

- ...rules of engagement before we begin, we request that there be no names, use of names. No personal attacks, no unfounded allegations, product pitches, no profanity and as always, we don't give medical advice, so we won't be able to respond to questions of that sort. The opinions expressed today are those of the Disability Rights Center and those are of our guests. This is a live call-in show and if you are so inclined, we encourage you to call us at 713-1079 or 779-1079. Today, I'm very excited. I have a special guest for you this morning. Her name is Linda Gavin and she is from the St. Croix Senior Collaborative. So we have a lot to learn today. Good morning, Linda.

- Good morning, Amelia. Thank you so much for having me.

- Well, I'm very excited. I've been following some of the emails that I've received over a few months about your group and so I would welcome hearing more about what the St. Croix Senior Collaborative is.

- Well, we've been in existence probably going on three years and basically it is made up of a group of seniors. Although we do have some younger members who are trying to both educate themselves about what services are available on the island for seniors and also try to promote better services for us as we approach those years when we're going to need assistance and a wider range of services than we need now when we are fully able.

- Okay. So what kinds of issues or services you find is of issue?

- Well, it might, it might be helpful, we really originally started with a group of people who mostly moved here from the mainland in their retirement and our plans all were pretty uniform that we would in 10 years or so move back to the mainland, find our assisted living facility where we could spend the rest of our lives and that would be it but as I'm sure many of your listeners agree after living here a few years, we decided we didn't wanna leave. And so we started to look around to see what kinds of services were available here and of course, they're pretty limited in terms of assisted living or senior care facilities on the island. And so it originated with a small group, maybe 10 people, who started by saying, "Well, maybe we could do it ourselves. Find a facility, a multi-family dwelling where we could all live and watch each other's backs and share services and transportation and that type of thing." So we started out and for a few months, that's what we did. We looked at property to see if something could be developed into that but the complexities of financing and setting up the legal contracts, etcetera of that were pretty daunting so we kind of let it go. And then about six months later, we got back together and at that time, word was starting to spread, so our first meeting we had like 20, 30 people show up.

- That's pretty good.

- Yeah, which is a pretty good indication that there was a need for this type of discussion. And so over the next few months, we decided to form a formal organization. We applied for sponsorship under the St. Croix Foundation, they're our physical sponsor, developed bylaws, etcetera and then started to listen to the people that were coming to the meetings as to what they wanted and I think probably there are still a group of us that still would like to look at, do it ourselves in a multi-family dwelling but for the most part, our members wanna stay in their homes as long as they possibly can. So we started focusing first on just educating, you know, what do we have. You know, we've had Tracy Sanders from Continuum Care come out, she's done an overview of her services. She's also done advanced medical directive planning session with us which everyone no matter what their age should have.

- Right.

- That kind of paperwork.

- Now let's explain what that is.

- Well, it's a series of questions that you answer on paper and give to a loved one or someone who might be in charge of your care if you were seriously ill or had to make end-of-life decisions as to how you want that to play out, you know.

- Right. And if you're not in a position to decide "This is my direction while I am aware and competent."

- Exactly.

- Right.

- Exactly. And we've had, we've had the medical range of issues we've had when Dr. Griffith was the head of the hospital. We had a reception where he spoke to us along with his administrative staff. We've toured the hospital, we have a future program coming up on PAVA which is the program that arranges for you to go to Puerto Rico to see medical specialists that maybe were unavailable here on the island. We have representatives on the Patient Family Council that get regular updates on what's new at the hospital and the improvements that they're, that are being made at the hospital because medical care is probably the number one concern of everyone. Are we gonna have that? We've had SkyMed and, out and MASA is due to come out again and talk to us about getting off island in case of a medical emergency. We've looked at financial issues. Scot McChain came out and talked to us about trust and wills and the importance of those being in place, we just had Bruce Swanson and Tanya Swinney come out and talk about financial planning for seniors to educate us a little bit more about those decisions made at our stage in life. We also do some fun things.

- Yeah, I hope so. This was getting a little serious.

- Yeah, it's a little depressing after a while. We have the community garden in Frederiksted has been out to talk about their project and we've signed up to do a plot there so our members can do a little gardening and...

- Where is that?

- It's right as you, you can turn left at the post office as you come into town, go down about a block and a half, and it's a big lot that Randell Gerard and Jess Yuer are developing and you go and put in your hour or two every week and then you can help share in the bounty and it's really an interesting project and I think we're gonna start out by planting a lot of pineapples.

- Okay.

