



A VOTELESS PEOPLE IS
A HOPELESS PEOPLE

Every Vote Counts

Influencing, engaging, and empowering Virgin Islanders to vote

By Zion Moorehead

Pearl B. Larsen | Mrs. Mitchell | 7th Grade

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Introduction

“A society which pays little attention to the preparation and nurturing of its future leadership forfeits the control of its own destiny.” As a famous Virgin Islands four-term senator Dr. Randall James eloquently summarized, the right to vote is a privilege to select the leaders that will lead the territory in the best interest of the people. The right to vote has not always been given to Virgin Islanders. Ideally, the right to vote would have been granted when slavery ended on July 3, 1848. In reality, the people were given the right to vote for the governor over 122 years later on November 3, 1970 (Willocks 357). By electing a governor and other officials, Virgin Islanders have more say in how orders and laws are executed to support their needs, which makes participation in the election process critical.

Empowering Kids to Vote

One way to get Virgin Islanders to vote is to introduce voting at a young age. Currently, at my school, Pearl B Larsen, only 8th graders vote for a class president. If students in younger grades are allowed to vote, this would not only teach eighth graders to campaign to multiple other grades, but it would also teach the other grades about the voting process. Another way to engage students early in the voting process is to bring voting machines used during Virgin Islands Gubernatorial and Senatorial elections to schools. These voting machines would show

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kids how votes get counted and how to elect a candidate. A third way to encourage young kids to vote is to designate one or a few grades to meet an elected official to speak to kids about voting and life as a politician. For example, Governor Bryan visited a sixth grade class at my school, and the students really enjoyed it. What if every year sixth graders in every school across the Virgin Islands received a visit from an elected official? I would advocate for these three actions that would allow interacting with elected officials and the voting process to become a normal and fun part of students' lives.

Kids & Adults Working Together to Encourage Voting

In the Virgin Islands, political candidates execute campaigns including rallies, advertisements, and community activities to engage voters. In the future, a campaign that uses a lot more data and social media will be critical to engage voters (“Data-driven political campaigns in practice: understanding and regulating diverse data-driven campaigns”). I would encourage candidates who are open to new ideas to use data to determine what kids like best and host kid events like a video game contest or a bowling tournament with parents, kids, and candidates instead of hosting adult-only events. Having kid events during Governor Bryan’s 2022 Friday night events at campaign headquarters could have brought kids and adults together to encourage voting.

Other successful campaigns have offered micro-grants of about \$500 to students to help

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support campaign work to target supporters, undecided voters and non-supporters, including with ads on social media (Strauss and Roth | “Data Exploitation and Political Campaigning: A Company Guide Resource”). I would tell my friends about the grants and apply along with them to support campaigns. Working together, kids and adults can influence each other in the voting process to select leaders that will make the right decisions for society.

Conclusion

With over 56% or 22,557 of registered voters in the 2022 General Election, Virgin Islanders are making positive progress towards having their opinion represented through elected leaders (“Statistics”). By advocating to engage kids at a younger age and having adults and kids work together on the election process, Virgin Islanders will further realize why voting is so important in our community and for our future. As Congresswoman Stacey Plaskett once said, “I am always excited to go to all the polls, electioneering and thanking the people of the Virgin Islands young and old for participating in one of the most sacred aspects of our democracy (“PLASKETT RELEASES STATEMENT IN HONOR OF ELECTION DAY”).”

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