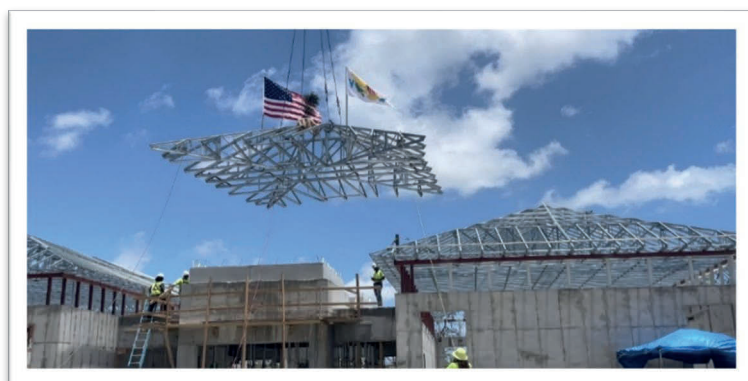




# Under the Tree

A PUBLICATION OF LUTHERAN SOCIAL SERVICES OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

## Topping Off the Summer Season!



In June, our LSSVI staff celebrated a significant milestone by witnessing the "Topping Off" ceremony for our new Early Head Start center. This state-of-the-art facility will cater to children aged from birth to three years, offering support to their families and pregnant women in the program.

The center's amenities include enhanced classrooms, showers, a laundry facility, charging stations, indoor and outdoor play areas for various age groups, a commercial kitchen, a generator, a large gathering space, and more. The center will serve as a vital hub of assistance during natural disasters, providing essential services to low-income families, our staff, and their families. With the dedicated efforts of James Benton and his team at J. Benton Construction LLC, we are on track to complete the project by mid-November. We eagerly anticipate creating wonderful memories with the next generation of Virgin Islands' children in our Early Head Start program at this new facility.

It is important to note that this new Early Head Start center is funded by the Office of Head Start through Region II Administration for Children and Families (ACF).

## A Message From Our CEO, Junia John-Straker



"HAPPY SUMMER!!!! We hope you are enjoying these summer months despite the extreme heat. The recent year has brought numerous changes, and businesses and organizations alike have had to navigate through them, including the complex task of ensuring adequate staffing. We have not been immune to this struggle. We apologize if you have not heard from us as frequently as in the past or if we have been unable to keep up with your requests. Despite the hurdles, we are delighted to share that the individuals in our programs have been thriving, thanks to the dedication of our exceptional staff—from the children at Queen Louise Home to those with profound developmental and physical disabilities to our seniors and others in our care. It is with a heart full of gratitude that we acknowledge your unwavering support throughout this journey. Your compassion and commitment to our mission have been the driving force behind our success. We are eagerly looking forward to reaching out to you and hearing from you. Thank you for being an essential part of our story."

## Cottage Parents & Family Make A Grand Return to Queen Louise Home!

On Thursday, July 20th, Queen Louise Home received a lovely visit from the Evans family! Joe and Linda Evans were previous Cottage parents at our Queen Louise Home from 1981 to 1983. Two of their sons, Eaton and Norman, were both cared for at Queen Louise and adopted by the Evans in their early childhood, while their third son, Joe. Jr., was born on St. Croix. Norman and Joe Jr. brought their spouses and children to see their childhood home, totaling a nine-person entourage that was eager to tour the facility.

As we gave the family a tour of the campus, they were able to recall distant memories and unlock a lot of nostalgia from their time with us, as well as note how the facility has grown and changed. Joe and Linda were both able to recall their own memories from being Cottage parents and what it meant for them to have such an impact. Our staff learned of all the fun endeavors the former Cottage boys embarked on after they left our care and relocated abroad. They concluded their trip by handing our CEO, Junia John-Straker, a generous donation to the Queen Louise Home program.



## 5-STAR Rating for our Housing Management Division & More!



The occupancy and maintenance staff at our respective HUD-funded facilities were diligently preparing for the annual visit from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Each year, HUD representatives and accredited contractors visit to assess the soundness and safety of our buildings, review our files and records, and evaluate the performance of our occupancy and maintenance staff. This comprehensive evaluation aims to ensure that our tenants and those in our care continue to live in a safe, well-kept, and organized environment. In June, we warmly welcomed a team of seven HUD staff members from Puerto Rico and Florida to our facilities.

