

>> ...have mothers.

We got to make this land a better land than the world in which we live.

>> Good morning, Virgin Islands. This is "Ability Radio -- You and Your Life."

I'm here, Archie Jennings, with Julien Henley.

Good morning, partner in crime.

>> Good morning, Archie.

Good morning.

>> And we are going to do a different format.

We're waiting for our co-partners and host on St. Croix to join us, but this is a year in wrap-up, a reflection of what the Disability Rights Center is all about as well as to give you updates on certain areas that we're working on.

And, for me, looking back at where we were at the beginning of 2018 as at the end of 2018, it's been a year of changes, a year of recovery, and a year of hope.

>> Oh, yeah.

We've actually tackled a lot of great guests, and it's good when we reflect back and remember all the great things that we've shared with the public, you know, whether it was hurricane recovery, whether it was health and wellness, and a variety of topics, park and VIPD and other opportunities that we've seen over the years, and to say that, in 2018, we had them in as guests, Archie.

>> Yes, we had different folks from different agencies.

One of the new ones that we had a lot of interaction with has been FEMA.

So, again, it was part of the disaster-recovery and disaster-preparedness program sort of interweaved into our regular work through the agency.

And I think one of the things that you brought up as the idea for this show was, who is Disability Rights Center?

>> Right, you know, and to see exactly the population that we're actually responsible to serve, which is the disabled population in a territory, and, you know, there is a Disability Rights Center in all states and territories, and we're fortunate to be the ones here in St. Thomas, in the Virgin Islands.

>> In the Virgin Islands. That's true.

And to give a little background before our other partners join us is that the Disability Rights Program is really what's called, under the law, a protection-and-advocacy agency.

It was sparked for these type of agencies to come into an existence because of mistreatment and abuse of persons with developmental disabilities in various institutions across the United States, and, in particular, one program in New York state got highlighted in a national program under Geraldo Rivera.

With that program or national attention, laws were brought forth to create the protection and advocacy of developmental disabilities program, and that was the birth of what's called the P&A system, protection-and-advocacy system, which carried that name for a number of years until around 2005, where most of the agencies adopted a name called Disability Rights within their state -- we're called the Disability Rights Center of the Virgin Islands.

But it's all about protection and advocacy for various persons

with disabilities, be it physical, mental, and the programs provide a variety of services, be they small like we are, like we are, or large, like California and Texas.

So therefore, we're gonna discuss some of those things that we do in response to providing those services under that particular law and some of the things that you as an advocate with our program perform.

>> Right.

You know, and what was great is, sometimes you do things in hindsight.

I mean, couple of months before the hurricane, you made contact with some FEMA officials, and you see right after the storm they were there.

You were able to reconnect, and our assistance changed roles overnight.

I mean, they were hoping to, you know, get in touch with the Disability Rights Center, and you ran into them.

And, hopefully, you know, after that, it was where we started to say, "Okay, we can start working out of the

Disability Rights Center and register individuals with disabilities at the center. All your communications with the deaf-and-hard-of-hearing community, all your meetings, Archie, and just a lot of work that you put in prior right after Irma and way before Maria, Archie.

>> Well, that's true.

And that was the result of the network, 'cause, essentially, as part of the network, all we had to do was make a call, and they put us in touch with a FEMA representative.

And behind -- so as of probably September 7th or 8th of that same week, one of the first

responders was looking for us because that was a contact made right prior to the hurricanes, or, you know, as the hurricanes went down, and so, therefore, there was at least a base of operation and a connection with community is what they were looking for.

You know, unfortunately, most businesses, most things were closed up, and so first responders, be it Red Cross or FEMA, getting on island, were looking for agencies that were already known to them and the P&A system because, mainly because of Katrina, was a known entity 'cause of the P&A in Louisiana worked closely in the aftermath of Katrina at reestablishing various programs there for persons with disabilities.

So although we thought we were isolated, there were, you know, people, there's programs that were to be set in place, and a lot of it was tailored because of Katrina and the New Orleans situation.

>> Yeah, when you look at the disability-integrated team from FEMA, you know, this was a new program that started, like you said, after Katrina, but it really made a difference where they had a unit just there to deal with and address individuals with disabilities. They had sign-language interpreters.

They had individuals that was management to get out in the field, and really not just to say, "Okay, you didn't lose your house," or, "You lost your house," but what durable medical supplies you needed.

And all the different assistance that they brought aboard as people, as individuals registered for the FEMA assistance, they were able to

interview with an integrated person, who, you know found out a whole lot more that they might need that was damaged from the storm.

>> Well, that's true.

