

Emergency Income Support Grant Signed



Prime Minister Leona Romeo-Marlin (r) and Keith Graham (l), SMTF President

PHILIPSBURG - On Tuesday, August 7th, a second Grant Agreement of the Sint Maarten Recovery and Resilience Trust Fund was signed by Prime Minister Leona Romeo-Marlin and the World Bank in the amount of \$22.5 million US dollars. The Trust Fund was established by the Netherlands and the World Bank in April 2018 to help rebuild Sint Maarten in the aftermath of Hurricane Irma.

The grant will support the implementation of a new *Social Registry System* and finance the *Emergency Income Support and Training Program*. Present at the signing was Mr. Keith Graham, President of the Sint Maarten Training Foundation (SMTF), which is the Foundation that will carry out the implementation of the Emergency Income Support and Training Program.

The new *Social Registry System* will complement the existing IT system of the Ministry of Public Health, Social Development and Labor (VSA) and will synchronize information sharing between the different departments of the Ministry. The system will ensure that customers will now only have to register their general information once with the Ministry of VSA. Their information will become accessible to all other Ministry departments in order to ensure that future visits for new services will not require re-registration of the general information.

The new system allows the inter-linking departments to accurately assess the customer's current situation and any updates will automatically be viewable across all departments. This will greatly help the Ministry to better serve its clients and reduce delays in service.

The *Emergency Income Support and Training Program* is a continuation of the Hospitality First Training and Education initiative that started in December 2017 by the Sint Maarten Training Foundation. This initiative afforded 900 employees of the Sonesta Group, the Sunwing Great Bay Beach Resort and a number of other unemployed workers in the hospitality sector the opportunity to engage in training and certification opportunities. To prevent layoffs, the participants received financial support in the form of stipends. This program was subsidized by the Government of Sint Maarten.

The mission of the Sint Maarten Training Foundation is to aid in the development of, and further advancements of professional skill sets through integral, structural and educational programs that will enhance career opportunities within Sint Maarten's hospitality workforce. While SMTF is still a new organization, the core team has proven experience in the hospitality industry. SMTF is cooperating with the University of St. Martin (USM) and the National Institute for Professional Advancement (NIPA).

With the support from the Trust Fund, the program will now be opened up to a greater amount of hospitality, construction and maritime workers who are unemployed or underemployed (employment up to a maximum of 3 days). The program gives workers the opportunity to partake in a six-month training and certification program of up to three modules, including Hospitality Operations, Culinary Arts and Casino Operations. In these modules, participants learn service standards, culinary arts, public health, food safety, leadership skills, CPR, customer service, and personal development through theoretical and practical hands-on experience. Students are also taught the history of Sint Maarten and have the opportunity to enroll in an English as a second language course. The program focuses on the economic sector that was hit hardest by hurricane Irma and provides participants income support and health insurance coverage throughout the courses. It is expected that at the end of the training program, the graduating students will be able to find new jobs or return to their previous jobs. In addition, acquiring the certificate will hopefully encourage persons to further their education in hospitality at USM or NIPA.

The Government seeks to register an initial 150 new participants, starting as of August 15th. The program will be further expanded in the coming months. Individuals interested in registering for the Emergency Income Support and Training Program are encouraged to contact our National Employment Service Center (NESC) Team, at 542-0640, 542-0349 or 520-5279 or email us at address labor-affairs@sintmaartegov.org for more information and registration. Information on the program and curriculum can be found at www.hospitalityfirst.sx.