

# The Virgin Islands Consortium

## Four Head Start Workers In Kingshill Were Said To Be Beaten By Mental, Homeless Man In Presence Of Children; Workers Say They Had Been Asking For Security Protection To No Avail

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Ernice Gilbert **September 26, 2019**



Head Start where incident took place (Ernice Gilbert, VIC)

*Last updated at 10:38 a.m. on Sept. 27, 2019*

ST. CROIX -- It started out as a regular day at the Head Start school in Kingshill. But coming up on the 4:00 p.m. hour on Friday, the Head Start -- whose hours extend to 5:30

p.m. for parents working late -- experienced an incident that left the four workers at the facility beaten, with all four transporting themselves to a medical facility for care.

Around 3:45 p.m. on Friday, a homeless man with mental problems walked up to the facility, broke its door, started acting erratic and proceeded to violently assault four workers, according to a parent whose child attends the Head Start. This parent, a mother, said she was given first-hand information by at least two of the assaulted individuals.

As one teacher who was first attacked fought to protect herself, she was joined by other staff. The workers told the Consortium Friday morning that the man had assaulted at least two individuals before making his way up to the Head Start.

All this occurred in the presence of terrified children ages 2.9 to 5 years old, according this parent. "The children had lost it, they were crying. The staff had to calm them down," said the parent.



Head Start where incident took place (Ernice Gilbert, VIC)

The Herbert Grigg complex once included a facility that housed homeless and mentally ill individuals. This unit, however, is no longer at the Herbert Grigg complex. It is believed that the madman came to Herbert Grigg in search of refuge and lost control when he was not allowed to enter the Head Start.

"He went in rage so they were trying to keep him out of the center but there's no security up there and this is something we've all voiced as parents over and over. We pleaded with them to have a security to that site and especially a site that used to have mad people walking around," this parent said. "We are so sick and tired because we pleaded with D.H.S. to have security and they refused. We don't know what is the problem of putting a guard there."

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Old Bethlehem Shelter sign. The facility once housed homeless and mentally ill individuals. It is believed that the mentally ill man went up to the facility seeking refuge.

The Consortium reached out to Dept. of Human Services Commissioner Kimberly Causey-Gomez for comment last week. On Thursday, she said the department would beef up security at the facility. Ms. Causey-Gomez initially told this publication last week that the information relayed to it by the parent was incorrect. However, asked on Thursday twice what was incorrect about the information, the commissioner responded by stating that D.H.S. had taken corrective action to prevent a similar incident from occurring in the future.

"The Head Start staff were affected by the incident and D.H.S. is ensuring increased security presence at the facility. It was not just teachers affected," Ms. Causey-Gomez said.

She added, "Corrective action has been implemented. Head Start has strict federal guidelines which we follow as well as our facilities are licensed." Ms. Causey-Gomez said students were also affected by the assault.



## Entrance to the Head Start in Kingshill (VI Consortium)

A tour of the facility last weekend revealed that while a security booth at the Herbert Grigg complex included one security officer per shift, there was no security personnel whose job was to secure the Head Start. And the security on duty during our visit said someone should have been at the post during the assault.

Government House acknowledged the incident and said that a report was made to the V.I.P.D. As of Thursday, however, the Consortium had not received a report from the police force.

The administration said Ms. Causey-Gomez had planned on meeting with parents and staff this past Monday as they arrived at the Head Start.

The assault not only laid bare the lack of security at the Kingshill Head Start that could have possibly turned deadly; it also exposed further the mental health crisis affecting the U.S. Virgin Islands.

"I think the gentlemen in question is mentally ill and homeless. He needs services. This is an urgent issue to be addressed," Ms. Causey Gomez said.

## **Corrections: Sept. 27, 2019**

*The Consortium made a number of corrections to the story. One teacher and four workers were assaulted; they were not all teachers as previously stated. And a wrong image was used for the facility in Kingshill: There are two Head Start facilities on the Herbert Grigg Complex, one to the immediate right at the entrance, and another in the Herbert Grigg complex itself. Additionally, the workers -- including the teacher -- transported themselves to the Acute Alternative Medical Group, not the Juan F. Luis Hospital, according to the workers, who spoke with the Consortium this morning. The story has been updated to reflect the correct information.*