms. Holness highlighted that on February 16, 2018, the first

cohort of 19 inmates from NBSRACC graduated from the programme. **“The greatest impact of the programme is the changing of the inmates’ lives for the better. They become more responsible in their behaviour. Some inmates who usually sport a low self-esteem are having a better outlook on life. They now see themselves, no longer as victims of circumstances, but as catalysts of change in which they can assist others,”** she noted.

Several inmates concurred with her sentiments that their participation has affected their outlook on life and demeanor. One stated that Anger Management is his favorite class because it teaches him how to deal with difficult situations, while others voiced that they are more responsible and have developed restraint.

The SOAS programme is an initiative of the Probation Aftercare arm of the DCS that arose out of a need to provide more meaningful intervention for prospective parole applicants. This is in keeping with ‘Rehabilitation and Redemption’ pillar of the Ministry of National Security’s Five Pillar Crime Reduction Strategy that seeks to effectively rehabilitate offenders and prepare them for life upon release.