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Division of Family Assistance

DHS, Governor Bryan, and Recovery Partners Celebrate Joint Ribbon-Cutting of Two New St. Croix Head Start Facilities

U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS - The Virgin Islands Department of Human Services (VIDHS) hosted a celebratory event today at Anna's Hope, culminating in a joint ribbon-cutting ceremony for two newly constructed, state-of-the-art Head Start facilities. The highly anticipated ceremonies, which went off flawlessly, mark a monumental step forward in the territory's commitment to providing world-class early childhood education environments for its youngest learners.

These new centers represent projects number two and three out of six major Head Start facilities allocated under a historic \$42 million federal grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families (ACF). Following the successful opening of the Cruz Bay facility on St. John last year, today's joint ribbon-cutting at the Anna's Hope ceremony demonstrates the Department's undeniable momentum in rebuilding and expanding the territory's educational infrastructure.

"Today, we are not just cutting a ribbon or unlocking doors; we are celebrating the realization of a dream for the future of our children," said **VIDHS Commissioner Averil George**. "These state-of-the-art facilities represent the immense, unseen labor of our dedicated staff and partners. When we open doors to environments of this caliber, we are telling our three-, four-, and five-year-olds that their potential is absolutely limitless, and their community believes in them from day one. I extend my deepest gratitude to our DHS senior leadership, Head Start Administrator Masikia Lewis, Assistant Commissioner Carla Benjamin, and our entire staff for carrying the weight of this vision."

The successful completion of these facilities was the result of intense collaboration across multiple government agencies and private partners, driven by the steady leadership of the Bryan-Roach Administration. VIDHS extends its deepest gratitude to **Governor Albert Bryan Jr.** for his continuous push to bring these projects across the finish line, alongside the **Department of Public Works, the Department of Property and Procurement, and J. Custom Builders VI** for their master craftsmanship and technical expertise.

"These facilities are about giving our children a strong start and giving parents confidence that their children are learning and growing in a safe, modern environment," **Governor Bryan said**. "We have said from the beginning that recovery has to mean more than rebuilding what was lost. It has to leave the Virgin Islands better than we found it."

We opened the new Arthur A. Richards School earlier this month, and today we are opening two new Head Start facilities here on St. Croix. That is progress people can see. I want to thank Commissioner George and the team at Human Services, the Office of Disaster Recovery, our federal partners and everyone who kept these projects moving. We still have work to do, but every facility we complete is another step toward giving our children and families the opportunities they deserve."

Working in lockstep with VIDHS, the Office of Disaster Recovery played a pivotal role in navigating complex federal frameworks and keeping the projects on track.

ODR Director Adrienne L. Williams-Octalien shared her experience as a student in the program. "As a product of Head Start, I vividly remember my teacher, Ms. Golden, who shaped my professional trajectory at a very early age. I eagerly looked forward to seeing her both in and out of school. The foundation I received then is the reason I am standing here today. We are reinforcing this legacy by rebuilding and strengthening our facilities utilizing federal disaster recovery funds."

The Head Start Program promotes the school readiness of young children from low-income families by supporting their mental, social, and emotional development. Serving children who are three to five years old, Head Start provides comprehensive educational, health, nutritional, and disability services that are deeply responsive to the ethnic, cultural, and linguistic heritage of each family. With three facilities now successfully opened under the \$42 million grant, VIDHS and its partners remain aggressively focused on completing the final three projects, ensuring that generations of Virgin Islands children receive a strong, safe, and loving start.

The Department of Human Services (VIDHS) exists to provide social services to members in our community with diverse needs. In times of national uncertainty and hardship we act as a safety-net and exist to inspire hope and empower change through non-judgmental, quality delivery of needed services and resources. Please visit the Department of Human Services website, www.dhs.gov.vi or on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/usvidhs>).

The Bryan-Roach Administration is investing in the Territory's people, infrastructure, and future through transparency, stabilizing the economy, restoring trust in the government, and ensuring that recovery projects are completed as quickly as possible. Visit transparency.vi.gov.

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