

VIRGIN ISLANDS OFFICE OF DISASTER RECOVERY

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A Message from the V.I. Office of Disaster Recovery

The Virgin Islands Office of Disaster Recovery extends its heartfelt congratulations to the Virgin Islands Department of Human Services on this momentous occasion of constructing a new Head Start facility dedicated to fostering the early educational journey of St. John's children.

The Office of Disaster Recovery's mission is to create a safe and resilient community by strengthening the Territory's infrastructure through strategic planning, collaboration, and dedicated project execution is embodied in this endeavor. This educational facility stands as a symbol of our commitment to transform and reinforce the Territory's capacity to serve its communities effectively. Such construction projects, especially on St. John, require not only technical expertise but also robust partnerships, precision, and determination.

This Head Start facility, designed to support the education and growth of St. John's youngest learners, was made possible by the generous support and recognition of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Head Start. A total of \$42 million in federal funds was received by the Territory to restore Head Start facilities post-Hurricanes Irma and Maria. Of this amount, \$5.1 million has been utilized on this project to enhance educational opportunities and positively shape the future for the residents of St. John.

This collaborative effort showcases the very essence of recovery work. It is the collective determination of "building a resilient Virgin Islands" that empowers our communities and will do so for generations to come. Congratulations once again to the Department of Human Services and thank you to everyone involved for your tireless dedication and commitment to building a brighter future for our children and our Territory.

Sincerely,

Adrenne L. Williams-Octalien
Director

"Building a Legacy of Resilience"



Government of the Virgin Islands of the United States
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

Office of the Commissioner



Averil E. George
Commissioner
VIDHS

On behalf of the Department of Human Services, it is my distinct honor to extend my heartfelt congratulations on the grand opening of the Cruz Bay, St. John Head Start facility. This new beginning is a shining example of our collective efforts to create a brighter and more promising future for the children of our territory.

The establishment of this Head Start facility in Cruz Bay stands as a testament to the unwavering commitment of the Office of Head Start, DHS, the Bryan-Roach Administration, community leaders, parents, educators, and all those who worked together to make this day possible. This moment marks a significant step forward in ensuring that every child in St. John has the opportunity to thrive in a nurturing, supportive, and enriching environment.

Early childhood education is the bedrock upon which we build a thriving society, and this Head Start center reflects our dedication to providing the best possible start for our youngest learners. With this new facility, we continue to affirm our belief that every child, no matter their circumstance, deserves access to high-quality education and resources that will set them on the path to lifelong success.

To our Head Start Teachers, Staff, Head Start Administrator, Assistant Commissioner Carla Benjamin, and all who have contributed tirelessly to this achievement, I express my deepest gratitude for your passion, hard work, and dedication to shaping the minds of our future leaders. I would also like to thank the Office of Disaster Recovery, the Department of Public Works, the Department of Property and Procurement, other supporting staff and agencies, and of course, J Benton Construction LLC who played a key role and did an amazing job in bringing this project to fruition. Your collective efforts have been instrumental in making today's celebration possible.

To the parents, thank you for placing your trust in this program and investing in your children's bright future. And to the children who will fill these classrooms with curiosity and joy, we look forward to watching you grow, learn, and achieve great things.

The Cruz Bay Head Start is more than just a building—it is a symbol of hope, progress, and the boundless potential that lies within our community. Together, we are laying the foundation for a brighter, stronger St. John, one child at a time.

Congratulations on this wonderful achievement, and may this facility continue to inspire and uplift future generations.

Warmest Regards,

Averil E. George
Commissioner of Human Services
Government of the U.S. Virgin Islands



Government of the Virgin Islands of the United States
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

Office of the Commissioner

November 6, 2024



From the Office of the Assistant Commissioner and on behalf of a thankful community, I extend heartfelt gratitude to each of you whose

unwavering support and dedication has brought this new Cruz Bay Head Start Center to fruition. The site before you demonstrates the power of collaboration, resilience, and a shared commitment to serving our community's youngest members.

After seven long years without these essential services, the opening of this new facility marks a profound moment for us all. The return of the Head Start Center will not only restore early learning and developmental opportunities for our children but will also provide a foundation of support for families who depend on these vital resources.

