

- Good morning. You're listening to Ability Radio, You and Your Life. My name is Amelia Headley LaMont. I am the director of the Disability Rights Center of the Virgin Islands and I am joined this morning by Iris Bermudez. Good morning, Iris.

- Good morning. Good morning. Good morning.

- How you doing?

- Doing fine. Thank you.

- First, we would like to thank all of you who had listened to our previous series of broadcast called Ability Radio, You and Your Health. We hope that you learned a wealth of information about healthcare and this purpose of our new series of broadcast is to help people live life to the, its fullest. And promote awareness of what the US Virgin Islands offers from different perspectives with an emphasis on the disability perspective. You will hear and learn from individuals, groups, leaders in our community. Who are working here to make the VI dedicated to maintain and preserve an inclusive community while focusing on our history and culture. Before we begin, there's some words of engagement so to speak. No use of names, please. No personal attacks, no unfounded allegations, no profanity, and the opinions expressed on this show are those expressed of the host, the guest, and not our federal funders.

- [laughter]

- This is a live call-in show so if you are inclined to call with questions, please feel free to call us at 713-1079 or 779-1079. Today we have a phenomenal individual joining us. I have admired her work in this community for a number of years. She had previously served on our Board of Directors. Welcome this morning to Junia John Straker. She's the Executive Director of Lutheran Social Services. Good morning.

- Well, good morning, Amelia. Good morning. Thank you for having me and good morning radio listeners.

- Junia, I think, even though, you know, some people are aware of the services that LSS provides, Lutheran Social Services. I'm always curious about your mission and how it got started in the first place?

- Well, can I go ahead? Oh, okay. I'm sorry. Well, we have a pretty interesting history actually. Our history began with Queen Louise Home during the early 20th Century. Many people in the Virgin Islands still work rigorous jobs on cane fields, and would be gone from home from sunrise to sunset with no option for child care or wages capable of buying nutritious meals. Parents who are left with few options to leave their children at home and often malnourished. In the fall of 1904, Crown Princess Louise of Denmark founded the West Indian Committee to provide child care and sent two deaconesses to St. Croix to help combat the high infant mortality rate and to care for sick children on the island. It was on December 13th of 1904, when an infant was found in the house with her deceased mom and needed refuge that Queen Louise Home first opened its doors. So we, uh, we'll be celebrating on December 13, a hundred and twelfth years of serving children. So by the 1917, there were three homes, a Queen Louise Home for Children in both Frederiksted and Christiansted, and then the Ebenezer Orphanage for Girls in Frederiksted. When the United States purchased the Danish West Indies in 1917, control of the three orphanages was conveyed to a local board of directors and it later became Lutheran Social Services. And I'm happy to report since that 1904 December, Queen Louise Home has never closed its door. We are here for children twenty four hours, seven days a week, three hundred and sixty-five days a year.

- Plus.

- [laughter]

- And then the agency, the rest is history has grown tremendously since then.

- Wow.

- That's phenomenal history because I remember when I started my career in the Virgin Islands as a social worker, I was assigned to the Queen Louise Home for Children and my task when I first went to the Queen Louise Home, I recall Russell Richards who was the director at the time, the first thing he told me was, "Now, Iris, what are you gonna do to get this children out of here? They've been here for too long." So we started working with the community to try to develop foster home environments for them and we were successful in trying to get some of the children out. Some of them had been there since they were born.

- Uh-hmm.

- But going back to what you said about, you know, when it first opened up in 1904, it must have been interesting to see and to know that there was a safe haven for children at that time going all the way back even before a lot of the social work systems were, you know, authorized to do something like that. So we were like ahead of the curb here.

- Absolutely. And today the home is more like a group foster home and, you know, I'm just happy that in the middle of the night when a police or a social worker has to remove a child from a situation of danger. That they can come to us and will have a bed for them. As a matter of fact, it's, you realize how important it is when you have a group of siblings and right now we have a group of six.

- Oh, my goodness.

- So imagine trying to pull those kids out of a home in the middle of the night, and trying to find a placement for a group of six, and not having to separate them. So I'm just grateful for Queen Louise Home.

- Absolutely because again I go, when I go back in terms of what we had to do at that time, it was very, very hard to separate those siblings. I recall many instances where some of the children were, like, I think the age limit is 12 years old, 11, 12...

