



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

Ministry of Social Development and Family Services



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

Tuesday, 16 March 2021

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Priority: **HIGH**

### **Towards Inclusivity – Sign Language Training for Frontline Staff of the MSDFS**

As the world celebrates World Social Work Day today, the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services marked the occasion by demonstrating its commitment towards ensuring that persons with disabilities, especially those who are Deaf, have equal access to the Ministry's programmes and services. The Ministry has rolled out its first ever, Sign Language Training for its Frontline Staff.

Speaking during a session at the UWI Open Campus on Padmore Avenue, San Fernando today, Minister of Social Development and Family Services, Senator the Honourable Donna Cox indicated that the Workshop, coincidentally taking place on World Social Work Day, is a strategic step in the right direction. According to the Minister: "The Ministry's National Policy for Persons with Disabilities clearly articulates a holistic framework for achieving the goals of social inclusion and equal opportunity for all citizens with disabilities in Trinidad and Tobago. Therefore, I am confident that this course will not only provide a forum to raise awareness about persons who are Deaf, but create a social and physical environment favouring accessibility, integration and full participation of persons with disabilities as articulated in the Policy".

Minister Cox also noted that the course will reduce the cost of sourcing an interpreter when conducting business at the Ministry as it can cost on average, a minimum of one hundred and fifty (\$150.00) per hour to utilize the services of an interpreter.

The training is being held in collaboration with the University of the West Indies and is intended to, among other things, reduce the need for an intermediary between the Deaf community and the Ministry's personnel when accessing services, develop effective communications between persons who are Deaf and frontline staff, and improve the level of service provided to the community of persons who are Deaf. Trainees will be exposed to hands on training in various areas, including a brief introduction to Sign language, the History of Sign Language and finger spelling, the Art of Signing, learning to sign the alphabet along with practical activities, numbers, colours, days of the week, time and actions.

Approximately twenty (20) members of staff from the Ministry's San Fernando, Point Fortin, Rio Claro, Chaguanas, Penal and Princes Town offices will be participating in the sessions to be conducted over a twelve (12) week period. It is envisioned that these training workshops will assist to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities.

The Ministry expects to host two more sessions at other venues to train additional frontline staff.



*Minister of Social Development and Family Services, Senator the Honourable Donna Cox signs “Good Morning” as she obtains brief training in Sign Language.*



*Staff engage in Sign Language exercises during the Ministry's Sign Language Training for Frontline Staff.*



*Staff engage in Sign Language exercises during the Ministry's Sign Language Training for Frontline Staff from Instructor Shameer Bhaggan*



*Minister Cox obtains brief Sign Language training from Instructor Shameer Bhaggan.*



*Minister Cox address staff at the Ministry's Sign Language Training for frontline staff.*

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