



INSIGHTS FROM WHOLENESS & JUSTICE

FOR THE PERIOD
DECEMBER 2020 – DECEMBER 2021

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ABOUT THE PROGRAMME

CAISO: SEX AND GENDER JUSTICE ESTABLISHED THE WHOLENESS & JUSTICE PROGRAMME TO EXPAND ACCESS BY DIVERSE LGBTQI+ PEOPLE IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO TO WHOLENESS, JUSTICE AND HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES. THE PROGRAMME IS COMMITTED TO RESPONDING TO VIOLATIONS OF LGBTQI+ COMMUNITY MEMBERS, WITH AN EMPHASIS ON TRANS, NON-BINARY, GENDER-NON-CONFORMING AND INTERSEX PEOPLE; AND TO DELIVER CLINICALLY COMPETENT, TRAUMA-INFORMED INTERVENTIONS THAT ENABLE HEALING AND RESILIENCE.

Initially launched in May 2020 with a smaller scope, the Wholeness & Justice programme onboarded the services of its current Clinical Administrator, Akilah Riley-Richardson, and Caseworker, Rae Alibey, to respond to the community's needs amid the rapidly changing environment of the COVID-19 pandemic. From then through October 2020, Wholeness & Justice aided over sixty-five clients.

The Wholeness & Justice programme began full operation in December 2020, with a six-month track record of responsiveness to and presence in the community. Akilah Riley-Richardson and Rae Alibey continued in their respective roles, and the services of a Community Lawyer (Donielle Jones) and Programme Associate (Kellog Nkemakolam) were enlisted.

The Programme offers three types of services:

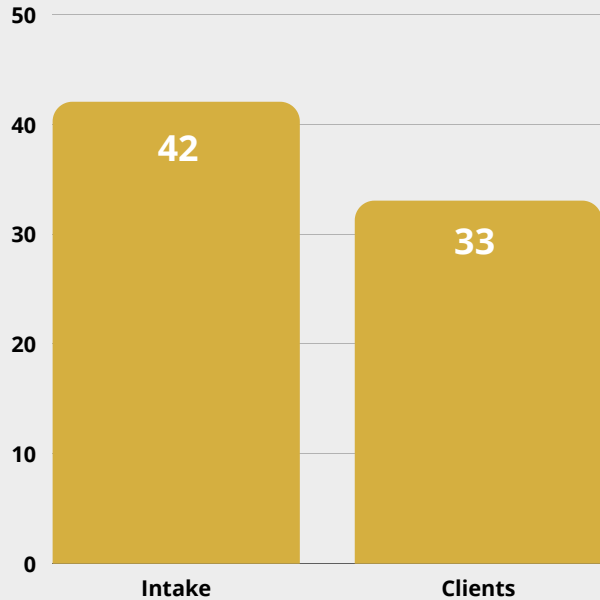
1. Legal support for clients who experience any violations, acts of discrimination, or abuse. Based on available resources and capacity, the programme may enlist the support of partners or limit the type of legal support provided.
2. Clinical (psychosocial) support to members of the LGBTQI+ community, who may experience traumatic events, require mental support while accessing other services, or need assistance with managing day-to-day challenges, aiming to respond to these needs.
3. Wholeness Development – guidance and support in managing day-to-day life challenges, including financial planning, exercise and activity routines, connecting with service providers and engaging different agencies and bodies.

Additionally, Wholeness & Justice is committed to engaging community development initiatives and working to build capacity among service providers accessed by LGBTQI+ people.

