

COLLECTIVE ACTION FOR SAFE SPACES

THE EVOLUTION:
Our 2020 Annual Report



TABLE OF CONTENTS

On Adaptation and Transformation: An Introduction from Je'Kendria	3
The CASS Universe: Get To Know Our People	4
On the Edge of the Horizon: Unearthing A New Organizational Identity	5
Breaking New Ground: A Transformative Justice Ecosystem	7
Milestones: What We Accomplished Together	8
Street Harassment Prevention Act: Year One of Implementation	9
A Historic Hearing for DecrimNOW	10
On the Issue of Roles: Surviving Global Crises & Uprisings	11
Uncharted Territory: How We've Been Meeting This Moment	12
The Virtual Realm: Cultivating Connection and Collective Skills	13
Take Root: A Closing Call to Action	14
In Deep Gratitude: The Journey Continues	15



ON ADAPTATION & TRANSFORMATION

An Introduction from Je'Kendria



In the midst of a brewing revolution, fueled by a preventable pandemic, we are still here fighting for safer communities for everyone. Our commitment to supporting survivors who live within the margins hasn't wavered, and our organizational evolution speaks to this dedication. With our roots in preventing street harassment, Collective Action for Safe Spaces has emerged as an organization focused on dismantling patriarchal violence of all kinds, providing anti-carceral ways to respond to conflict, hurt, harm, and abuse, shifting the cultural narrative around sex work, upending the criminalization of sex workers and survivors, and cultivating an ecosystem of community members, workplaces, and organizations who actively create safety for all oppressed people. We know that our power is birthed through shared struggle & echoed through deepened trust in our community, and we're clear that our role in this moment is to bridge our resources to further amplify that power.

It is no easy feat to lead an organization through an unprecedented time, and as I recently celebrated my one-year anniversary with CASS, I've felt transformation within myself and within our CASS community. Our resources have grown, and we've stretched and adapted into new ways of defining the work we do. What excites me the most is how our new framing meets this moment that demands the defunding of police, demands safe housing for all, demands a movement free from sexual harm, and demands the health and wellness of Black trans women be centered. This report paints a portrait of our evolution and transformation, where we shepherd in a refined mission, vision, and service offerings. We invite you to journey with us through a story depicting our trajectory of growth and our future terrains, cultivating our community's capacity to keep each other safe from harm.

*With love,
Je'Kendria*

THE CASS UNIVERSE

Get to Know Our People

The CASS team has evolved into a new formation of identity. We are now a Black trans, queer, and non-binary led organization, with an expansive volunteer base that has helped us grow a more intimate connection to those we fight for.

In September 2019, **Je’Kendria Trahan** (she/they) joined the CASS team as our Executive Director. Je’Kendria is a fat Black non-binary femme who brings her unique experience as a survivor who is disabled and formerly housing insecure to CASS initiatives. Je’Kendria’s work as a facilitator, healer, artist, and community organizer has greatly informed their intentional and unapologetic approach to CASS’ comprehensive, community-based work.

In May 2020, **Kai Hartsfield** (they/them) joined the CASS team as our new Deputy Director. With their expertise in fundraising and grant writing, Kai is leading the operations and development efforts at CASS. Stepping into this new role, Kai navigates the particularities of non-binary perception, invisibility, and violence as they work to end gendered-violence and build CASS’ transformative justice work.

This strong team -- along with a budding group of volunteers and part-time staff members -- have dedicated their time and collective energy to sustain this evolving work. CASS continues to evolve as an organization that is by and for community in the DC metropolitan area.



Staff

Je’Kendria Trahan,
Executive Director
Kai Hartsfield,
Deputy Director
Nona Conner,
Program Manager
Kayla Friedland,
Programs & Advocacy Fellow

Board

Noor Mir,
Board Co-Chair
Preston Mitchum,
Board Co-Chair
Ebony Tucker,
Board Treasurer
Tim Wright
Secretary
Cecilia Dos Santos
Eteng Ettah
Katherine Eyster
Elizabeth Hague
Michela Masson
Qudsia Raja
Emily Tatro

Volunteers

Jade Ferguson
alicia sanchez gill
Alisa Zipursky
Carsen Beckwith
Erin Gar-Yun Andriamahefa
Emily Verburg
Kristen Mejia
Lauren Taylor
Leah Muskin-Pierret
Liam Conlon
Naomi Chasek-Macfoy
Nkiru Nnawulezi
Samia Lalani

