



CAISO: Sex and Gender Justice

Tel: 868-347-9447 | Email: info@caisott.org

Address: 1 Robinsonville, Belmont, Port of Spain, Trinidad

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Contact: Angelique Nixon, Director, 868-384-9557

IDAHOBIT 2023 Media Statement

Together Always: United in Diversity

International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia

CAISO Responds to LGBTQI+ Discrimination through Wholeness and Justice

In commemoration of the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia (IDAHOBIT) on May 17th, **CAISO: Sex and Gender Justice** is pleased to share the findings of its *Insights from Wholeness and Justice Report*, based on the second year of providing clinical, legal, and wholeness development services to Trinidad and Tobago's LGBTQI+ communities.

At a virtual media conference on Monday 15th May, CAISO shared an overview of the findings of the *2022 Insights Report*, which will be available for public download on CAISO's website (caisott.org) from May 17th.

The Wholeness and Justice Programme offers free, clinically competent, trauma-informed interventions that enable healing and resilience to members of the LGBTQI+ community who have experienced a violation, with a focus on trans, non-binary, gender-non-conforming and intersex people. The 2022 Report provides data on service provision and community interventions, discusses key findings, provides a deep dive into the problems presented by clients, and offers policy recommendations based on client and community engagement.

In 2022, the Wholeness and Justice Programme enlisted 31 new clients, bringing the total number of clients seen since programme launch in December 2020, to 63 LGBTQI+ community members. Seventy-four percent of enlisted clients in 2022 accessed legal services (often in combination with other services) while 52% required clinical (psycho-social) support.

The Programme's clinical and legal professionals note the following problems presented by clients over the past year:

- Prolonged exposure of LGBTQI+ people to spaces that are neither inclusive nor enabling, contributes to 'endurance trauma;'
- Intersecting identities - such as a migrant who identifies as gender-diverse - may increase a person's vulnerabilities, making it difficult for some LGBTQI+ people to engage social service institutions on their own;



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- Every client who presented with employment issues was wrongfully dismissed; interventions included providing legal advice upon consultation, connecting clients to trade unions, and offering direct guidance on industrial relations processes;
- For people of trans experience, name change through the Deed Poll Application process enables them to affirm their identity and take control of their narrative;
- Intimate partner violence (IPV) affects heterosexual and LGBTQI+ people alike but LGBTQI+ people experience discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation, when reporting IPV to the police;
- LGBTQI+ people face public discrimination and harassment from neighbours, school mates, strangers on the street, in cyber space, and from public servants, such as health care workers and police officers, with long-lasting consequences for their mental health.

Not surprisingly, one of the key findings of the *Insights Report* is that structural discrimination inhibits LGBTQI+ people's access to public services. The lack of protections on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity and the glaring gaps in legislation, policies, and social services are key reasons why homophobic and transphobic attitudes permeate national services that ought to be accessible to all citizens.

Housing instability and food insecurity - exacerbated in recent years by the social and economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic - remain intractable problems for some LGBTQI+ communities. One group affected by housing instability is that of young people between the ages of 19 and 25, displaced from their homes by relatives disapproving their LGBTQI+ identity. Over the past year, the Programme provided food cards to approximately 15 clients and community members each month, prioritizing those most in need (trans people, migrants, people engaged in sex work, and people living with HIV). Intersecting issues such as family violence, employment discrimination and job insecurity, make LGBTQI+ people more susceptible to food insecurity and housing instability.

Not only does the Wholeness and Justice Programme respond to LGBTQI+ community needs, but it is also committed to engaging community development initiatives and building the capacity of service providers accessed by LGBTQI+ people.

CAISO Director Angelique V. Nixon notes that IDAHOBIT 2023's global theme, 'Together Always – United in Diversity' "offers a reminder that in our LGBTQI+ advocacy for rights and justice, we should be mindful of the differences across our community. This is why the CAISO Wholeness and Justice programme addresses the multiple experiences of LGBTQI+ community members across intersecting issues. CAISO started this work because of the lack of protections on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity and the glaring gaps in legislation, policies, and social services. This is why we continue to call on the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to amend the Equal Opportunity Act, to include protections for LGBTI status."

Responding to the community's needs remains the top priority of the Wholeness and Justice Programme. According to **CAISO Research and Programme Officer, Kellog Nkemakolam**,



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this includes, “building on strategic litigation and advocacy around the issues affecting clients and the community; providing public education centred on rights awareness, service navigation, skills-sharing and capacity-building – all hinged upon meaningful community engagement, collaboration and alliance-building.”

Community Lawyer with the Wholeness and Justice Programme, Donielle A. Jones affirms the benefits of the Domestic Violence Act (2020) for LGBTQI+ people experiencing violence in a dating relationship. She notes, however, that court proceedings need to accommodate LGBTQI+ identities. While the Judiciary of Trinidad and Tobago’s “Gender Equality Protocol for Judicial Officers” (launched in 2018) is quite progressive, Jones opines that it isn’t “implemented in a way that recognises and includes LGBTQI+ people, particularly people of trans experience and gender diverse identities.”

The International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia (IDAHOBIT) draws attention to the violence and discrimination experienced by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex people and all other people with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities or expressions, and sex characteristics. Launched in 2004 by Martiniquan Georges-Louis Tin, the date - May 17th - commemorates the World Health Organization’s 1990 decision to declassify homosexuality as a mental disorder. It was first celebrated in Trinidad and Tobago in 2011.

CAISO: Sex and Gender Justice is a feminist civil society organisation that seeks to mobilise a forward-thinking, visionary, and human rights approach to wholeness, justice, and inclusion for Trinidad and Tobago’s LGBTQI+ communities, through developing analysis, alliances, and advocacy. LGBTQI+ persons in Trinidad and Tobago who have experienced a violation, or who need help determining same, may contact the programme for legal and psychosocial support at: 868-28-CAISO (282-2476), Monday to Saturday between 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.; or via email at wholenessandjustice@caisott.org.

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