- Yeah, although, yeah, that was the age limit. We actually do not put out a child if they can't find a place to transition them to. So we actually had one young, I call her young lady now, but she's 20 now, and we had her for most of her life, she had left and come back, and left and come back. So we became basically her family, so she was always able to come back to Queen Louise Home and had a home. So she's now in school in the States receiving training. I mean just has blooming to this wonderful, really gorgeous, confident besides, you know, early on, you saw how uncomfortable she was with her disabilities. Now she's in embracing them, she's just doing just wonderfully.

- You have some really phenomenal good stories coming out of the Queen Louise Home. I remember a lot of them and I remember placing them in the community foster homes some of the children, and they growing up in some of the foster homes. And they turned out to be excellent, well, I won't say excellent, but really good citizens of the Virgin Islands. They went to school. They went to college. You know, they had, there was no shoes back then, but with the warmth and the care that they got in the Queen Louise Home. I think that laid a foundation for them for later in life and we were talking about that when Dr. Williams was on the show. How early intervention really, really makes a big difference in people's lives.

- It does make a difference. We don't wish that kids grow up in, at Queen Louise. That's not the ideal situation for the kids and because of that we have other programs, intervention programs, that where we work early with the families, at risk families too, in hope that the kids don't end up at Queen Louise Home. But we're really happy to be there. We try to provide as much as possible a home setting for them. Although it is a good home, can be difficult, we try to give them the experience that you would, your own child at home. So after school activities, you know, we do, also start from teaching them how to ride a bike, to, you know, helping them with their first step really working on their development as a child to make sure they develop how they're supposed to. We have babies that are coming to us straight from the hospital. Four days old.

- Oh, boy. Okay. Well, listen. We're gonna talk a little bit more about that and I wanna hear more about the different programs because we could talk about babies all morning which is always nice. We'll be right back after this. We're back. You're listening to Ability Radio, You and Your Life. My name is Amelia Headley LaMont. I am joined by Iris Bermudez this morning and our special guest is Junia John Straker, Executive Director of Lutheran Social Services of the Virgin Islands. Before we go further, let me mention to you that if you've missed anything this morning that our guest says, you can find our previous broadcast on our website which is drcvi.org. Junia, before we talk, well, no during the break, I had a question for you and we were talking about Queen Louise Home and children who've been abandoned or need of care. How does that happen? How does one child is presented to the Queen Louis Home or into your system for assistance?

- Okay. Every child that's placed at Queen Louise Home currently is placed by Department of Human Services. So even if someone should bring to our attention that a child is in danger and in need of placement would do the referral to Department of Human Services. So they'll go through and they will, and then place the child after they've evaluate the situation with them, make a determination on whether or not the child should be placed at home. If there's an emergency situation in the middle of the night, the police or whoever, they'll call, and through Human Services of course and then bring the child.

- Yeah, and the goal is to reunite the family, not to have that child living in perpetual in the Queen Louise Home.

- Absolutely. Or to identify a home for that child where kids should be in families.

- Exactly.

- But while they're with us, we try our best to give them the experience and to make sure that they know that they're loved. I always say when we talk about what we do, the first thing we do is we love.

- Yeah.

- And so we try as best as possible to just provide them with the security and to restore the faith in human knowing that we really care for them.

- You mentioned some of the things before we took the break was some of the things that your staff does like teaching a child how to ride a bike, what else you had there?

- Yeah, we do, we do. All of it, you know, we, we'll take, we'll have the child and with their first step, we'll sing them ABCs, hold their two-wheel bike to support, you know, as they learn, you know, with the training wheels. We prepare them for graduation. We attend their graduations. We complete science projects. We go beyond just to make sure that everything that we can, we do everything that we can to raise that child in a healthy environment and safe environment as well, and teach them skills so that they could develop, you know, in areas like social, emotional, academic, moral, physical, and to be able to communicate. So we just try to make sure that the child is cared for and has the opportunity to grow and learn and succeed as they move through life. That's our goal when they're with us.

- What I remember a lot when I, back then was that the staff at the Queen Louise Home was very protective of the children and very, they share a lot of love with the children and sometimes, it was hard to remove the children from the Queen Louise Home because they became so acclimated to the home.