- That's we decided because it'd take a lot of growth. And we occasionally will have like, we'll bring people in that have plans for the islands. One of our more interesting sessions was with Dr. Kor Christian who came with her son Marcus and presented their plan for an assisted living facility which they would like to build on property they have on the south shore, a beautiful, beautiful plan, and we're hoping and trying to help promote that because they need the funding for it obviously. And then we have social events like we have potlucks a lot just to get together and share. And then I think probably another really valuable part of our process is we share information and, like we've been doing a lot of research on assisted living and I even read a book on it. There's a really wonderful book. I'll think of the title in just a second here.

- Uh-hmm.

- Anyway, it is, what it pointed out was, you know, I grew up in a town where elderly that can no longer take care of themselves were put in a nursing home.

- Right.

- And that was pretty horrendous.

- Yeah.

- I mean, I had a great aunt that went into one of those and it was pretty depressing. And then assisted living became the thing and it started out as really a nonprofit idea, developing places where people could feel like they were more in a, in their own home but still have the care and support of the staff. Both my husbands and my parents were in assisted living before the end of their lives and they were beautiful. In fact, I used to tease my mom that I wanted to move into one then, right there when I was like 55. And I still hold to that. But the average cost of assisted living today is \$85,000 a year.

- Wow.

- Which is unaffordable to most people.

- That's right.

- And even if you are fairly well off, you can't afford that kind. So what we found is, we've done a lot of research and we found a couple of programs that we're really promoting. The first is we have joined a group called the Village to Village Network.

- Uh-hmm.

- And one of the big movements on the mainland is for these organizations they call villages, starting in a community that are usually, began with just volunteers to help provide services that allow people to stay in their own homes. And so there are things like buddy systems and phone call checks daily. Transportation is a huge issue.

- Yes.

- I no longer wanna drive and how do I get to my doctor's appointment.

- Right.

- And so they get like volunteer drivers to pick people up and take them to appointments and such. And then they also do social events and that type of thing. So when we started with them as just an associate member that was about six months to go, they had a hundred of these organizations across the United States and in that six months, it's gone to two hundred.

- Wow.

- So it's exploding.

- We're going to go more into this phenomenon. We'll just take a quick break and we'll be right back. We're back. You're listening to Ability Radio, You and Your Health. Our special guest today is Linda Gavin from the St. Croix Senior Collaborative. Linda, I wanna share with you something that I was a little intrigued by. I was curious about the population of older adults, that's another phrase, in the US Virgin Islands and we're looking at approximately a little over 14,000 people or 32% of the Virgin Islands population. Out of that 32% had indicated that they had some form of a disability, one or more disability. So the kinds of issues that you've addressed earlier is certainly, you know, important.

- Yeah.

- Before we took a break. You mentioned something about the village to village concept and I wanted you to, if you can, just elaborate a little more in that for us, please.

- Okay. Well, so this system that we belong to, this network, provides everything you could ever want to establish it, you know, how to set up your volunteer base, how, the legal things that you have to take care of, insurance, that type of thing. So we've had a team of about seven of our members looking at this and we get a report, an initial study report to our group in July and we decided that we wanna move ahead

with this and we're gonna start out very simply. Probably we will set up a buddy system so everybody has a buddy that can check on them daily or periodically as often as they like. And also, we will start initiating the transportation policy because on the Virgin Islands, in the Virgin Islands, that seems to be the biggest problem that people face. I mean, most people have a nice social network, have ability to get places, you know, socially. But if they break their hip or they break an ankle or what have you, transportation may be a problem. So we wanna get all the issues of volunteers recruited and liability insurance, that type of thing that needs to be in place so we can start that.

- You probably know this but transportation is huge.

- Yeah.

- A huge need.

- And we have, we have looked into, like, the transportation available for people with disabilities here and we know that that is pretty, a pretty good program but we're thinking in terms of those people that fall out of that window.

- Right.

- You know, they're not legally disabled but they no longer feel comfortable driving or even comfortable driving under certain conditions. There are days I don't wanna drive.

- Right, right. Or nighttime driving also is an issue. Yeah.

- So, and we're doing all kinds of research. In fact, I was real pleased to see, I received a memo from I think one of the senators at St. John has a transportation system right now for the seniors that need rides. They got a special grant and have a van and people to drive it over there and I've reached out to them to get more information about that, so, but initially, we'll probably just start out with volunteers that drive their own cars and then hopefully go into a bigger system.

- Kind of a Uber thing going on?

- Yeah, exactly.

- Okay.

