



Society 340  
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Dear Honorable Angel L. Bolques, Jr.,

Thank you for this opportunity to share about the work we are doing within our community. Please see below for the requested testimony:

### **Who are we?**

Society 340 is a non-profit organization that focuses on Workforce Development, Youth & Young Adult Empowerment, Education and Community Outreach. Our goal is to empower and educate our youth and young adults through cultural preservation, educational and mental health empowerment, recreational activities, workforce development and outreach throughout St. John. We believe that through networking, training, mentorship and financial literacy, you can achieve wonders!

We were founded in 2019 and established in 2021. We were founded by Dior Parsons and grew to a powerful, all women, and all local team. Karina Simon, Shanekua Lee-Tyrell, Andretti Samuel-Williams, Chelsea Baranowski are all board members who are very involved in the welfare of our community. Together, we all work to make St. John a better place.

### **What do we do?**

Our current programs include, **Train, Develop & Apply**, **Hear Every Voice**, **St. John Running Club**, **Journey To A Better You**, and **Leh We Talk**, and **Love City Flying Club**. Our Programs are designed to inform, expose, inspire and then equip. We remain engaged with our program participants to offer mentoring and consulting where necessary.

**Train, Develop & Apply** – T.D.A. – began as a 12-week Culinary Development Program in collaboration with Lovango Resort Group provided to youths in 11<sup>th</sup> & 12<sup>th</sup> grades with a transformational experience as they experience different aspects of hospitality. The goal of the program was initially to offer an introduction to hospitality while providing exposure and knowledge that will benefit them in their pursuit of gainful employment in the industry upon graduation. With the support of our community, Senator Donna Frett-Gregory, and local businesses, this Program has now flourished into a more in-depth Program that explores other industries and backgrounds. With secured funding, the program is projected to take off in May of 2024. The initial start date of May of this year was delayed due to lack of funding.

**Hear Every Voice** is a 12-week program in partnership with St. John School of the Arts that uses Creative Writing as an avenue for creative expression and mental health. The first program concluded with an Art Showcase and Spoken Word Event open to the entire community. We are



proud to now be working on the publication of the pieces from the young Writers and Artist. Their books will be available for purchase very soon. The next program will begin after summer.

**St. John Running Club** began during the peak of COVID to create a safe and COVID friendly outlet that also encompassed physical health and mental health. This program is a partnership with Giffit Hill School and the St. John Sports, Parks and Recreation. The students meet 3 times a week at Giffit Hill and are currently preparing for an upcoming island wide Track & Field and Cross Country Meet.

**Journey to a Better You** is a life coaching program in a group setting that incorporates a series of personal and professional development learning in addition to focus on mental wellness. Our goal aims to help youth find their purpose, establish smart goals and guide them to becoming their best selves. Youth will have the opportunity to learn new skills that will prepare them to become productive members of their society.

**Leh We Talk** began as monthly Facebook lives that featured Virgin Island Stakeholders from all backgrounds from Senators to Musicians to CFO's. They were interviewed about the road to their successes, the obstacles along the way and how they overcame these obstacles. Leh We Talk was created to show children that look like us and came from where we come from that they too can achieve anything, sometimes even what seems to be the impossible. This has now grown into a podcast that has created a platform for conversation on important topics that are affecting our youth and young adults of St. John. This unique outlet will be led by our younger generation giving them a platform to not only be heard but to control what is heard.

Now to **Love City Flying Club**, the program that brought us here today. **Love City Flying Club** is an aviation program inspired by our "Fly Girl" Makeda Dawson. Makeda Dawson was born and raised on St. John and is an alumni of Giffit Hill School. Her interest in aviation grew on her first plane ride with her grandmother to visit family. The pilot invited her into the cockpit and that was the moment that she knew that she wanted to become a pilot.

Makeda attended Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University. Upon her graduation in 2021, she was eager to begin her career in aviation as an airline pilot. An airline pilot requires 1000 to 1500 pilot hours and 5-7 certificates/ratings ranging from \$12,000 to \$20,000 each! You can imagine the financial burden this can be for recent college grad. Makeda had to work tirelessly to not only gain the required flight hours but also work to save money to pay the certificates/ratings.

Justin Bartosh came to Dior wanting to create a presence of aviation on St. John. His dream was to create an Aviation Program that was solely for St. John students. With his role at St. Thomas Standard Aviation and Society 340, he was able to offer assistance to St. John students seeking careers in aviation. His concern was the lack of exposure and programs on St. John for aviation. He requested that we work with Makeda to create a program that highlights the opportunities within aviation.

When we began working with Makeda to get ideas to peak interest in aviation we learned that Makeda was fighting to gain her final requirements to achieve her lifelong dream to become an airline's pilot. We made a call to Justin and shared what was happening and we agreed that our



first goals was to first aid Makeda in completing her certificates/ratings and offer her the well-deserved help she needed.

With Justin's support we were able to conduct a free, all expense paid Workshop to St. John and a few St. Thomas. The Workshop was led by Makeda and concluded with a beautiful reception at the St. John School of Arts open to the entire community. We closed the reception by presenting Makeda with a \$15,000 donation (sponsored by Justin Bartosh) to achieve her dreams. Today, we are proud to announce, that as of June 21<sup>st</sup>, 2023, Makeda has passed all her test and is now on track to become an Airline's Pilot! The goal of this program is to be able to tell many more of these stories.

### **How do we do it?**

Due to the lack of funding, Society 340 is operated by 100% volunteer efforts. The President, Dior Parsons, also serves as the volunteer Executive Director, Program Director and Office Manager. The Vice President, Karina Simon, is the volunteer Book Keep, Accountant and Operations Director. The entire Board volunteers their time where they can. Partnerships and community support is the backbone of our organization. Our community has been so fruitful and generous to us and our initiatives. Our Private Donors have been vital to our successes. We are currently developing our office and community center with land donated to us by the late Robert O'Connor Jr. and his daughter Jarell O'Connor. They also provided us with a 20-foot trailer already outfitted for an office. With funding from our private donors, we were able to purchase 2 40-foot trailers that we are now developing into a community center. All of the development work to include excavation, transportation and crane work has been in-kind donations and hard work of staple community members like, Rashad Griffith, Author Paris "Bucky" and Steve Smith "Puncha". It is people like them and their efforts that have allowed us to do what we do!

### **How can you help?**

We believe that non-profits are in place to fill gaps, but these gaps require hard work, passion, dedication, keen ideas and solutions, determination and funding. Society 340 has mastered all of the above except funding. As we all know, the cost of living on St. John is very high, and when you add in being full-time moms and full-time employees with extremely busy schedules, finding time and money to pour into our initiatives sometimes feels impossible but somehow we still find time and money to give because our community so desperately needs it. Government assistance and advocacy is vital.

### **Why Help?**

We have achieved wonders with the little we have, so with the right direction, support and funding, we are confident that our organization has the capacity and ability to change St. John for the better. Our programs are not for today - our programs are for what we will need in 5 and 10 years. Our programs will enhance our economy, education, tourism, livelihood and so much more!