



# St. Croix Avis



## VIUEDD unveils new autism center

SHAUNA TUCKER

ST. CROIX — A newly developed autism center was unveiled Friday morning as part of the Virgin Islands University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (VIUEDD) with a grand opening to share the services offered with the general public.

The Autism and Developmental Disabilities Research Center features several rooms for learning under various con-

ditions, as well as displays of extensive research done locally by Dr. Kimberly Mills, VIUEDD associate director.

Mills said research has shown that the earlier a child is diagnosed with autism, the better outcome they will have.

“We do early screening here from as early as 2 months and we would provide treatment as well as recommendations,” she said.

Mills said she has experience running autism clinics all over the world and was part

of one of the largest autism research programs in the nation before moving to the territory.

She said her work has given her the knowledge of applied behavior analytic methodologies, which she will be practicing at the center to adjust the behavior of autistic children.

Mills noted that human behavior functions in several areas, including socially

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Dr. Kimberly Mills (left), associate director of the Virgin Islands University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (VIUEDD), shared plans for the newly unveiled Autism and Developmental Disabilities Research Center at their Friday grand opening with Shauna Tucker (right), VI Territorial Americans with Disabilities Act coordinator.

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mediation, access to tangible items, escape and avoidance, and automatic reinforcement.

“If we understand the function of how the behavior is working, we can work to change it,” she said.

Mills said she wanted to bring autism research and assistance to the Virgin Islands since it

was something brand new for the community in addressing the development disability.

“I wanted to bring the best to the Virgin Islands,” she said.

Mills noted that the center will not only serve as a place for treatment and diagnosis but also for professional training. Persons in the community can receive training in the administration of a range of psycho-

logical, academic, social, behavioral, emotional and adaptive behavior assessments. Certification training also will be provided for a registered behavioral technician, an internationally-recognized credential. Employment training for people with disabilities and training in the teaching of verbal behavior also will be provided.

Americans with Disabilities Act Territorial Coordinator Jamilla Russell, who was present at Friday’s opening, said her office works closely with the VIUEDD and called the autism center “an excellent opportunity for diagnosis and intervention.”

“Studies show that early diagnosis is key and this center is well needed,” she said.

Russell noted that the last census showed approximately 10,000 people with disabilities and called this the “low-end” since many people were not included.

She also said that knowing no local “chief advocate” is in the territory, her office offers support and expertise to all organizations that work with the disabled.