



# FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **Youthful Offenders are step closer to making Christmas wishes come true for successful life after incarceration**

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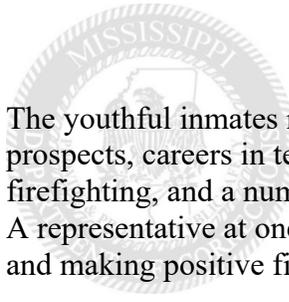
**JACKSON, MS (Dec 21)** – A group of young inmates with a Christmas wish of a fresh start and having a job lined up for a successful life after incarceration could be one step closer to making their wish come true after participating in a recent career fair.

William Hayes, 18, was one of 12 inmates in the Youthful Offender Unit at Central Mississippi Correctional Facility who examined career prospects and gained tips on making good first impressions with a better image. The career fair was designed to provide information about options the inmates, some who are nearing release dates, could consider. Inmates also asked questions of representatives of 17 businesses and educational institutions on hand for one-on-one interviews.

Hayes and other inmates had an opportunity to try on a nice coat and tie to help understand how important a good image can be. “I never learned how to tie a tie. When I get out, I want to get a perfect suit so I can get the perfect job,” Hayes said. Stan Jones, of Brooks Brothers clothing business, said trying on the ties and coats makes a powerful impression on the inmates. “They get to see themselves in a different light and that can mean everything to them in building self-esteem and confidence,” Jones said.

One of the cornerstones of the MDOC’s efforts has included re-entry efforts in preparing eligible inmates for life after incarceration. Commissioner Burl Cain said helping youthful offenders at this juncture of their lives is critical in helping to making a difference.

“Being in the business of corrections, we are all about rehabilitation and replacing inmates’ past behavior with a new way of thinking and acting while inmates are with us, but it doesn’t end there,” Commissioner Cain said. “We have to continue giving them the tools and resources they need to go out, get jobs, and be productive citizens. This certainly applies to our youthful offenders and if we can succeed with them, that will go a long way toward getting to where we want to be.”



The youthful inmates received information about a wide variety of topics including industrial prospects, careers in technical fields, barber and beauty salons, restaurant employment, firefighting, and a number of resources in furthering their education for additional opportunities. A representative at one of the information tables provided details on good money management and making positive financial decisions.

Misty Munn of Members Exchange said this is one of her favorite career fairs that she participates in while giving information about finances. “I love getting one-to-one-contact with the students and seeing how excited they are to attend this career fair. [I enjoy] listening to their hopes and dreams about what they envision for their future and know that they have a future,” Munn said. “The testimony they will have for others in sharing their stories really brightens my day.”

Amber Parker, who represented Refill Café which is known for having hired persons after their incarceration, said the timing is important to provide this information before the inmates’ release. “It is really important to capture them at this point in their lives and provide information to help them make good decisions and set them up for success,” Parker said.

The young inmates’ responses were all positive in expressing appreciation for the resource fair and the businesses for speaking to them. Crystal Marshall, the lone female inmate participating in the fair, said it was a positive experience. “They all have some great information. I am really interested in the Hinds Behavioral Health Program,” Marshall said.

Betsy Smith, also from the Refill Café, echoed a common feeling expressed by the participating business representatives in what the fair meant to them. “This activity has really blessed my life. We are really appreciative of being a part of this activity. The [inmates] have been open and receptive to the information that has been passed on. I hope it really makes a difference as it has for us,” Smith said.

Warden Derrick Chambers, who oversees the Youthful Offender Unit, said the fair is a valuable tool in giving the youth a fresh start and turning their lives around. “This will help them with their skills to go out and get jobs. It will teach them to be men instead of little boys,” Chambers said. “It has helped their morale. They looked forward to this event. They put that tie on, they put that jacket on, and they feel like real men. It motivates them. They look forward to being men and real leaders when they get out and survive in the real world.”

*For more information, contact Chris Baker, MDOC Office of Communications, 601-359-5289.*



MDOC inmate Bryson West, left, discusses career and education options with Tracy Smith, center, and Cheryl Rush of Delta Technical College during a mental health resources fair held this week at the Youth Offender Unit of the Central Mississippi Correctional Facility.



Stan Jones, center, assists MDOC inmate Jonathan Taylor, right, with fitting a dress coat while fellow inmate William Hayes, left, enjoys the look and feel of a coat and tie during a mental health resources fair held this week at the Youth Offender Unit of the Central Mississippi Correctional Facility.



MDOC inmate William Haymon, left, discusses career options with Tobe Sayles Jr. of Level 3 Barbershop during a mental health resources fair held this week at the Youth Offender Unit of the Central Mississippi Correctional Facility.



MDOC inmate Bryson West tries on a protective coat assisted by Joel Williams of the Pearl Fire Department as part of his interest in possibly choosing a career during a mental health resources fair held this week at the Youth Offender Unit of the Central Mississippi Correctional Facility.