



THE DISABILITY RIGHTS CENTER OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

ANNUAL REPORT

2024

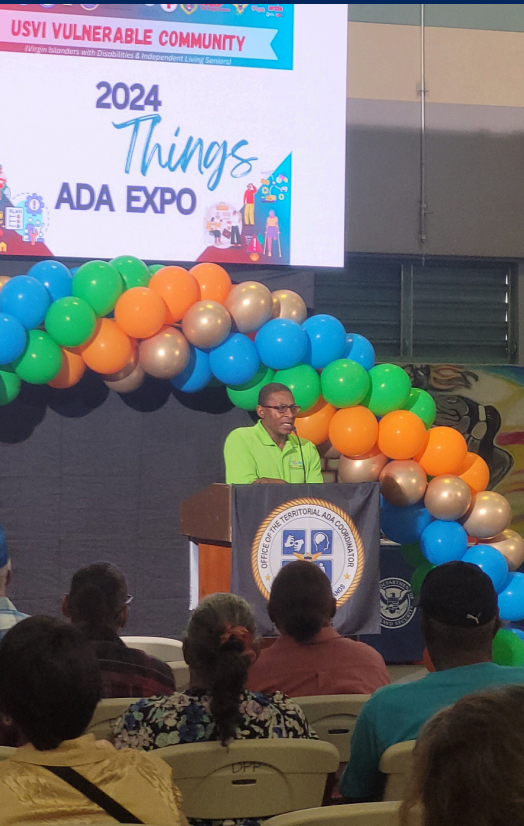
MISSION STATEMENT

Advance the legal rights of people with disabilities,
support and empower families,
and inform and involve professionals and others
interested in the healthy development and education of
children and youth.

Keeping the Community Informed

The Disability Rights Center of the Virgin Islands (DRCVI) keeps residents and clients informed via radio and online presence. Its Ability Radio airs every Saturday on 91.3 WTJX. In 2024, DRCVI recorded 27 shows. Each episode is based on a topic that affects our community. Ability Radio spotlights DRCVI and disability-related services, programs, experts, people with disabilities, and service providers.

Our website, drcvi.org, has a wealth of information about disability protection and advocacy. DRCVI maintains an online presence and regularly educates its followers on advocacy measures. Information is shared via Facebook, Instagram, X, and Bluesky. Additionally, recorded training webinars and other resources, including Ability Radio episodes, can be found at www.YouTube.com/@DRCVI.



Client Assistance Community

DRCVI provides advice and consultation, direct client representation, and referrals to appropriate agencies.

Legal areas include civil rights in education, employment, healthcare, and transportation; housing; public benefits, including social security information and Medicaid eligibility; unemployment; workers' compensation; and ADA issues related to FMLA, mental illness, developmental disabilities, assistive technology, voting rights, and other individual rights.

Throughout 2024, DRCVI hosted and participated in events and trainings where staff answered questions, addressed concerns, and distributed 9,318 informational materials and giveaways.

Some notable events included VI Agrifest, All Things ADA Expos, Diabetes Outreach and Clinic, Mental Health Summit, Take Back the Night: Domestic Violence Rally, Deaf and Hard of Hearing Awareness Day at UVI, and Pediatric Emergency Disaster Expos.

ADA Rights

In 2024, DRCVI hosted several information sessions about the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Topics included disability awareness/sensitivity training, how to communicate well with people who have disabilities, sessions for public transportation drivers of deaf and hard-of-hearing people and others with disabilities, training for hotels and restaurants about service animals and the rules around them, returning to work on Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), employer and employee information, and regulations for federal contractors.



The Right to Vote

In September 2024, DRCVI hosted two voter registration drives — one on St. Thomas and one on St. Croix — in partnership with the AARP and the Elections System of the Virgin Islands to encourage USVI residents to register to vote. Participants also learned how to use voting machines and about the federally protected voting rights of citizens with disabilities, one of the largest voting blocs.

DRCVI also hosted two Ability Radio episodes informing Virgin Islanders about ADA protections, the absentee ballot process, early voting opportunities, and accessibility measures to ensure that individuals with disabilities can exercise their right to vote without barriers.

Mental Health

DRCVI helps people living with mental illness navigate the mental health system, defend against discrimination, and locate the services and treatment they need to live independent lives in the community.

DRCVI hosts quarterly webinars to educate the community about mental health conditions and to offer referral information. 2024 topics included homelessness, family and holidays, helping teens with trauma, and suicide awareness for veterans and older adults.

Public Health

The DRCVI outreach program collaborated with the VI Department of Health's Mobile Integrated Community Healthcare. During home visits, a DRCVI advocate informed caregivers and patients about their rights and provided much needed support services.

DRCVI also worked with the New York Mid-Atlantic Caribbean Regional Genetics Network to provide healthcare professionals and families with the latest information about developmental disabilities.

Monitoring Public Facilities

In 2024, DRCVI legal staff conducted 26 in-person monitoring visits at 19 different local residential facilities.

Under federal law, DRCVI, as a protection and advocacy agency, is authorized to conduct monitoring visits at residential facilities in the U.S. Virgin Islands to ensure that residents are aware of their civil rights, receive appropriate care and treatment, and are not subject to abuse or neglect.



Virgin Islands Parent Training Institute (VIPTI)

VIPTI empowers parents, students, and professionals by assisting them with and teaching them about disability rights laws like the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This helps ensure that children and youth receive a free, appropriate public education through accommodations, Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), and Section 504 Plans. VIPTI also provides one-on-one support for families and caregivers navigating educational challenges.

Honoring an individual's strengths and limitations while upholding their rights improves their life from early learning to adulthood and beyond.



Advocacy

VIPTI prepared parents for Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings, assisted our parents with filing formal complaints, and provided representation to parents in due process hearings.

For the second year, VIPTI continued the Youth Empowerment Leadership Program (YELP) for at-risk youth, focusing on self-advocacy, career exploration, self-esteem, leadership development, and mental health education.

Education

VIPTI, in collaboration with the Virgin Islands Department of Education (VIDE), served 212 students and over 150 staff by hosting "Disability Sensitivity and Awareness" trainings and "Self Advocacy / Self Awareness" professional development trainings.

Advocates hosted workshops for Head Start and VIDE teachers and staff to help them understand their roles in supporting students with disabilities.

Advocates also hosted workshops for parents and students to ensure they are aware of their rights and options.

Outreach

VIPTI was involved in 27 community events in 2024, including new projects such as "DARRI's Book Club" and "The Hygiene Project," which linked self-advocacy and self-care, as well as events with the Children's Museum of the Virgin Islands and Tutu Park Mall.

VIPTI's art therapy program served 870 individuals from schools, group homes, and medical centers over a four month period.

Here to Help

Parent Advocates are available year-round to help parents and caregivers navigate the needs of their children. Call (340) 772-1200 or (340) 776-4303 to speak with an advocate.

VIPTI also keeps in touch via bi-weekly texts to parents. Text "Family" to 833-681-5129 to subscribe to our parent texts. You can also text "DRCVI" to 833-681-5129 to subscribe to our news and events texts.

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The contents of this report are solely the responsibility of DRCVI and do not necessarily represent the official view of any of these agencies. DRCVI is an equal opportunity employer and service provider.



DISABILITY RIGHTS

CENTER OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

Advancing Justice through Protection and Advocacy

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