

Iowa State Students Lend a Hand to Island Green Recycling Effort on St. John

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By Source staff

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Iowa State students and organizers sorting recyclables at Island Green (Photo courtesy Island Green Living)

A group of approximately 10 Iowa State University students volunteering in the U.S. Virgin Islands spent Tuesday and Wednesday helping sort recyclables and prepare materials for shipment at Island Green Living's Recycling Center at the ReSource Depot on St. John, the organization announced in a press release.

The students, accompanied by CALS Study Abroad Director Jodi Cornell and Associate Professor Julie Blanchong, assisted Island Green Living staff with processing aluminum and No. 1, 2 and 5 plastics collected through the nonprofit's recycling program, according to the press release.

"Having the students from Iowa State here really exemplifies how community, when we get together and we work together, can conquer issues," Interim CEO and Vice President Dawn Henry said in the release. "Island Green is leading the effort in the territory to source separate to keep resources from filling our landfill, and we encourage Virgin Islands to not only help by volunteering with us, but also by asking Waste Management to step up efforts by source separating on a municipal basis. The Waste Management Authority's role is essential to the territory's success."

Island Green President Harith Wickrema said volunteers and donors are essential to the organization's recycling program.

"Island Green values our volunteers and donors greatly in ensuring our recycling program continues. We truly could not operate without them and we thank the Iowa State students as well as Jodi and Julie," Wickrema said. "We have still not received our full 2024 allocation from the Legislature and were not included in the 2025 budget, so

although we are performing a municipal service by collecting and recycling hundreds of thousands of aluminum cans and ocean-bound plastic containers per year, we do so almost exclusively through donations and volunteers.”

Iowa State students and organizers with Island Green team (Photo courtesy Island Green Living)

Blanchong said the experience gave students an opportunity to contribute while visiting the territory.

“The organization makes a huge difference. It’s nice to see local people working, caring for the island, caring for the territory, and it is nice that when visitors come, they do their fair share to keep this island beautiful,” she said.

Cornell also thanked the organization for welcoming the group.

“We thank you for the opportunity for our students, for all of us, to learn and do something productive while we are here,” Cornell said.

Island Green Recycling Manager Akeino Williams with Iowa State students helping to process recyclables (Photo courtesy Island Green Living)

According to the release, Island Green Living has recycled more than 5.2 million aluminum cans and more than 167,000 pounds of ocean-bound plastics since the program began. The nonprofit also encouraged residents and visitors to volunteer, even for an hour or two, and emphasized reducing consumption of single-use plastics as the first step toward sustainable waste management.

The organization accepts rinsed No. 1, 2 and 5 plastics and aluminum cans at collection sites in Cruz Bay, Giff Hill and Coral Bay, as well as at its ReSource Depot behind the Virgin Islands Territorial Emergency Management Agency on Giff Hill Road, the release stated.

Island Green Living’s ReSource Depot thrift shop has diverted more than 1 million pounds of building materials, household goods, clothing and other items from local landfills. The nonprofit has also supported environmental initiatives including restrictions on plastic bags, plastic straws and toxic sunscreen, as well as food security and environmental education programs, the release stated.

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