We recognize the immense work that went into every step of this journey—from planning and design to construction and completion. We now have a beautiful, state-of-the-art center that will serve as a safe and nurturing environment for children and families, as well as a much-needed hardened space in times of disaster. We are excited to see the positive impact this center will have for years to come, creating lasting benefits for our community.

We extend our deepest appreciation to the Administration for Children and Families, Office of Head Start, the Bryan-Roach Administration, our local government and nongovernmental stakeholders and Team DHS for your partnership and for believing in the importance of this project. We look forward to continuing our work together to support and uplift the families and children who will benefit from this facility.

Sincerely,

Carla E. Benjamin, MA. Ed, MSW, CSW, CPM
Assistant Commissioner



35th Legislature of the Virgin Islands

CAPITOL BUILDING, P.O. BOX 1690
ST. THOMAS, US VIRGIN ISLANDS 00804
(340) 693-3577

From the Office of
The Honorable Senator
RAY FONSECA

CHAIRMAN
Health, Hospitals & Human Services
VICE CHAIR
Homeland Sec., Justice & Public Safety
MEMBER
Budget, Appropriation & Finance
Housing, Transportation & Telecommunications
Gov't Operations & Consumer Affairs

October 15, 2024

The Honorable Averil George
Commissioner,
Department of Human Services
3012 Golden Rock
St. Croix, 00820

RE: Congratulation Letter- New Head Start Development for St. John

Dear Commissioner George:

The Virgin Islands Department of Human Services is to be applauded for the successful effort to establish a Head Start Center in Cruz Bay, St. John. Not only is this critical advantage for children expanded for the residents of St. John, but it also enhances the prospects for excellent student achievement during their regular academic careers.

Given the documented advantages of early education opportunities, all Virgin Islanders should be encouraged by this development, brought about by the hard work and determination of the Commissioner and staff of the Department of Human Services.

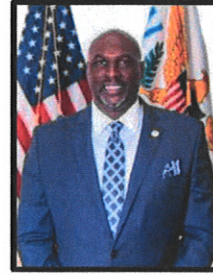
As Chairman of the Legislature's Committee on Health, Hospitals, and Human Services, I am extremely pleased with this achievement. It is with a sense of great satisfaction that I join in thanking and congratulating all who have helped to advance our progress in educational development. The entire Virgin Islands community will benefit for years to come from this needed Head Start for future generations of the children of St. John.

With sincerest appreciation,

Senator, 35th Legislature of the Virgin Islands



SENATOR NOVELLE E. FRANCIS, JR.
35TH LEGISLATURE OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS
PRESIDENT



Message from the Senate President

On behalf of the members of the 35th Legislature, it is my distinct honor to congratulate Department of Human Services Commissioner Averil George and her team on this occasion of the ribbon cutting of the Head Start facility in Cruz Bay, St. John. Thank you for your commitment to the early education of the youngest residents of St. John.

I commend the Department of Human Service and the Office of Disaster Recovery for bringing this project to fruition. This Head Start is more than a facility – it is a significant investment in our children’s futures. The thought and effort that has gone into this new facility is clearly intended to support how children will learn and grow, ultimately contributing to their educational success. Education can change the direction of a child’s life, and this Head Start is a symbol of our collective commitment to lift these children and their families towards brighter tomorrows.

By providing welcoming classrooms, exciting play areas and a community space, the Department of Human Services has created an institution that will benefit and serve St. Johnians now and in the future. I look forward to seeing our young learners thrive at this Head Start and be provided with the tools needed to successfully transition into kindergarten.

My congratulations to all on this accomplishment.

Sincerely,

Novelle E. Francis, Jr.
Senate President, 35th Legislature of the Virgin Islands



INVESTMENT AND IMPACT



The Cruz Bay facility is one of six new Head Start centers under construction across the territory, representing a \$42 million investment from the federal Office of Head Start Disaster Recovery Funds.



This investment is part of a broader vision to strengthen our community by prioritizing the education and well-being of our youngest residents, building resilience and opportunity from the ground up



Early childhood education is the foundation of a successful society. By providing modern, safe, and supportive learning environments, we are ensuring that every child, regardless of their background, has access to the tools they need to excel academically and socially. This facility in Cruz Bay will stand as a beacon of hope and opportunity, serving generations of Virgin Islanders.”



