

The Virgin Islands Consortium

At Back To School Event, Free Backpacks, Loads Of Entertainment And Words Of Wisdom

VIC News / **Published On August 22, 2016 02:41 PM /**

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ST. CROIX -- It was the second year that M&Z Promotions held its back to school backpack giveaway event. But Sunday's affair at the Island Center for the Performing Arts, was more than just giving away free items. Above, Melissa Gustave, right, founder of M&Z Promotions, along with Stephanie Nelson from the Peace Initiative Committee, give backpacks and other items to children.

This year saw the involvement of respected individuals in the community, all hand-selected by Ms. Gustave to relay a message that would be beneficial to the 200 or so children who attended yesterday's affair.

Officer Charles Nibbs spoke about the dangers of guns, encouraging students to steer clear of a lifestyle that may lead to gun violence. He also urged parents to be vigilant in their homes. His talk was followed by that of Emmanuella Perez-Cassius, an educator, who stressed the importance of working together to achieving a shared goal.

Ms. Perez-Cassius used birds as an example, stating that in order for their migration from North to South and back to be successful, each bird must get in a certain formation that aids the entire flock until the goal is achieved. So too, she said, instead of fighting down each other, must people work together to succeed.

Richard Muhhamed spoke about finding one's identity.

There were great musical performances as well, including acts like soca artist BugZBugs, gospel artist Suzie Q, the band Mind, Body and Soul, Shamall and Maria Carmona.

Inner Changes for Girls and Boys Council, Inc., a nonprofit organization that partners with public and private schools and federal and government entities such as Dept. of Labor, Dept. of Human Services, National Parks Services, and the Dept. of Education to provide quality after school programs for children ages 5-19, according to its website, was also on hand giving away items to children, while promoting a \$75 per month special offering that runs through September 12. See a Consortium story on the nonprofit [here](#).

Ms. Gustave, a single mother herself, said her passion was borne from knowing the difficulty that single mothers face just before school opens -- some with multiple children -- in getting items necessary for learning for their children.

"You know, it's giving back to the community," she said. "I'm raising two daughters and I know the struggles of having to be around for them. You now have to play both roles, and with the economy how it is, I felt like this is one way we could make an impact. And going back to school, every little bit counts."

Ms. Gustave intends to make the event an annual affair, offering different themes throughout the years but with a pointed message of unity, discipline and giving back.

Her sponsors included the following: The GILAR Center, Inc., Inner Changes, Sen. Terrence "Positive" Nelson's, Office Depot, Taste of St. Croix, Nigel's 1,2,3, Nat'ral Xpression, Lisa's Style Creations, Island Jewelry, Sapphire Ministries, Sen. Almando "Rocky" Liburd, Sen. Novelle Francis, Sen. Samuel Sanes, LJ Avenue, Sam's Gas Station and Island Center for the Performing Arts.

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