



Virgin Gorda Youth Leadership Initiative

VGyli's mission is to inspire and assist young people to develop their full potential, broaden their horizons, strengthen their character and develop their leadership abilities so they can positively contribute to a better future for Virgin Gorda. VGyli was formed in 2006 by local citizens, business, churches, education, government and youth concerned for the island's youth. They issued a report: ***VGyli Summary of Observations and Recommendations from Virgin Gorda Community Leaders*** (November, 2006). *For Virgin Gorda and the BVI to effectively address the emerging challenges of the 21st century, there is an urgent need to invest in the island's next generation of leaders. Young people must be identified, trained, rewarded and given incentives to return to the islands to contribute to the social, environmental economic well being of the Island.*

The Institute organized a **Vieques-Tortola Economic-Cultural Development Delegation** with VYLI youth leaders, Vieques Mayor and his team. BVI officials were impressed with VYLI youth leaders and asked the Institute to develop a similar program in the BVI. As a first step, youth leaders from the BVI attended VYLI's 3rd Summer Institute.

VGyli is a fellowship program where young people receive mentors, internships, apprenticeships and/or job training. They practice their leadership skills by working with younger students and assisting them in clarifying their dreams and developing projects with churches, schools and organizations. Our leadership program provides educational and training opportunities; collaborates with other VG/BVI organizations; catalyzes community projects; organizes field trips and travel opportunities to expose youth to the world and represent BVI at educational conferences; develops public-private partnerships to prepare Virgin Gorda youth to become leaders of the 21st century.

VGyli has dedicated this year to sustainable tourism. Given the Caribbean islands are on the front line of climate change and global warming, there is an urgent need for informed, educated and empowered citizens who serve as environmental stewards and engage people on their islands to address critical issues and develop strategic plans for sustainable development. Who better than youth to be the champions? A VGyli youth delegation participated in the **Caribbean Media Exchange Conference on Sustainable Tourism** in St. Lucia and San Juan, PR where they learned from Caribbean and U.S. leaders in the tourist industry, government and media about managing the delicate balance of increasing tourism while preserving the unique Caribbean culture and environment.

Benefits for Virgin Gorda Youth

- Youth clarify their dreams and goals for their lives & create personalized action plans to achieve them;
- Youth experience a greater sense of responsibility for their lives, their future and for their island;
- Youth develop a better understanding for the challenges on their island and how they can help;
- VGyli youth are trained and prepared to represent VG in BVI/Caribbean educational events;
- Increases youth pride and self-esteem; encourages self-sufficiency and social responsibility;
- Youth trained with transferable skills to enhance youth employability with island companies;
- Motivates youth to develop work ethic, team work, critical thinking, problem-solving skills;
- Develop life-long skills in communicating and making presentations (written and verbal);
- Youth connect with opportunities and responsibilities in Virgin Gorda/BVI community;
- Work side-by-side youth leaders who created successful program on their own Caribbean island;
- Multiplier effect/replicable model: trains VGyli youth to recruit and train other VG youth.

The Stone Soup Leadership Institute provides technical assistance and training to VGyli. The community shares their time, talents and resources. **VGyli Sponsors:** Ministry of Education & Culture, Office of the Governor of the British Virgin Islands, H. Lavity Stoutt Community College Virgin Gorda campus, Counterpart International, A Dream Come True Villa, Bitter End Yacht Club and jetBlue.

Environmental Stewardship



VGyli is dedicated to sustainable tourism. During the year, VGyli youth watched the movie *An Inconvenient Truth*, participated in ocean field trips and tree-planting activities; learned to swim and snorkel to develop a greater appreciation for the island's delicate coral reef systems and one attended the Ocean Conservancy Youth Summit. VGyli youth delegation participated in the **Caribbean Media Exchange Conference on Sustainable Tourism** in St. Lucia and San Juan, PR.

VGyli organized an ocean field trip with Patouche Charters. For some, it was their first time snorkeling. They were nervous, some afraid of what lies in the seas. They were delighted to see beautiful schools of fish, stingrays, barracuda and turtles living in the coral reefs. "God's creation is amazing!" exclaimed Jadine Matthias after her first look. "We really need to take a look at our own backyard. It's gorgeous!" For some, it was their first time out in the open ocean. "When I finally went into the water, I realized I was born in a really beautiful place that lots of people travel to experience," said Nakisha Warner.