6

\$42M

MAJOR CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS

DISASTER RECOVERY FUNDING



07/09/24

CONCORDIA
HEAD START FACILITY



07/11/24

CRUZ BAY
HEAD START FACILITY



07/09/24

ANNA'S HOPE
HEAD START ADMINISTRATION BLDG.



07/11/24

BOLONGO
HEAD START FACILITY.



07/11/24

MINETTA MITCHEL
HEAD START FACILITY



07/11/24

LINDBERGH
HEAD START FACILITY.



STACEY E. PLASKETT
VIRGIN ISLANDS

2059 RAYBURN BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

A MESSAGE FROM CONGRESSWOMAN STACEY E. PLASKETT

On behalf of the Members of the 118th Congress, my family, and my staff, it is an honor to congratulate the Virgin Islands Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Government of the Virgin Islands on the ribbon-cutting ceremony of our new Head Start facility in Cruz Bay, St. John.

From 1965, Head Start has been creating positive impact in our communities. A comprehensive early childhood education program, Head Start has been proven to help break the cycle of generational poverty and provide children with the skills necessary to build confidence and resilience. Research shows that one of the most effective ways to build broad-based prosperity is to invest in children – providing benefits in the immediate term and over the course of their lives.

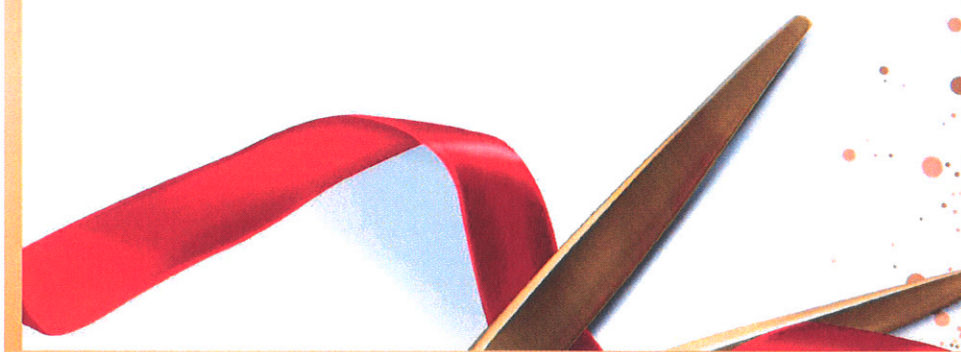
In the Virgin Islands, Head Start invests in the development of our future generation by providing families with the resources necessary to not only survive but thrive. The importance of this program for the health and wellbeing of our young ones cannot be overstated, that is why I have no doubt that the new Head Start Program facility in St. John will be a major, driving factor in the school readiness of our infants, toddlers, and preschool-aged children, providing critical support and resources for our family systems.

I commend DHS Commissioner George and her team for the awesome work of investing in our children through the opening of our new Head Start facility on St. John.

Congratulations again!

Sincerely,

Stacey E. Plaskett
Delegate to Congress





OFFICE OF THE LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR
UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS



MESSAGE FROM THE LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

It is my distinct honor to join the Virgin Islands Department of Human Services for the official ribbon-cutting ceremony of the new Head Start facility on Cruz Bay, St. John. The opening of this state-of-the-art facility marks a significant milestone in the Territory as we continue to improve and expand early childhood education opportunities to our families in the Virgin Islands, and in this instance, particularly to the residents of St. John.

The Cruz Bay Head Start is one of six Head Start projects being constructed simultaneously throughout the Virgin Islands. These facilities will provide modern, safe, and creative learning environments for children of low-income families, giving them equal access to comprehensive development services. Most notably, the completion of the Cruz Bay Head Start will offer foundational learning for twenty students, offering parents a more convenient option for early childhood education, without the daily commute to St. Thomas.

