GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

# PRESS RELEASE

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# Social Development Department Honours Foster Parents for Dedicated Service

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The Social Development Department recently recognised foster parents across the Virgin Islands for their commitment to supporting vulnerable children, during an educational session hosted by the Children and Family Support Services Unit.

The event celebrated long-standing foster parents who have provided safe, loving and stable homes for children in need. The session also offered professional development, guidance and encouragement for both new and experienced foster families.

Minister for Health and Social Development, Honourable Vincent O. Wheatley, praised the honourees for their compassion and dedication. He said, “Foster parents play an essential role in our society because they step forward when others cannot. Their continued commitment ensures that children who need care are welcomed into homes full of support, guidance and hope. On behalf of the Government of the Virgin Islands, I express heartfelt gratitude to every foster parent for answering the call and for prioritising the wellbeing of our children.”

The educational programme featured presentations from Licensed Clinical Psychologist Dr Michelle M. Martin-Dowe and Education Officer Ms Afiya Smith, who shared insight on behaviour, trauma-informed care, child development and strategies for strengthening family support systems. Coordinator of Employee Relations, Ms Kimra DeWindt, who is also a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, delivered a session on practical approaches to addressing emotional needs within foster homes and managing challenging situations in a supportive and healthy way.

Programme Director for Children and Family Support Services, Ms Laurel Freeman, commended foster parents for their invaluable role in contributing to the social protection landscape of the Virgin Islands. She said, “Fostering involves patience, resilience and unconditional care. Our foster families have demonstrated these qualities again and again. Today we honour their sacrifices, celebrate their successes and commit to giving them the continued professional support they deserve.”

Ms Freeman further noted that the Department continues to place emphasis on training, community engagement and improved resources for foster families. She added, “As we work to strengthen our foster care system, we recognise that no one walks this path alone. We are committed to building a supportive network of practitioners, educators and foster parents working together to ensure every child in our care has the opportunity to grow, heal and thrive. We look forward to increasing public awareness and encouraging more families to consider fostering as a way of transforming lives.”

During the session, the foster parents were presented with tokens of appreciation and were encouraged to continue partnering with the Social Development Department to provide safe, nurturing and secure homes for children in need of alternative care.

The Ministry of Health and Social Development, through the Social Development Department, remains committed to strengthening child safeguarding systems, building family support networks and promoting a culture of care across the Virgin Islands.

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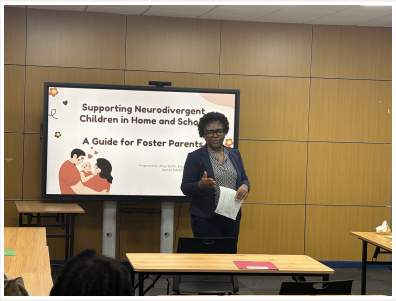
## Gallery




"Today we'll explore practical ways
foster parents can support
neurodivergent children at home an
in school, especially children who m
also be navigating trauma."






Supporting Neurodivergent
Children in Home and Scho
A Guide for Foster Parents






Honoring of Foster Parents






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## Additional Documents or Media

- 20251126_pressrelease_sdd_honours_foster_parents.pdf