

Voices for VI Children

Daily News, the Avis – March Op-Ed column, Judith Richardson, columnist (*photo on file*)

Title: ***Let's Make sure that VI Kids Count in the USVI – By Counting Children in the Census***

We need your help in counting the territory's children this year.

As the Director of the Community Foundation's USVI KIDS COUNT project, which each year documents the well-being of VI children and families, I'm aware of the utmost importance of reliable data, in order to make real and lasting progress for children. Specifically, we need to know how many children are living in the US Virgin Islands -- and what are their needs?

As 2010 is a Census year, now is the best opportunity to get an accurate account of all children living in Virgin Island households and families. Here's why it's so important that each one of us provide complete and accurate information when filling out the census forms.

The first reason is because the national Census allows all of us to accurately document who lives in our households on April 1st of this year (Census Day), and how we and our families are faring in the current economic downturn.

The second reason is because Census data is used to distribute more than \$400 billion in federal funds each year to children, families, and others most in need. These public programs include Head Start, State Children's Health Insurance Program (S-CHIP), Foster Care, Food Stamps, Medicare, and other services.

Are there children living in your household or family now? Children are the age group missed most often in the Census, and the undercount of children results in reduced funding, especially for needy families.

Of all children, infants and pre-schoolers are most likely to be undercounted. In the 2000 Census, 4 percent of children age birth to four (or 750,000 young children) in the U.S. were missed.

Minority children are undercounted most often. Black male children under age 5 were missed at a rate of 5.3%, while black female children of the same age were missed at an even higher rate of 5.4%.

Children are likely to be missed for several reasons.

- Perhaps they live in a household with more than six people (while there's only room for six members to be listed on the Census form). If this describes your residence, please be sure to add a page and list the extra children, or describe them verbally to the Census-taker.
- Perhaps they live in a household headed by neither parent. If this describes your residence, please "count" any child living with you on April 1, even if the child is not your own or even related to you. Recent KIDS COUNT figures show that here in the USVI, 2900 out of almost 28,000 children (or 10% of all VI children) lived with neither parent, and of these, 200+ lived in households headed by a non-relative.
- Perhaps they live temporarily in several homes during the year. If this describes your residence, please "count" any child living with you on April 1 of this year, even if the child has another residence at other times of the year.

Without a concerted effort, it is certainly that young children will again have a higher undercount rate than any other age group.

Accountability requires counting. Please spread the word about the importance of making sure that "Every VI Child Counts"! And when the Census form arrives in the mail, or a census-taker knocks at your door, please identify and describe ALL members of your household.

It's our best chance to improve the well-being of all our families and children!