Mekdes Sisay
Tiffany Wang
Travis Brookes

ON THE EDGE OF THE HORIZON

Unearthing A New Organizational Identity

As you can tell, CASS has been in a state of evolution towards more bold and radical offerings over the past two years. Specifically, about half of our annual budget is dedicated to transformative justice based projects, therefore our language needed to reflect this expansion of programming. Additionally, our community has been reaching to us to support with racial equity trainings, workplace policy reviews, abolitionist strategies for safety, healing justice work, and community accountability. This moment of political uprising during a global health crisis calls us to take a clear stance in naming who we are, what we do, and what fuels our work in supporting survivors and safer communities.

Our New Mission Statement

Collective Action for Safe Spaces is a Black trans, queer, and non-binary-led organization that uses public education, cultural organizing, coalition-building, and advocacy to build community safety. Collective Action for Safe Spaces cultivates the greater DC community's capacity to respond directly to patriarchal and state violence through transformative justice and abolitionist frameworks.

Our Refined Values In Action

- We believe in people power and center survivors and communities at the margins
- We approach our work through an intersectional, abolitionist lens
- We work to challenge patriarchal violence at its root
- We oppose the criminalization of harassment, harm, and interpersonal violence
- We believe that everyone deserves to be treated with respect and care
- We strive to embody collective leadership
- We are accountable, adaptable, and actively against oppression in all forms

Our Updated Service Offerings

- Making workplaces, organizations, and public spaces safer environments
- Training communities on anti-harassment, anti-oppression, and transformative justice practices
- Equipping communities with tools & strategies to respond to harassment, conflict, and other forms of harm and abuse without the carceral state
- Cultural organizing to shift narratives and spark action
- Advocating for policy change that shifts power to communities
- Dismantling patriarchal violence and building nurturance culture
- Powering local transformative justice and healing justice initiatives towards a path to liberation

How are we defining patriarchal violence?

“Patriarchal violence is an interconnected system of institutions, practices, policies, beliefs, and behaviors that harm, undervalues, and terrorize girls, women, femme, intersex, gender non-conforming, LGBTQ, and other gender oppressed people in our communities. Patriarchal violence is a widespread, normalized epidemic based on the domination, control, and colonizing of bodies, genders, and sexualities happening in every community globally. Patriarchal violence is a global power structure and manifests on the systemic, institutional, interpersonal, and internalized level.

Examples include normalization of rape culture; the harassment, abuse, and murder of Black women by police and by community members, the criminalization of sex workers, homophobic and transphobic violence, the leading cause of death of Black trans and cis women being murder by partners, and the erasure of trans and nonbinary people in local and national policies.”

~ From The Working Definition of Patriarchal Violence, authored by a group of organizations that convened for the Abolishing Patriarchal Violence Innovation Lab in 2019, hosted by Black Feminist Future.

How are we defining transformative justice?

We define transformative justice as a series of strategies, practices, beliefs, theories, and tools that reject punitive responses to harm and abuse, and actively seek to transform the conditions that cause harm and violence on an interpersonal and institutional level. Transformative justice is a framework birthed from communities recognizing that the carceral system thrusts survivors into cycles of harm and trauma and strips them (and harmdoers) of their agency, healing, and safety. As defined by Generation Five, the goals of transformative justice are Safety, healing, and agency for survivors; accountability and transformation for people who harm; community action, healing, and accountability, and transformation of the social conditions that perpetuate violence – systems of oppression and exploitation, domination, and state violence.

How are we defining harassment?

We define harassment as any unwanted, disrespectful, or threatening action or comment toward someone targeted because of a real or perceived vulnerability. This can mean their gender, race, age, sexual orientation, gender expression, disability, religion, housing status, or any number of factors.

BREAKING NEW GROUND

A Transformative Justice Ecosystem

We've known for a long time that the state has failed to provide long-term solutions to end violence in our community, and the global crisis has further proven that. We seek to provide more options for survivors in D.C. to receive and cultivate the healing, justice, accountability and safety that mainstream organizations and the criminal legal system cannot offer. By centering queer and trans communities of color, specifically survivors of sexual assault, intimate partner and domestic violence, we've embarked on a journey to understand more deeply what anti-carceral survivors want after experiencing harm through incubating a transformative justice hub.