I mean, having been here from Maryland, one of the greatest things was that they already had people lined up.

Just like for the deaf and hard of hearing, they brought down interpreters, American-sign-language interpreters as well as, when it came to equipment, they had contact with organizations of the United States that said, "Oh, this is what you need," or, "We can get this to you," and partnered -- your group -- I was gone for part of the time, but partnered with Red Cross to bring in many generators so that persons who needed to keep their insulin cool would have those types of assistance immediately. There was no need -- you know, so their needs were tried to be identified and trying to match those needs with people who had those requests out there, and making connects was really -- and the networking was fabulous between VITEMA, Red Cross, you know, and FEMA to try to address the people's needs.

>> You know, Archie, talking about some of these things really brings back some chills to see where we were and where we are now.

And still underground, there is that integrated team that will be putting in a new focus, and while they left and put in place permanent FEMA-integrated team members, local hires, that will continue this mantle as we move forward.

It was great and, you know, through that FEMA process, where we give assistance over Disability Rights Center for the

SNAP program, where a lot of individuals needed that assistance to get SNAP, they needed assistance to get, you know, like I mentioned, the durable medical supplies. They needed assistance from the EPAP program, because we don't realize that most of our individuals that live on the island, who work in the private sector, their employment either went down or went out of business.

And because of that, you know, they've had no insurance to get medication.

>> Right.

>> So the EPAP program was great, because then they were able to come in as the federal program -- as soon as they got pharmacies and stuff signed up, that they were able to then provide citizens, once you could prove that you had no insurance at all, that they were able to give some assistance to these individuals.

>> All righty, well, again, we're waiting for our partners in St. Croix to join us, and at this point, we're gonna take a small break.

And, again, recapping the year 2018 as it relates to the disability community through Disability Rights Center of the Virgin Islands.

>> We'll see you back in a moment.

>> ...better man with the kindness that we give.

>> I know we can make it.

>> I know that we can.

>> I know darn well we can work it out.

Oh, yes, we can.

I know we can can.

Yes, we can can.

Why can't we?

If we wanna, yes, we can can.

>> I know we can make it work.

I know we can make it if we try.

>> Oh, yes, we can.
I know we can can.
Yes, we can.
>> Great gosh almighty.
>> Oh, yes, we can.
I know we can.
...and try to find peace within
without stepping on one another.
And do respect the women of the
world.
Remember you all have mothers.
We got to make this land --
>> Good morning, good morning.
You are listening to
"Ability Radio."
This program is brought to you
by the Disability Rights Center
of the Virgin Islands.
Hi.
My name is
Amelia Headley LaMont.
I am the Executive Director of
the Disability Rights Center.
This morning, I am joined by my
illustrious staff.
To my right is our advocate,
Iris Bermudez.
Iris, good morning.
>> Good morning, good morning.
>> And in St. Thomas -- hello,
St. Thomas -- we are joined by
our managing attorney, attorney
Archie Jennings.
Archie, can you hear me.
Maybe not.
[Chuckling] Okay.
And we are also joined by
Mr. Julien Henley, who is also
an advocate, our newest, I
should say, colleague in the
disability-rights advocacy
world.
So, Julien Henley will also be
participating in this morning's
program.
What we're going to focus on
today is pretty much a review of
this past year.
We've done, I learned this
morning, approximately 49
broadcasts, which I'm very happy
to hear about.
Also wanted to let our listening
audience know just a little bit

about what the Disability Rights Center is. It's referred to as a protection-and-advocacy organization.

Back in 1975, the Congress of the United States brought fourth a law that created what we now refer to as a P&A, which stands for protection-advocacy system. And the purpose of a protection-advocacy organization is to advance the rights of persons with disabilities who, at least many years past, were not in a position to advocate for themselves.

That's no longer the case. The P&A system started from a disaster, a scandal that occurred in Staten Island at a Willowbrook institution that housed over 3,000 people with a variety of developmental and other disabilities, and they were treated in extreme inhumane conditions.

Geraldo Rivera was the reporter at the time, and there was such a human cry from that scandal -- people were living in their own feces, were not fed, no medical attention, and so it was determined by then-Senator Jacob Javits that there needs to be an entity in place that advocates for individuals who are institutionalized and who are severely abused and neglected.

Another point I wanted to make is, well, what do we mean when we talk about a disability? And we really focus on what's put out.

It's not a medical definition for our purposes. It's a legal definition brought by the Americans with Disabilities Act. And the Americans with Disabilities Act defines a person with a disability as a person who has a physical or

mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities.

So our office, we cover a number of areas.

