The Virgin Islands Consortium

Special Olympics: Children With Disabilities Meet Here To Be Themselves

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ST. CROIX -- A mother at yesterday's Special Olympic activities, held at the St. Croix Renaissance Park right across from Diaego Rum, told The Consortium that she attends with her child every year because it's a place where he is liberated to be himself.

"Special Olympics encourages my son and he gets to meet other people with special needs to let him know there are children just like him," said Valda Jeffers. She said children with special needs often get frustrated when they're in environments with their peers and realize that they can't do what the other children are doing.

Ms. Jeffers' comments appeared to ring true by the looks of yesterday's activities, led by Special Olympics USVI and supported by other local organizations, ADA Coordinator Jamila Russell, along with other government department and agencies.

Guided by adults, the children heartily participated in a multitude of sporting events: long jump, running, soccer, basketball, ball throwing and more. When they appeared to be giving up on a particular task, the loud cheers of parents and other attendees would spur them to completion.

Special Olympics

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Special Olympics
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Among those in attendance were Mapp administration officials, including Ms. Russell, V.I.T.E.M.A. Director Mona Barnes, St. Croix Administration Stephanie Williams, and Governor Kenneth Mapp himself, who dropped by --- as he's done since taking office -- to shake hands, take pictures with and encourage the children. Mr. Mapp also handed out medals.

Ms. Russell, uniquely positioned as ADA coordinator because of her own child with special needs, said she's always participated in the Special Olympics not only to support her child, but to raise awareness as well. She echoed Ms. Jeffers' sentiments that the annual event gives the children room to be themselves without fear of not fitting it. Ms. Russell also thanked the organizations that partnered with the Special Olympics, most notably the Lions Club.

But she told The Consortium that the event could use more participation from community members, and encouraged residents who've yet to attend a Special Olympics event to show their support by attending upcoming activities.

Indeed, Crystal Peter, an elementary teacher at Claude O. Markoe, visited for the first time on Saturday, in part because some of her students were among those at Saturday's games.

"I'm really happy to see some of my students participating today," Ms. Peter said. "I have one student in particular who makes me very proud. He works very hard and I'm proud to see him accomplishing something here."

"I've never been here before but I definitely will be back," she concluded.

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