- Exactly. And then we have, of course most of the people in our group are retired and there are a level of skills in different areas that can be of use. Like my husband is an IT person and I think already he probably services half the groups' computers, he gets a lot of calls. But looking at services that we can offer to one another that maybe it's minor household repairs or assistance around the house or doing grocery shopping or those types of things, just to have each other's backs for a while and then as we get more sophisticated and larger, we can expand it but we decided that was the best way to go, start out small and then we'll expand it as we go. All of our people at this point are still fully abled.

- Uh-hmm. Uh-hmm.

- So we don't really have to worry about it but we figured this is the time we have to put plans together so that we're in place by the time we get to the point where we need more services. So we hope to be able to, our group is meeting, our research group is meeting next week and we hope to be able to give at least the outline of the plan for group approval or comment in our November meeting and then at that point, I think we've been talking earlier about why you haven't really seen this publicized very much. At that point, I think we will start spreading the word, this is who we are, this is what we do because we have a specific goal in mind of providing a service to seniors that need that.

- And what is your scope, do you have a geographical element...

- No, we have people from, we started primarily on the west end.
- Uh-hmm.
- And that's where I live and most of my friends live that originated the group.
- Uh-hmm.
- But it has spread to the east end and we have people that come, in fact, we've moved our meeting to AARP offices.
- Which is centrally located?
- That's more centrally located for people in the east end to be a part of it.
- Right.
- So we're hoping that, and our programs for the rest of the year, we have, Norma Dejarnette is gonna speak about nutrition for seniors next week, or next month, we're going to also have, as I had mentioned earlier, the PAVA program in, we're gonna have...
- Yeah. What is PAVA, P-A-V-A or...
- I don't remember what it stands for but basically it's an organizations that, well, if you need for example, let's say arthritis, you have arthritis and you want to see a rheumatologist, you could arrange with them and they will set up the appointment in Puerto Rico, arrange your flight over there, arrange your flight back, I've had friends that have used it for, like, eye surgeries than couldn't be done here and so it's another option as opposed to having to go all the way to the mainland for a special need that you wouldn't be able to fulfill here on island.
- I wonder if it, it it's Pavia, I think there's a hospital in Puerto Rico called Pavia.
- It might be.
- Okay.
- I might be mispronouncing it.
- Okay.
- That could be correct.
- That's, okay.
- Yeah.
- Okay.
- And then we also are gonna have ADT come out because ADT has a, has a med alert system.
- Oh, I didn't know that. Okay.
- You know, which is like the ability to alert another, well, at this level, it goes to the central place that the alert is sounded and then they notify whoever you've identified as somebody to come and check on you. And so we have a lot of exciting things. Plus I think one of our programs is gonna be on the Turtle Project

because that's an area that we thought would be interesting just for your information, so, for the rest of the year.

- Okay. What is the Turtle Project?

- Well, the Turtle Project is just the program that's run out, it's at Sandy Point for preservation of leatherback turtles. And they also work with the hawksbill and green turtles, they're working with those right now and it's something that everybody seems to be interested in learning a little bit more about. So we try to blend it, the serious stuff and other stuff that's just for our information.

- Sure.

- And then our other really big program that's coming up is the, we're being, my husband and I are being trained to be trainers of trainers.

- Okay.

- For a program called A Matter of Balance and this is a training program for seniors to help them prevent falls.

- That's huge. That's a huge program.

- And it was developed by MaineHealth, the state of Maine, and they have a wonderful health education program there and we're going up in October to be trained for two days and then on the 25th of October, we'll come back and we're gonna do a training session at AARP, really there's three of them, the 25th of October, the November 15th and December 6th for people interested in training. So we've contacted or will be contacting more groups like, Continuum Care is one of our sponsors [inaudible] Health, AARP, the Retired Government Employees Association, different groups that have a large number of seniors as their members and we're encouraging them to get the training to go back and then train their seniors. And it's quite intensive, it's like eight weeks, two-hour classes or you can break it, you know, to a week or what have you but it's interesting because part of the training is getting over the fear or falling because what they've, in their research, have figure out is that seniors, as they get older do less and less activity because they're afraid of falling and they know the consequences.

- Right.

- My stepdaughter always says if you fall, it's all downhill from there and that's your biggest fear is [inaudible] you're gonna fall and break a hip because a lot of complications do come from that but I think the fear of that causes you to be more sedentary and that causes all kinds of other health problems. And then it also helps you assess your surroundings, you know, can you make your house a safer place, like your bathtub railings and rugs and that kind of stuff so you don't have the dangers of falling. And then exercises to help build up your balance and strength and overcome any weaknesses that might lead to that. One in three adults over sixty years of age will fall and have injuries as a result of that. In fact, we came here from Arizona and my husband was just reading an article that one of our former governors died this week and he said that it was as a result of injury suffered from a fall.

- From a fall? Yeah.

