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Frederiksted Health Center Pushes Beyond Clinical Care With HIV Prevention, Hot Meals, Homeless Support, and Plans for Expansion

On Live with Laura, Aisha-Jamila Mussington and Virginia Clairmont detailed condom dispensers across St. Croix, pantry and shower programs for the homeless, daily meals, resilience services, and plans for a men's health clinic and mobile outreach.

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On Sunday, two women attached to the Frederiksted Health Center sat down with Live with Laura host Laura Forbes to discuss aspects of the organization that the community may not necessarily know about.

While the mission of FHC is of course delivering the best clinical services possible to its patients, a focus on “the social side of healthcare”, as Ms. Forbes put it, is also of vital importance. According to Aisha-Jamila Mussington, Director of Social and Community Programs, the FHC team is “the social work arm of healthcare in St. Croix.” The Ryan White Part C HIV/AIDS treatment program and its offshoots provide essential community support services. “You see us as boots on the ground in the community,” Ms. Mussington declared, “providing that risk counseling and prevention service, condom distributions.” She highlighted the condom dispensers that are present at bars, restaurants and hotels across St. Croix. “Hopefully they’re always filled. If they’re not, call us,” she quipped.

Providing care for the unhoused is also a priority for FHC. Homeless individuals do not only receive medical care, but “we have a pantry program, we have a shower and clothing program,” Ms. Mussington disclosed. “We provide hot meals...we provide barbers, if we can,” she continued, speaking about FHC’s “one stop shop clinic” on the second Saturday of every month. The health center also runs a needle exchange program as part of their efforts at harm reduction.

Virginia Clairmont, chair of FHC’s board, pointed out that meals for those who need them – homeless or otherwise – are available daily, funded from the health center’s own budget. “We no longer receive funding for that but the health center decided to continue that program because the need was there,” she disclosed. Other “resilience” services provided by FHC include public access to water, electricity, and wi-fi, 24 hours a day.



Aisha-Jamila Mussington, left, and Virginia Clairmont. (Credit: WOMEN IN BUSINESS VI & CARIBBEAN INC.)

Ms. Mussington also highlighted their community mental health education program, “Mental Health First Aid,” run in partnership with the University of the Virgin Islands.

Despite the ups and downs the clinic has faced over the years, including the closure of some locations, Ms. Clairmont expressed optimism for the future of the Frederiksted Health Center, a St. Croix healthcare institution. After 25 years of operating as a nonprofit, federally qualified health center, the next 25 years, if left up to Ms. Clairmont, would feature an expansion of services, a diversification of funding sources, and the introduction of a men's health clinic focusing on full service care exclusively for male Virgin Islanders. “Our local men do not go for care, and I'd love to see them have a space of their own,” she remarked.

For Ms. Mussington, a mobile health clinic is her next wish for FHC. “I would like to see it go into the different communities and provide health care...take the health outside of the health centers into the communities.” Above all else, she says, FHC must remain focused on “putting the care back into health care.”

