



Ministerial Statement

By

The Hon. Wayne Caines, JP, MP
Minister of National Security

Gang Violence Reduction Team

23rd November 2018

Mr. Speaker, this morning I would like to highlight and acknowledge the important work that the Ministry of National Security's Gang Violence Reduction Team continues to do in the community. Recently there have been suggestions that this Government has ignored the serious gang violence problem that continues to plague our island home.

In actual fact, **Mr. Speaker**, every day the Gang Violence Reduction Team is out in the community working to combat the risk factors that often set our young people on a path toward gang involvement and anti-social behaviours. I meet with the team regularly and have great confidence in the work they are doing.

Mr. Speaker, the Gang Violence Reduction Coordinator, and the Outreach and Prevention Manager lead a multi-agency effort to violence reduction. The team is supported administratively by the Ministry of National Security Headquarters staff. The team operates from a coordinated plan to tackle gang violence and anti-social behaviour through a series of strategically designed prevention, intervention and rehabilitation programmes and initiatives. To this end, the team works in conjunction with the Inter-Agency Gang Enforcement Team (IGET).

IGET is a multi-agency working group that works to identify at-risk youth and develops multi-pronged mechanisms to mitigate violence and support prevention and intervention efforts.

Mr. Speaker, since September 2018, the team has been working with the Administration and Student Services teams at Cedarbridge Academy and Berkeley Institute, alongside the Bermuda Police Service, to provide support services for at-risk students. The team visits the schools at least once per week. When necessary, this has increased to daily visits. The goal of this initiative in the senior schools is to provide: Incident Management Support; Mediation Services; Individual Student Support Sessions; and Group Sessions.

Mr. Speaker, this initiative has already seen several successes within the involved schools. The team has worked with the Department of Public Transport to develop transportation plans that get students home safely. In recent instances of increased tensions, the team has been able to go into the schools and coordinate mediation sessions between students involved in rival gangs. These interventions have realized a marked decrease in gang related conflicts at the schools and in the immediate after school hours.

Mr. Speaker, the hallmark of this initiative is the continued individual and group sessions that the identified students are invited to participate in. At Cedarbridge, the team is currently delivering a 10 week pilot Excellence Programme. The programme focuses on incident mediation, understanding risk levels, and encouraging self-reflection and introspection. Through these ongoing interactions, the Gang Violence Reduction Team is able to help these students realize their self-worth and see the many opportunities of self-improvement available to them.

Mr. Speaker, the team's involvement with our young people does not start at the senior school level. Frequent interactions with the administration and guidance departments at our primary and middle

schools have helped the team to identify potentially at-risk students and put intervention plans in place to ensure that these students steer clear of anti-social behavior. The Gang Resistance Education and Training Programme (G.R.E.A.T.) remains an ongoing tool used within the schools. The programme is currently rotating through all public Primary 6 and Middle 1 year levels. By June 2019, the G.R.E.A.T. programme will have reached all students in these year levels.

Mr. Speaker, outside of the ongoing schools initiatives the Gang Violence Reduction Team continues its work in the community. In order to lower community tensions the team also focuses on Prison Outreach and Street Level Outreach. At each level of outreach the connections made and relationships built facilitate the reduction of violence in two key ways. Specifically, by directly mediating tensions and conflicts between individuals and groups that lock people into deconstructive cycles of violence; and by connecting the proven-risk population to much needed community-based programs and services.

Mr. Speaker, the team's prison outreach provides support for incarcerated violent offenders with links to gang activity. Where appropriate, the team offers therapeutic services and liaises with prison staff to assist with developing long-term plans for the inmate's rehabilitation. For these identified offenders, the team provides an affirming resource that takes special interests in the wellbeing of the offender and their eventual reintegration into society.

Mr. Speaker, the work of the Gang Violence Coordinator, Pastor Leroy Bean is high touch, highly confidential and sensitive. It involves directly working with persons who are currently involved or have been directly impacted by gang violence. As a result of the sensitive subject matter, it is not appropriate for the Government to provide detail on the particulars of this outreach work in order to protect the confidentiality and security of those individuals.

At the street level, **Mr. Speaker**, the team's overarching strategy is to target individuals and groups who are known to be players in the cycle of violent behaviour. The team provides intervention through the formation of trust-based relationships that serve to deescalate and mediate tensions when necessary. A major component of outreach at this level is connecting individuals to neighborhood resources and making necessary referrals to case managers. The goal is to steer these young men towards pro-social activities by providing a range of opportunities for change.

Mr. Speaker, one such change opportunity is the so called 'chicken farm' attacked by the Opposition Leader in his Throne Speech reply. The Redemption Farm is still in the planning stages, and initially will not have chickens at all. The team had a successful meeting with the Bermuda Farmer's Association to share the Redemption Farm plan. The Association has agreed to provide their support and assistance wherever they are able.

Mr. Speaker, scheduled to be fully operational in the 2019/2020 fiscal year, the Redemption Farm will provide successful engagement of at-risk young men in a socially restorative, incentivized employment training programme. The programme will be operated from a holistic approach and will arm participants with necessary vocational and entrepreneurship skills through various forms of farming. Additionally, case management services will ensure that personal development is also encouraged of those who subscribe to the programme.

Mr. Speaker, the Gang Violence Reduction Team's relationship with community partners underscores much of the important work that they do. The team currently supports a wide range of community groups that align with the team's aims including: Mothers on a Mission (MOM) Bermuda, the Clergy Working Group, and Living Legends Community Group.

Mr. Speaker, the work of the Gang Violence Reduction Team is important and should not be understated. The ongoing gang related

tensions in the community have not been ignored. Rather, this Government and the Gang Violence Reduction Team have been steadily working to coordinate resources to best address the issues and we are seeing results. The team offers triage services and directly addresses the concerns of the individual or refers them to appropriate agencies.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank the team for their work. However, **Mr. Speaker**, the team cannot do this work on its own. I encourage all of us who love this community to roll up our sleeves to assist with stamping the gang culture out of our island. Parents and families must continue to be involved with their children. Churches must look for ways that they can support their communities outside of the church walls. Charities and sports clubs must develop strategically designed programmes that divert our young people away from anti-social activities. Business owners must create training programmes that lead to gainful employment for these young Bermudians. Finally, **Mr. Speaker**, politicians must agree to support policies and legislation that aim to empower and elevate our marginalized young men.

Thank you, **Mr. Speaker**.