

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Legendary VI Boxer, Julian Jackson, Motivates Dads During D.O.J.-Sponsored Fatherhood Event

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Participants who attended the second Fatherhood Buzz, sponsored by the Department of Justice's Paternity and Child Support Division, have hailed the event a success, Department of Justice Public Media Officer Corliss Smith announced Friday.

Being dormant for a number of years, the fatherhood training was resurrected three years ago when Attorney General Claude Earl Walker assumed the position as the Virgin Islands' top prosecutor, under whose auspices falls the Paternity and Child Support Division, according to D.O.J.

"In 2015 when I took over as the AG, it was brought to my attention that we had a problem with some fathers owing large amounts of child support payments, so we decided that we have to do something to get fathers to understand the importance of taking care of their children spiritually, as well as financially," Mr. Walker said during brief remarks Tuesday afternoon at the Fatherhood Buzz closing ceremony held at the St. Andrew's Episcopal church's recreational hall. "We were getting the complaints about some fathers going into the nightclubs and the bars buying everybody a round, but not taking care of their children and spending thousands of dollars on rims for vehicles, but not taking care of their children. That's wrong...there's something wrong with that picture," he said.

Mr. Walker said the Department decided to tackle the problem by offering delinquent fathers courses on fatherhood.

"The purpose was to provide a balance – on one hand, you have to take care of your children financially, but on the other hand, society is providing a way, providing courses to help us to be better parents.... One of the greatest experiences you can have in this life is to have a good relationship with your children... If you give your children love, as time goes by, they'll give it back to you and more. I have seen that... Children give love back to you that you can't put a price on, but it first starts with you," Mr. Walker said.

Director of Paternity and Child Support Division Charlotte Poole-Davis commended the 10 fathers for completing the six-week program aimed at helping them to become better parents.

"We are really pleased to have the participants of the Fatherhood Buzz program here tonight for their closing program; they have reached a pinnacle and we're proud of them. We're glad that they stepped up and that they took the opportunity... they took a different approach and enrolled in the class..." Mrs. Poole-Davis said. "It's our goal and our objective to continue this program and to make sure that we try to change the culture and not leave any child behind and make sure that every child has the benefit of not only the mother, but also the father."

Carl Francis, one of the fathers who attended the workshop, extolled the Department of Justice and its Paternity and Child Support Division for implementing what he described as a "very positive" program.

"We learnt a lot and they taught us different avenues to help us...I wish the program were even longer because it's very positive. I've learned a lot and I'm sure the other guys have learned a lot... now we get a chance to tell our story and to show the public that it's not all about child support; it's information that we need... The government is here for us and again, I want to thank you guys for putting on this program and I look forward for many other fathers to come and get this kind of information and relieve a lot of the stress," Mr. Francis said.

Cliff Finch, another father who participated in the pilot program held 2016, echoed Francis' sentiments.

"When you first attend this program, you come in negative because everything else outside the program seems to be attacking you negatively and you really didn't know

what to expect. I can tell you that by the third month we did this thing, as far as my personal experience, it had nothing to do with child support, more so than it had to do with the support of each other, ways to deal with our situation and the brotherhood that we actually connected with... Programs like these are important. I wish that it would come more often than it is or as it has been... I appreciate it and I give thanks," Mr. Finch said.

Program facilitator, Carlton Stevens, also lauded the DOJ and child support division for their vision in trying to stymie an issue that is facing the Virgin Islands.

"Father loss is big; it has touched so many lives. We know so many people that grew up without their fathers and we can somehow see the effects that has caused on those particular individuals. If they don't have that support around them, it's tough," he said.

In presenting a brief overview of the program, Mr. Stevens said the six weeks were spent "soul searching, reviving, restoring, re-educating, renewing and reconnecting these men to what they need to do."

"There's a lot of miseducation when it comes to males, about being fathers and about being men... So what we did in those six weeks was try to help these men understand their purpose by re-educating them as to what it is to be a man, what their purpose is in life when it comes to being men and what value they have in the lives of their children," Mr. Stevens said. "So, we restored that and tried to re-connect that with those lost times and hope that it just grows and renew their beliefs in their faith and their families.... We had several successes during those six weeks that we met, where men actually reconnected themselves with their children and you saw the look, the joy, the happiness... the weight lifted off of that man's shoulders after re-connecting with his family," Stevens said.

The keynote speaker was Virgin Islands legendary boxer, Julian Jackson, who relived his story of growing up without a father.

"As a young man growing up here in St. Thomas, I yearned for the backbone of my father. I remember when I was in 6th grade and I used to see my friends and their fathers dropping them off, giving them a hug, giving them a kiss and I didn't have a father and that used to affect me," Mr. Jackson said. "I didn't know the effect it had on me until when I was older because I was looking for attention, I was looking for somebody to be there for me... I was searching for somebody and I ended up in a gang looking for that fatherly love and I realize that that's the case today where a lot of young men and even our daughters are searching for somebody to speak to them ... My confidence, my self-esteem was so low because at that particular stage of my life, I did not have a father and that affected my life. That caused me to go in myself, shut everybody out and start to self-destruct..."

He said it wasn't until an older man came into his life that he changed for the better.

"This old man started teaching me principles that are grounded in the Word of God; he believed in respect and in honor and those are the key values that are affecting our young men and women. If they don't respect their father or mother, how are they going to respect anybody else? That's where it starts, in the home, in the family," Mr. Jackson, the

father of eight, said.

Each of the fathers was awarded a Certificate of Participation. A similar fatherhood training session is planned for St. Croix later this year.

Feature Image | From left to right: Director of Department of Justice's Paternity and Child Support Division Charlotte Poole-Davis; Attorney General Claude Earl Walker; V.I. legendary boxer, Julius Jackson; and program facilitator, Carlton Stevens, at closing ceremony of second fatherhood training program. (Credit: DOJ)

Correction: September 21, 2018

A previous version of this story, because of a text error, incorrectly referred to St. Thomas legendary boxer Julian Jackson as "Julius" Jackson. The story has been updated to reflect the correct name.