- So it can be a very serious. There's, as you probably know because you probably deal with people that have suffered disabilities as yourself.

- Right. Or, you know, or hitting your head, traumatic brain injury and that type of thing, yeah.

- So we'll start classes in January in that both, our goal is to start just for the general public and that several organizations will be trained to do with their own memberships. And then we also, like my goal...

- Well, let me ask you about this now. The training that you talked about, that's eight weeks for two hours, that's training for the trainers?

- For seniors. No, the trainers...

- Okay. Not the trainees?

- No, the train, the trainers are a one-day eight-hour workshop to train them how to be trainers.

- Okay.

- And then we'll help supervise and mentor them as they go through their training. The...

- But what I'm trying to figure out is the population that you want to learn how to not injure yourself readily. How long would that kind of training...

- That's eight weeks.

- That's eight weeks?

- That's eight, that's eight weeks, two hours a session.

- Okay. Okay.

- And I think, you know, a lot of people go "Wow, that's a lot."

- That's a commitment.

- "That's a lot." But, you know, if you think of your own learning styles, I go to a day workshop and learn all kinds of exciting things and two days later I've forgotten half of it.

- Okay.

- So I think a lot of it is the reinforcement that goes through eight weeks of training, especially with physical exercises and there's a lot of, you know, group discussion and working through people's individual issues with that and I'm real excited. We are training to train, it's two days and we'll be up in Portland, Maine in October to do that.

- Uh-hmm.

- The other one that I wanted to stress though with that is that we also hope to be able to get caregivers. You know, we wanna approach the caregivers group here on island, people that work at Herbert Grigg, I believe that Continuum Care's staff also wants to be trained because they probably will not go out and actually deliver a whole eight-week class but they can use techniques they learn to share with their clientele as they deal with them in their work too.

- All right. Again, our guess is Linda Gavin from the St. Croix Senior Collaborative. If anyone has any questions, feel free to give us a call here at 713-1079 or 7798-1079. Let me ask you this, Linda, is this a membership organization?

- It is. At this point, we charge \$30 a year to be a member.

- Uh-hmm.

- And we have no plans for changing that for the following year, next year. Our membership starts in January and people are invited to come to a meeting or two to check us out before they join, we aren't hardcore you can't come in here.

- Okay.

- As long as you paid your money.

- Uh-hmm.

- Because we know it's a, it's a taste of whether or not you wanna be a part of it. We have a lot of people that maybe don't actually get to attend the meetings because they have conflicts on that night but they do, we try to do a very informative set of minutes every month and so they get all the information and the announcements in any research that we've done and a summary of what the speaker said. So our mailing list is like I think close to a hundred people, so that's great. And like I said, we really haven't promoted it, we haven't advertised it or pushed the group and I think we'll be ready to do that after the first of the year because we'll have programs in place that I think will be a little more solid than what we've had in the past which have been meetings and special guest speakers.

- Okay. And again, you know, for the membership fee, I guess the question would be then what services do I get as a result?

- Okay. We have, well, initially the fee was to help us get our, all our work, our paperwork done that you need for forming an organization. We intend to go forth with our 501(c)(3) because especially with, we get into having a full-blown village and offering all those services, there will be special legalities and stuff that we should--we'll have to take care of and we'll want to have a full coverage. So the costs of that are quite extensive. We do like part of the training the group is, we, has wonderful sponsors. AARP has given us money, Tracy Sanders, we've had private donors and then the St. Croix Senior Club have donated for our trip, they'll do the Matter of Balance training. I forgot to mention too that we are gonna offer all that for free.

- Uh-hmm.

- I mean, there's no charge for organizations to come for the training nor will there be charges for people to actually go through the classes, so, in fact, the only thing we're gonna need is maybe some people donating some money to buy snacks. Otherwise, they're stuck with our cookies that we make.

- Okay. I understand we have a call? Good morning. Good morning. I heard a voice. Hello, good morning.

- Hello? Can you hear me?

- Hey, good morning.

- How are you doing this morning?

- Fine, how are you?

- Good, good, good. I was, I was listening to Ms. Gavin, is that correct?

- Yes.

- Yes.

- And I'm also connected with AARP and you did answer the question while I was waiting, is that what was your connection with AARP and you were saying there was some assistance and I guess you meet at AARP offices at least on St. Croix?

- Yes, we do. Basically our connection has just been of common interests. Denyce Singleton who is the most recent director of the AARP Virgin Islands who has just recently retired is, has been a member of our group since its inception and so important in providing us with information and guidance and she was able to be able to get the National Office to donate some money for our going to having the Matter of Balance training in October. And they, she has been most gracious to have us have our meetings there too and as I understand, we are gonna be able to continue with that under new directorship. So there, we're not officially affiliated with them but we are very closely affiliated in our missions.