I applaud Commissioner Averil George and the dynamic team of the Virgin Islands Department of Human Services, as well as the Office of Disaster Recovery for overseeing the new Head Start projects. As public servants, we recognize the importance of the comprehensive mental, social, and emotional development of preschoolers, who will become our future leaders. I trust that with this new facility, our St. John children will thrive and grow in a happy and healthy environment while we prepare them for success.

I pray for God's guidance and protection for the Head Start students, facilitators, and families and extend best wishes to all for a successful program.

Tregenza A. Roach, Esq.
Lieutenant Governor



Head Start is recognized nationwide as a primary empowerment program for low-income families, involving them in all aspects of service delivery and decision-making for the program. Head Start encourages the role of parents as their child's first and most important teachers and facilitate building relationships with families that support positive parent-child relationships, family well-being, and connections to peers and the community.



Head Start and Early Head Start programs have a profound impact on over 100,000 children from diverse communities, offering vital early childhood education that prepares them for academic success. These programs are essential to breaking down educational barriers and creating equitable opportunities for every child to thrive.



THE UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
GOVERNMENT HOUSE



A MESSAGE FROM THE GOVERNOR

On behalf of the people of the U.S. Virgin Islands, it gives me great pleasure to extend my heartfelt congratulations on the grand opening of the Cruz Bay, St. John Head Start. This remarkable milestone is not only a testament to the unwavering commitment of our educators, parents, and community leaders but also a pivotal moment in our collective effort to provide the youngest members of our community with a strong foundation for their future success.

The grand opening of this Head Start facility points to the commitment of the Bryan-Roach Administration, through the Office of Disaster Recovery, to working with our federal partners to improve the quality of life of Virgin Islanders.

Early childhood education is the cornerstone of a thriving society. The opening of this Head Start facility in Cruz Bay represents our dedication to ensuring that every child, regardless of circumstance, has access to the tools and resources they need to excel both academically and socially. This new facility will serve as a beacon of hope and opportunity for generations to come.

To Department of Human Services Commissioner Averil George, the Head Start teachers, staff, and all those who have worked tirelessly to make this day possible, I offer my sincere gratitude. Your dedication to our children's growth and development is deeply appreciated. To the parents, thank you for entrusting your children to this program. And to the students, I look forward to seeing all that you will accomplish as you embark on this exciting journey of learning and discovery.

Together, we are building a brighter future for St. John, one child at a time. Congratulations, once again, and may the Cruz Bay Head Start be a shining example of what is possible when a community comes together for the benefit of its children.

Sincerely,

Albert Bryan Jr.
Governor

Cruz Bay
HEAD START
RIBBON CUTTING CEREMONY

ORDER OF CEREMONY

Master/Mistress of Ceremonies
Ryan Nugent & Masikia Lewis

Invocation
Rev. Charles Brown Jr.

National Anthem
Shikima Jones-Sprauve

Virgin Islands March
Shikima Jones-Sprauve

Special Selection
Semone Rey -George

Welcome
Commissioner Averil George

Remarks
Commissioner Derek Gabriel, Department of Public Works
James Benton, President, J. Benton Construction LLC

Director Adrienne L. Williams-Octalien, Office of Disaster Recovery
The Honorable Stacey E. Plaskett, Delegate to Congress, Esq.

The Honorable Novelle E. Francis Jr., Senate President, 35th Legislataure

The Honorable Lieutenant Governor Tregenza A. Roach, Esq.

The Honorable Governor Albert Bryan Jr.

Benediction
Rev. Charles Brown Jr.

THANK YOU !

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to everyone who contributed to making this event a success. Special thanks to the Department of Public Works, the Department of Property and Procurement, J. Benton Construction LLC, the Office of the Governor, the Office of Disaster Recovery, the Bryan-Roach Administration, Head Start Region II, the Administration for Children and Families, Former Commissioner Kimberley Causey-Gomez, our Head Start Administrators, Teachers, and Staff, and the Department of Human Services.

Your dedication, support, and partnership have been invaluable. Together, we continue to build a brighter future for our community. Thank you!



Cruz Bay
HEAD START
Official Ribbon Cutting Ceremony
St. John, U.S. Virgin Islands



Cruz Bay
HEAD START

Official Ribbon Cutting Ceremony

St. John, U.S. Virgin Islands

Wednesday, November 6, 2024

