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Priority: **HIGH**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Community Social Outreach and Impact Caravan
to continue after COVID-19 pandemic.**

The Community Outreach and Impact Caravan which was launched by the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services in August 2019 will continue when the COVID-19 pandemic is over. In keeping with all national efforts to avoid the spread of the virus, the *Ministry* suspended the initiative. The Caravan, over the past 7 - 8 months has attracted in excess of two hundred persons in some instances.

The Ministry is cognizant that given the downstream impact of the Coronavirus, the need for a social safety net will be required even more, in order to provide social support to both the vulnerable and the *new vulnerable* individuals and families, as a consequence of termination, retrenchment and loss of or reduced income. Under the theme, **Building Resilience to secure our Nation**, the *Community Social Outreach and Impact Caravan* is a direct output of the *National Social Mitigation Plan (NSMP)* which was developed in 2017 to cushion the fall out effects and shocks of any downturn in the economy.

During the last eight (8) months, staff of the *MSDFS* together with other State institutions and agencies such as the Ministry of Public Utilities, the Office of the Prime Minister – Gender and Child Affairs, the National Commission for Self-Help Limited, the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development, the National Training Agency, the National Agricultural Marketing Development Company, as well as, the various Regional Health Authorities, have partnered to provide citizens with direct access and on-site assessment within their communities, for a suite of State-funded grants, services, training and employment opportunities. The main intent, according to the Ministry, remains the assurance of *building more resilience and the subsequent sustainability of households and communities; particularly within periods of socio-economic uncertainty – all towards improved living standards for citizens of this country.*

Between August 2019 and March 2020, the *Ministry of Social Development and Family Services'* Inter-Agency caravan visited twenty-seven (27) communities across districts in Trinidad, often with the support of the local Government Councillors and village councils where venues like community centres and other areas of support have been provided.

Residents also continue to express their satisfaction over the quality and variety of services being made available at the *door steps* of the citizenry.

According to an unemployed youth from South Oropouche, “ With this outreach I am finally given the chance to be heard and to receive support towards the realisation of my dreams in fish farming”. This was achieved through the award of temporary grant facilities from the **MSDFS** and re-direction to specific training providers. “*This,*” according to the **Ministry**, “*is what the caravan is also about. Empowerment of our most vulnerable can only be truly achieved, when all institutions are aware of what each does and they agree to work together for the collective good.*” As such, all applications are at present being processed and once the initiative is resumed as planned, all previous commitments will be honoured. In particular, three (3) caravans are planned for locations in Tobago, in partnership with the *Division of Health, Wellness and Family Development*.

In addition to services and grants, the **MSDFS** continues to observe the increasing trend in requests for counselling within the communities. Such requests have come from a number of single parents, guardians of children with disabilities, as well as, male adolescents. Records from the Ministry’s *National Family Services Division*, show that since the start of the Caravan, there have been a marked increase in requests for immediate interventions and follow-up support by the Ministry, during the outreach exercises.

While the Executive and staff of the Ministry continue to adhere to national guidelines concerning the health and wellness of all citizens, they have in the interim, embarked on the revision and implementation of several key policies and practices that will ensure business continuity. Of special interest is the seamless delivery of core social services and grants in consultation with some of their key stakeholders - the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development, the National Insurance Board of Trinidad and Tobago, the Bankers’ Association of Trinidad and Tobago, iGovTT and TTconnect; as well as, the Trinidad and Tobago Postal Services Corporation.

The Ministry of Social Development and Family Services (MSDFS) wishes to advise members of the public seeking information on the newly introduced social support measures to visit the Ministry’s website at www.social.gov.tt for the guidelines and application forms. As the Ministry continues to observe and comply with social distancing stipulations and guidelines, persons are advised to avoid visiting the social welfare offices and to instead utilize the electronic measures available to apply and submit their applications. Please feel free to call your Local District Office, the Ministry’s toll free hotlines at 800 – 1MSD (1673), 800-OPIC (6742) or 623-2608; Extensions 1120 to 1132 for any enquiries or further information.



Persons gather for services at the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services' relaunch of the Community Outreach and Impact Caravan at the Pinto Community Centre.



Persons access services at the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services' community caravan in Maloney.



Persons access services at the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services' community caravan in South Oropouche on February 28th.

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For more information:

Communications Unit
Ministry of Social Development and Family Services
(868) 623-2608; Ext 5405/5445/5432
Website: www.social.gov.tt
cceu@social.gov.tt