- Okay. I'm just checking to see because I am connected with them as well and I wanted to be sure that have you been able to make a presentation to the chapter of AARP, there's one on each island.

- Yes. I think that's going to be in the works soon as soon as we get back from our training so that they under, because the very first class that we're offering which starts on January 10th is going to be offered to those people.

- Okay. Okay. And I did hear quite clearly, was there a national organization that you spoke of that sort of, and there were clubs around the nation, is there a common name that you can...

- Are you, are you talking about the village to village movement?

- I didn't quite hear that's why I was asking again. I didn't hear exactly...

- Oh, yeah, we, our organization, the St. Croix Senior Collaborative, is not a national organization. That's just something that we, I'll tell you a funny story in a bit about that, but that's something we came up with. But the Village to Village Network, which is the, it's kind of a help group for people that are interested in forming villages in their community and they are a national organization. They have over 200 different organizations formed in communities across the nation and the network itself just provides information and support to those. Like we just had a webinar this week on transportation and one of the member villages presented their system for scheduling rides and volunteers to take people for those rides that they use and it was very helpful and great information for us to use as we move forward.

- Okay. Well, thank you. I would want to remind Amelia that with that sort of dispatch system was brought up by the Community Transportation Association Report, that we never really had a chance to follow up on with VITRAN, but it seems to, it might be, with this new movement, a way to revive that approach about movement of people without worrying about systems and equipment.

- Well, that's wonderful. That'd be wonderful. I'd be interested in talking to you more about that.

- We will happily share that.

- Oh, but it's great to have this information and I think it's a good movement. A lot of people don't remember, under the Affordable Care Act, there was a Community Living Assistance [inaudible] provision that the one party threw out and it didn't get [inaudible] of it and it would've allowed for persons to have funds for these kind of services.

- Oh, wonderful.

- Individually through the Affordable Care Act, or make it a private so you can expand community living, aging in place, and, you know, being able to assist one another.

- Exactly.

- Again, carry on with the good show, Amelia, and Ms. Gavin and whatever we can do to help spread the word, I think, we would really wanna get involved to make sure this happens in Virgin Islands, on both islands, in Water Island and St. John as well.

- That's wonderful. I'm so glad you think it would be beneficial. Once we get everything in place, we would really like to reach out to the other two islands to see if we can assist them. And it would be great to have a unified organization across all three.

- Okay. Well, carry on.

- Thank you.

- Thank you.

- Take care. Have a great morning. Have a great weekend, Amelia.

- Thank you. You, too, Archie.

- All righty. Bye-bye.

- I was gonna tell you the story of our name. When we first got together, we did a lot of research on groups like this that are just in communities trying to form a better organization for seniors and we discovered what they call NORCs.

- NORCs?

- They're Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities. And basically they're, you know, communities where you buy your house as young marriage, you have children, they grow up, you all grow old, and then you kind of watch each other's backs because it's a naturally-occurring situation. But we figured that we were deliberately organized communities. So, for a long time, we called ourselves the DORCs.

- Oh, God.

- And I still love that name. In fact, I had a former student made me a bag that says "DORCs from the Virgin Islands." But we thought we better get serious and get something a little more professional sounding as we move forward.

- Well, you clarified for me that the, your collaborative is not affiliated with any other entity.

- No, not at this point.

- Okay. So, you're pretty much breaking new grounds.

- We are. And you know he brought up a very good point, you know, about the proposal to government to take on some of what we've been mentioning.

- Uh-hmm.

- And I wanna stress that we don't take ownership in any of this. If we can help facilitate something that's already in place or something that can be developed that already has its beginnings here in the island, collaborating with other organizations, that would be wonderful. We do a lot of things with the Patient Family Council, for example with the hospital because that's one of the areas that we are most concerned with. And, you know, initiatives, government programs that we can help promote or help develop, we'd be more than glad to do that. It's not, we're not one of those groups that say, "We came up with the idea first. Let us do it first."

- Right, yeah.

- It's not [inaudible]

- Right.

- Yeah.

- No, understandable. Understandable. So have you crafted a mission yet? I know it's still kind of early to...

- Basically...

- ...etch it in stone, but...

- Yeah. Basically, what we say officially is that we, our mission is to develop, collaborate, and deliver programs, services, and events in supportive of senior residents of St. Croix.

- Uh-hmm.

- And our goals, our social activities, ADA Access Programs, edification and educational opportunities, improvement and diversity of options in community housing, and other opportunities as they may arise consist [inaudible] so...