Our priorities consists of mental-health advocacy, discrimination rights, arguing for better educational services for children with disabilities, we do a lot of public education and communication, abuse and neglect, which is our original area of focus, as well collaborating with other community organizations.

So, Iris, let me turn the floor to you, and you give us a summary as to what we tried to accomplish this year.

>> The floor.

Got it. [Chuckles]

Good morning, Virgin Islands, and what we want to share with you was that throughout 2018, "Ability Ready -- You and Your Life" provided a lot of information and awareness of services provided to residents of the US Virgin Islands. We shared information related to pre-hurricane preparation, post-hurricane recovery, many topics on health and wellness, on the Virgin Islands Disability Network, so people that we work with to bring out the information on disability.

We even included last year -- this year on Virgin Islands Elections Systems to bring out policies and information including voters rights and information on various government and other private entities that provide local services.

Our goal was to make sure that you understood what your rights were, what the programs and services are available in our community.

In all, like Amelia said a little while ago, we

broadcasted approximately 49 shows to our listening audience, some of which we will summarize and share with you.

>> Okay, want to just find out. Archie, are you there? Are you joining us this morning?

>> We are here.

>> Yay. Okay.

>> Hello.

>> Well, Iris is gonna sum up a little bit, and then we're gonna call on you to give us a little bit more information about your post-disaster work.

>> Well, some of the themes that we did this year were on -- with FEMA, VITEMA, health and wellness, and mental health, our collaboration with partners, transportation, disabled parking laws, and collaboration with our other private entities.

So to give you a little synopsis of some of the shows that we have, I'm gonna turn it over to St. Thomas so they could talk to you about what they did with FEMA and VITEMA that was really, really helpful, especially after the hurricane.

Take it away, St. Thomas.

>> Well, one of the things that we did while waiting for you to be connected was we covered the interaction with FEMA and all that happened, you know, early on right after IRMA hit.

And so we were able to discuss some of those topics, Archie, and, you know, what we probably would be going to now is health and wellness, seeing that we covered -- but one of the things that we didn't mention, Archie, was VITEMA and their interaction with the

Disability Rights Center as to, you know, coming and doing a -- you know, stepping into one of our meetings and then joining us to share with the public on, you know, what it is about tsunamis and other things that

they cover.

>> Well, again, that was more disaster preparedness.

That was after the immediate needs were met after the first responders and starting to go into recovery.

We, probably around the spring, started doing disaster-preparedness meetings and training.

As Amelia had mentioned, we tried to do a lot, a lot of training.

We're a small agency, so we're trying to spread the word and let people know what their rights are, and we promote advocacy.

We especially promote self-advocacy to ad-- can advocate on behalf of persons with disabilities, such the VI deaf-and-hard-of-hearing group, NAMI, National Alliance for the Mentally Ill, and so certain collaborations were sponsored and, you know, basically supported these organizations, and we still work with a lot of organizations and collaborate not only with other nonprofits and non-governmental agencies, but even just, like, during the storm, we collaborated with the housing.

>> Yes.

>> I think you reached out to housing to get some of the list of persons who were isolated, right?

>> Oh, yeah, that really made a difference, and one of the things that in -- every bad thing to become a good thing, because in 2018, we have a bill now where individuals in a territory can actually register and give their information so if there is another disaster and you need assistance where you're isolated, that they could actually locate the individuals who are seniors or individuals

with disabilities in the territory.

>> Right.

And they had, also, a disaster legal program going on that we also partner with the VI legal services as well as other groups who basically were just trying to reconnect with what is going on.

Our partners under the law that we work with, as you said, University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities and the VIDC council, were also a part of the rolling into disaster preparedness.

And so, in that area, we are -- and we still are doing a lot of training and preparation for, which we must do on a continual basis.

I'm sure, Amelia, on St. Croix, they're just trying to match the long-term recovery groups I guess for all three islands.

Is that not correct?

>> That's my understanding.

Yes, absolutely, yeah.

>> Okay.

And that's something that's needed.

So there's a lot of collaboration that, at the time, when services are needed, that people know where to go, what's gonna happen beforehand, and, hopefully -- that's why I said the "hope" part, is that learning from the past as we go into the future, taking that information and coordinating that information so those aspects and those gaps won't be repeated again that had occurred before.

Anything on health and wellness that anybody wants to speak about?

>> Yeah, I'll defer to Iris, whose expertise is in that regard.

>> Well, one of the things that we did last year -- I mean this

year.

I keep saying "last year."

I don't know why.

[Chuckles]

>> Not yet.