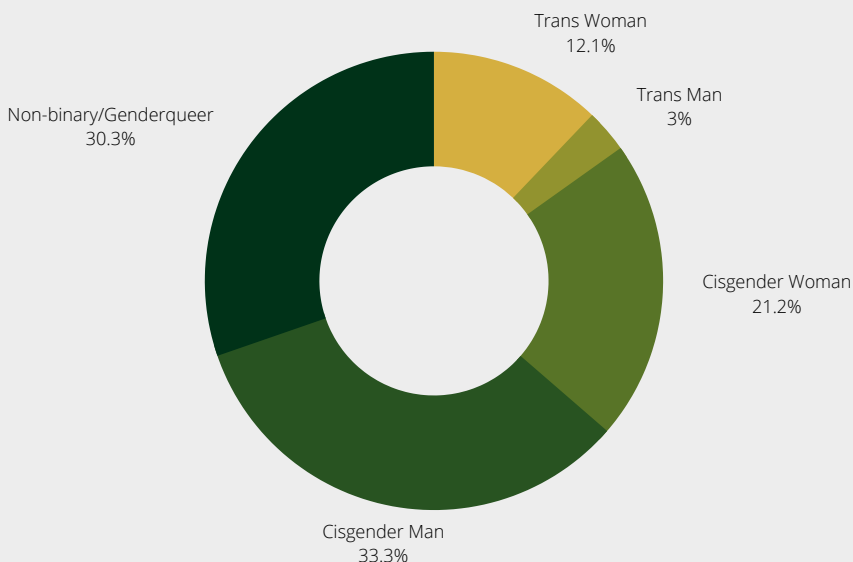
SERVICE OVERVIEW

1 INTAKE AND CLIENT ENLISTING

For the period December 2020 - 2021, the programme completed **42 intake assessments**. Based on the needs identified by community members and the services provided by the programme, **33 of these intakes were enlisted as clients**. The 9 persons who were not enlisted as clients were provided with suggestions for other service providers.



GENDER IDENTITY OF CLIENTS 2

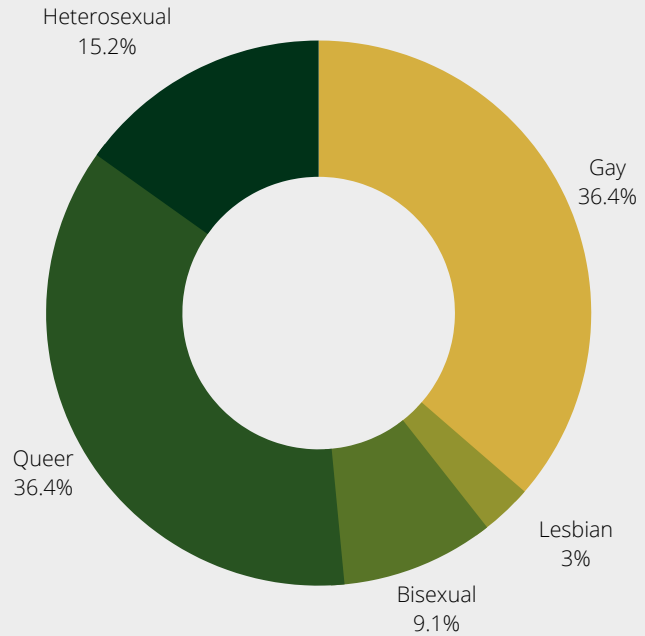


Of the programme's **33 clients** enlisted between December 2020–December 2021, just under half identified as non-binary/genderqueer or transgender. The remaining clients identified as cisgender.

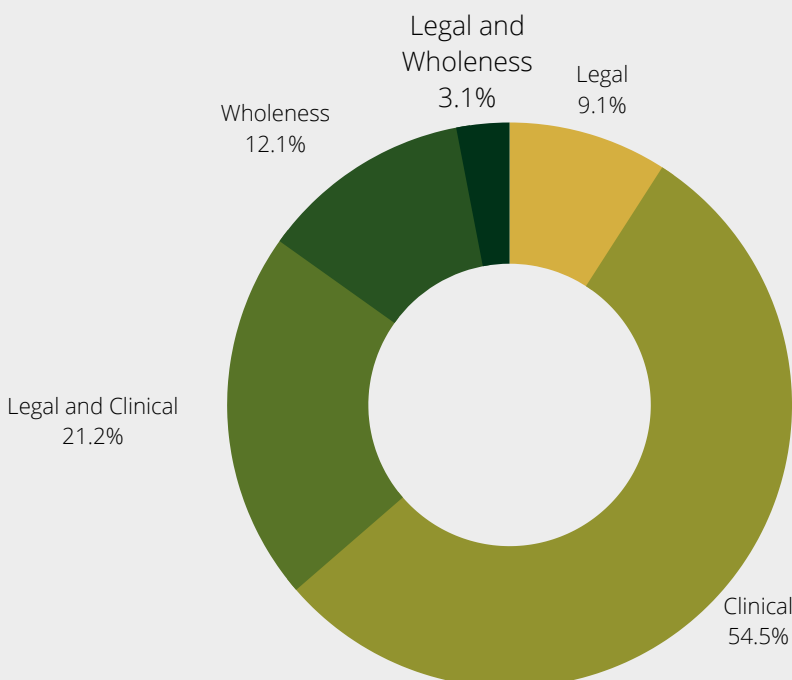
SERVICE OVERVIEW

3 SEXUAL ORIENTATION OF CLIENTS

Of the programme's 33 clients enlisted between December 2020– December 2021, roughly a third identified as gay, another third identified as queer, and the remaining third as either bisexual, lesbian, or heterosexual. It is important to note that the majority of the programme's trans clients identified as heterosexual.



