

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Children With Autism Receive Learn-To-Swim Lessons On St. Croix

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ST. CROIX -- Island Therapy Solutions, the USVI Department of Sports, Parks & Recreation (DSPR) and the St. Croix Dolphins teamed up this spring on St. Croix to provide learn-to-swim lessons for children with autism, a release issued recently has made known.

Children with autism are 160 times more likely to die from drowning compared to other children, according to a recent study conducted by Columbia's Mailman School of Public Health.

Sayamira Cordero-Fontaine said it is a great relief to find a swimming program for her son Xavier, who is autistic.

"I've been trying to teach him on my own, but I am no expert. So, having someone who specializes in that, I think that's outstanding," Mrs. Cordero-Fontaine said. "I am sure there are so many things they can teach him that I cannot."

"All parents on an island are concerned about children and water safety. Parents of children with Autism are no different, but finding swim lessons for their child is a challenge," said Island Therapy Practice Owner Dr. Lindsay Wagner.

Swim Coach Kie Ransom of DSPR led the instruction, which focused on teaching the child to swim and basic water safety. Ms. Ransom is a certified water safety instructor/trainer, according to the release. She has been a Water Safety Instructor & Lifeguard for 30 years, and she has completed special training in water safety courses to work with special needs children.

"We were able to go from not being able to get into the water to being able to be in the water unassisted with a kickboard or a noodle and swim across the pool unassisted," Ms. Ransom said.

"Dr. Wagner approached me about doing classes with children with autism who are underserved in this community. It's always an issue of finding a swimming pool. It had to be at a time and place where the pool and the surrounding area is quiet," she added, noting that she will work with the St. Croix Dolphins instructors, [WL1] as well, to hopefully build the special needs program and integrate special needs children into their learn-to-swim programs. "Water safety is an essential skill for all children," she said.

Wagner said Ms. Ransom's experience teaching swimmers with autism was very helpful, according to the release. Parents were encouraged to attend with their children, but Island Therapy Solutions offered Registered Behavior Therapists or Behavior Therapists to parents unable to attend. [WL2]

The instruction took place in the St. Croix Dolphins teaching pool located adjacent to the Good Hope Country Day School campus.

St. Croix Dolphins Program Director Cinthia Michele Sanes said the organization participates year-round in learn-to-swim programs for school-aged children and adults in the USVI, according to the release. The Dolphins organization readily partnered with Island Therapy Solutions and the Department of Sports, Parks & Recreation to help the participants learn life-saving skill. The Dolphins also provided goggles and swim caps to the participants, the release said.

"It was a great opportunity to be able to offer swim lessons to children participating in the Island Therapy Solutions program," Ms. Sanes said. "Within eight lessons we began to see progress in each child's swimming ability. Swimming is an essential life skill especially growing up on an island. Here, at the St. Croix Dolphins, we believe every child should have the opportunity to learn how to swim. Thanks to Coach Kie and the Dolphin staff's help and hard work, this was all made possible. We are excited to continue our partnership with Island Therapy Solutions and resume swim lessons in the fall."

To learn more about other Island Therapy Solutions services for children or adults with autism, please contact Andrea Purdome at Island Therapy Solutions 340-719-7007, or go [here](#).

Island Therapy Solutions is a multi-dimensional practice serving St. Croix, St. Thomas and St. John, providing psychological testing for adults and children, individual and group therapy, psychiatric care, couples therapy, family therapy, ABA autism services for children and adults, occupational therapy for children, and speech and academic tutoring services, according to the release.

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