This hub aims to address the root causes of violence that's been exacerbated by the pandemic by centering and supporting survivors of patriarchal violence who are Black, Indigenous, and/or a person of color (BIPOC) and identify as woman (trans and cis) and/or LGBTQ+ in seeking healing, safety, and accountability. These offerings address the failures of the criminal legal system by giving community members people-powered options outside of the system that will aid in long-term healing and safety, while also building communities' capacity to support survivors and respond to harm without the police. Our goal is to continue aligning together with organizations, individuals, and networks to cultivate a cross-movement community of practice to develop our internal skills, resources, and practices around transformative justice and healing justice, while bringing along more people to create a DC-based ecosystem of community care and safety.

Our Focus Areas

- Transformative Justice Foundational Frameworks
- Conflict Transformation
- Community Accountability
- Healing Justice
- Survivor Safety and Wellness
- Criminalized Survival

Core Offerings & Initiatives

- Survivor Needs Assessment & Report
- Community Workshops
- BIPOC TJ Community of Practice
- Youth TJ Study Group
- Online Resource Hub & Directory
- Policy Platform to include abolitionist demands like #DefundMPD, #PoliceFreeSchools, and #NoNewJails
- Cultural Organizing & Coalition-building



MILESTONES

What We Accomplished Together

As the organization shifts our focus, we have continued to develop and grow our collective action initiatives across the board. Grounding ourselves in community care and centering the voices of those impacted by gendered harassment, the staff, volunteers, and supporters of CASS have built into tremendous initiatives.

30

workshops

held both locally and across the nation

610

people trained

through the Bystander Intervention program and Safe Bar Collective

Bystander Intervention Trainings and the Safe Bar Collective: A National Train the Trainer Model

In 2019 through October 2020, CASS equipped participants with strategies to respond directly to harassment and violence, using community-based alternatives to police. Addressing topics from workplace harassment to harassment on our public transit system, this work expanded nationally this year as CASS trained collectives and anti-violence organizations in Memphis, Nashville, and Boston.

"It's so incredible to have scripts for approaching an aggressor or supporting a target."

"It was so encouraging and helpful, and the instructors made a really safe space for discussing difficult topics."

ReThink Masculinity: Our 4th Cohort

In 2019, CASS held the 4th cohort of 14 men and masculine-identified people trained through the Rethinking Masculinity (RM) program. This partnership between CASS, ReThink, and DC Rape Crisis Center aims to build nurturance culture, make connections between gender norms and gendered violence, and create an environment where everyone feels responsible for making communities safe.

100%

"I've acquired new information and skills for communicating and interacting with others."

87.5%

"The program was a supportive space to process my emotions."

75%

"I can identify problematic behaviors and offer health behaviors."

STREET HARASSMENT PREVENTION ACT (SHPA)

Year One of Implementation

Through cross-organizational and cultural organizing in 2018, CASS worked alongside other community advocates to lay the groundwork for this legislation. SHPA is the first of its kind to define street harassment in the United States and uniquely focus on prevention through education, rather than criminalization. Since this historic win, CASS has maintained engagement in this work in 2019 and 2020 as a member of the Advisory Committee on Street Harassment (ACSH). CASS has worked with the DC Office of Human Rights to conduct a landmark city-wide survey and focus groups that incorporate the voices of marginalized

folks. The research findings include details about prevalence, communities most affected, and recommendations for prevention and change. Affirming community knowledge, the report reflected that respondents who were queer, disabled, immigrants, experiencing homelessness, and of a religious minority consistently experienced street harassment at higher rates. These respondents expressed a desire for responses to this harassment that are grounded in anti-carceral actions. We see each day that we keep one another safe; the implementation of SHPA and community responses reaffirm this truth.



Findings from the SHPA Report

When asked "when you have experienced street harassment, what would you want to happen?" **50% of respondents indicated that they preferred for someone to intervene while harassment was occurring.**



Some participants in the black trans women group felt that they experienced street harassment similar to what cis-gender women experienced. Others stated that **being trans also made them a target - because of the marginalization of trans women, the stigma trans women face, and the association with sex workers.**



A HISTORIC HEARING FOR DECRIMNOW



The DecrimNOW DC campaign advocates for decriminalizing sex work because it is crucial for the safety of people in the sex trade, who are most commonly Black, trans, women, and/or folks experiencing houselessness. Through cross-organizational and cross-cultural organizing, CASS along with our Sex Worker Advocacy Coalition (SWAC) partners organized our community over two years through sex worker speak-outs, arts and education events, canvassing across the city, and testimony writing workshops.

