

The Virgin Islands Consortium

31% Of Territory's Children Live In Poverty; 67% On Food Stamp, New Report Reveals

VIC News / **Published On August 04, 2015 10:44 AM /**

Ernice Gilbert **August 04, 2015**



ST. THOMAS -- The Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands on Monday released its fifteenth annual USVI KIDS COUNT Data Report on July 30 at a presentation to Governor Kenneth Mapp and members of his leadership team at Government House here, according to a press release the nonprofit organization issued.

The newest 2014 USVI KIDS COUNT Data Report, titled *Our Commitment Matters*, provides an update to policy-makers and the VI community on the risks and well-being of the territory's children.

Using most-recent territorial surveys, the findings show that economic instability in the territory since 2008 has heightened the risk of negative social outcomes for VI children.

Using 2012 data, which is the most recent available numbers, the report notes that 2,500 fewer children lived in the territory than in 2008 (an unexpectedly large drop of 9%). While there are fewer children, the risk factors increased, as family incomes fell.

In 2012:

- Children's families in poverty: 27% ...(up from 25% in 2008)
- All VI children in poverty: 31% ...(up from 28% in 2008)
- Children engaged in the paternity and child support system: 34%
- Children receiving SNAP food assistance: 67% ...(up from 37% in 2008)

Educationally, in 2012:

- Half (53%) of 5-year-olds lack expected age-level skills for successful kindergarten learning
- 46% (almost half) of 3rd graders cannot read proficiently for 4th grade learning
- Almost 2/3 (64%) of 11th graders in public school cannot read proficiently.

These trends are consistent with the overall picture for children in the US as a nation, according to the National KIDS COUNT Data Book, released last week in Baltimore by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The annual National KIDS COUNT report (which does not include VI data in its state-by-state overview of mainland children's trends) shows that since 2008, the number of US children living in poverty has risen by almost 3 million, from 13.2 million children in 2008 (child poverty rate: 18%) to 16.1 million in 2013 (reflecting a rise in child poverty to 22%).

Locally, the just-released 2014 USVI KIDS COUNT Data Report indicates that without effective social and educational investments in today's Virgin Islands children, a dwindling population of future VI workers -- many with lower academic achievement skills -- predicts a smaller and far less robust workforce to support our aging VI population.

Recommendations from the presentation to Governor Mapp include public investments to reduce poverty, and to strengthen students' school readiness and achievement.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation promotes a two-generation strategy as effective in achieving these goals. Two generation-strategies directly address the needs of children while simultaneously providing tools and resources to their parents.

Recommended actions for policymakers:

- Provide parents with multiple pathways to get family-supporting jobs and achieve financial stability.
- Strengthen policies promoting higher pay, paid sick leave, flexible scheduling and expanded unemployment benefits that will result in higher family income, reduced parental stress and an increased capacity of parents to invest in their kids.
- Ensure access to high-quality early childhood education and enriching elementary school experiences for young children.

- Equip parents to better support their children socially and emotionally and to advocate for their children's education.

The 2014 USVI KIDS COUNT Data Book (online at www.cfvi.net) is a valuable tool to help prompt responses through community awareness and public policy to the challenges facing our community.

The Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands says it's committed to working with other concerned stakeholders to identify and implement stronger supports for children, and to build greater success for the entire Virgin Islands community.

© Viconsortium 2026