



MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

By

**Minister of Public Safety, The Honourable Michael H. Dunkley, JP,
MP**

BRIDGING THE GAP VII: COMMUNITY REINTEGRATION FAIR

September 20th, 2013

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Public Safety and the Department of Corrections remain committed to the Department's mission to empower inmates to be responsible and productive citizens. In furtherance of its mission, the Department last month held Bridging the Gap VII, a Community Reintegration Fair, which brought together 60 Department of Corrections' inmates along with corrections officers and programme staff; and 32 vendors, including 21 private sector companies. From 9:00am until 1:30pm on August 7th, at Westgate Correctional Facility, inmates received firsthand information designed to assist them on release.

Now in its seventh installment, the Fair has been designed and tailored to enhance reintegration and discharge planning efforts in order to “bridge the gap” between community services outside of the prison walls and Corrections. **Mr. Speaker**, inmates from Westgate’s Units E1, E2 and E3; the Prison Farm; and the Right Living House, who participated in the programme, were provided with an opportunity to learn about community resources prior to discharge. An offender’s awareness of community resources is vital to his successful discharge. Through the Bridging the Gap Community Reintegration Fair, it is expected that offenders will know where to go for assistance if the need ever arises once they are released into the community.

It is well known that a key aspect of reducing the risk of recidivism is ensuring that released offenders are employable and able to seek and maintain employment on release. As such, the Bridging the Gap Fair also sought to link offenders to resources such as employment agencies, potential employers, and education or trade schools. **Mr. Speaker**,

representatives from Butterfield & Vallis; Bermuda Air Conditioning; Bermuda College; D.T. Construction & Maintenance; the Hustle Truck, KEMH; M.E.F. Group of Companies; the National Training Board, the Department of Workforce Development; and Trinity Construction were all on hand to provide inmates with information on prerequisites for education enrolment, company hiring policies, company standards and employee requirements for job placements.

Mr. Speaker, an offender's wellness is also fundamental to a successful reintegration programme. Inmates were exposed to representatives from helping agencies such as Alcoholics and Narcotics Anonymous, the Departments of Financial Assistance and Social Insurance, and Focus Counseling Centre, giving them the opportunity to ask questions related to the services offered through each of these agencies and receive immediate feedback from those who work in the field.

It is the aim of the Department of Corrections to have each released offender adequately informed of their responsibilities and requirements

on release so as to reduce the risk of returning to prison. Probation and Parole Officers and Members of the Parole Board shared with the Fair's participants typical conditions of probation and parole, and the workshops and groups available to them through the Department of Court Services.

Mr. Speaker, I am confident that these interactions resulting from the Bridging the Gap VII, Community Reintegration Fair reassured the inmates that there are people in the community who are willing and have the resources to assist them if they only take the time to seek them out.

I would like to thank each of the vendors and companies who participated in last month's Fair. Their willingness to enter the prison and speak with incarcerated offenders demonstrates that they understand that each of us have a part to play in the rehabilitation of offenders. Without the support and guidance offered by these agencies, many offenders would be resigned to life long criminal activity.

Mr. Speaker, the ultimate objective of the Department is to return offenders to the community as law abiding, contributing and self-supporting citizens; and the Bridging the Gap Fair provides a wealth of resources to prevent the recidivism of those inmates who take full advantage of it.

Thank you, **Mr. Speaker.**