



CAISO: Sex and Gender Justice

Tel: 868-384-9557 | Email: info@caisott.org

Address: 1 Robinson Ville, Belmont, Port of Spain, Trinidad

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

CAISO Responds to LGBTQI+ Discrimination through Wholeness and Justice

In honour of the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia (IDAHOBIT) on May 17th, **CAISO: Sex and Gender Justice** calls once again on the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to meet its human rights obligations to be as inclusive as possible and protect all people living in Trinidad and Tobago from harm and discrimination. Due to the lack of protections afforded to LGBTQI+ people, and few avenues for accessible and meaningful redress, CAISO responds to violations (breaches of human rights, infringements on safety, and impeded access to public services) experienced by LGBTQI+ communities through its **Wholeness and Justice Programme**.

Initially launched in May 2020 with a smaller scope, the programme responded to the LGBTQI+ needs amid the rapidly changing environment of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this initial phase of seven months, the programme aided over 65 clients with a focus on food support and navigating social services. In December 2020, the programme began offering full services to clients through legal support and clinical services, as well as community development.

The Wholeness and Justice programme expands access by LGBTQI+ communities in Trinidad and Tobago to wholeness, justice, and social services. The programme places an emphasis on trans, non-binary, gender-non-conforming, and intersex people. **The services provided are free to clients and offer clinically competent, trauma-informed interventions that enable healing and resilience to LGBTQI+ people who have experienced a violation.**

A combination of these services are offered through the programme:

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 through guidance and support in managing day-to-day life challenges, including financial planning, exercise and activity routines, connecting with service providers, and navigating different agencies.

Additionally, Wholeness and Justice is committed to engaging community development initiatives and working to build capacity among service providers accessed by LGBTQI+ people. The programme has hosted two capacity building webinars for mental health practitioners and developed LGBTQI+ sensitivity workshops for sign interpreters, social workers, and healthcare providers.



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This year, in recognition of IDAHOBIT and our continued efforts to ensure LGBTQI+ protection and inclusion, CAISO is sharing its Wholeness and Justice Insights Report from the first full year of providing services to LGBTQI+ communities (December 2020 - December 2021). In 2021, the Wholeness and Justice programme enlisted 32 clients with just over 50% requiring clinical (psycho-social) support, and 30% requiring a combination of legal and clinical support. The report will be launched on IDAHOBIT on the CAISO website (caisott.org) after the virtual media conference (public access via Facebook, 17th May at 10am).

CAISO Director Angelique Nixon states that “IDAHOBIT’s 2022 global theme ‘Our Bodies, Our Lives, Our Rights’ resonates deeply for the work of CAISO’s Wholeness and Justice programme. Key insights reveal the everyday institutional and social discrimination and lack of access to freedoms and protections which LGBTQI+ people experience. 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. Hence our continued call for amendments to the Equal Opportunity Act.”

For many members of LGBTQI communities, access to safe and affordable housing, as well as employment opportunities, are prominent challenges, exacerbated by the social and economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic. A significant number of the LGBTQI+ people who approached the programme 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. In addition the continued existence of institutional and social discrimination against LGBTQI+ people, most identifiably recognised in the lack of codified protections for persons on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, consolidate experiences of minority stress and endurance trauma.

The work of the programme further reveals that there is a continued need for substantive and procedural legal support for LGBTQI+ people as many may not know they have been violated or that redress may be available. This is a strong indicator that more work has to be done to ensure members of the community can thoroughly engage in self-advocacy. The programme has provided 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, there remains a general sense of hesitation and/or unwillingness to pursue legal action or engage these services. This is reflected in the disparity between the number of individuals who sought legal consultation and those that agreed to receive legal services. Many who come to the programme have shared general anxieties surrounding engaging legal processes with some opting to not pursue legal redress due to the fear for their safety (or that of persons acting on their behalf), and retaliation from their perpetrators.

CAISO Director Elron Elahie notes that “the provision of legal services supported by psycho-social intervention is critical for LGBTQI+ communities in Trinidad and Tobago. The compounded effect of often intimidating and unfriendly judicial and public services, the lack of codified protections on the basis on sexual orientation and gender identity, and continued social discrimination makes justice-seeking very difficult for many LGBTQI+ people. Particularly for people who are working class and have limited access to networks and connections.”



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CAISO's Wholeness and Justice programme is committed to responding to the needs of LGBTQI+ people living in Trinidad and Tobago who have experienced violations and continues to offer programmes and services that build community, resilience, and shape self-advocacy. If any member of LGBTQI+ communities in Trinidad and Tobago has experienced a violation, or may be unsure, but would like assistance in determining same, and is interested in receiving legal and psychosocial support, contact the programme at 868-28-CAISO (282-2476) on Monday to Saturday between 8:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. or via email at wholenessandjustice@caisott.org.

The International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia (IDAHOBIT), was created in 2004 to draw 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. Spearheaded by Martiniquan Georges-Louis Tin, the date (May 17th) was specifically chosen to commemorate the World Health Organization's decision in 1990, to declassify homosexuality as a mental disorder. First celebrated in Trinidad and Tobago in 2011, the day is marked in more than 130 countries. This year the global theme is "Our Bodies, Our Lives, Our Rights."

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. CAISO runs a programme called [Wholeness & Justice](#) that expands access by LGBTQI+ people in Trinidad and Tobago to wholeness, justice, and social services. The programme responds to violations through legal and psycho-social support by delivering clinically competent, trauma-informed interventions that enable healing and resilience.

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