

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Our Thanks, In Advance: Raising Awareness on Stalking, Human Trafficking & Social Consciousness

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Every new year creates new opportunities for us to reflect, recharge and reset goals for various aspects of our lives to include our health, career, family, spirituality and other 'priorities' as we see it. We ask for support with our goals and even make requests for more money, less stress, more recreational time and less burden. Likewise, advocacy organizations ask for more donations, volunteerism and contributions to awareness and events.

This year, however, the Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault Council (DVSAC) wishes to share a different approach for 2016: An Approach of Gratitude. We wish to 'give thanks' for all that has already been done and 'thank you' in advance for all that you are about to

do to end family violence and sexual assault in our community for 2016 and beyond.

January is significant for DVSAC and millions of advocates around the world because it is Stalking Awareness Month and Human Trafficking Awareness Month. During this month, we reflect on the 54% of murdered victims who reported stalking to the police before they were killed by their stalkers and the 6.6 million people who continue to be stalked every day in the United States alone

During this month, we also reflect on the 2.4 million people throughout the world who are lured into trafficking through promises of a good job in another country, false marriage proposals turned into bondage situations and even children under the age of 12 who are sold into the sex trade by their own parents. However, every month of the year, DVSAC reflects on all of these cases and the fact that they also occur on the beautiful, warm and vacation inspired islands of St. Croix, St. Thomas, St. John and Water Island.

These islands that we call 'home', and the people within whom we call our 'friends and family', are the reasons why we recharge our efforts time and time again to raise awareness and challenge social and cultural norms of 'mind your business', 'leave it alone', 'it happened to me and I turned out fine' and 'mehson, you hear bout...?' (None of which resolves issues, extends a hand to help, condemns inappropriate behaviors or provides encouragement for those in need!)

In 2016, we thank our community in advance for 'resetting' one of the greatest challenges that we can all face: ourselves. We thank survivors for their courage to live, safeguard their families, seek resources and be the expert on their lives even when they are greatly misunderstood and judged. We thank advocates and providers for having hope, practicing compassion, exercising confidentiality and providing the kind of care that mankind could use more of. We thank law enforcement and the criminal justice system for practicing due diligence, protecting women, men and children and for serving our community with respect, truth and objectivity. Lastly, we thank you, the reader, for taking the time to receive this message; for being a person who chooses 'sharing' over 'gossiping', 'healing' over 'hurting', 'advocating' over 'silencing' and 'welcoming' over 'judging'.

For the actions that you are about to take on behalf of someone who is unable to act for themselves and for the advocacy that you will provide 'just because you genuinely want change for the better', we 'thank you'. At DVSAC, we are thankful for the opportunity to give gratitude, in advance, because we expect the best of people, we claim a supportive community and we believe in a Virgin Islands with 'people who help people'.

Stalking and Human Trafficking are a crime in the U.S. Virgin Islands and every crime - no matter how small it may seem - is a life-threatening crime waiting to knock on our doors if we are not proactive. Whether it is neglect of an animal, emotional abuse of a child, homophobia or rape of an elder, we must be cognizant of the reality that 'their experience' is 'our exposure, desensitization and psychological trauma' too because crime anywhere, is crime 'too close'. So, again, DVSAC extends arms of gratitude to our community, in advance, for 'being the change that we all want to see' in the US Virgin Islands by reflecting, re-charging and resetting the mindset, language and attitudes that we have towards crimes including Stalking and Human Trafficking.

The Virgin Islands Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Council is recognized as the Territorial Coalition by the Office of Violence Against Women and the Family Violence Prevention Services Act. DVSAC aims to end domestic violence and sexual assault through prevention education. We promote programs and activities whose purposes are to improve the response of the legal system, service providers, and the media to our issues as well as those that support and promote quality programs which empower victims and rehabilitate their aggressors.

For more information on the US Virgin Islands Stalking and Human Trafficking Laws, please join DVSAC in January for a series of webinars on Virgin Islands legislation and policy. For more information on this series, or to schedule a training, please call DVSAC at (340) 719-0144 ext. 5 or email Carlotta@vidvsac.net.

Thank you for your support of our agency, our partners, our mission and the survivors whom we aim to empower. Until next time...Be safe, be kind and be grateful for a Peaceful and Prosperous 2016!

Citations:

1. Stalking Resource Center: Stalking Fact Sheet
2. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime: Fact Sheet on Human Trafficking

About the Author:

Khnuma Simmonds-Esannason is the Executive Director of the VI Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault Council, Owner of My Girlfriend's Closet Boutique & Mother of one. She has reviewed grants for the Department of Justice: Office on Violence Against Women, presented for the 2015 National Sexual Assault Conference and was honored by the Integrity Women In Business Center for her 'LeadHERship'. She holds a B.A. in Communications from Hofstra University and a M.A. in Education Guidance & Counseling from the University of the Virgin Islands, St. Croix.