

Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum

February 10 - May 8, 2022

A Community Project and Installation in conjunction with *Being Muholi: Portraits as Resistance*

Chastity Bowick, Executive Director, Transgender Emergency Fund of MA INC (she/her)

Transcript of 8-minute Audio Story

KEY:

CB: Chastity Bowick

AG: Arielle Gray

AG: When I meet with Chastity Bowick at her Dorchester apartment, she's excitedly checking her phone.

CB: Like I said, hopefully, I keep checking my email waiting to receive this lease to sign for this apartment for a year to at least get six homeless, trans or gender non-conforming folks off of the street.

AG: It's a big deal for the Transgender Emergency Fund where Chastity is the current executive director.

CB: And in the meantime, still working with the city and state and with our project manager to get our capital campaign together for the purchase of a three-decker home so we can have a permanent program.

AG: The organization provides essential resources for trans and gender non-conforming people; both in and outside of Boston. Many resources for trans people are centered around outdated stereotypes, tending to focus just on HIV testing.

CB: OK. What about the housing? What about the health insurance? What about the other resources around it? So, most organizations only see trans folks as for numbers.

AG: The work that Chastity and the Trans Emergency Fund does is to fill in the gaps so often left open by state and city programs.

CB: I think the Trans Emergency Fund is a prime example of tailoring the needs to fit the community that you're trying to serve. And so for me, it's very important that people who are sitting at the table who are making decisions at these organizations should be from the community.

AG: My name is Arielle Gray and you are listening to the *Future Archives*, a project and installation at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum.

As an artist and reporter, I'm constantly thinking about documentation. And, as a Black queer woman, I know often times, those most marginalized have no say in how we're represented in our

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archives and if we're represented at all. *Future Archives* highlights the stories of 5 Black queer and trans people here in Boston, in their own words.

As I mentioned before, Chastity is the current director for the Trans Emergency Fund. But 10 years ago, her story was very different.

CB: I myself happened to be a recipient of the Trans Emergency Fund in 2012.

AG: Chastity has lived in Massachusetts for a decade but she's originally from Upstate New York. She left to begin her transition away from her family.

CB: So in 2012, at that time, I found myself homeless after leaving an abusive relationship. Um, being discriminated...

AG: A friend told Chastity about the fund and she reached out to the founder, Jessie Pack. She was skeptical at first about what the fund could even offer her. But she was surprised.

CB: So he actually drove me to the hotel, gave me some gift cards for the grocery store down the street. And, I literally cried the whole weekend still expecting the worst. Like, what's going to happen on Monday? And Monday he was true to his word. He had set it up where The Trans Emergency Fund paid the rent for a room for three months for me.

AG: That room was pivotal. Chastity was able to establish a safe place to begin rebuilding her life.

CB: And during that time, one question kept popping up in my head - what the hell am I going to do with myself? What do I want out of this life? And, one of the things that kept coming up was to be a resource for my community.

AG: Chastity started out volunteering for the fund. And just two years later, Chastity became the volunteer executive director and transitioned the fund from Worcester to Boston.

CB: And from 2015 to 2019. I was really just putting on fundraisers trying to figure out how can I build the platform.

AG: Everything changed when George Floyd and Breonna Taylor were killed by police in 2020. Protests erupted across the country and just weeks after that, a trans woman of color, Iyanna Dior, was attacked by a group of mostly Black men in Minneapolis. In those spring and summer months following the protests, 14 Black trans women were murdered in the U.S.

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CB: For me, I felt hopeless. It was this feeling in my stomach that I never felt before. To where, you know, when you feel like something bad about to happen to you specifically? Like, I had that knot in my stomach. And, is it, was it like, am I next? Like, is this the end of the era for trans people? We are now being attacked in broad daylight, recorded, and nobody cares.

AG: Trans people of color sit at unique intersections of identity. Trans people are 4-times more likely to experience violence, intimate partner abuse, and sexual assault. For Black and trans people of color, racism also plays a role in their experiences.

CB: I wanted answers. I wanted justice. I wanted to know, what would it take for you to see us as human? What would it take for you to see us as equal as another Black person?

AG: At the same time this was all going on, “Boston Pride,” the organization that ran Boston’s Pride parades, was being called out again for racism. Chastity and others in the LGBTQIA+ community had enough.

CB: And so that made us here in the trans community very upset and we have had enough. And, we decided to march [fingers snapping] in the hood where we are, where we sleep, where we're attacked, where we do sex work at, and let people know that we are here and we have needs.

AG: LGBTQIA+ activists, organizers, and allies boycotted Boston Pride and urged people to attend the first annual “Trans Resistance March” instead. Hundreds of people showed up and marched from Franklin Park to Nubian Square.

[Sound from the 2020 Trans Resistance March: *Whose way? Our way!*... chanting plays for 6s and then fade under next track.]

CB: when I looked out, I saw community. I saw diversity. I saw inclusion. And that's something we don't see all the time. That's something that you've never seen at Boston Pride. And so for me, that moment on that stage allowed me to get to the rest of the day. Because, it let me know that the community [hands clapping] is here behind me. We are all on the same agreement for once [fingers snapping] about what is needed is wrong and that we need to fight and be loud about who we are.

[Sound from the 2020 Trans Resistance March: People yelling, whooping, chanting, “*Black Lives Matter!*” Sound plays for 5s and then fade under next track]

AG: The march helped raise \$100,000 for the Trans Emergency Fund. After so many years of being a volunteer executive director, Chastity finally became the fund’s first paid employee. From there, things took off.

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CB: So in 2020, we were able to assist 51 trans folks with housing that totaled over \$181,000.

AG: Now, the fund is working on securing that three-decker house Chastity mentioned. It's also hosting retreats geared for trans women and men and non-binary people, along with...

CB: ...sessions called "Bridging the Gap." Dinner and discussion sessions between straight black men and transgender women of color. These have been the most eye opening, riveting conversations that I have had the pleasure to be a part of.

AG: These conversations are important to facilitating understanding, Chastity says.

CB: I'm hoping that, we're hoping that, we can take the conversation on the road to some of these major cities ah, where it's really needed to start breaking down these biases, these stereotypes, the stigmas. Because, if we don't educate, we're going to keep on moving with that same miseducation that we were taught when we were younger.

AG: For her, building community is really what her work is all about.

CB: Once you build community, you have power. Once you have the power, you can start breaking down some of these systems that have been put in place to tear us down.

AG: It's a complicated process. As a Black trans woman, Chastity is fighting for liberation for everyone in her communities.

CB: How can we move the Transgender Emergency Fund forward? How can we move the Black community forward? How can we move communities of color together forward? I don't have all the answers, but I'm hoping and I'm, I'm, I pray that like-minded people soon come together soon and try to bridge this gap.

AG: Thank you so much for listening to this installment of the *Future Archive* project. As usual, there is so much we couldn't fit into this story like hearing more about Chastity's story and a little bit more about her work with the Trans Emergency Fund. Head over to the website to hear the full interview.

Lead Artist and host is Arielle Gray. Sound is by Palace Shaw. The *Future Archives* Project is a community-based exhibition at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum.