

Press Release: March 11, 2009
Subject: Kids First! Begins Operations,
Web Site Launched
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Kids First! Begins Operations on St. John First Grants Committed Web Site Launched

Kids First!, a Virgin Island non profit organization dedicated to supporting education on St. John has completed all preparation necessary to begin full operations effective March 15, 2009. First incorporated in June, 2008, Kids First! has operated on a limited basis while building the organization and infrastructure necessary to be fully operational.

“Our mission” said Bruce Claflin, president, Kids First!, “is to support quality education for all the children of St. John in a safe and nurturing environment. We believe that by providing a quality education for the island’s children, we can ensure they grow into productive, responsible, and fulfilled adults who provide the leadership St. John needs for the future.”

Kids First! intends to focus much of its resources on early learning programs. The years from birth to age 5 are the most critically important for human development. High quality early learning initiatives can greatly improve a child’s readiness to begin formal schooling and to thrive in subsequent years. As resources permit, Kids First! will also support programs that directly contribute to learning in grades 1-12.

Kids First! has made the first of several grants expected to be given over time.

Reading Intervention Teacher at Guy Benjamin School

Reading is a critical skill, essential for success throughout the school years and beyond. Unfortunately, some students begin to lag behind, starting in the early years and by 4th or 5th grade it is difficult to catch up. Recognizing

this, Dionne Wells, principal at Guy Benjamin School, created a new position: “Reading Intervention Teacher”. This teacher closely monitors the progress of all the children at Guy Benjamin School and works with teachers and students to help each student read at grade level or beyond. Despite the progress being made, this position was at risk of being eliminated due to budget pressures. Kids First! is providing emergency funding to ensure this position will be maintained throughout the school year and will work with Guy Benjamin School to secure ongoing funding. “This position is critical to the success of our students” said Ms. Wells. “Kids First! has made it possible for us to continue providing this important support for our children”.

Financial Aid for St. John Children to attend Giff Hill Early Learning Program

St. John public schools are not funded to run pre-school programs. Giff Hill School fills that gap with the largest early learning program on St. John. This highly regarded program supports children from ages 2½ to 5 and ensures that young students are ready to thrive as they start the more formal education of first grade. Giff Hill’s comprehensive program, based on the *Creative Curriculum*, focuses on the cognitive/language development, the social/emotional development and the physical development of the young child. Unfortunately, many island families cannot afford the cost of this program. To ensure the highest number of St. John children possible have access to this valuable learning experience, Kids First! provided a grant for financial aid, allowing up to 10 more children to attend this program. Commenting on Kids First!’s support, Ben Biddle, Headmaster of Giff Hill School said, “GHS’ mission is to serve the entire community of St. John. Scholarship funds received from Kids First! help to assure an education in our Early Learning Center is accessible to all students—regardless of financial background.”

Development Retreat at Julius Sprauve School.

Brenda Dalmida, assistant principal at the Julius Sprauve School, wanted to prepare her teachers for the new school year, while demonstrating how valued they are within the St. John community. To support her efforts, Kids First! sponsored a one day planning and development retreat at a St. John villa. Held just prior to the start of the new school year, 19 faculty and 3 staff along with 3 administrators had an intense day of training, planning,

brainstorming and personal development. While it was “all work”, it was done in the nicest possible environment with majestic views of the north shore islands, catered meals and audio visual support. Commenting on the session, Ms Dalmida said, “My staff left (reluctantly!) feeling important, valued and empowered to take on the very serious challenges of public education in the US VI.”

Kids First! has launched a comprehensive web site (www.kidsfirststj.org) that describes its mission and goals, organization and programs. Featuring pictures of island children and schools, it also includes an easy to use, secure, on-line credit card contribution system.

About Kids First!

Our mission is to support quality education for all the children of St. John in a safe and nurturing environment. Kids First! believes that supporting quality education is the single most important contribution to keep St. John the special place it is today. By providing a quality education for our children, they will mature into responsible citizens, enjoying the fruits of a productive, happy life, while providing the leadership we need for the future.