- Yeah, it becomes very emotional sometimes. We know they need to be in a home but sometimes, when they've been with us for a while, it's very difficult.

- It's difficult, yeah.

- Yeah.

- Yeah, because they feel safe.

- Uh-hmm.

- Well, tell us a little bit more about the other services that you provide for children. I know you have more than Queen Louise Home so what else is there that's...

- Well, actually, at Queen Louise Home, we have three programs in the campus. One of the programs that we have, we have a cottage that's named Sister Emma Cottage and in that cottage, we provide services to kids who are severely disabled.

- Uh-hmm.

- Most of them are also medically fragile so there's a nurse. We have nurse on staff. We have a contract with a pediatrician so he actually comes to the home at times or if the child needs care at the hospital, he'll meet us there and those kids, I have to tell you, the staff in that cottage, the staff is so attached to those children who are protected, protective of those children that it's just a real special unit of Queen Louise Home. So we, so that cottage is also in the campus of Queen Louise Home. And then, the third program we have on Queen Louise Home is our Early Head Start Program. That program is 80% funded by the federal government. It's based, it's like Head Start. Where it's early head start is based on a lot of research by the federal government and it has performed standards that's mandated exactly how the program is to be run and it's also monitored heavily. And that's, is one of my favorite program because not only does it provide services to the children but to the parents and to encourage the parents to be involved with the child's learning based at school, readiness aspect to that program. I mean, it's just an incredible program and it's an encouragement for the parents to think through their lives and to plan and to even think through the steps to reach to their goals. And that program, we have a center-based where we have 72 kids in our center. We have a center in Queen Louise Home and we have a center at the [inaudible] Road. We also have a pregnant women's program where we provide services from as early as possible in the pregnancy. So we serve a year, 24 women and we just, to help them with prenatal, we do referrals, we help them to think through when the baby is born. We talk about anything that they would need to try to prepare them for that child.

- Yeah, go ahead. I mean, I didn't know about this. What are these women needs? How, you know...

- Well, we recruit them first of all or they're referred. And then, they meet in different places. They do socialization. We actually have an employee who works with these women and so they get together. We bring presenters. We have them do activities, we do a lot of, a lot of activities with them to help prepare them for that child. And the hope is when the child is, well, I guess the early, the research is done earlier, you get involved with that child. So even in the stomach, it's important that they recognize that trauma. The effect that trauma could have on a child's brain development. And so all that research, there are lots of programs to now do the intervention part.

- Okay.

- And so, that's one of those programs and recognizing that the parents are the first teachers and helping parents understand that and teaching them how to do that. We also have 24 home-based spots that we go into the home and provide the same services to the child like the home with the parents being involved.

- So you said your recruit them?

- We do, well, there's a, for the pregnant women, we do. For the children, there's an application process where they fill out the application so it could be through referrals.

- Okay.

- And the application, the information is then, any kind of identifiable information is white out of the application and you have a committee making up, made up of committee members, partners I should say, staff. Also from parent's policy council. And they go through, they have like a score system that they give so if someone is homeless. If a child is homeless. For example, there's a certain score you give to that child so at the end of the day, the hope is that the kids who are most of, in need of the program or the most at risk are the ones that's gonna rise to the top and get into the program. And once you're in, you're in. There is a 10% requirement that we have children with disabilities in the program and so that requirement doesn't require that you'd be low income but that one is on a first come, first serve basis. And we do referrals in the program so if the child is identified as having some kind of disability, once they placed with us, then, we'll refer them to infants and toddlers for services.

- Okay.

- And the services, some of the service that actually provided at the center.

- Wow. Is there a follow-up for the mothers after they have the babies?

- Yes.

- Oh, wow.

- Yes, we have a nurse that call, I think it's within a certain number of days, they have to go and visit with that mom. And the hope is that that child, so the service doesn't stop when she gives birth.

- Quick question, the Early Head Start Program, what ages are we talking about?

- We're talking about birth to three.

- Oh, my goodness.

- And there's a school-readiness aspect of it.

- Okay.

- You know, where the child is prepared, we actually have the child transition into Head Start. You know, and the other aspect that I really love in that program is that the teachers move up with the child so you teach that child about attachment so by the time they leave us, the teacher are devastated because they've been with that child for three years.