9

canvassing events

supported in 2019

3,000+

signatures

collected for petitions

In June 2019, we reintroduced the "Community Safety and Health Amendment Act of 2019", the bill to decriminalize the survival of people in the sex trade, make our communities safer, and reduce barriers that sex workers face in accessing alternative opportunities and resources. It was one of few proposed sex worker-based policies in this country that would alleviate the police's stronghold on sex workers, and was co-introduced with support from members of the D.C Council thanks to community organizing and the leadership of impacted communities, specifically sex workers and survivors of color. In October 2019, the DecrimNOW team and our partners provided 172 testimonies over 15 hours and advocated for the safety of people in the sex trade during the historical city council hearing to decriminalize sex work in D.C. This hearing made international waves, where opposition invited people from all over the world to attend and challenge the bill, and many other sex work decriminalization initiatives cited our strategy as an effective model for sex worker-led coalition building.



"Sex work is one of the primary ways Black women, girls, trans and non-binary people experience racial profiling, police violence and mass incarceration." ~ Preston Mitchum

"Everything that we say comes from the heart. We live this and we do this every day. This is our life." ~ Tiara Moten

"We have a history of moralist laws that do not create safety, nor improve the health of the community... deliver us from these laws that cause known harms." ~ Tamika Spellman

ON THE ISSUE OF ROLES:

Surviving Global Crises & Uprisings

The current global crisis has pulled us to shift, adapt, and expand as we continually imagine and work towards liberation during a pandemic. We are living in an unprecedented, grief-filled reality where our sense of urgency and hope are intertwined with a vast unknown. Yet, Toni Cade Bambara's words from "*On the Issue of Roles*" remind us that we've got time to get right with ourselves, our relationships, and our unique roles. We each have something to contribute to this brewing revolution, and for CASS, survivors who live within the margins are at the center of our universe.

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, we recognized the immediate need for mutual aid for DC's most vulnerable residents, and will continue to support efforts to connect marginalized survivors and those seeking crisis support. With survivors bound to their homes through social isolation, conflict, hurt, harm, and abuse is still happening, and in some cases at a higher rate. We're also witnessing women and LGBTQNC folks of color in DC's over-criminalized areas being disproportionately impacted by the current state of policing and hyper-surveillance. Our goal is to take care of our people, and to prioritize healing modalities, self-care and direct giving to people that need it.

We are also witness to the effects of capitalism and colonialism globally, making the connections between the political uprisings in the U.S. and the #EndSARS movement in Nigeria in response to state violence. Queer Nigerian youth continue to share their experiences of violence at the hands of Nigeria's Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) and bias within the police system. This serves as a reminder of the intertwined struggle and solidarity of Black queer, trans, and non-binary youth around the world. As we navigate complex emotions around the U.S. election, regardless of who's in office, we know that we will continue to keep each other safe, keeping those in the margins at the center. Within this interconnected global context, we continue to reflect on our relationships to power and our unique roles in building community safety and accountability and prioritizing collective care and healing.

UNCHARTED TERRITORY

How We've Been Meeting This Moment

CASS has been recalibrating the focus of our budding transformative justice (TJ) work towards the development of virtual webinars and digital resources that bridge stories, theories, and approaches to patriarchal violence through an anti-carceral lens. This includes using relational organizing to cultivate connection between our growing coalition of TJ facilitators and enthusiasts, resourcing healing practitioners to provide services to people experiencing trauma activation, and connecting individuals to resources for survivors of domestic abuse and sexual assault.

Defund MPD Hearing

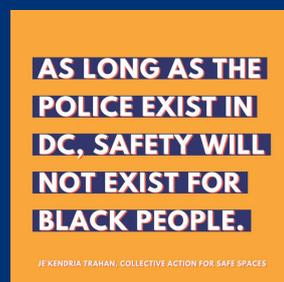
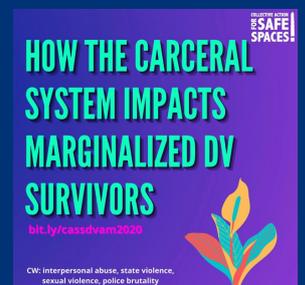
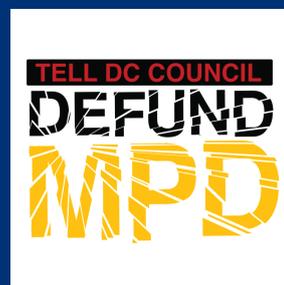
Our executive director Je'Kendria Trahan provided live testimony during the DC Council's MPD budget hearing earlier today, urging our elected officials to do their job: listen to the people and #DefundMPD and instead invest in our communities, in modes of care and tools that actually center the needs of survivors and the marginalized, transform the conditions that cause violence, and build true safety. "As long as police exist in DC, safety will not exist for Black people."

