

THE DISABILITY RIGHTS CENTER OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS



# ANNUAL REPORT 2023



## MISSION STATEMENT

Advance the legal rights of people with disabilities, support and empower families, and inform and involve professionals and others interested in the healthy development and education of children and youth.

## PARENT TRAINING & INFORMATION CENTER

The Disability Rights Center of the Virgin Islands (DRCVI) helps parents participate in their children's education and development. This year, parents successfully represented themselves at administrative hearings in response to formal complaints to the Virgin Islands Department of Education and the Office of Civil Rights.

DRCVI collaborated with the Virgin Islands Department of Human Services to provide training for Head Start staff. The training sessions focused on enhancing the attendees' understanding of their roles and responsibilities regarding the various educational laws supporting students with disabilities.

## EMPLOYMENT RESOURCES & TRANSITION SERVICES

DRCVI found creative ways to connect job seekers and employers in the unique "post-pandemic" job market. We regularly host Employer Recruitment Roundtable events tailored to individual job seekers, where local businesses share their job openings, application processes, career ladders, and diversity initiatives.

The sessions also help Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) beneficiaries understand myth vs. fact and ensure that clients have the necessary Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) job accommodations when returning to work.



*Kishma Francis, Esq., Parent Training & Information Center Project Director; Cheri Meade, Vocational Teacher; and Shammi Carr, DRCVI Advocate, with the first Youth Empowerment Leadership Program (YELP) class. The students choose to cover their faces with emoji graphics to represent their chosen career paths.*

## WORKING WITH THE YOUTH

In 2023, DRCVI developed the Youth Empowerment Leadership Program (YELP), which aims to provide career readiness classes to at-risk youth, focusing on self-esteem and leadership. The program has proven successful, leading DRCVI to present its teachings to other Parent Information Centers at the Navigating Excellence -- Parent Center Assistance and Collaboration Team (NE-PACT) Conference in New Jersey.

The program was established at the Edith Williams Alternative Academy located on St. Thomas. Plans are underway to expand the program to include St. Croix and St. John schools, enabling more at-risk youth to benefit from the program.

## CONTINUING OUR WORK FOR A MORE INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY

DRCVI continues to attend as many community events as possible so that staff can continue to share information about our protection and advocacy duties. In 2023, DRCVI utilized its advocacy platform to meet the community in their neighborhoods and collaborated with organizations in the public and private sectors to help with outreach in churches and residential facilities.

DRCVI is partnering with the Virgin Islands Department of Health's Mobile Integrated Health (MIH) - Community Paramedicine Program project to reach individuals who are homebound. This will help connect them with the appropriate services and programs based on their individual needs, allowing our advocate to assist a previously hidden population through one-on-one assessments and referrals.

## MEDIA OUTREACH

Executive Director Angus Drigo had two op-eds published in the Virgin Islands Daily News. One op-ed aimed to raise public awareness about the importance of expanding care for individuals with mental illness. The other op-ed addressed the ongoing need for jet bridges at local airports.

The Executive Director, as well as other staff members, also frequently appear on local talk show programs to speak about DRCVI's role in our community and the services offered to residents with disabilities and mental health illnesses.

*Able to Raise*, the archived WTJX show, can now be found on [www.drcvi.org](http://www.drcvi.org) and *YouTube*.

A Public Service Announcement (PSA) about Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) was created in-house and aired during the St. Croix Festival season.

DRCVI also reaches the public through its radio program, *Ability Radio*, which airs on WTJX, the Virgin Islands Public Broadcasting System, every Saturday at 11:30 a.m. and is available to stream on [www.drcvi.org](http://www.drcvi.org), *YouTube*, and most podcast platforms.



Advocates Shammi Carr, center, and Dawn O'Bryan explain the services offered by DRCVI to one of the attendees at the 2023 Vulnerable Community Expo on St. Croix.

## MONITORING LOCAL RESIDENTIAL FACILITIES

DRCVI, as authorized by law, is the protection and advocacy agency responsible for conducting monitoring visits at residential facilities in the U.S. Virgin Islands. This mandate ensures that clients not only receive appropriate care and treatment, but also that they are not subjected to abuse or neglect, and their rights are not violated. In 2023, DRCVI's legal staff conducted in-person and virtual monitoring visits at eight (8) facilities.

## MENTAL HEALTH & WELLNESS

DRCVI advocates and our community partners hosted quarterly lunchtime discussions on mental illness with partners and community members. The topics covered during these sessions include mental health awareness, reshaping attitudes around stigma, self-care, and mental health during the holidays.



## **2023 DRCVI Board of Directors**

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Kishma Francis, Esq., Staff Attorney  
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The contents of this report are solely the responsibility of DRCVI and do not necessarily represent the official view of any of these agencies.

DRCVI is an equal opportunity employer and service provider.



**DISABILITY RIGHTS**

CENTER OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

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