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## Second Phase of Program to Provide Reduced-cost Solar Generators to Low Income Families Launches in St. Thomas, St. John

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Low-income families on St. Thomas and St. John, beginning this week, have another opportunity to receive subsidized solar power generators, as the Share the Sun program begins Phase 2.

Community Action Now, a Georgia-based organization, is a nonprofit which in 2022 assisted over 55 families purchase solar generators at a reduced cost.

This year, the program has been expanded to low-income families on St. John. Eligible purchasers will receive a 100-watt solar panel on wheels that connects to a 60Ah sealed lead-acid battery, which is also on wheels, making the system fully portable. The battery unit also contains an 1800-watt pure sine wave inverter, so as to output AC power (110V). There is also a DC outlet and a

USB port for more power options.

For greater output, a second solar panel and up to 4 battery/inverter units can be connected together.

The single panel and battery retail for \$1200, but those eligible for the subsidized price will pay “no more than \$350”, according to Iffat Walker, Executive Director of Community Action Now. For that price, households will be able to sustainably generate their own source of power, thereby reducing their reliance on the grid and providing resilience in the face of potential natural disasters.

Units are also available at full price for interested persons whose incomes do not allow them to qualify for the subsidized price. Funds from retail sales in this regard are used to expand access to the Share the Sun program, “helping more families to gain access to solar,” according to a press release from Community Action Now.

Additionally, money “received from income eligible participants is reinvested into the program to build program capacity,” said Ms. Walker. “Private donors provide additional funding to build capacity in this program,” she continued.

Given the level of interest that Phase 1 attracted from the public, and on the verge of launching Phase 2 of the mission to provide sustainable power to families in the USVI, Ms. Walker says that now, efforts are focused on securing more support to expand the reduced-cost program to St. Croix.

“This year we’ve expanded to St. John because we were able to find an on-island partner,” Ms. Walker explained. To do the same thing on the Big Island, “we must find an on-island partner and funding sources to sustain the initial program development to include storage of devices and intake.”

With program support already coming from several partners such as the Rotary Club of St. Thomas, the Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands, the Virgin Islands Conservation Society, and Island Green Living, Ms. Walker is now looking to build their coalition.

“We would love to work with another agency that is willing to partner with us to make this happen. We also need a funder to help with upfront costs to purchase devices at cost, find an on-island device assembler and distribution of devices once they arrive. There’s a lot of logistics that must be covered with both committed partners and funders,” Ms. Walker explained.

Additionally, Community Action Now says it is looking to develop a training program for solar installers and repair technicians so that people who receive units from Share the Sun can maintain them for ongoing effective operation. “Right now, the talent is scarce but the need is great which makes this a huge opportunity” for human development in the territory, according to Ms. Walker.