

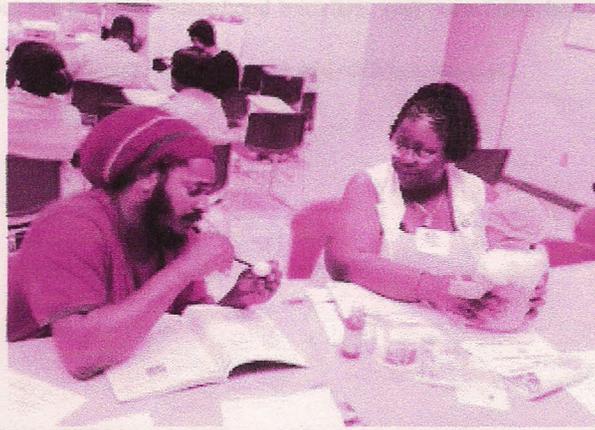
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**St. Croix workshop designed to improve dads' parenting skills**

By AESHA DUVAL

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For more information about

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Daily News Photo by CRISTIAN SIMESCU Village Strength Project Program Coordinator Xawntoia Franklin holds a doll while participating in a exercise with Tafari Tzaddi on how to measure and give medications to young children at a National Fatherhood Initiat

ST. CROIX - Equipping new and expectant fathers with practical knowledge of child health and safety will help to forge committed relationships in the long-term relationships with their children, said organizers of workshops for local health care providers that were held this week.

More than 20 representatives from St. Croix hospitals and clinics, pregnancy centers and other community-based organizations attended the "Doctor Dad" Training Institute workshop at Luis Hospital on Thursday. A similar workshop was held Wednesday on St. Thomas.

The workshops were hosted by V.I. Perinatal Inc. and Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands and facilitated by the National Fatherhood Initiative.

Tamesha Antoine of Perinatal Inc. said the goal of the workshops will be for health-care providers to go out and help the Virgin Islands fathers they encounter each day be the best dads they can be.

"We want fathers to be more active in their children's lives," Antoine said. "These workshops will help those people who go out to homes and provide services to families."

Rebecca Graham, director of health care at the National Fatherhood Initiative, facilitated workshops on both islands and trained the providers in a variety of child care tips, such as the right way to hold a baby and what to look for when a common cold in a child is serious enough to call a doctor.

"Our mission is to improve the well-being of children by increasing the proportion of children that grow up with involved, responsible and committed fathers," Graham said.

Because of cultural changes over the years, there are more single-parent families, parents who both work full time and fewer fathers involved in raising their children, Graham said. She said arming fathers and father-figures with the skills to be better parents will help level the playing field.

Graham said research shows that when fathers are connected to their children during pregnancy and infancy, they are more likely to stay connected for the long term. Children with involved fathers are more likely to do well in school, to avoid criminal activity and to have fewer emotional, health and behavioral problems than children whose fathers are not involved, she said.

The premier fatherhood renewal organization in the country, the National Fatherhood Initiative works in every sector and at every level of society to engage fathers in the lives of their children.

Antoine said the health-care representatives who took part in the workshops will go back to their agencies and

organizations and provide training to their fellow providers, who will in turn reach out to fathers and mothers in the territory. Some of the agencies represented at Thursday's workshop were V.I. PUSH, the Women Infants and Children program, Queen Louise Home for Children, Health Department, church-based organizations and local preschools.

For more information about the National Fatherhood Initiative, visit [www.fatherhood.org](http://www.fatherhood.org).

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