

The Virgin Islands Consortium

St. Croix's Public High School Girls Told 'It's All About You' At Day Of Empowerment

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As junior and senior high school male students across St. Croix Wednesday attended the [Fifth Annual "Man Up" conference](#) hosted by the University of the Virgin Islands, female students on the campuses of Central High School and the Educational Complex were treated to a day of empowerment that was all about them. The respective schools held a variety of workshops and activities designed to help the teen girls successfully manage their lives, now and in the future.

"It's All About You" was Central High's theme for this year's event.

Now in its fourth year at the school, the gathering saw approximately 170 girls pack the school's modest library to attend sessions on caring for the mind and body, knowing the law about domestic violence and building self esteem. A Calypso aerobics workout session was also held in the gymnasium.



At the domestic violence workshop, which served to commemorate February as Teen Sexual Violence Awareness Month, detectives Gregory Charlery and Moses Francis of the VIPD's Domestic Violence Unit provided students with information on what healthy relationships should look like. Charlery pointed out that relationships had to do with every kind of inter-personal connection the young ladies would encounter, such as with friends, parents and teachers, not only dating relationships.

In an effort to gauge students' knowledge of how they make decisions, Det. Charlery asked the girls if it ever was a good idea to tell their best friends everything about their dating relationships. The girls overwhelmingly responded that it was not a good idea.

One girl said, "There is no such thing as a best friend" and another added, "No, because the information could be used against you in the future."

Francis told the captive audience that "domestic violence is about power and control" and explained that in many of the cases he investigates "the men have control over the women because they are the ones working and bringing money into the home, while the women stay home with the children."

As part of their presentation, the detectives showed the music video "Start Anew" by legendary reggae artist, Tarrus Riley. The video played out scenes of a young lady being emotionally and physically abused by the man in her life, yet she continued to remain in the relationship, seemingly powerless to leave. In the end, she found the strength to leave.

Parts of the video held the students' attention, particularly when images of the female actor's bruised eye and a punch to the face by her lover flashed across the screen.

Det. Francis said data shows that it takes a woman up to eight times, on average, before she makes a clean break from her abuser. He encouraged the teens not to go that route, however, instructing them to call emergency 911 if they are being physically, sexually or emotionally abused.

During and after the workshop, the girls asked a variety of questions about dating, sexting, physical abuse, and more.

Principal Janasee Sinclair said she was pleased with this year's event.

"I told the girls to think, keep an open mind, and ask questions," she said.



The principal said she wasn't surprised by any of the questions the girls' asked or the information they shared; rather, she said she was happy to see they were "inquisitive" and that "they wanted to know how to do things the right way."

"I don't want girls to get mentally dead," Sinclair said. "I want them to flourish. We are trying to mold them to make good choices."

Seventeen-year-old Misha Williams, Renyce Armstrong and Da'Jah Armstrong said they learned a lot from the VIPD workshop.

"It taught me a lot about relationships and knowing what a healthy relationship should be," said Renyce Armstrong. Then, when asked if they thought the guy who acted as the abuser in the Riley video was less harmful because of his good looks, the girls said, "Looks isn't everything."

Jacqueline Greenidge-Payne, training officer for the Dept. of Health-EMS, also led a workshop on self esteem, and helping the girls to set and achieve goals. Greenidge-Payne, who says "keeping the care in healthcare" is her personal motto, said she wants the young ladies to "believe in themselves and set dreams, because dreams become a

reality."

The Central High event was planned by assistant principal, Lilli Cornelius.

At the Educational Complex, assistant principals Debbie Colbourne-Thomas and Celeste Knight-Lang also arranged a comprehensive line up of workshops for their girls. With everything from financial planning to yoga and beauty tips, 200 girls made their way to class rooms where about 28 different workshops were held throughout the day.

One such workshop, "Attitude Is Everything," was conducted by Maren Roebuck of the Dept. of Health. As the teens entered her room, Roebuck asked each of them to provide their name and share something about themselves.

After introducing themselves, several students used the words mean, rude, crazy, and hard to describe themselves. One student, however, described herself as a "fashion lover with a great smile." Armed with that information, Roebuck began the work of trying to understand why the girls overwhelming used negative words to describe themselves. She helped one girl understand she may not necessarily be rude, but perhaps needed to make changes in the relationships she had with others.

Roebuck also told the young ladies that "you could be pretty, but if your attitude is funky, it makes you ugly," adding that their attitude in life could either "make you or break you."

At a financial planning workshop conducted by Sana Joseph, owner of IHOP St. Croix, teens were taught the four principles of budgeting: giving, expenses, saving and spending. Joseph advised the girls to start saving now, saying that they have a better chance of their money significantly increasing with interest, than someone who starts saving later in life.

Joseph also provided the girls with guidelines for using credit cards, saying that they should always pay their bills on time and to only use 30 percent of the credit made available to them. The conversation soon turned to summer jobs and working at IHOP. Joseph said she only hires teens if they can provide good references. She said the franchise currently employs 50 workers.

Colbourne-Thomas and Knight-Lang, who joined the Ed. Complex staff this year, told *VI Consortium* it was important for the girls to have their day, too.

"They need it," Knight-Lang said, while highlighting some of the workshops that were offered to the students, including "Who Am I," "UVI University Bound," and "Beauty Shop."

Colbourn-Thomas said they planned the event within the space of one week, but that every presenter they called was willing to come and share their insight and expertise with the students.

When asked what they thought teen girls need most these days, Colbourn-Thomas said they need "guidance."

"But guidance in the way that helps them to make good choices," she explained. "You want to teach the young ladies how to make choices, to be thoughtful about what they're

choosing, think carefully -- have a plan A, a plan B before they proceed with whatever career realm, relationships or whatever they will do. Think long and hard."

Twelfth-grade student, Christal Flavius, said the "Beauty Shop" workshop impacted her the most.

"You learn how to be a young lady and how to position yourself and what the word 'beauty' means to you," she said, adding, "It's not all about your facial expression, it's about your personality, it's about your inside because that's what makes you beautiful -- your inner self, not your outer self."

The teen further explained that the messages presented resonated with her because "I have certain friends who feel like they're not pretty enough and one of them don't feel pretty unless someone gives them a compliment, and that's wrong."

She said she also battled self-esteem issues in her younger years.

"When I was in elementary school, I had low self esteem, and growing up and learning that it's not what others think about you, but what you think about yourself. You have to love yourself first before you can love anyone else," Flavius said.

Girls attending St. Croix's junior high schools also enjoyed similar workshops on Wednesday.