"Nature has blessed us with world attractions of The Baths and the 3rd largest reef in the world," said Venner Williams. "When I saw the bottom of the ocean for the first time, I experienced one of the greatest feelings in my life – which is real happiness." Maggie said, "I've seen these fish on television, but never in real life. I felt like I was on television." Take a tip from Maggie, "For those of you who think that you should try it, especially if you are stressed out and need to relax, go snorkeling and see how this trip can change your life." "These respectful youth are on their way to becoming environmental stewards. We look forward to working with them to create a future for the BVI that will be brighter because of them," said Patouche owner, Joe Standish.



Virgin Gorda youth Feliza Fenty is an aspiring TV journalist. She is eager to find ways to use the power of the media to promote sustainable tourism. She surveyed 80 people in the BVI on their perceptions of their environment. She was concerned that while students in the United Kingdom must watch the environmental documentary, *The Inconvenient Truth* by Al Gore, many BVI students had never heard of it. "While the truth is inconvenient, we must each do our part," she said. "Before you throw that soda can in the road, think twice. We can be a shining example." Feliza presented her report to delegates at the **Caribbean Media Exchange Conference on Sustainable Tourism** in San Juan.



Making Dreams Come True Training Marsha Reeves-Jews

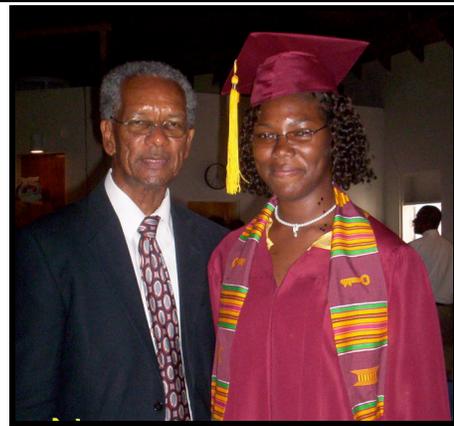
The Institute hosted guest speaker **Ms. Marsha Reeves-Jews**, an entrepreneur from Baltimore who shared stories about black professionals who achieved greatest in their careers and communities.

Dr. Mark Dean came from a poor family in Tennessee and is now IBM's Design Scientist and Inventor. **Ms. Joanne Barry** oversees 24 U.S. states as Boeing International's Small Business Purchasing Officer. **Ben Carson** is a world-class pediatric neurosurgeon at John Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore. As President of Lockheed Martin's Global Strategies, **Art Johnson** manages 2,000 people. **Nancy Stewart** is WalMart's Chief Information Officer and **Lt. General Joe Ballard** is the Chief of the U.S. Army Corps Engineers. "It's important that our black youth have opportunities to learn about successful people who look like them – so they can do, and be what they want to be," said Ms. Reeves-Jews. "We can be whoever we want to be if we are committed to our dreams. We need to vision tomorrow today."

Ms. Reeves-Jews encouraged Virgin Gorda youth to research prominent BVI professionals, especially Virgin Gorda who reached their professional goals both here and abroad. "Take pride in who you are," she said "and responsibility for helping younger children strive to reach their goals."

During the workshop, Ms. Reeves-Jews provided individualized career counseling so youth could develop their own personal action plans. "I was impressed with the focus, determination and hard work of these young people," said Ms. Jews. "I can see the progress they've made with VGYLI and sincerely believe that if they stay on track, they will realize their career goals."

Ms. Reeves-Jews is a board member of the Stone Soup Leadership Institute. Her bio: [Our Team](#).



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Connillia Williams is a founding member of the Virgin Gorda Youth Leadership Initiative. She wants to become a pediatrician. On her island, there are no local doctors. Her dream is to improve health care for her people, especially children. Connillia's family is from the island of Dominica. They traveled to the BVI in search of a better education for their children. At her graduation from high school, Connillia had a picture with **Dr. Orlando Smith**, the first physician in the British Virgin Islands and **Dr. Stacy Rhymer**, the first woman doctor in Virgin Gorda.



For the last year, Connillia has been working towards getting her BVI and UK passport so that she can travel to the U.S. to visit hospitals and medical schools. In August Connillia will travel to Boston for a site visit at **Harvard University's Medical School**. While there she will attend presentations from high school and college youth who have interned at Boston hospitals. She will meet with Dr. Joan Reede, Director of Harvard's Minority Fellowship Program. During her stay, she will be with her host family, **Dr. Robert and Germaine Fritz** and visit **Beverly Hospital** where he is an eye-ear-nose specialist.