



# Under the Tree

A PUBLICATION OF LUTHERAN SOCIAL SERVICES OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

## A Message from our Chief Executive Officer

Junia John-Straker



Summer is here and flamboyant trees have splattered their red and orange colors across the hills in the Virgin Islands. It is impossible to ignore their stunning beauty. Here at LSSVI, each of the individuals in our care is like a radiant flamboyant tree. They bloom each day and show their beauty in the resilient ways they cope with and overcome their challenges. We embrace every chance we get to love and care for them. The love we share with them comes from the hope we receive from you. You are our guardian angels and we thank you for inspiring and supporting our work in the community. The gifts you share are blessings to the children, seniors, families and adults with disabilities in our care. Thank you for your kindness and for your continuing to trust and believe in our mission.



President Bill Clinton greets Project Reach LSSVI AmeriCorps members at Queen Louise Home for Children.

## Strengthening the Community through Love and Service

For a few moments last June, LSSVI watched years of combined effort and love come full circle. President Bill Clinton and Secretary Hillary Clinton visited Queen Louise Home for Children to announce a partnership between the Clinton Global Initiative and the Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands to bring solar energy independence to LSSVI's residential foster care program. The President and Secretary toured the campus and also met with parents and children enrolled in LSSVI's Early Head Start (EHS) program. It was during President Clinton's administration that the Head Start Act was reauthorized, and it has allowed LSSVI to serve young families and children in the Virgin Islands for the last 16 years. Rayvenne Bradshaw was one of the first pregnant women to join EHS, and she received valuable support and training to help her prepare for motherhood. After her daughter's birth, she enrolled in EHS's infants and toddlers program, which was a catalyst in helping her pursue a career in early childhood development. *"I wanted other parents in my situation to receive the same benefits."* Sixteen years

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Secretary Hillary Clinton speaks at LSSVI's EHS Center (From left to right) President Bill Clinton, First Lady Yolanda Bryan, USVI Delegate to Congress, Stacey Plaskett, LSSVI Director of Fund Development Keziah Sullivan, EHS Family Community Engagement Coordinator Rayvenne Bradshaw, VI native and retired NBA player Tim Duncan and his fiancée Vanessa Macias.

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**They bring hope, compassion and vitality to the elderly, people with disabilities and at-risk children. Hillary Clinton**

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later, she is the Family Community Engagement Coordinator at one of LSSVI's EHS centers. Rayvenne's training in early childhood education and her experience as a single parent in the program prepared her to encourage families to meet their goals and empathize with their struggles. The Clintons recognized Rayvenne's achievements during their visit and also gifted the EHS program with interactive toys and books through the Clinton Foundation's Too Small to Fail initiative. They also applauded AmeriCorps members working throughout LSSVI's programs. *"They bring hope, compassion and vitality to the elderly, people with disabilities and at-risk children".* The federal AmeriCorps program was created under President Bill Clinton by the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993, and LSSVI has since been facilitating service opportunities in the community. Keila Milan joined the AmeriCorps program in 2013, and worked with Project Reach LSSVI for four years as a mentor for adults with disabilities in LSSVI's housing programs and at Queen Louise Home for Children. Her passion for the children at Queen Louise Home solidified the career goals she had in mind, and she decided to study Early Childhood development. *"I felt complete joy when working with children... it was a way for me to continue helping the children to develop to reach their full potential."* Keila is now a teacher at LSSVI's Early Head Start program and for her, the Clintons' visit was the opportunity of a lifetime. She got to meet the people whose leadership set her on a fulfilling life and career path. And we got to share in a special moment with some of the men and women whose lives have been changed by service and love.



President Bill Clinton & Secretary Hillary Clinton greets LSSVI Board Members (from left to right) Maureen Moorehead, Nichelle Armstrong, and Michelle Moore at LSSVI's Early Head Start Center.



President Bill Clinton greets (from left to right) AmeriCorps alumna & EHS Teacher Keila Milan, AmeriCorps member Avis Reid and AmeriCorps member Giezlee Lao at Queen Louise Home for Children.



**...it was a way for me to continue helping the children to develop to reach their full potential.**

**Keila Milan**



## Renovation to Recovery: New Homes for Seniors

All of LSSVI's programs are slowly recovering from the damages left behind by Hurricanes Irma and Maria. Flamboyant Gardens, our senior housing community on St. Croix, suffered major damages to its apartment roofs and flooded shortly after the storms. Residents sought shelter with family and friends while repairs and rebuilding took place, and eagerly watched the work's progress. Over the last eight months, we have rebuilt and reinforced roofs, upgraded bathrooms, refurbished kitchens, and installed new tank-less water heaters to help reduce energy costs. The first two buildings are complete, and we have welcomed some of the residents back home. Despite delays due to a shortage of building materials, we continue to make progress on the rest of buildings and all our displaced residents will soon enjoy their new, safe homes.



