

Voices for VI Children, October 2006
Judith Richardson, *Daily News* columnist

Title: The Family Connection Center: A Place for Childcare Providers to Enrich their Skills

We have something to celebrate, this month! On October 14, a well-stocked resource center called The Family Connection Center has opened its doors across the street from Pueblo supermarket, in Vitraco Mall. The result of more than three years of research and planning efforts by a community-based board of directors at the Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands, The Family Connection (TFC) Center will serve the needs of the territory's many early childcare and education providers – whether they're working in formal daycare settings, or providing “family, friend and neighbor” childcare within the home.

From my own and others' work with young children, I have always been a believer in the positive effects of early childhood care and education. In the past two decades, an explosion of brain-based research has verified that the experiences between birth and age five significantly affect the architecture and learning-capacity of the brain. During these early years, children's high-quality *care* is extremely important. It's now clear that when infants and children are exposed to supportive, responsive, predictable relationships with the adults who care for them, they have more positive life-outcomes than children who don't have these continuous, affirming interactions.

In daycare settings, high-quality programs are staffed by skilled licensed caregivers, who can provide the best, age-appropriate interactions to young children: opportunities to explore, to seek challenges and accomplishments, to learn through play, and to develop a love of learning.

While these adult caregivers are key to determining whether young children grow up ready to succeed or not, there are few enrichment opportunities available to *them*, locally. That will now begin to change.

The Family Connection Center will provide center-based childcare providers, and parents of young children, with information, services, tools, and programs. Backed by community-raised funds, most resources are currently free. For immediate use, TFC offers a book, toy, teaching-aid and video lending library; consultations on the materials' use, that can also happen within individual local daycare centers. The TFC Center, located next to Jack's Wings Restaurant, also contains a start-up database of USVI childcare providers, plus usable technological equipment, and a meeting space for childcare providers' workshops, training and networking meetings.

The staff offers planning and workshop assistance to enhance daycare providers' programs and credentials. They provide assistance to caregivers working on their Child Development Associate Credential (CDA). TFC Center also helps centers to apply for quality-improvement grants, and to attain national accreditation through the National Association for Education of Young Children (NAEYC). A first NAEYC-accreditation orientation session was held on October 25th.

The two-person TFC Center staff also offers support to parents seeking knowledge to improve their own early care to their children, and provides help in locating licensed local daycare centers, and childcare subsidy programs, when needed.

Hooray for the Family Connection Center (777-0990), a “greatest-need” response by the Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands to the concerns facing the territory's children and families, documented over seven years in the annual USVI KIDS COUNT Data Report!

