

Push is on to Get Prepaid Cards Into Mayaguana 'Before Christmas'

ABRAHAM'S BAY, Mayaguana – Officials of the Ministry of Social Services and Community Development and the Department of Social Services will work closely with local vendors in Mayaguana and officials from the Bank of The Bahamas to ensure that qualified recipients of the Department's Food Assistance Programme receive their Visa Pre-Paid Cards by December 2016.

Addressing residents attending a cross-denominational Church Service held at Zion Baptist Church, Abraham's Bay, Minister of Social Services and Community Development, the Hon. Melanie Sharon Griffin made the commitment to work towards having the Cards available "before Christmas."

"Today I make a commitment to this community that we will work with everyone involved to ensure Prepaid Cards are in Mayaguana before Christmas," Mrs. Griffin said. "We plan to keep this commitment." The Social Services Minister said providing social assistance to Bahamians in need of it "is a Christian Ministry."

"We are indeed our Brothers (and Sisters) keepers as God has commanded us to love one another; to care for each other and of course that the strong must bear the infirmities of the weak and so that is the mission of Social Services," Mrs. Griffin told the congregation.

When people refer to my area as a Ministry, they may mean it as a government ministry, but my Social Workers know that we are not just a government ministry, but that we must minister for Christ. When people are hurting, when people are in need – no matter what it is – we must serve them and give service as unto God.

"In the final analysis only what is done for Christ is going to last and that is how I operate and that is the way I deal with my Ministry," Mrs. Griffin added.

The VISA Prepaid Card will replace the food coupons residents utilizing the Food Assistance Programme currently receive.

Mrs. Griffin said the implementation of the Visa Pre-Paid Card (launched in New Providence in November 2014) into the Family Islands has allowed qualified recipients of the Food Assistance Programme throughout The Bahamas more flexibility in their purchases, while speeding up payments to vendors.

"The Visa Pre-Paid Cards provide clients with a better way of managing their purchases during the course of a month and at their convenience," Mrs. Griffin said. "No longer will clients have to pick up all of their groceries at one time or in one place. With the food coupon, if clients went into the food store and did not use it all at one time, that was it.



"Now, clients can measure their spending to better suit their household needs. If they want to buy meat at one place, and their dry goods at another store, they now have the flexibility to do that. If they want to break down their purchases into four monthly purchases, or however is most beneficial to their household needs, then they now have the capability of doing that.

"We are more than happy with this new, modern payment system as additionally, vendors will receive payments within 48 hours. This means an immediate increase in cash flow and eliminates the high level of paperwork for accounting purposes," Mrs. Griffin added.

Mrs. Griffin called the discussions and meetings "meaningful and fruitful."



Minister of Social Services and Community Development, the Hon. Melanie S. Griffin (centre) addressed a cross-denominational church service while in Mayaguana. Pictured (from left) are: Pastor Melanie Murphy, Church of God of Prophecy, Abraham's Bay; Reverend Albert Parris, Associate Pastor, Zion Baptist Church, Abraham's Bay; Minister Griffin; Reverend Reginald Charlton, Pastor, Zion Baptist Church, Abraham's Bay and Reverend Huel Williamson, Pastor, South Zion Baptist Church, Betsy Bay.

Social Safety Net Reform Programme to Impact All Bahamian Communities

ABRAHAM'S BAY, Mayaguana – The Government of The Bahamas is committed to ensuring that every Bahamian has access to as many of the critical Government services as possible regardless of their geographic locations, Minister of Social Services and Community Development, the Hon. Melanie Sharon Griffin told residents of Mayaguana.

This includes the Government's Social Assistance Programmes which, Mrs. Griffin said, are based on need, not entitlement.

Mrs. Griffin met with residents of Pirate's Well, Abraham's Bay and Betsy Bay during a Town Meeting, September 9, 2016 held at the Abraham's Bay High School to provide them with an overview of the many services provided by the Ministry of Social Services and Community Development through the Department of Social Services and to answer questions regarding the Ministry's Visa Pre-Paid Card Programme and the RISE Programme -- a key component of the Government's Social Safety Net Reform Programme.

The RISE (Renewing, Inspiring, Sustaining, Empowering.) Programme is the country's Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) initiative that is designed to "break the cycle of generational poverty" amongst Bahamian families.