- That's right. That's right. That's fantastic.

- It's really great.

- How many students do you have in the Early Head Start Program [inaudible] something about that location.

- Okay. That location serves 72 families. And all in the program, we have a hundred and twenty families but don't forget, we have the pregnant women and then ,we have the home-based program. So the actual center there, you have the ratio of teachers to children is one to four.

- Okay. That's very good.

- At all time. Even if you're going to the bathroom, you cannot have more than one child. You have to get somebody to relieve you to go to the bathroom.

- Right.

- And so, they get a lot of attention, a lot, a lot of attention.

- Sounds like a very strong program.

- It is.

- It is.

- It really is. I just love that program.

- Now, of course, your services doesn't end with children. We can, we can go on about care for adults and seniors.

- Sure.

- What's, what does LSS or Lutheran Social Services do in that regard?

- Okay. Well, we have, where we provide services to seniors as well as adults with disabilities. So our senior housing, a matter of fact, we are celebrating tonight along with half-an-hour Christmas celebration, 30 years of Flamboyant Gardens, serving the community. Flamboyant Gardens was our first housing projects and if you haven't seen that project, please go take a look. It's by Barren Spot, it's a beautiful facility. We have, we house 56 apartments at the facility. We just, a matter of fact, just recently did upgrade to that facility where we double the size of the community room. We air-conditioned the family room, we double the size of the office. We brought, you'll be happy to hear that, Amelia. We brought our walkways to ADA compliant because, you know, those things change all the time. The apartments, we operate the same way.

- That's great.

- And so the facility looks wonderful, one of the things that I really love about it, that's my [inaudible] is that we were able to change the wiring and fencing to iron picket fencing and I think it just make such a difference. That's all I brag about, the fences. So the program, we have low income seniors. We have 56 apartment like I said and we know that, for the lack of assisted living facilities in the Virgin Islands that we can put a senior out if they can live independently, so we've been forced to and happy to do so, find ways to provide support to the seniors as they age in place.

- Okay. Well, we're gonna go a little bit more into that because I always get a little confused about the names of these places. So many trees and shrubs and so we could distinguish. We're gonna take a little break and we'll be right back. We're back. You're listening to Ability Radio, You and Your Life. This program is sponsored by the Disability Rights Center of the Virgin Islands and it's federal partners. Joined today by Iris Bermudez, my co-host. And our special guest today is Junia John Straker, Executive Director of Lutheran Social Services of the Virgin Islands. Junia, before we had our last break, we were talking about the care that LSS provides for seniors, and persons with disabilities, and you were giving us your prideful remarks about the Flamboyant, let's hear more about that, please.

- So like I said, our senior housing was our first housing community that was constructed back, it was like 1986. All our housing and communities, now we have quite a few, hopefully I'll have the opportunity to go through all of them. As subsidized by the federal government, so the rent is subsidized, so if you have an income after medical expenses, you pay 30% and there is an income limit on, to be able to, the house that pays for a very low income. And at Flamboyant, we have also adults with physical disabilities. We have 10% of the individuals are adults with disability, so we have ADA units like I mentioned before. So, what we've had to do, what we do is, the federal government considers themselves landlords. So for as far as providing services and some other services that we provide to the seniors, we have a bus that we, you know, transport them to doctor's appointment, to activities, shopping, and we also have individuals

who go with them, so we were fortunate to be able to, and was granted, the first year the grant was out, we're able to apply for a miracle grant. And I'm sure your familiar with AmeriCorps, it started on the, President Clinton. So LSS, applied to the Corporation of National Community Service and we currently have 20 positions of individual volunteers that we use throughout the agency, put here on Saint Thomas that we do have and usually about programs in Saint Thomas, so we have four places that the Flamboyant, so they provide, they may do light housekeeping, like I said activities, physical activities, they check on, every morning, every afternoon for their need, they check on the residents to make sure that everything's okay. They may do also, like, meals, like, breakfast, and help them with their laundries, so there are series of services that we provide to the seniors to help them, and the adults with physical abilities at Flamboyant Gardens. And some are those same services are provided throughout the, our housing community. They are independently [inaudible] but facilities of a housing, apartments. What we recognized that our residents need help. And so we have really fund raised, and to try to provide some other services to help them maintain the independence.