>> Maybe I want the year to end real fast.

Well, one of the things we did do was we interviewed I think twice the director of the Medicaid program, and we learned that the income levels for eligibility for this program have increased substantially that would make other residents of the Virgin Islands eligible for this program up to and including 2019 when that pack of money goes away.

So, again, we're encouraging now the residents of the Virgin Islands who may be eligible for Medicaid, please apply.

Or if you go to the hospital in an emergency, they have presumptive eligibility.

You probably heard our PSAs throughout the year, especially after meeting with the director of Medicaid, to assist them in getting the word out that you should apply even if you're not found eligible, but there is a window of opportunity, especially for parents of young children.

We talk about preventive services.

They have the EPSDT program, Early Periodic Screening Treatment program, and this is one of the things that I worked with a lot when I was with Medicare and Medicaid, and that was a preventive effort that both programs are making to make sure that we catch whatever disease or whatever illness you may have, and we nick in the bud.

Maybe we can't nick it in the bud, but at least we know something's there, and we're

going to treat you with it or for it.

And this is one of the things that we found so fascinating about 2018, and that was the collaboration between the Disability Rights Center and Medicaid, which was something phenomenal, and we're going to continue doing it until hopefully they reach their goal of having, you know, at least, what is it, 50,000?

>> Yeah, it's our understanding that, right now, more or less, we were told that they've enrolled 28,300 persons for the Medicaid program.

>> Program, yes.

>> Their immediate goal -- I mean, short-term goal, let's say to March, will be 35,000, but it's felt that there may be even arguably more than that that could benefit from this expansion.

So it's an exciting opportunity for us, and this is -- I can't imagine a better time to take advantage of this type of opportunity than now.

>> Exactly, before it goes away.

>> Right, right.

>> And the other thing that we did under the health-and-wellness piece was Zika.

We had a small grant, where we tried to advise the community about the risks and consequences of the Zika virus.

It kind of morphed into a wellness campaign because the federal government didn't want people totally freaking out. You know, we just got over two hurricanes, so now we have to worry about, you know, the flight of the mosquito.

>> The mosquito.

>> So it was viewed -- it was rebranded as a wellness campaign, and so one of the things that we did in-house was

send out postcards, which is not something I enjoyed doing. It was quite an undertaking. But we sent out -- we specifically targeted some communities and mailed out 5,000 postcards promoting wellness. And so I think it worked pretty much hand-in-hand with the Medicaid expansion...

>> Exactly.

>> ...you know, the audiences that we were trying to reach to promote taking better care of ourselves.

So that's a timeless concept. So that's something we tried to accomplish under our 2018 mandates.

What else we have that we've done?

>> Well, we've reached -- we've really collaborated with a lot of our disability-network partners, and, like, namely, like, Archie already talked about, the Virgin Islands Center for Disability, the UVI Department of Education and Department of Human Services, Head Start Centers, and the Virgin Islands Parents for Autistic Children, which was really impactful.

They're a dynamic group, so we're suggesting that, you know, parents of children with autism really try to reach out to them and be part of what they're doing to inform the community about autism.

And one of the things that we did that was really, really good was when Julien went out and started gathering a lot of information about transportation, especially with respect to disability parking laws and requirements.

So we're gonna turn it over to Julien now.

>> Well, that was really an exciting time, especially seeing that I'm an individual who

actually needs to be able to park in a disabled parking spot, and that education, I think, really helped, because a lot of people -- individuals feel, "Oh, you have disabled parking spots because it needs to be this close because you can't traverse a longer distance, but it's mainly the safety and the size of the parking spot that we were able to educate the public on, because you need that space when you park to be able to get out of your vehicle and assemble your disable -- your mobility device, and then to be able to transfer out of your vehicle onto that device.

So we were able to really talk a lot about that, but then the enforcement part was really where we had VIPD in one of our shows to talk about the lack of enforcement on individuals who are parking in those disabled spots.

So that went over really well, and we educated the public on a lot of different things.

We talked a lot about travel, and, you know, the importance of having a --

Think this happened in 2017, but it rolled out in 2018, where we advocated and did speak with American Airlines and others, and they were able to bring in some vans with lifts, scissors lifts, that was able to get people a little safer onto the planes but still not as faith as the jet-bridge project.

And we continue to be, you know, advocating or looking at when we will have that service of having jet bridges down at the airport. So that was great for us, you know?

>> Right.

We were asking the VI Port Authority, "If you're gonna rebuild, rebuild stronger and safer."

>> Mm-hmm.

>> And what could be safer for persons with disabilities as try to navigate onto and off the plane rather than go down on the tarmac.

