

“How the Virgin Islands will stop the excessive violence in the community”

With a population barely exceeding 100,000, the 2012 homicide rate in the Virgin Islands was 56 per 100,000 people. While such numbers are startling, the effects of the numbers are quantified by the size of the community. There are many ways to stop excessive violence in the community; among such ways of doing so are prevention, reduction of idle hands roaming the streets, and halting crime from its roots.

First, in order to prevent violence we must first find out what the roots of the crimes are. It is apparent that many if not most of the crimes are neighborhood or gang related. The most effective way to stop youths from feuding in hood wars or gang wars would be to find out what they are fighting for. If we can figure out why they are fighting then we can begin to formulate strategies to stop the deadly gun battles that are happening wherever opposing gang members encounter one another

When talking about reducing violence, it is important to know that crimes will always exist. There is no way to eliminate them completely. In St. Thomas a large amount of the young people roaming the streets depict persons that cannot be idolized. This means that the gangster look is prominent among youths. The image portrayed among young adults must be changed to that of becoming individuals so that children will have role models to look up to.

When going to school in the Virgin Islands, it is easier to gain respect among peers by being tough and intimidating than it is to be a smart and well behaved individual. We need to find ways to change the notion that being bad is cool. One way to prevent this is by going to elementary schools and middle schools with documentaries to show students where bad people end up and the types of lives they live.

Increased counseling and preventative interventions are also ways to prevent youths from committing violence. In the past, many believed that it was the responsibility of the police to provide counseling and methods of interventions. But according to some police officers, they are trained to react to violence, not prevent it. If this is true, we need to start looking elsewhere for help. There needs to be more counselors hired in the public schools. We need more counselors specifically at the public high schools. It's a bit too much for three counselors to balance student college preparations, academic advisory, and personal advisory for graduating classes of over 300 students. Preventative interventions should be performed by organizations whose goals are to provide at risk individuals or groups with assistance, whether it is parenting education for young parents or simply just anger management.

Providing affordable extracurricular activities for students will ensure that they aren't roaming the streets in their spare time. Parents should not allow their children to stay at home doing nothing as they will be more inclined to hang around the neighborhood and get themselves into unnecessary trouble. Parents should require their children to join some sort of activity, whether it is boy scouts, a sports team, or a music class. Idle hands are the devil's playground. Also, finding ways to reduce dropout rate reduces the number of idle hands roaming the streets. A person who has graduated is more likely

Devon Williams

to look for jobs than someone who has left school early. That person who left early is more inclined to try to make money quickly, the illegal way.

Without funding, it is near impossible to make any changes to improve the safety of the community. The government needs money to create and run new crime prevention programs. The best alternative to avoiding crime is to stop it among the youths. Preventing problems at their root is always the most effective way to stop them from escalating. This all comes down to budgeting, if a budget is formulated properly, within a few years the government will have enough funds to have programs up and running. By preventing violence there will be less hospital and funeral bills to pay, less insurance money being lost, thereby giving government and other agencies a little more cash to work with in the future.

Two important methods of reducing crimes are reducing the availability of guns and finding ways to reduce drug sales. Many of the crimes committed are a direct result of substance abuse. Drug abuse impedes the brain's ability to make sensible decisions. If there are any shops in the Virgin Islands that sell guns, they should be closed permanently because there is absolutely no need for guns in the islands. We don't have any hunting grounds therefore there is nothing to shoot. We also need to find ways to slow down illegal imports of guns.

The most important way to reduce excessive violence is by having the police regain the trust of the community. Many see the police as corrupt and distrustful, which is why citizens take matters into their own hands. They must prove that they are not the enemy. As a direct example, Virgin Islands police officer Roy Chesterfield shows that some policemen can be trusted. He is always in the schools and runs a program for high school students; The Law and You Program – which teaches students of the different high schools the law. All police officers should make a concerted effort to be active among the schools. Also there should be at least one officer that patrols every public middle school regularly just as with the high schools if they aren't already. They should also take time to talk to the elementary students regularly so they can become familiar with the law.

There are many ways to stop crimes but the most crucial of them all are increasing the minimum sentences of repeat offenders and first time offenders of violent crimes. With higher stakes at risk people will be more cautious of committing violent crimes. Another crucial way of halting crimes is to put juvenile delinquents in police cadet forces rather than putting them directly in a boy's home. This will give them a chance to redeem themselves by doing good things in the community and also it may possibly change the mindset they have of the law. With everything before mentioned put in place, the Virgin Islands will be free of excessive crime. Change is possible, we just need to formulate a plan and execute it well.