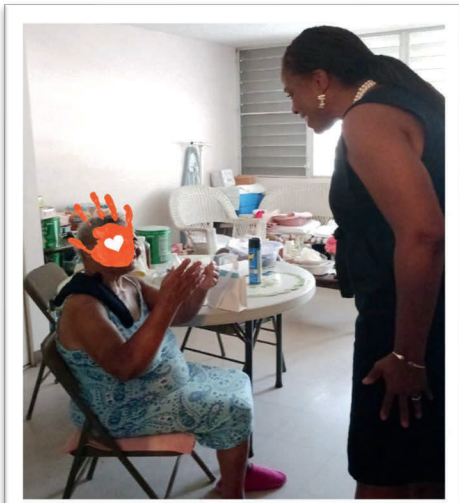
The visit turned out to be a resounding success as our Housing Management Division (HMD) staff reported that the HUD team was highly impressed with our projects. Our appearance and file management received glowing praise. Notably, Flamboyant Gardens, Yellow Cedar Residence, Prince Street Residence, and Danish Gardens all achieved superior ratings for housing management by the end of the visit. The commendations did not stop there—our maintenance staff garnered 3 gold awards and 1 silver award for their exceptional performance during past REAC inspections (with scores above 90 and one above 85). The HMD staff made a point to acknowledge the outstanding contributions of our maintenance crew, who earned four certificates for the REAC Property and Unit Inspection, underscoring their meticulous attention to detail during the examination of our apartment units and repairs. We are incredibly proud of our team's dedication to providing a safe and comfortable living environment for our residents.

## Yellow Cedar Residents Take A Splash!



Our Yellow Cedar Residence is home for up to 12 low-income adults with developmental disabilities. The facility offers 24-hour supportive care to our residents in the program. Our staff at Yellow Cedar was able to take advantage of the summer heat and use specialized swimming equipment to get our immobile residents in the water. They had a blast, enjoying the crystal-clear waves that the beautiful island of St. Thomas has to offer.





## A Superb Surprise From Stacey: Congresswoman Stacey Plaskett Pays A Visit!

Congresswoman Stacey Plaskett paid a joyful surprise visit to our seniors at Ebenezer Gardens on Tuesday, June 27th, 2023. Accompanied by her staff, she graciously toured the facility, going door-to-door to greet each of our frail seniors. Her staff had been consistently visiting Ebenezer Gardens in recent months to engage in a series of game nights, which included bingo, dominoes, and exciting story time readings that our residents eagerly participated in. The look of surprise and joy on their faces when Congresswoman Plaskett surprised them was heartwarming.

Along with her warm and welcoming energy, she also presented our residents with small gift bags, including lotion, a thank-you card, and other considerate items. We sincerely thank Congresswoman Stacey Plaskett and her staff for all they have done for our seniors and for showing up in person to present these tokens of love. It's truly heartening to have such caring and humble figures leading our community, especially those who make time in their busy schedules for our most vulnerable individuals.



## Thank You Phillips Charitable Foundation!

The **Phillips Charitable Foundation** has been an incredible partner to Lutheran Social Services, generously supporting our Queen Louise home for the past four years. We are deeply honored to receive the grant award they bestowed upon us, which covered the cost of a much-needed new van for Queen Louise Home. Currently, our three vans have endured wear and tear from everyday activities and travels, causing them to be in constant need of repairs. With heartfelt appreciation, we welcome this replacement, as it will greatly improve our ability to provide seamless transportation for those in our care.

The swift response and concern shown by the Phillips Charitable Foundation in addressing our transport issue fill us with a sense of wonder and joy. Knowing that the love for our children will always prevail through the support of such compassionate partners is truly heartwarming. The impact of this shiny, new van will be immeasurable for the children at Queen Louise Home, enabling them to partake in park outings, soccer games, community gatherings, and doctor's visits with ease and without worry. We feel incredibly blessed to collaborate with such a caring and attentive foundation like Phillips, enriching our agency's mission and positively transforming the lives of those we serve.



# You Can Make A Donation!

Please consider making a donation to support our programs:

You can donate at: [www.lssvi.org](http://www.lssvi.org)

Send a check or money order made out to:

Lutheran Social Services of the Virgin Islands, 516B Hospital St, Frederiksted,  
VI 00840-3824

Or call: (340) 772-4099 ext. 24 to make a credit card donation over the phone.

For more information, contact Junia John-Straker, Chief Executive Officer at (340) 772-4099  
ext.21 or email [j.johnstraker@lssvi.org](mailto:j.johnstraker@lssvi.org).

2023

Lutheran Social Services of the Virgin Islands is excited to announce a Golf Tournament. Get ready for a great weekend of friendly competition, food and fun! This year's lineup will include a two-day golf tournament with one day at the Carambola golf course and one day at the Buccaneer.



2024

This summer event will be relaunched next year! Our kayaking on St. Croix is set for June of 2024, and we are looking forward to a grander time than ever before. Stay tuned for more details but be sure to mark your calendar!



August 2023

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