

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Eldra Schulterbrandt Residential Facility Reopens in St. Thomas

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Department of Health late last week celebrated the reopening of the Eldra Schulterbrandt Residential Facility on St. Thomas.

The ceremony marked the completion of the renovation phase for the facility which will soon provide residential treatment for up to 32 clients, D.O.H. said. The facility will provide these clients with behavioral health services to include treatment for schizophrenia, bipolar disease, chronic depression and substance abuse.

Governor Albert Bryan expressed appreciation that the facility would soon be ready to begin taking in clients. He indicated that behavioral and mental health issues have

always been “near and dear to his heart,” having, as a child, had a grandmother who received treatment at St. Elizabeth’s in Washington, D.C. Referring to the grand opening, Bryan said, “This is a small step along the way, but we still have a long way to go. We need to do a lot more for those with mental health issues as well as the homeless population,” the governor said.



He added, "We also need to educate the public about mental health issues. You wouldn't run away from someone with cancer or tonsillitis. But people in our community do. We shy away from those with mental health issues. The stigma associated with mental health must be removed.

"We as Caribbean men need to be able to seek the help and get the services we need. As children we are told to "*man up*," but there are many things that could be dealt with effectively with treatment or medication. This stigma must also be removed."

Senator Donna Frett-Gregory indicated that the members of the Legislature were committed to supporting behavioral health issues. Furthermore, she said it was, "heartwarming to learn about the large number of events that have occurred behind the scenes over the past few months related to the new behavioral health unit. It's a very encouraging time."

Mrs. Frett-Gregory also took the opportunity to suggest that the Health Department consider developing a day program for vulnerable individuals with diseases such as Alzheimer's or dementia. This, according to the freshman senator, would allow working Virgin Islanders to manage their employment situation knowing that their loved ones suffering from these types of challenges are safe and properly cared for during the day.

Lauris Harley, assistant administrator for the Eldra Schulerbrandt Residential Facility, expressed her sincere appreciation to staff who worked tirelessly and contractors who helped renovate the facility back to standard. She expects that renovations to the adjacent building will begin shortly. "Once completed, the two buildings in the complex will be able to accommodate 64 inpatients," Ms. Harley said.

In closing, Dr. Lee Whitaker, medical director of the Eldra Schulerbrandt Residential Facility succinctly stated, "We don't dispose of our own. We make them a home. Our newly renovated facility will provide much needed care to our most vulnerable populations in a respectful and supportive way."