

The Virgin Islands Consortium

At Event To Remember Murder Victims, Tears, Pain And Hope

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ST. CROIX -- The hurt was almost tangible at University of the Virgin Islands's Great Hall on Sunday afternoon, as emotional mothers, relatives and others shared heart-wrenching stories of the pain that so many loved ones feel for those who have lost their lives through violence.

The gathering yesterday, called National Day of Remembrance for Murder Victims, was organized by Women's Coalition, St. Croix, and subtitled, "It Takes a Village to Save Our Community".

Four mothers spoke unabashedly yet emotionally about the hurt they continue to feel. Among them was the mother of an 18-year-old who was [gunned down at the Altona Lagoon](#) during a party while attempting to help his friend. In tears while letting out her pain, Shermaine Springer spoke of an agony that won't go away, and the struggles she continue to have in understanding why her son had to die the way he did. She expressed that he was not a young man known to be violent, and although he was not perfect, she explained, his heart was in the right place.

The death of her 18-year-old son also left Ms. Springer with two babies to help take care of. And she was unapologetic about her battle with God, and the resentment she sometimes feel.

"I did not have a perfect child. My son so loved women, he left me with an eleven-month-old and a six-month-old. Now I have two grand babies to raise," Ms. Springer said. "He was such a determined child to do the right thing [that] he had custody of his son. The judge told him I have never seen a young man make that effort.

"Don't come and tell me he was a drug dealer because he was a broke one," she continued, "because as he got paid, as he received his check, if everybody here was around him, he took his check and bought food for everybody."

Two poems were also read, both decrying violence while highlighting the reverberations felt throughout the community.

Sheelene Gumbs, Women's Coalition's crisis counselor, said the event is held annually to remind those affected that they're not alone.

"Women's Coalition does this annually because we see the pain in the community. In some ways the community is nearly desensitized, but it comes so close to home now that the fear has become nearly tangible," Ms. Gumbs said. "We do this so that people know they are not alone and that there is help and support available.

"For many people, they don't understand how real the pain is or how some family's struggle every day. Why there is a sense of helpless and hopelessness, which only adds to bystanders not being willing to step forward. But help and support is available. That's why we do the National Day of Remembrance for Murdered Victims - VI," she concluded.

A slide, which Women's Coalition calls the Wall of Remembrance, made known that at least 777 people have died through violence in the territory since 1990 (the list does not include Virgin Islanders who've died through violence outside the territory). Women's Coalition says it's been gathering the data for years, pulling information from newspapers, police blotters, and court documents.

Yet, through the tears and devastating accounts, there was hope that people were coalescing to make a difference. An event planned for October 2, dubbed Million Mother March -- which starts at the D.C. Canegata Ballpark and ends at Fort Frederik -- seeks in part to raise awareness and foster an environment where people are not afraid to reveal what they know, in the hopes of bringing justice to perpetrators and some form of closure to family and friends left behind.

The event's organizer, Patasha Tracey, said on Sunday that her idea was birthed after she visited a mother of the one of the five victims who was murdered in July.

Feature Image: Shermaine Springer, left, is comforted as she spoke about her son on Sunday. (Credit: VIC)

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