And somebody was complaining just yesterday they got left on a plane this past week.

>> Oh, gosh.

>> But it's one of those things that we are promoting it and we got a petition out, and we're still promoting that petition, that people should sign up and voice their opinion of the government including jet bridges as they rebuild the airport.

>> And that's what it was actually intended.

I know the one in St. Thomas had the dual levels, and then after a while they rented out to the government.

So that went away.

So, like we discussed earlier, that this time also brought some good.

So now that they evacuated the whole upstairs now, hopefully, we can --

>> Yeah, out of chaos comes order.

[Laughter]

>> We should hope.

>> We should hope.

And one of the things that, also, as we talk about the parking issue and going before the legislature on behalf of your state rehab council chairperson as the VI deaf and hard of hearing also went to get these placards for the deaf and hard of hearing to interact with the police department, because, again, it's all about being in the community and being sensitive to one another, being considerate of one another, and these placards would help.

And the persons from the deaf and hard of hearing testified before the legislature and let

their thoughts be known.
So, again, it's all about making
sure that totally integrated
into community, that persons
with disabilities can
self-advocate as well as through
their organizations and
participate fully in the
Democratic process.

That's what I was always taught,
and it's hard to be a Democratic
society, but it's one of those
things.

We might really appreciate, if
we watch on a national level,
why it's so important...

>> Right.

>> ...to remain a Democratic
society.

Because instead of somebody
picking and choosing what you
are able to receive or get back
from the government, it's
somebody dictating it rather
than you having a choice about
it.

So enough for my political spiel
for this morning.

[Laughter]

>> And, you know, when you look
at this small organization, and
when you look at the list of
things that we have done in
2018, Amelia, it's really -- you
know, it's really amazing to see
what all we accomplished in
2018.

>> That's because I have such an
awesome group of people to work
with, truly.

And this is not a disingenuous
love fest.

This is a genuine expression of
appreciation for, you know,
getting up in the morning and
saying, "Wow, let's see what
we're gonna tackle today."

[Laughter]

It's a collaborative effort, and
I'm very proud of all of you,
truly.

>> Yeah, and some of it comes
unexpected, too...

>> Right.

>> ...what we got to tackle.
>> I was told by a former colleague of mine that whenever I come out of the office and say, "Oh, I was thinking," everyone kind of braces themselves for the next...
[Laughter]
The next legal tsunami.
>> "What are we getting into now?"
>> Right. Exactly.
"What's coming up next?"
I mean, one thing I did neglect to mention is that, you know, out of -- the creation of the protection-advocacy system came as a result as a scandal having to do with people in residential facilities or institutions who were being abused and neglected, and that responsibility still resides within our network. So, periodically, our staff would go into facilities here in the territory, the Youth Rehabilitation Center, the Eldra Schulerbrandt center, and just go and see how people who live there are treated, whether there are any instances of abuse or neglect. And so that's a function that resides with us legally, and we find that whenever an administration change, we usually have to inform the new, you know, director or supervisor of an entity that that is our function, that is our core function, and we have been doing this for the past -- actually, last year, we visited I know, oof, maybe -- what was it?
>> I counted.
It was 26 different facilities.
>> Right, exactly.
And so that's something that we are legally mandated to do every year.
So that's part of our priorities for any given year, and that's something that's uniquely our responsibility.

>> Yeah, and that's our watchdog aspect, and so, again, like Amelia underscored, this is a very solemn aspect of what we do, is that reporting abuse and neglect.

So if you have any issues, relatives, or persons, you contact

Disability Rights Center -- 772-1200, 776-4303 -- to report it, because they have no voice if somebody doesn't speak up on behalf of those persons who are in facilities and who are being abused and neglected.

>> Right.

>> And that's one of the great things when you look at, once again, what we touch on, is that we're able to, from this small agency, be able to really touch lives that's being affected, and sometimes they don't even have a voice.

Sometimes, because of abuse, they don't even know that they should have a right to not be put in situations like that because they're vulnerable.

So, you know, here we go into 2019.

>> Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

[Laughter]

>> More of, you know, keeping our eyes out and looking at ways that we could improve services and empowering individuals with disabilities as we close out 2018.

>> And since 2003, our office had brought a lawsuit having to do with the state of our mental-health service system. Archie, I want to defer to you on that, if you can, you know, elaborate and say where we've been and where we are now.

>> Oh, oh, okay.

[Laughter]

It's been a long road.

>> It has.

>> Up and down.

>> Round and round.

>> And I think this is, what, our third administration we're probably going through in regard to it.

