

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Office Of The Governor To Provide Free A.D.A. Training For Summer Camp Providers

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Ernice Gilbert **May 11, 2016**



ST. CROIX -- In an effort to best accommodate the territory's special needs children, the Office of the Governor is offering free training to summer camp providers, a press release Government House issued today has revealed.

Territorial Coordinator for the Americans with Disability Act, Jamila Russell, said the one-day workshops will assist those running programs to help ensure that all children have a good experience this summer.

In St. Thomas and St. John, the training will be held on June 1 and in St. Croix on June 3, according to the release.

Ms. Russell urged those interested to sign up now, but that registration will be open until May 27.

“Once we can plan ahead we will make sure that everyone who is interested receives this training,” she said. “It takes only a couple of hours, but can really make a difference in the lives of these children.”

Ms. Russell reminded parents and summer program providers that under federal law children with special needs are entitled to attend any camp or activity open to non-disabled children attend.

“Participation cannot be denied on the basis of the individual’s disability,” she said. “Participation must be equal and separation is not equal.”

The A.D.A. coordinator emphasized the importance of the community embracing and including our special needs youth.

“Most recently we collaborated with the Departments of Education, Human Services and Labor to organize a Carnival troupe consisting of children with and without disabilities,” she said. “We called it the ‘Cultivating Inclusion Fun Troupe’ and participated in the St. Thomas Carnival Children’s Parade. The children dressed in their future career wear - firemen, policemen, doctors, nurses and actresses.”

Ms. Russell said the carnival troupe captured the spirit behind both the A.D.A. laws that prohibit discrimination and Individuals with Disabilities Education laws that mandate free public education for special needs children in the least restrictive environment.

“It is important that students with disabilities, along with their non-disabled peers, learn, play and enjoy carnival together,” she said. “But we must work to better ‘cultivate inclusion’ year around.”

Ms. Russell thanked troupe sponsors Banco Popular, V.I. Lottery, the Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands, King’s Alley Management and Seven Seas Water.

To sign up for summer camp training or for more information on the Americans with Disabilities Act please contact Ms. Russell at (340) 772-1000 or (340) 227-2348.