

# The Virgin Islands Consortium

## As 'Women Race' Continues Its Awareness Course, Response Against Sexual Violence In Territory Has Strengthened, Women's Coalition Says

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ST. CROIX -- It was another memorable day on Sunday at the Women's Coalition annual "Women Race", this year being the 34th annual. The race sees women of various backgrounds, including domestic violence survivors, coming together through the support of each other and a determination to raise awareness on sexual assault in the territory -- hoping to keep the longstanding problem at the forefront of society -- especially those in the halls of power.

The top three winners of the race this year, which saw over 200 participants according to a results document provided by Women's Coalition, were sisters 11-year-old Michelle Smith with a time of 11:57, (Ms. Smith defended her 2017 title) and Mikaela Smith with a time of 12:04, followed by Bridget Klein in third with a time of 12:07. The course started at the Christiansted waterfront near Fort Christianvaern, and spanned 2-miles, with participants making their way to the traffic lights near the Canegata Ballpark, and back to downtown Christiansted where it began. See full results [here](#).

The #metoo movement that has captivated the world and forced change by emboldening women who have been sexually assaulted to come forth with their stories, has also had an effect in the U.S. Virgin Islands, said Debra Benjamin, communications coordinator at Women's Coalition of St. Croix. But perhaps the Women's Coalition's most profound work is reflected in the growing response to sexual assault and violence against women, Ms. Benjamin said, which is reflected in local laws. "We've got legislation in place; they [lawmakers] are always asking us when they are creating this legislation, for insight and input," Ms. Benjamin said. This includes testimony at Senate hearings on sexual assault and related measures being considered.

The race, which started three years following the establishing of the coalition, has been a mainstay in the nonprofit's efforts to raise awareness and combat the problem. And it has taken a life of its own, becoming a community event that many have committed to for a variety of reasons. Importantly, the race is Women's Coalition biggest fundraiser for the year as well.

The event has also been dubbed a peace race, and serves to reinforce the coalition's support for survivors of domestic violence. "The race says to survivors we believe you, and we are here for you and we know that you are strong and can you do it -- you can escape that violence and lead a safer, more independent life," Ms. Benjamin said.

On the sidelines of the course near the starting point, onlookers cheered participants on as they made it to the finish line, with a host calling out results as a deejay kept the activity energized. The race recognizes top finishers with medals and trophies, with the Mary Mingus Trophy being awarded to Good Hope Country Day School for having the most participants, and the fastest team trophy going to the St. Croix Track Club, which came in ahead of Good Hope Country Day by 30 seconds, according to the coalition.

Although the race traditionally switches between Christiansted and Frederiksted each year, it was held back-to-back in Christiansted in [2017](#) and 2018, due to a scheduling conflict with Fort Frederik, according to the coalition.