4 TYPES OF SERVICES PROVIDED



The programme offers clients a combination of legal and psychosocial support and also provides wholeness development. The majority of clients required clinical service, followed by those who required both legal and clinical services.

SERVICE OVERVIEW

5 LEGAL ISSUES

The Programme provides legal support for clients who have experienced a violation. The table below shows the different types of legal issues clients experienced/received support for.

Type of Issue	Definition
Documentation	The preparation of legal and social documents such as deed polls, witness statements, and identification documents.
Intimate Partner Violence	Refers to any behaviour within an intimate relationship that causes physical, psychological or sexual harm to those in the relationship; also a form of domestic violence.
Family Violence	Any form of abuse, mistreatment or neglect that a child or adult experiences from a family member, or from someone with whom they have a familial relationship; a form of domestic violence.
Freedom of Information	An application pursuant to s13 of the Freedom of Information Act Chapter 22:02 to retrieve a document/s (for personal records) from a public authority that provides evidence to a violation experienced by them.
Forced Eviction	The removal of a person and/or group against their will from the home which they occupy.
Harassment	According to s30A of the Offences Against the Persons Act Chapter 11:08, harassment of a person includes alarming the person or causing the person distress by engaging in any course of conduct outlined in the Act.
Physical Assault	Any type of physical violence against a person that inflicts harm. The <u>Summary Offences Act Chapter 11:02</u> and <u>Offences Against the Person Act Chapter 11:08</u> provide greater detail on the types of physical assault.
Police Abuse of Power	The use of police authority to intimidate, ridicule, act unlawfully and/or excessively towards a person.
Unfair Dismissal	When an employer terminates an employee's contract of employment without following proper procedure.

SERVICE OVERVIEW

6 SOCIAL AND PERSONAL ISSUES

Social and personal issues are those which require psychosocial support from the clinical arm of the Programme (the Community Caseworker and Clinical Administrator). Some individuals who presented with social and personal issues had related legal issues as a result of the violation they experienced. The table below shows the different types of social and personal issues clients experienced/received support for.

Type of Issue	Definition
Family Instability	Conflict and challenges experienced by members of the LGBTQI+ community as a result of their family's treatment and behaviour.
Mental Health	A wide range of conditions related to a person's emotional, psychological and social well-being.
Relationship Conflict	Any form of abuse, mistreatment or neglect that a child or adult experiences from a family member, or from someone with whom they have a familial relationship; a form of domestic violence.
Social Assistance	Accessing State-provided services such as food support, housing and disability assistance.
Social Instability	The lack of safe and sustainable housing, food, and other amenities needed for optimal living.

KEY FINDINGS (GENERAL)

1

HOUSING INSTABILITY AND THE GROWING NEED FOR SAFE HOUSING

Access to safe and affordable housing is a prominent issue faced by LGBTQI+ people in Trinidad and Tobago. This instability been further exacerbated by the social and economic fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic. Many community members have had to deal with prolonged isolation with family members who used the opportunity of forced togetherness to shame and rebuke LGBTQI+ people in their households. These hostile living conditions resulted in some being instructed to leave their homes by family members, and others exploring alternative housing options.

2

DEMAND FOR FINANCIAL AND FOOD ASSISTANCE

A significant number of the LGBTQI+ people who approached Wholeness & Justice had their livelihoods considerably affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting restrictions in Trinidad and Tobago. With a reduced or total loss of income, it became increasingly difficult for these members of the community to sustain themselves and their dependents. Additionally, and as mentioned above, some young LGBTQI+ people were even forced to leave their homes because of their gender identity and/or sexual orientation and were left to fend for themselves without any financial or other assistance.

3

GENERAL AMBIGUITY AROUND WHETHER OR NOT A VIOLATION OCCURRED

Gleaned from the work of the Programme, there appears to be a general “legal under-literacy” among members of the community, particularly as it relates to their rights, infringement of these rights, and access to redress. This is to say that while in some circumstances, people may understand that a wrong has been done to them, some are unaware that the wrong may be actionable or of the avenues available to them for recourse. Some have even accepted these violations as a normal part of the LGBTQI+ experience because of how common they are.

