



# PRESS RELEASE

## Department of Human Services Recognizes National Foster Care Month

*For Immediate Release: May 5, 2021*

**U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS:** May is National Foster Care Month and May 2021 has been proclaimed as Foster Care Month in the US Virgin Islands by Governor Albert Bryan, Jr. The Virgin Islands Department of Human Services (DHS) encourages the community to learn more about the needs of at-risk children and youth and about how to support them across our Virgin Islands community. Support for children in foster care is available in a variety of ways through individual and corporate support that includes advocacy, mentoring, visiting, volunteering primarily through the Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS), sponsorship, etc. Those interested in becoming foster parents can contact the DCFS office to obtain an application and initiate the process.

Approximately 75-100 children are served through DHS' DCFS Protective and Foster Care & Adoptions offices in the USVI each year. The Protective office attempts to keep families together by providing in-home services to prevent separation. However, when children must come into foster care, placements can last from one day to many years.

### **Foster Parents/Families (also called Resource Parents/Families) can provide:**

- Emergency care overnight or over a weekend
- Ongoing care that lasts for as long as it takes for children to be safely returned to family or kin
- Ongoing care that lasts until a child finds permanency by adoption
- Ongoing care until it becomes clear that a youth's most realistic permanency option is independent living and the child stays with the foster family until they move on to independence or they move to a facility that facilitates independence.

*\* The Virgin Islands is in need of all categories of Foster Parents/Families.*

“National Foster Care Month serves a dual purpose of raising awareness of the growing needs of children and older youth in placements in our community and celebrating the foster parents who have committed their time and resources to ensure that youth have access to safe and loving homes where they can thrive both physically and emotionally,” said DHS commissioner Kimberley Causey-Gomez. “We also want to highlight the social workers and our partner agencies who work around the clock to be the village that kids and families in crisis need.”

The DHS team members (including social workers and Family Services Specialists) provide round the clock intervention, care and support. They work without accolades or comfort in high stress situations to bring safety, hope and healing. The community can and does play a critical role when people sign up to volunteer, advocate, donate or become foster care, respite care or adoptive parents.

**The Division of Children and Family Services has a variety of short term yet impactful ways people can positively impact Foster families including:**

- **Become a DHS-Approved Mentor (Big Brother / Sister) to a child(ren) in Foster Care** (Mentors can facilitate social outings, provide homework assistance, throw holiday celebrations, and conduct activities on-site where applicable, etc.).
- **Provide internships and apprenticeships.** Adolescents in the program desperately need the support of the VI business community to help them gain practical skills and work experience to succeed in the future. Apprenticeships and internships provide a great opportunity for mentoring and coaching and soft skill development.
- **Donate to DHS DCFS Resource Closet.** Our Resource Closet needs to continuously be stocked with items that children in Protective and Foster Care often need. Items for the resource closet include: diapers, toothbrushes and toothpaste, toiletries, notebooks, pencils, pens, coloring books, face masks, lunch boxes, car seats, socks, new pajama sets and underwear of varying sizes for boys and girls, combs, brushes etc.
- **Sponsor a Foster child(ren).** Sign up to sponsor music, dance, sports, camp, summer camp and other extracurricular activities for a child or children.
- **Donate a “sweetcase” or a number of sweetcases for children in Foster Care.** Sweetcases include a duffle bag or suitcase containing a new blanket and toiletries. Most kids coming into the Foster Care system do not have a bag or blanket to call their own.
- **Backpacks for Success.** Schools, faith-based organizations, businesses, nonprofits, and the general public are invited to sponsor 1- 100 backpacks with specified school supplies for children in placements.

- **Donate.** DCFS children and foster families are always in need of gear (cribs, small dresser drawers, new clothes, new shoes, toys etc.) and educational and technology devices like tablets (iPads) and laptops.
- **Host an ABC party.** Host a motivational and celebratory event at the end of each school marking period for our foster kids who made As, Bs and Cs on their report cards as a way of recognizing and encouraging their academic achievements. This is a great opportunity for businesses, churches and organizations to be an active part of the village.
- **Sponsor or host a fundraising event.** Are you great at connecting people and pulling together resources? We could use your skill to help us as we continually fundraise on behalf of the Division of Children and Family Services. Please contact the Division of Children and Family Services to learn more about how to support children and families in the Territory and join our village of support.

**For more information on becoming a foster or adoptive parent or how to support children in care, please call or email dcfs:**

- **(St. Croix)** - (340) 773-5303
- **(St. Thomas/St. John)** - (340) 473-5794 *\*Either number may be called for general information*
- **Email:** [fostercare.vi@dhs.vi.gov](mailto:fostercare.vi@dhs.vi.gov)

**\*All activities involving direct contact with children will require complete federal background clearance.**

*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](http://www.dhs.gov.vi) for more information.*

For more information on COVID-19, please visit our website, [covid19usvi.com](http://covid19usvi.com), or text COVID19USVI to 888777. To report a suspected COVID-19 case, call (340) 712-6299 or (340) 776-1519. ###