

A Second Chance is waiting for you!

The second chance you've been waiting for is FINALLY here! The Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) in association with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) officially launched The Strengthening Second Chance Education Programme (Second Chance) at The Accra Beach Hotel & Spa on Tuesday March 19th, 2013. The Second Chance Programme is a USD\$ 4.2 Million initiative over 3 years and will primarily target "at-risk" youths 16-35 years old across nine Caribbean territories, namely Antigua & Barbuda, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, St. Kitts & Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent & The Grenadines, Suriname and Trinidad & Tobago.

"At-risk" youth are persons who have experienced poor life outcomes in general. These include but are not limited to school failure; teen-age parenthood; economic dependency; drug use or incarceration because of poverty and/or crime; low levels of English proficiency; poor school performance; male marginalization; physical disabilities; unemployment and underemployment. It is expected that this educational programme will encourage them to take the first step in securing a better, brighter future.

The goal of the Strengthening Second Chance Education Programme is to build a sustainable infrastructure that will allow at risk groups of all interests and abilities to access programmes that may lead to the development of valuable life skills, training/retraining for the world of work, portable certification, and a continuing education platform for future development. The programme will be offered at participating learning institutions (Second Chance Institutions) and will provide a tangible element in the form of the CXC's Caribbean Vocational Qualification (CVQ®) Levels 1 and 2, and the Caribbean Certificate of Secondary Level Competence (CCSLC®) to those who successfully complete their programmes. This is good news for Ahmal, an at-risk male in the 20-25 age-group who says he prefers an action learning or competency-based assessment programme that he feels would better prepare him for the world of work.

Speaking at the launch, Chief Executive Officer of CXC Dr. Didacus Jules said he was pleased with the response from local and regional Second Chance Institutions (SCIs) as they eagerly look forward to helping vulnerable young people get on their feet again. *"The national and regional SCIs with whom we have interacted in the explorations leading to the programme design have been excited at the pathways that CXC's involvement will provide. Access to the CVQs and to the CCSLC will provide a solid foundation of competencies to enable young people to move from wherever they are to wherever they dream to go."*

Ambassador Larry L. Palmer, US Ambassador to Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean, said he was proud to be partnering with CXC in this educational effort and felt that the

Programme could make a big difference in the lives of those youth in need, as well as provide the Caribbean business community with a more attractive pool of potential candidates for employment opportunities. *“We must all strive to support our youth who need the assistance to reach their true potential. We must provide encouragement and support not only because it is the right thing to do, but because any opportunity lost can weaken a person, a family, and society as a whole. Second-chance programs encourage learning and improvement in the quality of education and services available to vulnerable youth who are willing to “try just one more time.”*

Recent research within the local business community suggests there are opportunities for at-risk youth to be employed but they must exhibit basic job skills for the job they are applying for, possess social and communication skills, be professional at all times, have a positive attitude, demonstrate willingness to learn, have ambition and be time sensitive. It was also stated that companies would be engaged to offer opportunities in the form of apprenticeships and internships as part of the Second Chance Programme but success from this experience could only be achieved if a suitable structure is established whereby the aims and objectives of the internship and the benefits for both employer and intern are clearly shown.

The Programme is expected to be offered at Second Chance Institutions (SCIs) in the nine territories mentioned at the start of the next school semester in September this year.