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Crucian Baby Leiyani Touches Hearts as She Competes to Be Baby of the Year

Born without a left hand, baby Leiyani's charm and resilience inspire her mother and community. Dana Charles calls on Virgin Islanders to support her daughter, who is already a shining star in their lives

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Mother Dana Charles and her baby Leiyani. By. DANA CHARLES

A Crucian mother is seeking the support of Virgin Islanders at home and abroad in her quest to have her bundle of joy named Baby of the Year.

At almost 4 months old, [baby Leiyani](#) has a somewhat different outlook on life to other children her age. "She loves her tummy," said mother Dana Charles. "That's the only way she will be in quiet mode." Outside of tummy time, "she will be crying your ears off."

Ms. Charles got the idea to enter Leiyani into the Baby of the Year competition after seeing an ad on social media. The prizes were attractive – an exclusive ad campaign on Good Housekeeping and \$25,000 in cash. “One of my friends added her son in it, and she was like, you should try,” Ms. Charles told the Consortium.

The publicity and attention from having Leiyani adjudged one of the cutest babies in the country would be prize enough for Ms. Charles, but the monetary portion would be especially helpful, as her baby faces mounting medical bills due to a congenital condition.

“She was born without a left hand, and seeing doctors and stuff is very costly,” Ms. Charles disclosed. An intrauterine band resting on the developing fetus caused Leiyani's left arm “to not...develop like it should,” she explained. The contest presents an opportunity for advocacy surrounding Leiyani's condition as well.



Dana Charles and baby Leiyani (Photo Credit: Dana Charles)

“Hopefully her story can be put out there as well, so that people are aware.” Noting that such conditions are also associated with instances of cleft lip and cleft palate, Ms. Charles said that the contest was “a good opportunity for people who are looking at the entrants...to actually learn something about this.”

Despite her condition, Leiyani is an otherwise healthy almost 4-month old baby. “I’m just so proud of her,” Ms. Charles said. “She has the most beautiful smile.” Her baby’s indomitable spirit has taught the anxious mother a thing or two, as well. “I feel like every time I worry about her, she always shows me that I don’t need to.”

Even with the young child’s equanimous approach to life, Ms. Charles is still concerned about the reaction of the public as Leiyani grows older and begins to interact more with the world. “My big worry is, I hope [she doesn’t] get teased because [she’s] different.”

Meanwhile, Leiyani’s proud mother invites all Virgin Islanders to visit the Baby of the Year competition and [vote](#) for her adorable bundle of joy. Participants may vote every day for free using Leiyani’s direct link, and may also purchase additional votes at any time via a charitable donation. Money collected in this matter will be donated to national non-profit Baby2Baby, which supports children living in poverty with basic necessities.

No matter the outcome, Ms. Charles says that she is overjoyed that her young daughter is healthy and thriving, despite her physical condition. “I feel what she’s telling me is ‘Don’t worry about it. I can make it through life with just one hand.’”