Mutual Aid Support

CASS recognizes the power and resources we have to support marginalized survivors and sex workers who are struggling financially as a result of the pandemic. CASS has been donating funds to mutual aid fundraisers through the DC Mutual Aid Network, and has resourced the Healers for Liberation Network to connect BIPOC survivors who are looking for items to meet their basic needs, as well as healing services to cope with the stress and trauma of the pandemic.

Reimagining Safety Forum

On September 23, 2020, in response to heightened police violence, Ward 8 organizers, community leaders, and organizations - including those directly impacted by recent incidents of community violence and police murders - came together to talk about alternatives to policing and the importance in investing in services and holistic approaches to safety for Black communities.



THE VIRTUAL REALM

Cultivating Connection and Collective Skills

Queering Survival: An Intergenerational Storytelling Experience



To continue the celebration of Black history following Juneteenth, on June 25th, we held a virtual event centering the legacy of sex work and LGBTQ resilience in DC, featuring illuminating stories told by local Black trans elders & organizers.

The loss of Oluwatoyin Salau, Nina Pop, & Brayla Stone, as well as the attack against Iyanna Dior was a call to action for us to build strategies for community defense, accountability, and wellness in a way that uproots state and interpersonal violence. On July 13th, CASS and BYP100's She Safe, We Safe Campaign created a virtual space to talk about gendered violence, survivorship, and how we equip our communities to defend Black trans, nonbinary, queer, and disabled folks. Hundreds of Black folks from all over the world gathered to unpack the spectrum of gender-based violence and learn tangible skills for keeping each other safe.

I Gotchu Sib: Building Abolitionist Tools for Community Care and Safety



An interactive experience that investigated how we look inward into our behaviors and relationships to transform the world. Marking the first day of Black August, this workshop created space for BIPOC to challenge the carceral logic that invades our collective psyche, and bridge our skills together to build fractals of community members committed to transforming self and crafting a liberated world.

Small is All: Embodying Transformative Justice Practices Within Ourselves & Our Community



On August 19th, we partnered with the Black Swan Academy's Summer Youth Organizing Institute to offer an introduction workshop to transformative justice. We talked about different forms of justice, built our understanding of transformative justice definitions, values and practices, and reflected on how the carceral system has impacted our minds, bodies and relationships.

Transformative Justice 101 Workshop with Black Swan Academy





TAKE ROOT - A CALL TO ACTION:

What is your commitment to building collective safety and wellness without replicating state violence? Who are you accountable to and how have you built sustained connection in your community in order to achieve liberation? Find your people, and join us in this work!



IN CLOSING

The Journey Continues



As we continue to journey into the unknown, CASS is firmly planted in our commitment to amplify marginalized survivors and provide resources to meet their needs. As we engage in this work, we continue to honor the legacy of Black resistance and the resilience of trans and queer communities, moving toward a safer and more liberated world for all.

Special Thank You

To those who have paved the way for us as an organization, namely alicia sanchez gill and Leila Raven for laying the groundwork for this evolution.

To our amazing board and dynamic volunteer squad, especially Erin Gar-Yun Andriamahefa and Carsen Beckwith who co-authored this report.

To our ASL interpreters, captioners, carebears, and all who support us to ensure we are meeting our community's access needs.

To our noble ancestors, radical freedom fighters, and bad ass organizers who light our path towards liberation for ourselves and for our future generations.✳

To those who help make our work happen, including our partners, advocates, donors, and funders.

Black Swan Academy

Black Youth Project 100

Brittney Packnett-Cunningham & Reginald Cunningham

**Consultance LLC
Cooley LLP**

David Wittenstein, Vinny Badolato, Kilsy Baird, Brendan Hughes and team

Covington & Burling LLP

Jason Georges, Scott Smith, and Sharmaine Heng and team

DC Mutual Aid Network

Georgetown KI Fellowship

Healers for Liberation Network

HIPS

**Linda Jacobs
Little Leaf**

No Justice No Pride

Rad Organizing Service Never Sleeps

The Eaton Hotel