

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Map Proclaims May Foster Care Month

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ST. THOMAS -- Governor Kenneth Mapp has proclaimed May Foster Care Month in the U.S. Virgin Islands, and in the weeks ahead the administration says it will increase its efforts to reach out to potential foster parents and others able to volunteer their time and talents, Government House announced Monday.

"We need more people to get involved in supporting the well-being of the children in foster care," Mr. Mapp said. "Not just foster parents, but tutors, mentors, coaches – anyone who can spare a few hours to truly invest in our future. Nearly everyone has something of value to offer these children."

There are more than 150 young people in the territory's Foster Care Program and they need greater community support, says Government House. For example, the Department of Human Services highlights the need for temporary caregivers to fill in for a few days when foster parents are ill or must travel.

"All young people in foster care need a meaningful connection to a caring adult who becomes a supportive and lasting presence in their lives," Mr. Mapp wrote in the Foster Care Month Proclamation. "Foster families are unsung heroes that serve as the primary source of love, protection and support to the abused and neglected children of the United States Virgin Islands."

The proclamation also pays tribute to all those who support youth in foster care.

"There are numerous social workers in the Department of Human Services, individuals, public and private organizations who work tirelessly to increase public awareness of the needs of children in foster care as well as the enduring and valuable contribution of foster parents, and recognize that the foster care system is only as good as those who choose to be a part of it," the governor wrote.

In January, the territory's leader announced that the Foster Care Program would receive a major boost as a result of his administration's successful efforts to achieve Title IV-E status – allowing the U.S. Virgin Islands to access federal reimbursement for a substantial portion of costs in the areas of food, clothing, shelter, daily supervision, school supplies, personal incidentals, travel and other expenses for children in the foster care system, as well as young adults who have grown up in foster care. This includes the costs of institutional care, which presently accounts for a significant portion of the human services budget. The territory will not only realize substantial savings in expenditures for personnel, goods and services, but it will also be in a position to expand and improve the services it provides to abused and neglected children, according to Government House. The V.I. government anticipates an estimated annual cost savings upwards of \$7 million dollars when Title IV-E is fully implemented.

D.H.S. has invited all individuals interested in foster care to visit the Division of Children and Families in Anna's Hope on St. Croix, or to call (340) 773-5303. On St. Thomas, visit the Knud Hansen Complex or call (340) 774-0930.