

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Golden Grove Inmates Display Talent At Music Workshop

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ST. CROIX -- Approaching a small recreational pavilion situated in the middle of the Golden Grove Adult Correctional Facility last Wednesday morning, the lyrics of unfamiliar music could be heard from a distance being sung by Stanley and the Ten Sleepless Knights. Inmates and staff members gathered around, listening intently, while some inmates could be heard singing along -- seemingly enjoying themselves in a facility otherwise known for its stringent rules.

It was the conclusion of a six-week music therapy workshop -- part of the prison's substance abuse program aimed at helping prisoners who struggle with substance abuse express themselves through music -- helmed by the well-known Dr. Eugene Petersen, a

renowned singer, percussionist and guitarist, with the assistance of prison staff.

The workshop saw inmates writing and composing the songs, with Stanley and the Ten Sleepless Knights performing them at last week's event. And it served as a great treat for the prisoners, whose expressions of joy were easily recognizable as they listened to their own songs being played back to them, by V.I. legends.

"[The] music therapy workshop [was] for persons who have self-identified with having substance abuse issues -- whether alcohol or drugs," said Sonia Liburd, coordinator and grant generator at the correctional facility. The intention, according to Ms. Liburd, was to "allow the participants a mechanism to be creative and to express themselves through music."

She said the prison reached out to Mr. Petersen to serve as program facilitator. Mr. Petersen came to the six-week workshop every other week beginning from the ending of December, and ended sometime during the latter part of March.

According to Ms. Liburd, Mr. Petersen taught the participants the basics of music and how to write music.

The program proved to be successful and effective throughout its duration. Ms. Liburd said she noticed participants showing signs of personal responsibility through their "dedication and following instructions." This is relevant, she said, especially when you consider "the structured environment in which they are in, which is very restrictive."

Participants received certificates for successfully completing the workshop. After receiving their certificates, several of the inmates expressed their feelings of gratitude towards Dr. Petersen as well as their over all appreciation for the program.

Dr. Petersen said he was satisfied with the outcome. "The participants did very well; they wrote several songs which were very nice and they were respectful," he said, revealing that four of the inmates' songs were performed." Other workshops conducted at the prison include a GED program and an anger management and substance abuse program.

Rick Mulgrav, Bureau of Corrections director, said the workshop, among its many benefits, served to highlight the positives that the inmates so often display but remain in the dark.

"It not's all about the negative," he said. "We do realize that they are criminals and they have done crimes, but our objective is to try to rehabilitate them in anyway possible and music seems to be a way that can just touch everybody."

In regards to volunteers, Ms. Liburd said the facility is always looking for persons to assist with workshops. Interested persons must be 18 years of age, although 21 and up is preferably. They must also submit an application and pass security clearance.