- Is it one person to a unit, can there be a spouse?

- Yes, we, couples, we have up to two, it could be a grandmother, you have to be 62 and above, it could be a grandmother and a child.

- Okay.

- We had a situation where we had a senior who had an adult disabled child, and when she passed away the child had, well at that time was senior, she was 62. So that's, she had been there for years and that's where, that's home. So we're able to keep her, so we provide the service for her. So she's been in the, and she has a lot of family support as well, but she's been in the community for years, a matter of fact, she's gonna be honored tonight.

- Oh.

- And, so it's really a family and you, it's great to see how they look out for each other. And those who are, who has physical disabilities are also really attached to the seniors and it's really great to see how defensive and how protective they are of the, of the seniors.

- I saw that when we did the training not too long ago with Dr. Williams.

- Uh-hmm.

- I saw how there was one that was wheelchair bound.

- Uh-hmm.

- And he was just being protected by this one senior on this, on the right, and another senior on the left, and they we're just helping him out with everything.

- Yeah.

- I saw that. So it's good to see.

- And there's a great support coming, lots of good support coming from the community as well, you know. Years ago when we had a vibrant community, you had masseuse coming in, you had, I mean, they had all sorts of people, you know, coming in and doing activities with the seniors, it's not as vibrant as before but it still have, you know. The good thing about being, you know, in this side of the world I should say, is that you see what people go through and what the challenges are, but you also get to see human at their best. You know, you get to see how wonderful human beings are, how giving, not just individuals but also the business community and different agencies as well that we work back and forth with. So it's really, it's really, this view that I have, it has been really life changing for me.

- Tell us about all the housing programs that's here, and I know it's not just Saint Croix, you also extend to the Saint Thomas community as well.

- Uh-hmm.

- Okay. So, I'm gonna work my way from Flamboyant to Frederiksted, we have on Hospital Street, what we call Danish Garden. It's a three-storey building that was a former Queen Louise Home for Children.

- Okay.

- That building was the last building that Queen Louise Home was, before moving to the site that they at right now. And so we have been able, we were able to obtain a grant through HUD. And to renovate that building, so we have our main office to the basement or ground floor of that building, and then we have seven apartments which is six single bedrooms and one double, well two bedroom apartments above where we provide, again subsidized housing for people with disabilities, and the same type of services we provide to the seniors, we pretty much provide to these individuals.

- Uh-hmm.

- And many of them are people with mental illness. We do not try to identify the disability as long as a doctor has certified that this person has a disability then they're qualified to be housed as long as they meet the requirements of HUD.

- Okay.

- Then, going on Prince Street, we have an entire block almost, and the property is actually owned by the VI government, and we have, like, a 99 year lease, I don't know how many years we have left on that. Well, we have again, through, no HUD, sorry, that one is a HUD project, we have Prince Street residence. And we called, the program itself Ginger Thomas residence, and that program is a group home for adults with disabilities, adults who are incapable of living independently. All the residents are developmentally delayed. That's a requirement to live in that group home you have to have a, your primary diagnosis has to be developmental.

- Where is that again?

- It's on Prince Street.

- Hmm.

- Yeah, it's on Prince Street.

- We'll take you there one day.

- And that's around 62, around 62 Prince Street...

- Okay.

- Just before you get to, like, Lagoon or Saint Patrick's.

- Oh, yes, yes.

- Yeah, okay. So it's the one with a picket fence, the building, and so we provide 24-hour care for those individual. We have a nurse also because many of the individual's house there are also medically fragile, so we have a nurse, and staff, and we have, you know, we do everything from them, from recreation to whatever their needs are, physical therapy, whatever that need is that's what we meet. And it's...

- Okay. Well, we're gonna take another break and we're gonna still go through a list, you have quite an extensive list. All right we'll be back. Hello, we're back. You're listening to Ability Radio, You and Your Life. I'm your co-host, Amelia Headley LaMont, joined by Iris Bermudez and we are joined this morning by Junia John Straker, who's the Executive Director of Lutheran's Social Services of the Virgin Islands. Junia, we are learning a lot about the history of Lutheran Social Services. The incredible amount of services that you provide to children, infants, and families, expectant mothers, I, I'm just in awe of the work that your organization is doing. And we were talking about care for adults and seniors, and specifically housing assistance. Can you give us more of a list and we were going through Frederiksted, right?

