

The Virgin Islands Consortium

A Giving Community: Queen Louise Home Receives Matching Gift Check of \$10,000 from The Market STX; \$41,000 Raised in Total

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From left to right: Shawn Hamed, Keziah Sullivan, Wally Hamed, and Junia John-Straker
By. LSSVI

Lutheran Social Services of the Virgin Islands received a matching gift check of \$10,000 from the Hamed brothers of The Market STX, formerly Plaza Extra West, on Friday afternoon at the supermarket's office suite, as a means to continue their unwavering support to the children cared for at Queen Louise Home for Children.

Last year, both parties collaborated on The Market Matching Challenge fundraiser that far exceeded expectations. The Market STX pledged to match up to \$10,000 in donations. Cash donations were received through the Lutheran Social Services website and mailed checks. A link on The Market's Facebook page forwarded donors directly to the agency's website donation page.

A December 18th post on the supermarket's Facebook page showed over \$20,000 was already raised by that time. By the end of 2020, Queen Louise Home received just over \$31,000. Including the gift match, they raised just over \$41,000.

Cash donations were "from \$5 all the way up," and came from longtime donors and many new ones, said chief executive officer of Lutheran Social Services Junia John-Straker in an interview with the Consortium. Funds are always prioritized toward having adequate staffing to make sure that the children are safe, loved, and taken care of. Everything else is added afterwards, she stated.

"This has been a very difficult year for everybody, but when you see how the people just gave their everything," it's every encouraging, expressed LSSVI Public Relations and Development Director Keziah Sullivan. Referencing \$5 donations, she added, "That's what they had, and they felt that they had to give. To know that they're giving during very difficult times speaks to how people feel about children, how people feel about the work that Lutheran Social Services does in the community. That's why it was so exciting for us to achieve that goal so quickly."

Conversations surrounding this year's fundraiser has already begun, said LSSVI. All in attendance at the check presentation commented on how great the community's response was to gift-matching.

The Market Matching Challenge was successfully executed in lieu of an annual Christmas Tree Sale that was suspended last December, due to the coronavirus pandemic. The Hamed family implemented the Christmas Tree Sale in 2018 to support the efforts of Queen Louise Home for Children. The first sale yielded over \$5,000. The following year, \$7,500 worth of Christmas trees were sold.

Store manager Shawn Hamed shared during an interview that there is a possibility that the Hamed family will organize a combination of both a Christmas Tree Sale and gift matching fundraiser to benefit the Queen Louise Home this year, if world conditions permit. "As long as it benefits Queen Louise, we're going to be creative and we're going to figure out a way that it both encourages the community to engage and also for it to reach the maximum benefits for Queen Louise," Shawn told the Consortium.

"This year, we should be able to make the big fifty then easily!" store owner Wally Hamed suggested during conversations at the check presentation, referring to an increased fundraising goal of \$50,000. Mafi Hamed, co-owner was not present at the check presentation.

Beyond cash donations, Lutheran Social Services usually posts and updates a wish list of necessary items on their website. In addition, the nonprofit typically welcomes volunteers from church groups, universities, and local high schools to assist at Queen Louise and Sister Emma Cottage. Since Covid-19, all volunteer opportunities have been

suspended to protect the children from exposure to the virus.

About Queen Louise Home for Children

According to the release, children first come to Queen Louise Home through the Virgin Islands Department of Human Services as a result of abuse, neglect, and/or displacement, or for respite care when needed. The program is a part of Lutheran Social Services of the Virgin Islands, the largest private child and family services agency in the territory.

“We must always be ready and prepared to receive children—We’re [open] 24/7,” said Ms. Sullivan during an interview with VIC. The hope is that the children they care for will be reunited with family members or placed in foster homes. The likelihood of that happening varies on a case-by-case basis, while some children stay until adulthood and transfer to institutions of higher learning or adult homes for people with disabilities, the CEO explained.

Ms. John-Straker expressed during an interview with VIC, “Queen Louise Home has been around for 116 years and you know that the only way that could happen is through the overwhelming support that we receive from the community. It takes all of us — it takes a village to raise a child. That’s exactly what we experience at Queen Louise Home.” Ms. John-Straker acknowledged those who continue to support from St. Thomas for over 40 years and stateside as well.

About The Market VI

Have you seen the The Market VI’s recently debuted store name, logo and brand transformation campaign featuring local music artist Adam O on advertisements? View [here](#). Even the children are catching on to the new name. [Take a look!](#) According to the release, The Market STX (formerly Plaza West) and The Market STT (formerly Plaza Extra Tutu) stores are committed to improving the Virgin Islands community’s shopping experience — including offering local produce, meats and products from local farmers and entrepreneurs.