

The Virgin Islands Consortium

'Forgotten In Paradise' Showcases Broken VI Mental Health System, Groups On Quest To Bring Change

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The current state of the Virgin Islands mental health service system is dismal, at best; possibly non-existent, depending whom you ask.

Haunting scenes from an hour-long documentary film chronicling the plight of Virgin Islanders requiring mental health services, and the little to no availability of those services in the territory, captivated a small group of faith leaders, mental health advocates, politicians, journalists and concerned citizens who had gathered on Monday for a special, first-time screening of "Forgotten In Paradise."



Executive Dir. of DRCVI Amelia Headley

LaMont, Esq., addresses the audience before the screening.

The recently released feature was produced by award-winning documentary filmmaker, Johanna Bermudez-Ruiz, and provides an in depth look at the history of the territory's mental health service system. With dismal testimonials from care providers, such as Dr. Olaf Hendricks, psychiatrist, to personal accounts of locals suffering from mental illness and enduring the stigma associated with it, the year-long production was the first of its kind filmed in the Virgin Islands.

"I put my entire heart into this movie, and as a filmmaker in this community, it's to really bring out issues in our community so that we can get some justice," Bermudez-Ruiz said.

In an effort to rebuild a viable mental health service system in the territory, the Disability Rights Center of the Virgin Islands (DRCVI) in conjunction with the VI Mental Health Consent Decree Commission has compiled a five-year strategic plan.

The plan is a result of a class action lawsuit settlement agreement brought by Ten Thousand Helpers of St. Croix, Virgin Islands Alliance for the Mentally Ill, Inc. and other individuals. It was developed over a four-year period by a nine-member commission led by attorney Liston Davis.

DRCVI filed the lawsuit in 2003 in hopes of moving the Virgin Islands government to develop and implement a plan for a more effective mental health care delivery system.

Amelia Headley LaMont, Esq., executive director of DRCVI, said, "We have a plan to make it happen. It is now up to all of us to make it happen."



Viewers gather to watch a screening of

"Forgotten In Paradise," a documentary film that chronicles the mental health service system in the VI.

Specific details of the five-year plan to overhaul the territory's mental health service system will be revealed at an upcoming press conference.

“Forgotten in Paradise” is a production of Cane Bay Films, LLC and DRCVI. A public screening is being planned for early November.

For more information on the rights of disabled persons in the Virgin Islands, contact DRCVI at (340) 772-1200.

Featured Photo: Julia Lopez who is featured in the film

All photos courtesy of Cane Bay Films/DRCVI

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