

DISABILITY RIGHTS CENTER OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS 2017 ANNUAL REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY



“EACH ONE OF US HAS LIVED THROUGH SOME DEVASTATION, SOME LONELINESS, SOME WEATHER SUPER STORM OR SPIRITUAL SUPER STORM, WHEN WE LOOK AT EACH OTHER WE MUST SAY, I UNDERSTAND. I UNDERSTAND HOW YOU FEEL BECAUSE I HAVE BEEN THERE MYSELF. WE MUST SUPPORT EACH OTHER AND EMPATHIZE WITH EACH OTHER BECAUSE EACH OF US IS MORE ALIKE THAN WE ARE UNALIKE.”

~ MAYA ANGELOU ~



DRCVI MISSION STATEMENT

Advance the legal rights of people with disabilities, support and empower families and provide training and information that promotes the overall health and educational development of children and youth.

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When the year 2017 came to an end, we stopped to reflect on the past 365 days, but it was the last 116 days that will be etched in our minds when we think of 2017. To say 2017 was a year of challenges is an understatement, but with it comes great opportunity for 2018.

Just days before Hurricane Irma's historic devastation of St. Thomas and St. John, we were busy hosting a training entitled Disaster Preparedness for People with Disabilities, which had been scheduled long before we had any inkling of the storms that would come barreling towards our islands. We never got the chance to host the training in St. Croix. As we have seen in countless natural disasters, most plans lack proper preparation for persons with disabilities as does the recovery, as we are experiencing post-Hurricanes Irma and Maria.

The aftermath of these two Category 5 hurricanes has been traumatizing for many Virgin Islanders, but people came together to bring relief supplies and direct service support. There have been far greater moments of gratitude in these circumstances than frustration.

I have never been more proud or more honored to be working with the wonderful staff we have at DRCVI, some of whom joined our team not too long before the storms, but hit the ground running after the hurricanes as if they had been here for years. After Irma, the St. Thomas office contacted FEMA, the Red Cross and other agencies to coordinate an effort to assist individuals with their applications for disaster relief. We have provided trainings on FEMA and what people's rights are in requesting accommodation from FEMA (with ASL interpreters present).

DRCVI staff has been negotiating with the Department of Labor to help displaced workers get their emergency unemployment benefits and advocating for services from the Department of Human Services on behalf of persons, some of whom are homebound and in need of meals, medicine, care giving, and vocational rehabilitation. A DRCVI staff member has been working closely with the territory's health care providers.

For several weeks, DRCVI hosted a weekly VI Partners conference call that was jointly chaired by the Office of Disability Integration and Coordination of FEMA.

Our main office in St. Croix endured structural damage, but that has not kept our staff from working tirelessly to get things operational. We have been busy coordinating efforts and objectives for 2018, while managing in crisis mode.

We are particularly excited about the opportunity that comes with some of the rebuilding efforts, in helping our VI community become a more inclusive, accessible place for our community members and visitors with disabilities. One such area of focus will be the airports and the chance to advocate for the construction of passenger bridges that offer easier access for everyone.

No one is ever quite prepared for a Category 5 strength hurricane, let alone two hurricanes. These disasters take a harder toll on those most vulnerable in our communities, when certain medical equipment and medicines require electricity, or debris makes it difficult to navigate around, or accessing basic essentials becomes an impossibility without communication lines via phone or internet service.

We are immensely grateful for the outpouring of support we have received both near and far and hope that the support continues for those who most need it as we forge into a new year ignited to make a better, stronger, and more accessible Virgin Islands.

Amelia Headley LaMont

DISABILITY RIGHTS CENTER OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS ADDITIONAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Completed 60 radio impressions on the Ability Radio program - a total of 6,384,300 media impressions.
- Expanded our radio audience outreach by linking our audio files posted on drcvi.org to written transcripts of each broadcast.
- Solicited, with the assistance of UVI's Undergraduate Program in Psychology, 417 individual responses to DRCVI's community needs survey.
- Presented 27 workshops on such topics as voting rights, special education, employment rights, self-advocacy for persons with mental illness, and disaster preparedness and recovery.
- Reached 90,150 hits on our drcvi.org website and an estimated Facebook audience reach of 9,251.
- Monitored 18 residential facilities.
- Re-released "Forgotten in Paradise", a historical account on the U.S. Virgin Islands' mental health service system.
- Completed our Advocacy Service Plan for 2018-2022.



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2017-2018 PAIMI

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Kimmie Tonge, Executive Assistant

ST. CROIX-MAIN OFFICE

63 Estate Cane Carlton
Frederiksted, VI 00840
340-772-1200
340-772-1280

ST. THOMAS/ST. JOHN

9003 Havensight Mall, Suite 313
Charlotte Amalie, VI 00802
340-776-4303
Fax: 340-774-7844