We do have a consent decree, and out of that consent decree in 2011 was the drafting and signing of a strategic plan in regard to developing a system of mental-health services.

So you can have from -- in working with the departments thus far, services and various locations and trying to build capacity within the Virgin Islands.

And I don't know if a lot of people saw some of the complaints from prisoners off-island and persons being placed off-island, but we're trying to cha-- we're spending tons of money off -- for off-island services, trying to turn that back homeward in compliance with what's called the homestead provisions in a lot of the laws where their services are to be delivered in the community in which the person resides or had resided. My understanding that the new prison bill on a federal side has that same mandate now. I haven't really seen the language.

I heard that over the news. So there's this making sure that where you have issues, be it because of mental-health issues, you receive the services in your home community, not somewhere where the family can't visit you, you can't visit on the holidays and become more isolated and estranged from your place of birth and place of residency.

So with that in mind, with the assistance of the federal government after the hurricane, there was an approach for a coalition, a behavior-health coalition, and a re-looking at

those services, and I think in trying to tap the whole community, there's been a development of directory, which has been a long time being updated of mental-health providers.

My understanding, and I've worked it out with NAMI, is gonna -- to maintain that directory that was developed with the help of the federal partners, and so therefore there will always be a source where you can go to and find out who's providing services, what kind of services they provide, and therefore make a quicker connection.

We always receive a lot of calls of, "I don't know what to do.

What's going on?

Where can I go?"

So with this directory, we perform information-referral services.

We don't provide mental-health services.

We are a legal office, and therefore, we can only refer persons to where those services are and making sure they have equal access to the services that are available.

We're having, you know, a lot of good luck, and, hopefully, with the new administration we've got their ear already, looking and can give them the consent decree and work toward implementation of some aspects of it that sort of lagged over the last four years.

>> All right, we're gonna take a --

>> So that's where it's at right now.

It's moving forward with the behavioral health coalition. And the priority setting from that coalition, information has already been given to the transition team.

So we're hoping that some good

things are coming out of that contact and more or less a community or collaborative approach from various sources, saying, "This is what's needed to basically bring the system into some sort of cohesive order."

>> Right.

>> And stop being the agencies, nonprofit and governmental, from working in silos.

Got to work together.

>> Right.

>> Collectively, this can be fixed...

>> Right.

>> ...and there's a lot of money to fix it, but we're sending it off-island.

>> Right.

>> Mm-hmm.

>> We're gonna take a short break, and we'll be right back.

>> Okay, all right.

>> You're listening to "Ability Radio."

>> I know we can can.

Yes, we can.

>> Great gosh almighty.

Now's the time for all good men to get together with one another.

We got to iron out our problems and iron out our quarrels...

>> We're back.

You're listening to

"Ability Radio."

[Laughing] I'm joined this morning by Iris Bermudez, advocate extraordinaire, Julien Henry -- Henley, advocate extraordinaire, Archie Jennings, our managing attorney, and myself.

I'm Amelia Headley LaMont, Executive Director of the Disability Rights Center.

This program is brought to you by the Disability Rights Center of the Virgin Islands.

And we were going over some of the things that our office had done during 2019.

>> 2018.

>> Oh, God.

I'm doing the same thing that
Iris is doing.

Goodbye, 2018.

[Laughter]

And I hope that we didn't
confuse folks with some of the
acronyms that we're using.

NAMI stands for the National
Alliance on Mental Illness.

I don't think we've done any
other acronym offenses, but if I
have, I'm sure you'll let me
know.

I also wanted to -- I'm told we
have like 15 minutes left in the
show, and I thought it would
be -- since we are now up to the
goals and priorities for next
year, 2019, Archie, I didn't
know if you had more to say on
the mental health, but that
remains a priority.

>> Right, it's a priority, but,
also, I think it's a priority to
reach out and give
acknowledgement to our
hardworking colleagues, you
know, Kippy Roberson, who's
doing some heavy lifting, coming
in. He's the new attorney on
St. Croix, and he's the one
that's been covering the
institutional and the hard work
of making sure the facilities
are monitored.

That's not an easy job,
especially when we have death
investigations.

>> Right.

>> And, of course, my jefe in
St. Thomas.

>> Kishma.

>> Kishma Creque.

>> Yay, Kishma.

>> We all owe her a world of
thanks.

She keeps the office running
when I'm just sort of drifting
up in the air, thinking up new
things that we can do.

[Laughter]

But she makes the hard work

easier.

>> And she keeps us in line.

>> Yes, right.

>> Good.

[Laughter]

>> And Kimmy Tong on St. Croix.

