

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Human Services Receives \$1 Million Grant To Collect Data On Territory's Early Childhood Education

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ST. CROIX -- The Department of Human Services, in partnership with the University of the Virgin Islands' Eastern Caribbean Center, the Dept. of Education and the Early Childhood Advisory Council, received a grant totaling \$997,590 to collect data on early childhood education, DOH Commissioner Vivian Ebbesen-Fludd confirmed to The Consortium last Thursday, following a meeting the aforementioned parties held at UVI's Great Hall on the Albert A. Sheen Campus here.

The meeting was the first of many in the four-year data-collecting process that Ebbesen-Fludd said would be used to make changes for the betterment of the early childhood program. The funding was made available through the Administration for Children and

Families.

"We had the childcare providers involved because there will be evaluation done at their sites," Ebbesen-Fludd said, referring to participants of last Thursday's session. "They will be actively involved in the process."

Commissioner Ebbesen-Fludd said the program is an "applied research grant," which means results must be applied to what's already in place, as previously mentioned, to improve services.

During the meeting, childcare providers, agency representatives and other officials could be seen sharing and gathering information amongst themselves and their St. Thomas counterparts via conference. Ebbesen-Fludd said the project was initiated by her predecessor, but she felt the need to get things moving quickly after a delay.

There are specific functions identified for each year of the year-four grant, which, according to the commissioner, will be an ongoing effort even after the completion of the initial four-year effort, and as more funding becomes available.

As for how the study will be conducted in the islands, there are 6 steps to follow. They include:

- Inviting 110 DHS-funded centers to participate in an observation research effort where one pre-k classroom is selected to monitor patterns;
- One research assistant observes a classroom with Early Childhood Education Rating Scale (ECERS), and one research assistant observes a classroom with Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS);
- With parent consent, 6 children will be randomly selected to follow and assess kindergarten readiness;
- With parent consent, 100 children will be randomly selected at the beginning of first grade to further assess school readiness;
- Fifty licensed programs volunteers will be randomly selected for what is called a Charting Change Study -- the assessment of performance outcomes;
- The analyzing of data received to further refine the territory's Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS) and prepare an annual report.

And Ebbesen-Fludd said DHS and UVI are working on other initiatives that seeks to further improve the quality of early childhood education in the territory, including childcare centers on both St. Croix and St. Thomas campuses, staff training and provision of scholarships for Rehabilitation Center youths, among other important collaborations.

Feature Image: Vivian Ebbesen-Fludd at speaking at Government House here.

Image Credit: VIC.