

The Virgin Islands Consortium

UVI Receives \$900,000 Human Services Grant To Conduct Three-Year Study

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The University of the Virgin Islands Caribbean Exploratory Research Center (CERC) has been awarded a \$900,000 U.S. Department of Human Services grant with the intent of improving the lives of territory residents, according to a press release issued by the university.

CERC will receive \$300,000 a year, over a three-year period, to conduct two human services research studies and to establish an ongoing research infrastructure. The project titled, "Human Services Research Partnerships: U.S. Virgin Islands" will last through Sept. 29, 2017.

According to the press release, the funds will aid CERC as it "seeks to build partnerships among researchers, community-based organizations, and local government agencies, including semi-autonomous agencies, to define and address research questions about the social and economic well-being of low-income children and families in the territory."

A 2008 Virgin Islands Community Survey shows that 28 percent of families in the U.S. Virgin Islands live in what is considered to be impoverished conditions. However, there is little research on the effectiveness of Head Start programs, and no research has been conducted on the quality and impact of the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) programs in the territory. Therefore, officials believe developing the territory's research infrastructure will allow the Department of Human Services to better determine the needs of its clients enrolled in these programs.

"We are very pleased to have received this grant from the Administration for Children and Families within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services," said Dr. Noreen Michael, CERC research director. "One of the most important purposes of this grant is to build the research capacity within the territory to address issues related to improving the quality of services received by Head Start and TANF clients."

Human Services Commissioner Christopher Finch also praised the effort.

"This research study on our TANF and Head Start families will help us understand how best we can ensure we are providing the services they need to achieve their personal goals for high quality and successful family lives," Finch said. "We thank UVI for engaging in now this second research grant to study the impacts of Human Service programs. This grant along with the child care research grant can only improve the work we do for the people of the Virgin Islands."

Dr. Gloria Callwood, CERC director and principal investigator, said, "As part of this grant, CERC will support critical collaboration needed for this project to be successful." She pointed out that this will be accomplished through the establishment of a research partnership with government agencies, semi-autonomous government agencies, community-based organizations, key personnel from the V.I. Department of Human Services, program participants, and researchers from UVI.

At the end of the three years, officials say the goal is to have an established database of information on public assistance programs and participants in the territory. The project also hopes to facilitate greater collaboration among policy makers and data-driven policy recommendations to improve human services programs. CERC also expects to have an increase in the pool of local researchers engaged in human services research.