4

ECONOMIC DIFFICULTIES AMONG CLIENTS

Although clients accessing the programme were not specifically asked about their income, questions about their employment status, information retained from consultations, and the nature of their requests for assistance revealed that the majority of clients accessing services faced economic instability and challenges, which were further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Clients’ limited economic resources available render access to health and human services difficult, particularly as State-provided services neither specifically respond to LGBTQI+ experiences and can be hostile and difficult to access.

LEGAL SERVICES

SPECIFIC LEGAL SERVICES PROVIDED

Legal Service	No of Clients
Assisting with the lodging of police reports	2
Court matters/business	2
Freedom of Information Applications – Medical Records	1
Freedom of Information Applications – Police Report Records	2
Legal Consultation	16
Police Station Accompaniment	1
Preparation of Deed Poll for Name Change	1
Preparation of Legal Complaints	3
Preparation of Petition for Divorce	1
Preparation of Pre-Action Letters	2
Preparation of Protection Order Application	1
Preparation of Witness Statements	3

The table above details the specific types of legal services provided by the Community Lawyer. Out of the sixteen (16) persons who engaged with the Community Lawyer for a consultation, even on a preliminary basis, eleven (11) of them went on to become clients of the Programme, three (3) persons who were eligible to become client, chose not to engage the Programme, while the remaining two (2) persons were ineligible to receive services from Wholeness & Justice and were consequently advised of more appropriate services.

KEY FINDINGS (LEGAL)

PREVALENCE OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE FACED BY LGBTQI+ PEOPLE

1

Different forms of domestic violence have been presented by people who have approached the Programme. The Programme enlisted three (3) clients who experienced intimate partner violence (IPV) which included harassment, threats (to life, property and reputation), withholding of property, and the dissemination of intimate photographs and videos. Family violence is another form of domestic violence experienced by clients. The Programme currently supports two (2) clients who have experienced family violence.

HESITATION TO PURSUE LEGAL ACTION OR ENGAGE LEGAL SERVICES

2

Despite the provision of legal support to its clients, the Programme notes a general sense of hesitation and/or unwillingness to pursue legal action or engage these services by members of the community. This is reflected in the disparity between the number of individuals who sought legal consultation and those that agreed to receive legal services. Clients have shared general anxieties surrounding engaging legal processes. Some clients opted to not pursue legal redress due to the fear for their safety and retaliation from their perpetrators (or persons acting on their behalf) while some prioritised a need to access safe housing over legal intervention.

GENERAL NEED FOR LEGAL ASSISTANCE

3

LGBTQI+ persons have received legal assistance with lodging police reports, requesting police intervention and assistance with service of court documents, submitting court applications and the general care and conduct of legal matters, among many other services. However, the continued need for substantive and procedural legal support and is an indicator that more work has to be done to ensure members of the community can thoroughly engage in self-advocacy. Further, clients have also shared that they felt unsafe and/or overlooked whenever they attempted to engage institutions and legal services on their own. From clients' shared experiences, this is largely due to the negative attitudes and beliefs that actors within the relevant institutions have towards LGBTQI+ people and the consequent disregard for issues experienced by them.

CLINICAL SERVICES

TYPE OF CLINICAL ISSUES PRESENTED

Clinical Issue	No of Clients
Depression	13
Anxiety	17
Relationship Challenges (Romantic)	5
Dissociation	1
Trauma	20
Bipolar Disorder	2
Relationship Challenges (Familial)	17
Gender Dysphoria	4
Borderline Personality Disorder	1
Schizophrenia (Clinically Diagnosed)*	1
Schizophrenia (Trait)**	1
Borderline Personality Disorder (Suspected/Trait)	2

* Diagnosed by a registered psychiatrist.

** Client presents symptoms of the condition but has not been clinically diagnosed.

As seen in the table above, anxiety and depression were commonly experienced by clients. These were often rooted in trauma, systemic violations, and unhealthy relationships. Trans women, in particular, are targets of physical and life-threatening violence. At least four of our clients have reported experiences of these. Clients present with long histories of enduring and endurance trauma. Notably, a number of clients presented one or more clinical issues.

KEY FINDINGS (CLINICAL)

LACK OF SAFETY AND PRIVACY IN CLIENTS' ENVIRONMENT TO RECEIVE COUNSELLING

1

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all sessions were held virtually. Some clients were, at times, unable to fully disclose their challenges to the clinician because of a lack of privacy in their homes. At other times, sessions were cancelled due to these same privacy concerns. This was especially the case for clients who did not live on their own. Due to financial challenges, it is also difficult in some cases for clients to pay for their own housing.