- Tell me about the ADA Access Program. That's something that we specially have an interest in.

- I did, well, you know, I think a lot of, like, we've had a lot of discussion about, as, like there's some kind of tax credits or tax forgiveness for improvements in your home, for disability like railings and ramps, and making sure that your houses is really handicap accessible. We're really...

- Okay. That's a voluntary thing. Yeah, the ADA doesn't require it, but we do have, we had been advocating along with AARP for a visitability, you know, program where you would get tax credit if you made, you know, the entryway to your home, your bathroom accessible, right?

- Exactly. And so we really would like to have that and, you know, we would be behind a hundred percent any disability access improvements to the streets in Christiansted and, well, everywhere on the island.

- Right.

- I mean, it's really quite sad how difficult it is for even people that are fully-bodied.

- Right.

- I had foot surgery this week and I was walking around Christiansted, picking up stuff for our silent auction for a fundraiser for the hospital yesterday, and out died trying to maneuver. And I think just making people aware of all the, those needs because we were, we got chikungunya, both my husband and I did, and it was bad. I mean, my husband was really bad. He ended up in a wheelchair for three weeks and had two surgeries and all that kind of that stuff.

- From the chikungunya?

- From the chikungunya, yeah.

- Wow.

- But we find out there that we couldn't live at our house. I mean, we would have to gut our house if we were disabled. We thought at first, "We just had to widen the door here or there," but taking a wheelchair around our house was almost impossible. And I think sharing with people and making them analyze the situations now is really important because if you wait until you are in a wheelchair, and you have to make

a major life change like that is really difficult. So, we're helping, hoping to really promote that. And we have provided information to our members that are about that and we'll continue to make that a priority, too.

- So how did you manage during that time?

- It was very difficult. I'd call neighbors to come help me get him into the car to go see the doctor. You know, I mean, it was, it was pretty much captured in one room. We couldn't get him out of the bedroom very easily.

- Right.

- It's very daunting and I think about all the things we talk about in our group is if this hadn't started, if we hadn't come up with this idea just to look for a common living space, I wouldn't have been prepared. I wouldn't be doing all the research and self-educating that I have done so far because you don't, you don't think you're ever gonna be at that point.

- Right. Yup. We're strong, we're, we can do it at all.

- Yeah.

- Okay. We're gonna take a few minutes to take a break and we'll be right back. You're listening to Ability Radio, You and Your Health. We're back. You're listening to Ability Radio, You and Your Health. I am your host this morning, Amelia Headley LaMont from the Disability Rights Center. Just a brief summary, we are talking about seniors helping seniors. In the US Virgin Islands, we have a population of over 14,000 people of individuals who are over the age of 65. The highest prevalence rate of persons in that category with disability is just a little over 20%. So, you know, we're talking about balance and being able to move, being able to walk is the highest prevalence rate here in the territory for persons who are over the age of 65, 65 and over. Let me also add that today's show, like all the other shows that we've presented on Da Vybe 107.9, are recorded. And if you are unable to capture what was said today or in any of our broadcasts, they are posted on our website, which is drcvi.org. Linda Gavin is our guest today from the St. Croix Senior Collaborative and, you know, I was remiss in asking you, what was your position with that organization?

- I'm one of the directors.

- Okay.

- We have several people that represent people from across the island.

- Great. Who are they?

- Our initial board was, you may know Florence John-Jules who is with Catholic Services right across the street here and she serves on our board, my husband Bill Boyton is on the board, Joann Jones from Frederiksted and Bertley Barrow from Christiansted. And we are really kind of the planning agents and then others jump in in terms of whatever we need for special committees, et cetera. We, one of the things that I forgot to mention when I said that our dues was \$30 is we also ask each of our members to put in 30 hours of volunteer work at an organization of their choice.

- Right.

- And I would say probably a hundred percent of them already do that beyond way, way, way beyond 30 hours. There's no, you know, they don't have to turn in a form signed by an adult saying, verifying it, but we just believe that one of the most important things for seniors to do is to give back to the community and to be involved with, we have, we have 300, over 300 non-profit organizations in this island. There's lots of opportunity to volunteer.

- Oh my goodness. Okay. So, what, I'm just trying to get a sense of structure, guys. I'm kind of like structure-oriented. So, it's more like a, literally a collaborative.

- Exactly.

- It's a committee of leaders.

- Yes. Yes.

- Okay. So there's no head honcho and no separate board, or how does that work?

