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**Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands
Partners with VI Nonprofit, Beautiful Dreamers, to Provide School-based
Mental Health Support Programming**

\$350,000 grant from Robert Wood Johnson Foundation will fund mental health support for students and professionals in the USVI public schools

U.S. Virgin Islands, January 15, 2020 — The Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands (CFVI) will partner with local nonprofit organization Beautiful Dreamers to operate a school-based mental health support program during calendar year 2020. A grant of \$350,000 to CFVI from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) will be used to fund a 15-month continuation project to provide mental health services for students and training for professionals in USVI public schools.

“The mental health services system in the Territory has been under duress for years, with both the current and immediate past Governors declaring states of emergency around mental health,” said Anna Wheatley Scarbriel, CFVI Director of Grants and Programs. “We also know from the 2019 Community Needs Assessment commissioned by CFVI that stress and trauma are prevalent in the USVI school population and remain a significant health issue for residents in the Territory in the aftermath of Hurricanes Irma and Maria.”

Founded by St. Croix native Vincentia Paul-Constantin, PhD, Beautiful Dreamers is a not-for-profit organization focused on working with families to meet their physical, educational, and psychological needs. Following the 2017 hurricanes, Beautiful Dreamers was one of the agencies selected by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to provide free counseling services to VI residents. CFVI provided an initial grant to Beautiful Dreamers in 2018 to establish baselines of both need and impact from the storms.

“It is important that we focus our attention on patterns that are helpful and healthy for the mind,” said Paul-Constantin, Executive Director of Beautiful Dreamers. “As a society, we must seek to

normalize conversations around mental health so that our children and adults can better understand the fundamentals of positive emotions and cognitive thoughts while working to reduce unhealthy thinking and destructive behaviors,” she said.

Working in coordination with school administrators, Beautiful Dreamers will develop an integrative plan to ensure students receive mental health services as they cope with unresolved issues in the home and community in the ongoing aftermath of the storms. The multi-phase project will incorporate a two-pronged approach: (1) providing mental/behavioral health support to students and (2) providing professional development for educators. The project will provide training and intervention to the 11 schools currently being served through the pilot project, as well as an additional 11 schools that have expressed interest. The list of schools covers both the St. Thomas/St. John and St. Croix districts, and includes elementary, middle, and high schools.

Dr. Paul-Constantin points out that while children living in poverty in the Virgin Islands are culturally diverse, they share a common reality: they are more at risk of living with multiple chronic conditions as they simultaneously confront Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). “Unfortunately, there is a social distance between mental health professionals and this vulnerable population,” she said, adding that the quality of the therapeutic relationship is crucial to effective treatment modalities geared for the unique presentation of USVI children. Dr. Paul-Constantin hopes that through the grant this gap can be bridged in order to offer much-needed services.

“Enriching the lives of children is one of CFVI’s major priorities,” said Dee Baecher-Brown, CFVI President. “Our hope is that the findings of this initiative will serve as a demonstration project that supports enhancements in school counseling services throughout the Territory. Ultimately, the success of this project will contribute to the success and personal development of school children in the Virgin Islands,” she said.

“Given the Foundation’s history of working with government agencies in various capacities, we are acutely aware of the challenges facing the Territory, particularly as it relates to capacity, so we have consistently supported organizations and initiatives that serve to supplement critical human and social services,” said Baecher-Brown. “Not only that, but we see this particular project as a means of expanding the conversation around mental health in the Territory.”

Support for this Territory-wide mental health support program has been provided by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF). The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect the views of the RWJF.

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About the Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands

For nearly 30 years, the Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands (CFVI) has been a catalyst for positive change in the Territory through initiatives committed to youth, learning, family support and the environment. With a professional staff and a volunteer Board of Directors composed of community leaders, CFVI is a trusted advocate and supporter of programs that ensure opportunity and sustainability for current and future generations. CFVI is a registered non-profit organization entirely supported by individual donors, grants, trusts, corporate donations and estate planning. For more information, visit www.cfvi.net.

About Beautiful Dreamers

The implementing partner for this project is Beautiful Dreamers, under the leadership of Vincentia Paul-Constantin, PhD LMHC, Chief Consultant/Clinician. Dr. Constantin is a Licensed Mental Health Counselor, as well as a qualified and credentialed professor and educator with 14 years of teaching experience in educational consulting, general education, special education, and the social sciences. For the past three years, Dr. Constantin has worked as a consultant in the USVI public school system to train special education teachers, school counselors and administrators in providing evidence-based educational and psychological approaches in educating the children of the Virgin Islands. Dr. Constantin is a native of St. Croix and completed her primary, secondary, and university schooling in the Territory. She will provide direct supervision of her team of licensed clinical social workers

and other mental health professionals to implement the project. For more information, visit www.beautifuldreamers.org.