NON-ATTENDANCE AT SESSIONS

2

On some occasions, clients forgot their sessions or experienced poor internet connection, which resulted in non-attendance. Due to their challenges, many LGBTQI+ persons battle with more mental health challenges than non-LGBTQI+ counterparts. Both proximal and distal stressors complicate their emotional well-being. Proximal stressors refer to the thoughts and feelings that are the result of concealment, anticipated stigma, and self-hatred. Distal stressors include experiences of discrimination and victimization. Stress has been linked to deficits in memory due to the effect of the stress chemical, cortisol, on the hippocampus (memory consolidating centre) of the brain.

LACK OF EMPLOYMENT WHICH COMPLICATES MENTAL HEALTH AND A SENSE OF AGENCY

3

It was difficult to build a sense of self-competence and healthy self-esteem while clients were experiencing true disempowerment due to their adverse financial positions and lack of employment. As such, unemployment indeed serves as a source of minority stress as indicated earlier in this report. The lack of agency and financial stability is a form of enduring trauma, which limits the efficacy of any therapeutic intervention. The clients of Wholeness & Justice have clearly articulated this lack of power. One client shared about "losing a voice" in the home due to a lack of finances, and even perceives himself as a burden to his family. Additionally, even accessing state support can become a terrifying experience for our clients, as they enter national social services with a sense of feeling defeated by their lack of economic power.

COMMUNITY INTERVENTIONS

As part of the Programme’s mandate, Wholeness & Justice undertook a number of community development initiatives aimed at building and strengthening bonds between and among members of the LGBTQI+ Community, as well as operating to improve the quality of life as queer people in Trinidad and Tobago. The initiatives engaged were:

- a. Emergency Food Support
- b. Living Room
- c. Share Space
- d. Awareness and Capacity Building

EMERGENCY FOOD SUPPORT

Given the social and economic fallout members of the community faced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and building on the work the initial iteration of the programme began in May 2020, the programme provided emergency food support to members of the community, with a focus on trans women, sex workers, and those who lost any source of income they may have had.

Additionally, to access food support from the State, people must be able to present valid forms of identification and engage often difficult and bureaucratic processes. Despite the Community Caseworker’s assistance in navigating these systems, community members are still hesitant as their identification documents do not capture their gender identity or they are unable to provide the required proof of address (having no home of their own). The table below shows the general breakdown of food support provided to members of the community.

Period	No. of People Supported	Total Value of Support
March - May	10	\$5000.00
June - August	10	\$5000.00
September - November	10	\$5000.00
December	10	\$10,000.00

COMMUNITY INTERVENTIONS

LIVING ROOM

Wholeness & Justice's work with members of the LGBTQI+ community revealed a specific need for a sense of community to aid in developing and sustaining identity and self-advocacy. As a result, and shaped by the Programme's continued work in the virtual space as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, **Living Room** was created. This virtual community space is designed to host different activities to engage members of the LGBTQI+ community and provide an avenue for socialisation and fostering relationship-building. From March – October 2021, Wholeness & Justice hosted two activities as part of its Living Room: Moving for Mental Health and Community Meet-up. The programme's Clinical Administrator, Akilah Riley-Richardson, who is also a certified fitness instructor, hosted 6 virtual Moving for Mental Health sessions for clients of the programme and members of the community. Three Community Meet-up sessions were held. Members of the community who attended shared their experiences and discussed what it meant to be queer in Trinidad and Tobago

SHARE SPACE

In response to the untimely deaths of community member Anthony Singh and leader of the Trinidad and Tobago Transgender Coalition, Brandy Rodriguez, Wholeness & Justice offered Share Space, a virtual space for members of the community to come together, celebrate and grieve. The Clinical Administrator, Akilah Riley-Richardson, moderated the space. The first Share Space took place on Monday 19th April and the second on Saturday 30th October. Both sessions were held via the Zoom platform and each saw an average of 20 community members in attendance. Almost all participants said they appreciated the guided facilitation and opportunity to share and reflect. Notably, the Programme enlisted some clients arising from the October event.

AWARENESS AND CAPACITY BUILDING

The Wholeness & Justice Programme aims to build the capacity of service providers in Trinidad and Tobago so that members of the LGBTQI+ community can be included and served without facing discrimination. On Wednesday 24th November, the Programme hosted its first webinar entitled "Serving the LGBTQI+ Community: Capacity Building for Mental Health Practitioners". Aimed at exploring the experiences of LGBTQI+ people and providing best practices for mental health practitioners on working with and serving members of the community, the workshop was a resounding success, with over 35 participants.



Services Provided and Report Completed by the Wholeness & Justice team:
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