The Virgin Islands Consortium

Teens Encouraged To 'Wise Up' At Conference

Education / **Published On February 08, 2015 09:04 PM /**

Ernice Gilbert February 08, 2015

The life of a teenager can be more complicated than their parents or guardians think. While some may trivialize the issues youngsters face on a daily basis, including relationship problems, self esteem, dating, sex and more, the fact is, teenagers, just like adults, must navigate through a host of decisions rife with consequences.

It was with that understanding the Virgin Islands Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Council (DVSAC) organized its 2nd Annual 'Youth Wise Up' event, formerly 'Sister Wise Up,' on Saturday in the Great Hall at UVI's Albert A. Sheen campus on St. Croix.

"This year we decided that we can't only concentrate on the females, we must also concentrate on the males," said Darlene Springer, community outreach specialist for

DVSAC. "So, we came up with a preferable concept of doing a Youth Wise Up, which entails females and males, because males face teen violence, too."

V. I. DOMEST
SEXUAL AS

Omega Psi Phi
Fraternity, Incorporated
19 11

PROTECT
PROVIDE
GUIDE

Women's Coalition of St. Croix's Sheelen Gumbs

VI DOMESTIC VIOLENCE And
SEXUAL ASSAULT COUNCIL
MISSION STATEMENT
GOALS

MARY KAY
MARY KAY
MARY KAY

Handouts

Members of fitness group, Metallic Muscle

The conference brought together both public and private groups to share their knowledge and expertise with the teens.

Veteran Senator Sammuel Sanes, who has an extensive history with youth programs as a former member of the Boy Scouts, Explorers, Sea Scouts and Junior ROTC, was the keynote speaker at the event. The senator spoke on the importance of the rightful treatment of women and highlighted legislation he spearheaded that would provide spousal protection in sexual assault cases, and the need to expand the definitions of sexual contact and child abuse.

Of the many topics discussed at the five-hour event, it was revealed that one of the more pressing problems facing the territory is the rise in sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS and other STDs, as well as teenage pregnancy, according to the latest data collected and published in 2011 by the Department of Health (DOH).

VI Consortium spoke with Adrian Edwards and Natasha Orr, representatives of DOH's Communicable Diseases Clinic, who explained the organization's role in raising t the importance of protecting themselves.

Members of fitness group, Metallic Muscle

"The DOH deals with communicable diseases that are reported to the Centers For Disease Control, and the primary infections that our program deal with is HIV/AIDS, chlamydia and gonorrhea, among others," Edwards explained.

Edwards also made known that the program's surveillance arm was active in collecting data on HIV/AIDS and STDs, and another arm within the same program deals with tuberculosis infections.

From 2006 to 2011, according to Edwards, HIV/AIDS and other STD rates in the Virgin Islands have climbed. He also revealed, however, that DOH has not released data for the years since then, although the department is currently working on doing so, he said.

Orr elaborated on the clinic's outreach efforts to the territory's youth.

"We have done other outreach activities with churches, different organizations, we've also done presentations with schools, high schools and middle schools," she said. "So, this concept is not new."

"We see that there is a need out there, and because we see that a lot of the new cases are around this age group and not your grandfather or great grandmother, or even your

mother. So, there is that need for young people to be educated, for your young women, not only just in the sense of preventing teen pregnancy or what have you, but something far more detrimental like an STD or HIV, or anything that may lead up to that," Orr added.

She further admonished teens to pay attention to their bodies and to get regular check-

Representatives of DOH's Communicable

Disease Division, Natasha Orr and Adrian Edwards

"It is of vital importance for them to understand their bodies -- and for your young men, too," Orr said. "If there's something that they're not understanding about their bodies, they're not understanding some of the symptoms, don't just sleep on it, find out, get yourself tested; it's important."

The local chapter of the Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc. kept the youngsters entertained with a boisterous step performance. Jermaine Mulley also provided a motivational message for those in attendance.

There is a certain difficulty in capturing the attention of young people for long periods of time, but the event's organizers were cognizant of that and kept presentations short and

Women's Coalition of St. Croix's Sheelen

Gumbs

Speaking of organizing, Natalie Joseph, one of the organizers alongside Springer, said Saturday's effort was a community one.

"We reached out to our partners, sororities and fraternities, everybody we thought would have impact and to get the message across, especially on all the social issues going on within our community. We just thought that, after having 'Sisters Wise Up' last year,

which was formed because of Man Up, we thought, let's do something for [all] the youth this year," she explained.

Springer said this year's participation, with over 180 teenagers signing up, far exceeded last year's turnout. She attributed the growth to the event now catering to both male and female teenagers. And with the help of public and private sponsorships, organizers say they see a continuation of the program for many years to come.

Presenters at this year's 'Youth Wise Up' included, Virgin Islands Department of Health's Maren Roebuck and Annett Scotte, speaking on the effects of mental health and substance abuse; Women's Coalition of St. Croix's, Sheelene Gumbs speaking on sexual assault; DVSAC's Jeanette John-Baptiste, speaking on teen sating violence; Inner Changes' Melanie Johannes-Titre, speaking on self esteem; DOH's Adrian Edwards, speaking on the department's HIV/STD/TB program; Men's Coalition of St. Croix's Carnell Troutman, speaking on healthy relationships; and Florida/Caribbean AIDS Education and Training Center's Jason Henry, speaking on HIV/AIDS prevention.

© Viconsortium 2026