Its purpose is to strengthen the institutional capacity of the Department of Social Services and to improve targeting through a Proxy Means Test, which is an instrument that ensures those in need are objectively assessed using household variables that are easy to identify and assess (household size, structure of dwelling, health and education).

The reform also calls for implementation of a new payment delivery system for beneficiaries and the installation of a state-of-the-art Management Information System to ensure the smooth processing of requests from registration to payment.

Minister Griffin said the implementation of the Visa Pre-Paid Card has had a "significant impact" on the delivery of Food Assistance to qualified recipients of the Department of Social Services' Food Assistance Programme throughout The Bahamas – allowing for greater privacy and more flexibility in their purchases, while speeding up payments to vendors, and getting rid of the food coupon system.

The R.I.S.E. Card will offer clients even greater flexibility as the card's use has been expanded to include usage at approved food stores, pharmacies, clothing and shoe stores, bookstores and LP Gas vendors.



Minister of Social Services and Community Development, the Hon. Melanie Griffin addressing residents of Abraham's Bay, Betsy Bay and Pirate's Well, Mayaguana during a Town Meeting at the Abraham's Bay High School.

"It is notable that when we introduced the Prepaid Card for the Food Assistance Programme it was restricted to food vendors only," Minister Griffin said. "While the RISE Prepaid Card will have some restrictions, it will allow clients more flexibility with meeting the needs of their households [as] clients in receipt of the RISE Prepaid Card will be able to withdraw a maximum of \$50 per month from the Bank of The Bahamas. The balance of the funds on the card can only be used at approved vendors (grocery stores, pharmacies, bookstores, clothing stores, shoe stores and LP Gas vendors)," Minister Griffin added.

Mrs. Griffin told residents that her Ministry has the "awesome responsibility" of ensuring that all islands of The Bahamas have the coverage of Social Services despite any geographic challenges – from the cradle to the grave.

"We have to go wherever Bahamians live and no matter how far-flung those islands are," Mrs. Griffin said. "It would be much easier if The Bahamas was not an archipelagic nation (spread out over 100,000 square miles of ocean), but no matter where you live, we have the mandate to have a presence," Mrs. Griffin said.

Social Services Minister Griffin Kicks Off Visit to Mayaguana

(Continued from page 1)

"I am delighted to be here with you this morning as the Minister of Social Services and Community Development to be able to speak with you," Mrs. Griffin said. "As the Minister of Social Services and Community Development, I am responsible for children – all of the children throughout the Commonwealth of The Bahamas belong to me."

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Social Services Minister Griffin Kicks Off Visit to Mayaguana with Stops at Pirate's Well/Abraham's Bay



Students of the Pirate's Wells Primary School listen attentively as Minister of Social Services and Community Development the Hon. Melanie Griffin addressed them Friday, September 9, 2016

PIRATE'S WELL, Mayaguana – Minister of Social Services and Community Development, the Hon. Melanie Sharon Griffin kicked off a busy weekend with visits to the Pirate's Well Primary School and the Abraham's Bay High School, meeting with students, staff and administrators of both schools.

Mayaguana is home to an estimated 300 Bahamians.

Minister Griffin was accompanied by Mrs. Phedra Rahming, Under Secretary, Ministry of Social Services and Community Development; Mrs. Lillian Quant-Forbes, Senior Deputy Director, Department of Social Services, Ministry of Social Services and Community Development; and Miss Tiffany Simms, Social Worker, Department of Social Services, Ministry of Social Services and Community Development.

Minister Griffin was scheduled to address a Town Hall Meeting for clients of the Department of Social Services and other residents Friday night, September 9, to "sensitize them about the services the Department offers."



Minister of Social Services and Community Development, the Hon. Melanie Griffin (centre) with students of the Pirate's Well Primary School.

The Minister is also expected to drive through the island, meeting with residents - including the island's elderly community.

Mrs. Griffin told students of the Pirate's Well Primary School that the delegation's visit to Mayaguana was in line with the Government of The Bahamas' vision to ensure that every Bahamian has access to as many of the critical Government services as possible, regardless of their geographical location.

(Continued on page 3)