- Yes, yes.

- Okay.

- So we left, the last, before the break I told you about Prince Street residence, what we called Ginger Thomas and that we service individuals whose severely disabled and the disability must, the primary one must be developmental. And when I tell you a little story about most of the residents there are Saint Thomians and the reason they're Saint Thomians was because they came from a group home, Ginger Thomas originally was in Saint Thomas.

- Oh.

- And when Hurricane Marilyn hit, it destroyed the facility there and it needed to be rebuilt. So it took a few years to rebuild the facility. In the meantime, the residents had made friends, they had, those who were poor had jobs, and we had gotten so attached to them that it didn't make sense to relocate them back to Saint Thomas, and so we called it Ginger Thomas where they are originated from Saint Thomas, so many of them are from Saint Thomas. The next facility is Genip Gardens. So, we have a lot of gardens, Genip Gardens. It's a rural development facility. It's funded facility. This is our only rural development funded facility. Now, that one is a little different and that you can house low income seniors or low income adults with disabilities, no matter what their disabilities are. We, well, there is an opportunity to build another one of those facility because what they learned from having those facilities is that adult, I mean, seniors are seniors and young people are young people whether disabled or not. So, the marriage between the seniors and the disabled come, young disabled people aren't the best, you know, the seniors want quiet, the younger ones party, you know, whether they're disabled or not.

- Uh-hmm.

- Although it works pretty well at our facility. We have the combination of those two and that's the only project we have besides Flamboyant has, like I say five with physical disabilities and that project is beautiful. We also provide security seven days a week because, you know, it could be really challenging having those facilities in town. And since this is downtown projects and we do have security every night from 9:00 to 5:00 or from 10:00 to 6:00 depending on what we feel is best. And so, if you have a chance to visit, that's really a nice facility.

- And where is that? In Frederiksted?

- That's in Frederiksted, right next to Prince Street. We have almost the entire block.

- They have the whole, the whole, yeah the whole stretch.

- Yes. Yes. And our last facility on Saint Croix is on King Street. It's a yellow building right across from the, right next to the EDA Office, so right across from Kentucky Fried Chicken and that facility again house individual with disabilities and it doesn't matter what the disabilities are. And again, subsidized by HUD and that's also a really nice facility which has a lot of renovation work on the facility and it was interesting to see the conversation on Facebook regarding the facility "It's about time the government did

something with this facility." "What is that? Is that a condominium? I want the one, you know, the one on the very top." So, it's really a nice facility. We have...

- It's beautiful.

- Yeah.

- It's beautiful.

- We have twelve one-bedroom apartments and two really large two-bedroom apartments at that facility. So, we're very proud of all our facilities as a matter of fact. So, you'll be happy to know that these are all of our facilities we have on Saint Croix but we do have facilities on Saint Thomas. The oldest of the two is Ebenezer Gardens apartment. It's right across from [inaudible] or Department of Human Services. In that facility, we house 42 seniors, only seniors, low-income seniors and again we provide some of the same services that we do on Saint Croix to the seniors there. And lastly, we have what we call Yellow Cedar and that's where the Ginger Thomas folks work prior to Marilyn and there we have again, twelve, six women, six men who are developmentally disabled. They may have other disabilities but the primary diagnosis has to be developmental. At that facility however, we have the higher function and we try to separate the higher versus the lower function. And so, at that facility, we do a lot of trainings. We try to make sure that if those who can work, are working, so half of them do have employment. And they do a lot of activities. And so, they are the higher functioning. So, the services we provide for them are more of a teaching, independence, self-care than the one on Saint Croix. And so, those are our facilities.

- That's excellent. I mean, just a little story. I remember visiting Bougainvillea Gardens and Junia was with me and I'll never forget one of the residence was giving you advise about what color to paint the hallways because it showed to me ownership, you know.

- Yeah.

- And he thought about the shade of whatever.

- Yes, yes, yes, yes.

- That was a really nice thing to see. You know, because that's home.

- Comfortable.

- Yeah, yeah.

- Very comfortable.