>> Yep.

>> She's the anchor for that office over there, as is Kishma in St. Thomas.

So, I mean -- so that's the core people that are working and trying to do all of these things, folks.

And our fearless leader has supported us in this kind of effort, and I owe her a world of thanks.

I think a lot of people should owe her a world of thanks to support those groups that weren't there before in 1995 that are operating today.

A lot of people don't understand what a lot of effort and going to these national meetings -- I give her a world of appreciation because, Amelia, when you go away and you bring back the information and we start looking for funding to fund and get the activities going, that's what resulted in the contact with FEMA.

That's what resulted in a lot of the post-hurricane work, is because of your going to those national meetings, your being on those boards gave us that exposure that the Virgin Islands was at the table to take advantage of these programs.

>> Mm-hmm.

>> So my thanks to you on behalf of the entire staff and the community.

>> Well, thank you.

>> Here, here.

>> Oh, yeah.

Oh, yeah, and I will say, you make it easy.

You bring facts.

You know, your way of communication has been really...

that helps us and motivates us to even look at, you know, things that we probably miss, and it's always good where you can -- you know, if you've found that you've found something, you want to talk about something, that you're always open to listen at least.

If it's something not within our range, you say, "Hey, we can't go that way.

We could go this way."

And that level of calmness and communication, I think, does so well and motivates us to say, "You know what?

We can make a mistake.

We could go out and look at these things."

But as we do these things and we bring it home, you know, you're there to evaluate it and keep it on the straight and narrow.

>> On a target.

>> Oh, yeah.

[Laughter]

>> And always with a smile, I have to say.

Always with a smile.

>> Well, we've got a lot to look at for 2019.

I hope we can keep smiling.

[Laughter]

You know, because as you said, Archie, mental health is a challenge, and it's not easy to go into institutions, as Kippy has been doing, and, you know, seeing the areas that need to be fixed and trying to right the wrongs of people who have been neglected or abused or disregarded.

And I notice here, one of the things -- a thread that runs throughout our priorities is empowering individuals with disabilities and the importance of advocating for themselves.

Julien, I'd like for you to elaborate more on that, because I know that's a real passion of yours.

>> Yes.

>> Yeah, you know, because when you look at individuals over the years, I find that it's always best to keep them quiet, and you give them all that they need just to keep them on the left, and then you can -- you know, you have this open 80%, 90% road to run on, and so they've learned to live with what they have and not have a voice.

And, you know, if we continue at that rate, even though we're doing all of what we're doing in a community, if they're not integrated into the community on a whole, then they're gonna always be left out.

They're gonna always not have accessible crosswalks.

They're gonna always not have the right type of sidewalks.

They're always gonna not have transportation or access to services because they're afraid to say something because, you know, someone might come back at them or agency might, you know, cut off their services or whatever.

So, you know, what we want to do is to really tell them, "This is a beautiful life.

We live in a beautiful place.

You know, go shopping.

Go to the park.

Do get out in the community."

We don't see much individuals with disabilities really enjoying this beautiful place.

We're trying to embark and getting accessible beaches.

Get involved with that.

There's projects that we could work together and create little footsteps that create a carpet on sand that if you have a mobility device, that you could get from shed to shed or to the restrooms and different things.

So, you know, as we look at 2019, you know, we're hoping that individuals in the

community want to do more,
especially those who have
disabilities.

I heard one young man on the
radio talk about all the fun
things that he does, and he's
blind.

He goes to all these rides, boat
rides, dance, and all the
different things that he does,
and making life -- life don't
end because you have a
disability.

It actually restarts, and so
that restart life, you really
need to make a difference in the
future.

And, you know, we're doing this
through a lot of education.

Archie and I have been doing a
lot of training.

>> Mm-hmm.

>> We had some great topics like
service animals, Archie.

[Laughter]

That always -- especially the
comfort-animal aspects, Archie.

>> Right, right.

We get calls at least once a
week on that issue.

So we hopefully do a lot of
training that people, especially
the retail and

public-accommodations areas,
know where they're acceptable
and what's the difference
between a service animal and a
comfort animal.

It's confusing, but we still try
to clarify those issues.

>> Right, and for a lot of
places to have policies, you
know, to say, "This is what, you
know, the law is.

You know, we can't discriminate
against service animals, but we
accept or don't accept comfort
animals," or whatever it is.

They need to really take a role
in making sure that the public
understands that, if it's a
place of public access, that
they can't deny a person with a
service animal from going in

unless it's a private entity
like a church or private club.
>> Right, right.

