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Teens urged to explore health issues in haiku workshop with Imani Ma'at

By AESHA DUVAL

Daily News Staff

ST. CROIX — Virgin Islands Perinatal will hold a new workshop today designed to encourage young people to consider making healthy choices through the writing of haiku poetry.

The "Healthy Haiku for Youth" workshop will be held at Florence Williams Public Library in Christiansted from 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Teenagers in grades 10, 11 and 12 are invited to participate. The workshop will focus on the alarming health issues affecting young people today, such as HIV/AIDS, diet, teen pregnancy and illegal drug and alcohol abuse.

The creative process of writing haiku poetry is expected to facilitate dialogue, new language and expressed ideas for solutions to the health issues affecting young people.

"It's an opportunity for the youth to take time to assess who they are, their attitudes and what are the beliefs that are driving them," said Virgin Islands Perinatal director Barbara Lee Jackson. "It's going to be their works, their creations and encourage them to consider the choices they are making about their health."

Haiku is a Japanese form of poetry that combines form, content and language to convey themes about nature, feelings or personal experiences. The poems usually use simple words and grammar.

Jackson said about 20 students from both public and private schools have signed up for the workshop.

Behavioral scientist and author Imani Ma'at will facilitate the workshop. Ma'at is the author of "Promoting Healthy Attitudes and Behaviors in Youth Using Haiku Poetry and Creative Expression: A Training Manual for Mentors," which provides information on youth health issues such as delaying sex, HIV, violence, self-esteem, diet and exercise. Her book also features examples of haiku and other poetry written on health issues.

Ma'at has worked for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for 19 years and she is an assistant professor in the Master of Public Health Program at Morehouse School of Medicine. She co-founded a health-focused teen theater group called Y.E.S. 4 Health. Ma'at has degrees from Mount Holyoke College, MIT, Harvard and Teacher's College of Columbia University.

Lunch will be provided and space is limited. For more information or to register, call **713-8083**.