- And lastly, I want to talk a little bit about our Disaster Relief Program. Although, we have not actively done any disaster relief. We do maintain relationship with the Lutheran Disaster Response Program nationally, put on by the ELCA. I don't know if you recall during, right after Hugo and again Marilyn, that is, we did a lot of disaster work. There's, the same that the Lutherans are the left, last to go. We really hang in there until, you know, the community is back on its feet. And so, although we haven't had, thank God, any disasters, we are constantly, we go to meetings. We make sure that we maintain that relationship so that should something happen here that we can call in the Lutheran Disaster Response Program and bring them to help us and we don't just help Lutherans, we help anyone in need. And we had a real robust program after Hugo where even after we had completed the program as it, in regards to response, we were helping low-income seniors, single moms, as well as people with disabilities by going to their home and reinforcing their roofs. Remember?

- I remember that.

- And then you hold, and we went thinking that's what we're gonna do and ended up doing bathrooms and just what couldn't believe that the conditions that some of these individuals were living in, so we end up doing a lot of renovations to a lot of homes here in the Virgin Islands.

- Wow. Again, we're learning quite a bit from Junia Straker, who's the Executive Director of Lutheran Social Services. We are going to take a quick break and then we will wrap up in the next little while. Well, we're coming to the conclusion of this day's show. You've been listening to Ability Radio, You and Your Life. Our special guest this morning was Junia John Straker, Executive Director of Lutheran Social Services. Let me again remind to our listening audience that if you've missed anything in today's broadcast, you can certainly check our website which is drcvi.org and you could tune in to this show and many other shows that we've done since last year. Iris, you had a question for our guest, right?

- Yes, actually, I have two questions and one is with all these services that Lutheran Social Services provides, how is your manpower? I mean, it takes a lot of people to do all the stuff that you guys are doing.

- Yes. We actually have wonderful staff and AmeriCorps members. We have part-time, full-time staff, and AmeriCorps members of, totaling like a hundred and sixty, a hundred and sixty-four on both islands. Our staff, particularly our directors, work some really intense hours. And so, we have some real dedicated individuals, like myself who came in and you just fall in love with the residence, so, it's no longer a job.

- Right.

- You know, it's a mission, it's something that you have to do. And then we have the support of the community. Like I said, it's just amazing how giving people are. And so, we have a lot of support from individuals, from agencies, from groups, from everybody that the corporate citizens. So, we really, it's more of a community effort. We couldn't do this alone. And we have contracts, I'll say 50%, maybe 60% of our funding is federal. And we have a contract with the government for the group homes that, including Queen Louise Home but the contract only provides for Queen Louise Home maybe 70% of the cost and we have to fundraise. And so, the only way we're able to do this is because of all these foundations who are willing to support the cause and the, our businesses and individuals. And so, together, the community, it's a community affair.

- And this really exemplifies partnership at its best.

- Yes.

- In order for you to take care of all these different situations that, or all these different services that you provide. Now, if somebody from the Virgin Islands wanted to become an AmeriCorps volunteer, how would they do that from here if that's possible?

- Right. There is an application process where you go to international, I'm sorry, let me get the name, the corporation for national and community service and there's an application process that takes place or you can call our office actually and we can guide you and help you with that. And our number is 340-772-4099 and there's an interview and selection process. And with the AmeriCorps members, they get a stipend of, don't quote me on that somewhere around 12,500 per year. You have, the individual is covered with health insurance and you also, for your first two years of service will get an award that you can, an educational award that you could use to go to college or you can use it to pay off a student loan that you have or you can, now they have it where if you are senior, you could pass on to your grandchild or to your child.

- Really?

- So, it's really, a really great way to give back to the community, it was the actual purpose of that AmeriCorps program.

- Interesting.

- Well, we've learned a lot today. And Junia John Straker, I'd like to thank you for your time and for this incredible history on the work that you're doing. The work that Lutheran Social Services is doing in this community is commendable.

- It's commendable.

- Absolutely commendable. So, thank you listening audience. We'd like to again invite you for next week. What do we have next week, Iris? Do you know?

- I, I don't remember.

- Okay, that's fine. It's still early. But in any event, thank you so much for listening. You're listening to Ability Radio, You and Your Life. Have a good Saturday.

- Thank you.