- We try to avoid that. You know, we've all had, we're all of an age that we've had really bad experience with these, with these types of things. And sometimes, because I tend to do all the emails and send out announcements and line up the people to speak and stuff, I've, I, one of my most common phrases is, "Please tell me if I'm on the wrong page here." Because we want the group to really feel like they have input and this is their organization and we're not just directing it. And that's why I said, I think before we went online, we started out with a different mission than what we ended up with and I hope our mission changes as we go along because I think it has to be real sensitive to what our members need and want and that we can't tell them. One of the things we do in the group is we do try to, every once in a while, break into subgroups. There is a, there are still a group of people that are very interested in finding a common property to live in, you know. That's still not everybody's wish, but there is a group and we try to accommodate that if we hear of a property that might suit those purposes, let them know about that. There are people that are very interested in developing a special community, you know, with some common goals and thinking and that type of thing. And we have...

- Sounds like a commune, is that what we're talking about?

- Well, a little bit, you know, a little bit. They're kind of very interested in peace and, you know, being organic in their eating, and that type of thing, and what I would hope is that we could be a place they could gather, several different people could gather to discuss those ideas and further those ideas within, under our umbrella.

- Okay. Well, you'd mentioned that you typically meet at AARP, is that correct?

- Yeah. We meet the second Tuesday in every month and we meet at 5:30. Our next meeting is gonna be October 11th and we're gonna have two speakers that night. We're gonna have Norma DeJeanette, who's gonna talk about nutrition for seniors, which will be really good for everybody to hear. And then we have a new member, Cindy Joseph who has just opened a senior living facility up near Salt River and I think she has eight beds. I'm not positive. I'd have to look at the brochure again, but Cindy is gonna talk about her developments. She came to our first meeting, her first meeting this last, this week when we met, and she's gonna talk about that and she does with people that are engaged into our program.

- Hmm, okay. All right. Where, let's, just for the benefit of our listening audience, do you, can you identify where the meeting is held? I know it's at AARP, but where is AARP's office?

- Best way to describe it, it's in the shopping mall that's right next to WAPA's office. So, with WAPA or the Kmart appliance store there, we're in that unit and we're towards the end next to, I think there a hair salon next to us. So, in between nail and...

- Nails and hair and...

- ...hair, there's AARP.

- Okay. And appliances? Okay.

- Yes. And we are, we're done by 7:00.

- Okay.

- And we have just recently, I forget, we could really use somebody that knows about how to do social media, because that's, I mean I'm on Facebook but that's it. But we just had, we just put up our Facebook page, St. Croix Senior Collaborative, and if people wanna message me there, I can put them on our email list. Most of our communication is done through email, announcing meetings and special announcements, and if people would like to be updated on our meetings and what's going on, I'd be more than happy to put them on our mailing list.

- Oh, okay. How about tweeting?

- I don't tweet. I don't...

- Neither do I, but figured I'd ask.

- I'm not a, I'm not good at that but, you know, I had said that this is of most interest to seniors, but we do have some younger members. And there are gonna be a lot of opportunities as we get this village started for volunteers of any age, and I guess one of the things we're learning from the network is that it's not, they have really two groups of people. They have the seniors they service, some of them also volunteer.

- Uh-hmm.

- And then they have a whole group that are just their volunteers, that that's their thing, they volunteer to drive people and the senior group or what have you. So we are going to be most interested in developing friendships with people that just wanna be a part of helping this population.

- That's great. So then there is no, in essence, age limitation.

- No, no, not at all, yeah.

- Okay. And you indicated there's a need for volunteers?

- Yes.

- Okay. And what kinds of skills would you view as a real asset to the collaborative?

- You know, any, I think as we get into giving services, tech skills, minor, you know, repair skills, people that maybe have handyman skills would be very good. Of course, driving and that's about all I can think of right now, but writing, maybe, doing some writing, that kind of stuff.

- Okay. All right. Very good. Very good. Our guest today is Linda Gavin. She is a, this is, what, would you say Board Member?

- Yes.

- Of the St. Croix Senior Collaborative. The organization began roughly three years ago on the island of St. Croix. It is focused on activities that pretty much is geared by or directed by the members itself.

- Correct.

- Health, transportation needs.

- Housing.

- Housing.

- Transportation.

- I do recall hearing just, you know, as in aside from somebody who I believe was affiliated with your organization, about the multi-family, multi-unit possibility.

- Yes.

- It, frankly it seems to be a, really a replication of what I think is very special about the Virgin Islands, everyone helping each other.

- Exactly.

- Community, you know, helping each other and that's what brings...

- You know...

- ...a lot of people here and why people enjoy living and working here or retiring here.

