

I could begin singing praises and listing accomplishments of Ms. Dilsa Capdeville today and still be speaking tomorrow. Good morning to the members of the 36 legislature. I am Dr. Angelina J. Prince and I stand before you today in full support of Bill No 36-0114 that seeks to rename the Bolongo Bay Head Start Facility the “Dilsa Capdeville Head Start Facility.” In my humble opinion, this meaningful gesture should be the first of many to honor her lifelong dedication to the Virgin Islands community. I don’t believe the people of the Virgin Islands understand the significance of dedicating over 60 years of your life to social work and public service to our people.

I first met Dilsa Capdeville as a young Master of Psychology Student at the University of the Virgin Islands. I worked tirelessly during that time as a news reporter and producer with WSTA radio, or so I thought, and made it my mission to report the harsh news of the territory and the Good News. During Child Abuse Awareness Month in 2011, I came across Kidscope inc. and learned that Ms. Capdeville was the founder. Deciding to interview Ms. Capdeville was the start of an eye-opening journey for me as a journalist, and unbeknownst to me, the beginning of the most rewarding mentorship relationship I could imagine. This interview provided insight into longstanding issues of child sexual abuse in our community, barriers faced in serving our families, and the dedication and commitment of Ms. Dilsa Capdeville to serve them. Family Resource Center exists today in large part because of Ms. Capdeville. Kidscope inc served the Virgin Islands Community for over 3 decades because of Ms. Capdeville. Our very own Nana Baby Home is another prime example of Ms. Capdeville collaborating with other invested individuals to better protect our children. The existence of comprehensive child abuse laws here in the Virgin Islands were written because Ms. Capdeville identified the deficits and made it a point to collaborate with officials to take action. Ms. Capdeville’s dedication to protecting our children and healing our families is undeniable. I won’t recant her entire history and wealth of contributions to our community. I choose to focus on my experience with Ms. Capdeville and firsthand accounts of her contribution to our society.

What do you mean you sold your car? I can vividly recall the shock that ran through my body when Ms. Capdeville recounted a sticky situation of running out of funding for the nonprofit Kidscope and making the extreme sacrifice of selling her car to keep operations going until funding could be secured. The history of how Kidscope came into existence intrigued me. A happenstance visit to a child advocacy conference in Huntsville, Ala., in 1996 was what opened her mind and heart to the possibility of operating a center for children on St. Thomas. Prior to that she had worked primarily with adults. But that all changed after her visit to Huntsville, where the first child advocacy center in the country was established, and after some other serendipitous occurrences that she couldn't ignore.

Hanging on the wall in Kidscope is a picture taken of 2-year-old Shaquanna Annett before she was beaten, molested, burned on a hot stove and finally killed by her mother's boy friend in 1992. It hangs above the blue and white drawing of an angel, complete with golden halo, that bears a strong resemblance to Shaquanna.

Shaquanna is one of the reasons Dilsa Capdeville was driven to provide a safe haven for abused and neglected children. When Shaquanna was killed there were no laws and little else available to protect her. So, Kidscope was born with a grant from the Law Enforcement Planning Commission to serve children, as is evidenced by its name and mission: To service child victims of abuse, neglect and sexual molestation.

What began with an inquisitive young news producer and a seasoned, dedicated social worker blossomed into a longstanding mentorship. As I progressed in my masters program and elevated to the final stage of internship, I knew that Kidscope was my calling. I began as an intern and then stayed on as a counsellor. In my 7 years at Kidscope, I had firsthand experience with what it means to truly serve our public and the horrors that plague our community and harm our children. There were times we worked until midnight, times we worked for free, and countless times we sacrificed time with our own families all in the name of justice and healing. Homeland Security, the FBI, and the VIPD were frequent visitors at kidscope. As a community, we are plagued by generational trauma, child abuse, sexual assault, human trafficking, and few resources to address these social ills. Ms. Capdeville and our team at Kidscope engaged in battle head on, facing the odds. The sacrifice of Ms. Capdeville was far greater than selling her own car. She faced litigation, threats of death, coercion, and bankruptcy all in the name of protecting our children.

From the first day at Kidscope until my final departure as I left for my doctoral residency with tears on my face, I remember the angels at Kidscope. There were all sorts of angels everywhere, in the art, little statues, tree decorations, large art pieces. The angel that I remember the most, is the most tremendous of them all, Dilsa Capdeville. I want the legislative body and greater audience today to recognize the blessing that Ms. Capdeville has been to me, to many before me, and to our community as a whole. Her presence and blessing to our Virgin Island community came at immense personal sacrifice and yet she persevered.

I have a humble request as I stand her today. I ask that we truly pause to give credence to the longtime, still ongoing service of Ms. Capdeville not just by naming the Bolongo Head Start Facility in her honor. I ask that lawmakers here today make a commitment to picking up the sword against child sexual abuse and dedicating much needed funds to creating a system for properly protecting and seeking justice for child victims and their non offending family members. With the shuttering of Kidscope, there is a gap in services to our most vulnerable population. This leaves children prone to revictimization, law enforcement lacking critical evidence, children left unhealed, and a society left unprotected as predators walk amongst us. We are in need of child advocacy that Ms. Capdeville selflessly gave us for decades.

As I depart the stand today, I want to reiterate my support for honoring Ms. Dilsa Capdeville. The late, great anthropologist Margaret Meade was a proponent of collective action and social change and stated "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has". In Ms. Capdeville, we as a Virgin Island people are tremendously blessed to have such an individual amongst us. Thank you.