>> Well, we can give you -- we
have a few minutes.

Let's tell people, what is a
service animal, and how would
you make that distinction
between a service and a comfort
animal?

>> Okay, well, service animal is
an animal that's trained to
perform a specific task
because a person has a
disability, and they're in need
of that animal to assist them.
Comfort animal is really under
two separate laws.

They're under the Air Carriers
Act, so you saw them on
airplanes, really, going back to
the 1980s as well as the
Fair Housing Act, which allows
persons to reside with comfort
animals.

And so those are the two areas.
ADA, the Americans with
Disabilities Act, covers the
service-animal aspect, and those
rules and regulations and that
definition issued by the
Department of Justice.

So they have their view.
The Air Carriers Act covers
transportation under the
Department of Transportation,
and they have their view on the
situation.

And then the Fair Housing Act is
usually covered by their --
under Department of Housing and
Urban Development Office of
Civil Rights.

So there's those three laws,
there's three different separate
agencies that set rules and
governance guidelines on that
aspect.

So with that in mind -- and
there's no way to certify
officially.

Unofficially, you can buy a
service-animal vest and a little
certificate over the Internet

for \$75.

I wish I had started that little service one when the first idea came up in the '90s.

I'd be a rich man, now.

[Laughter]

But, yeah, there is no official certification, and it's basically taking upon the honor of the person who's presenting the animal as an either service animal or a comfort animal.

So anytime you see the little pocketbook dogs, beware.

[Laughter]

They're a comfort animal.

[Laughter]

>> Not a service animal, per se.

>> There it is.

You know, unless they're trained to, you know, sniff out seizures or something to that effect.

>> Right.

>> But, again, a person has to declare their disability and why they need the animal.

>> Right.

>> Yep.

>> A lot of people don't want to disclose a disability, and that sort of blocks them from having official use, and I guess that's sometimes where the dispute lies.

But I want to get one plug before we...

We are starting, for parents, parent-coaching sessions this January.

Please contact the Disability Rights Center on our website, drcvi.org, to see these announcements for these -- I'm calling them coaching sessions because we want to elicit from the parents what they need to have addressed.

Rather than the agency selecting issues and topics to present, we want to make sure that the subject matters are relevant and pertinent to the person's individual circumstance.

>> Right.

>> So we're gonna schedule them from Saturday afternoons for 90 minutes.

We're gonna use the new technology.

We have Zoom, right?

>> Zoom. That's right. Zoom.

>> So we're gonna have a telephone conference line, and you can zoom if you're on computer and participate and have interactive coaching sessions.

Iris, I know you're gonna be helpful in this area, 'cause we have to reach -- make sure we have access for all languages that we can provide support and feedback on.

So we will have to, you know, more or less try to identify those sessions.

But this is a new venture, a new way to sort of do outreach through the Internet, take advantage of our technology to where we don't have to travel to our office or some location.

Parents, we're encouraging you to set aside and plan for it.

So if you got you

Saturday-morning chores to do and then maybe get the kids occupied in the afternoon.

That's what I used to do with Saturday afternoons in my office.

When they were old enough, I'd get the kids the blocks.

"Go in this room so I can go ahead and write some briefs in this other room."

[Laughter]

So it's doable, 'cause I know I did it myself.

And 90 minutes.

We're gonna try to answer your questions, or we can research issues for you, 'cause there's a lot to do under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

>> Yes.

>> It's a lot of regulations, there's a lot of information,

and I always felt that we only touched the surface for parents, and I really want to get down deep into it so parents get some questions answered.

>> I'm glad you mentioned that.

I'm glad you mentioned that.

>> Yep, and so, Amelia, as we look into 2019, you know, in closing, how do you want to invite individuals to participate with what we do?

>> Absolutely, and we are fortunate in that we have a Facebook page.

And we have, from time to time, gotten comments from the public. I encourage you to continue to do so.

Our phone-number contact, if you'd like to leave a voicemail message, is 772-1200 or 776-4303.

Thank you so much for joining us this day.

We look forward to having an exciting, interactive 2019.

I'd like to thank everyone -- Archie, Iris, Julien.

You were great, and maybe we can do this again soon.

[Laughter]

Have a great 2019.

>> Aw, yeah, this is great.

>> Happy New Year.

>> Happy New Year.

>> Happy New Year, everyone.

>> Happy New Year,

Virgin Islands.

>> All right.

>> Yes.

>> I know that we can.

>> Wow.

>> I know darn well we can work it out.

Oh, yes, we can.

I know we can can.

Yes, we can can. Why can't we?

If we wanna, yes, we can can.