- And I think, you know, I think it's also really important, and something was revelation to me is, you know, one of the things I was struck with the most when I moved here is the cultural standard here of you take care of the elders in your family, you know, and you, there's a built-in system for doing that even to the degree that I have friends who have come back to the island just to take care of ailing family members. And when we first started out, we thought the group was gonna be mostly people that moved from the mainland without their family. They don't have family here. And what we're finding is we, my husband and I were talking about it after our last meeting, is we have about half and half. I mean, we have more and more people who were born and raised here that are coming to the meeting whose families have moved back to the, or taken jobs away from the island or who don't have family members left here. Or people that have family members that just wanna be more independent and not rely on others to take care of them later on in life. And so I think it's important that it's not just people who moved here group, it's really a nicely blended group, which I think is, added to the richness of the organization.

- Well, this is a very exciting development. I certainly commend the work that you're doing.

- Thank you.

- And I look forward to hearing more about over the next several years what the St. Croix Senior Collaborative is doing. Let me announce that for the next few weeks, the Ability Radio Program will be airing some shows from our archives. Next week, we will be focusing on autism, one of the things that has been an issue with our office, the Disability Rights Center, and with parents, are the increasing numbers of children with autism in the US Virgin Islands and in the country. And so we deemed it important to repeat that broadcast. We will have, at that time, Dr. Kimberly Mills from the University Center For Excellence on Developmental Disabilities will do a show on some practical information on autism. Following that, we do a lot of work with respect to mental illness and advocating for the rights of individuals with mental illness, and so I'm told that during the week of October 2nd to October 8th is Mental Health Awareness Week, and so for our October 1st show, we will play a broadcast that was done by Dr. Rita Dudley-Grant who is a psychologist here in the US Virgin Islands. After that, we will have a show on a five-year mental and health strategic plan that the Disability Rights Center, in collaboration with our Mental Health Advisor, Mental Illness Advisory Council helped develop. This was as a result of a litigation that had arisen back in 2003. Our special guest the next show is Attorney Archie Jennings who we heard from a little bit earlier today. And we will also then follow up with some additional shows having to do with mental illness. We will have, on October 15th, a replay of our show with Dr. Dennis Romero. He is the administrator for the Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration, Department of Health and Human Services, SAMHSA we call it for short. And on October 22nd, we will have a show from an individual who's a director of a group called the STAR Center. It is a mental health advocacy

organization, Chacku Mathai, and that's gonna be on October 22nd. And finally, on October 24th, we will have a call-in, well, a show from the director of Kidscope, Dilsa Rohan Capdeville who's the Director of Kidscope, the child advocacy organization. I'm told we have a call. Good morning. Anybody there? Good morning.

- Good morning, Amelia. Actually, I was, I was hoping that I talk to somebody in the administrative office because this is Dolores.

- Hi, Dolores.

- I've enjoyed the show. I'm part of Linda's group there and I think it's fantastic and...

- Hi, Dolores.

- I think it's wonderful, but I really was wondering if you could drop by my place on the way back. I wanted to give that message to you, but I'm on air I guess.

- Yes, you are on the air.

- Okay.

- Is that a question for me or for Linda?

- Well, both if you could if you want. But I've got flowers for you then. All right.

- Okay. Wonderful.

- Okay. So I'll see you later.

- Take care.

- Okay. Bye-bye.

- Okay. Bye-bye. That was funny. Actually, the caller is a member of the collaborative, if I'm not mistaken.

- She is. She's one of our most active members, yes. We love her.

- Excellent. Excellent. Excellent. Okay. So in any event, for those of you who have been listening to our weekly broadcast, this has been a wonderful collaboration that the Disability Rights Center has had with VI Lottery, Making a Difference Program. It is our intention to continue with this show. It has been and will continue to be referred to as Ability Radio. We are considering now though changing and broadening our perspective. So, we will not only limit ourselves with health, but we will call it Ability Radio, You and your Life, which allows us greater latitude with respect to the issues that affect, you know, people who live and work in the, and retire in the US Virgin Islands. Linda, do you have any more information or parting shots you'd like to share with us this morning?

- No, I just, I encourage your efforts here. This has been wonderful and I'd love the opportunity to be able to talk about our work and I appreciate the invitation and we will keep you posted as we move forward.

- Absolutely. I'm looking forward to hearing more about what you do, and as Attorney Jennings mentioned earlier, we do have a template for, or the report that was done by the Community Transportation Association of America as to how we need to improve upon our transportation system. So, that's something we'd happily share with your group, okay?

- Oh, I'd love to get that.

- So we can get that, get that going. So, audience, thank you so much for listening and you will hear from us again soon live. But in the meantime, check out our archives and we'll see you next week.