## MEET OUR BOARD MEMBERS

Say hello to the individuals who are leading LSSVI in its mission to serve the community. Our board chair, **Hank Smock, Esq.** leads a group of amazing people who have answered the call to serve through LSSVI. Helping to steer at the helm is the vice president, **Nichelle Armstrong**, the treasurer and longest serving member of 13 years, **Richard Layton**, and the secretary, **Michelle Moore**.

Our newest board members include **Janine Hector**, **Ian Bass**, and **Phil Payne** from St. Croix, and **Danielle Cranston**, **Cornel Williams**, and **Martha Taylor Johnson** from St. Thomas. They are joining long-time board members who have been added to our family over the last 10 years, including **Cindy Gerber, Esq.**, **Carol Henneman**, **Shauna Huggins**, **Megan Littlefield**, **Dan McKenna**, **Maureen Moorhead**, **Marjorie Roberts, Esq.**, and **Delrise Varlack**.

We are so grateful for their service and love! If you get to meet them any where, be sure to say hello and let them know you appreciate them!



## Celebrating 30 Years of Friendship with Sonya Hough

The banner hung three feet above the floor on the right side of the wall in the Queen Louise Home auditorium. In bright coral colors, it claimed a special space with the words “So long Sonya! We will always love you”. Suddenly

and without prompting, two children stepped into the middle of the room to read a poem. “Thank you for making life easier and better for us. Your continual acts of love confirm our admiration of you. Your thoughtful kindness brightens each day for us. Each gift you share gives us hope, faith and love. Your smile will always glow in our memory, reviving pleasant feelings every time we think of you.” In the Virgin Islands community, Sonya is best known for her creation of the original Crucian hook bracelet. But at Lutheran Social Services, Sonya is a friend of 30 years. Her generosity underscores her love for the people she cared about — a commitment to causes that elevated the most vulnerable — giving them a chance in life. The children at Queen Louise Home had a special evening party with Sonya, because she made the last three decades of our existence extraordinary. We will miss her, but we wish her an enjoyable retirement and fun with family.

## By Love, Serve One Another: Employee Highlight

Caring for the frail children and young adults at Sister Emma Cottage takes a compassionate person that embraces their fragility and constant needs unconditionally. Meet **Philippa Hypolite**, Direct Care Coordinator at Sister Emma Cottage. For 21 years, she has provided love and care for the residents — feeding them, grooming and meeting their everyday needs. Ms. Philippa’s compassionate, gentle presence is noticeable, even by people who meet her the first time, and there is always warmth and love radiating through her when she is relating to the residents. But there is a particularly special bond between her and Joana, a resident with a cognitive disability. Joana sees her as her mom, and she is very receptive to Ms. Philippa’s encouragement and coaching. They have made a deal that Joana will exercise each morning after breakfast because exercise is good for her body. Without fail, Joana happily strolls around the Queen Louise Home campus and excitedly return to tell Ms. Philippa about her time outdoors. During the day, they spend time connecting and chatting with each other or doing activities that make Joana happy, like doing her hair, grooming her nails and learning how to care for herself. Lutheran Social Services is fortunate to have Ms. Philippa on staff, and we are so grateful for all that she and the team members at Sister Emma Cottage do for our residents. The hope and love she brings to Sister Emma Cottage is the essence of our motto at LSSVI to always by love, serve one another.

# What Will Your Legacy Be?

Let your legacy be every life you touch and enhance through our work at Lutheran Social Services of the VI. Support the hundreds of people in our care through a planned gift to LSSVI through your will or living trust. Your generous promise will help ensure the long term sustainability of our mission to express Christian love and care to the Virgin Islands community.

For more information, contact Keziah Sullivan, Director of Fund Development at (340) 772-4099 ex 31 or email [k.sullivan@lssvi.org](mailto:k.sullivan@lssvi.org). You can also reach out to Junia John Straker, Chief Executive Officer at (340) 772-4099 ext.21 or email [j.johnstraker@lssvi.org](mailto:j.johnstraker@lssvi.org).



2019

November, 16-17  
Golf Tournament

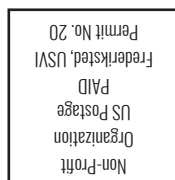
Lutheran Social Services of the Virgin Islands is excited to announce the relaunch of its beloved community event. Get ready for a great weekend of friendly competition, food and fun! This year's line up will include a two-day golf tournament at the Carambola Golf Course with a gala and auction on Saturday, November 16th. Our Joined at the Heart Golf Classic and Gala is the main fundraiser for Queen Louise Home for Children, and the event is essential in helping us provide 24-hour care for children in the Virgin Islands who have been abused, neglected, and/or have severe disabilities.

2020 June  
Kayak for Kids

This year's summer event was a blast but next year will be even bigger! Our 20th Anniversary of kayaking on St. Croix is set for June of 2020, and we are looking forward to a grander time than ever before. Stay tuned for more details but be sure to mark your calendar! You don't want to miss out on this celebration.



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