



ANNUAL REPORT

LETTER FROM THE FOUNDER & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Hey Cousins! Happy New Year!

As we embark on a highly anticipated year- a year in which we plan to organize, organize, organize- I am thrilled to highlight the resilience and ingenuity of our communities here in Houston, Texas and the ways that we have created and amplified beloved space for/by Black transgender and gender nonconforming people.

The Mahogany Project, since I created it in 2017, will turn 7 years old this year- and since the beginning has been a love letter to the beauty and power of transgender people. It has been a testament of the power we hold naturally as organizers, and how long before the creation of nonprofit organizations- Black people and Black trans people have been supporting and uplifting our sisters to ensure we're all ok.

As I write this letter, we've just come off the heels of our annual Black Transgender Empowerment Week: an annual tradition aimed at celebrating and uplifting the transgender community's resilience and contributions. I believe Black Trans Empowerment week is a heartfelt tribute to the entire black trans and gender-diverse community along with its dedicated supporters, who are committed to forging a brighter future for Black Transgender individuals. This week not only memorializes those lost to anti-trans violence, but also provides an organizing space for Black trans people to reimagine what

is possible for Black trans liberation in the United States. In 2023 in partnership with Save Our Sisters United, we commemorated the life and legacy of famed activist and award winning journalist- our dearly departed Monica Roberts. We organized the TGNC Advocacy Summit with Black trans leaders from across the country to renew coalition building in the fight for transgender civil rights- and we honored esteemed leaders and allies at the annual “This Is Us: A Celebration of Changemakers” gala.

In addition, 2023 was the year of responsive organizing as the tides keep changing- both in Texas and across the country. With the ban on drag and the growing anti-trans, anti-queer rhetoric in politics, The Mahogany Project launched the Drag Rapid Response Fund, providing over \$10,000 in mutual aid for queer and trans entertainers impacted by catastrophic loss of work due to the bans. We also co-established the Texas Drag Fund, intentionally supporting BIPOC Drag Entertainers statewide. We partnered with ACLU of Texas, Transgender Education Network of Texas, Equality Texas and others to advocate for permanent injunction against SB12- a free speech and first amendment violation that weaponized “protecting children” as a vehicle to outlaw drag.

Our organizing grew as the tides grew, and this past year, we organized around the intersection of local election impacts to our local Trans and GNC communities. We advocated tirelessly for the recognition of LGBTQIA+ History Month in Houston, with a dedicated proclamation honoring this month citywide this past October. We also organized and bolstered civic engagement- organizing multiple mayoral and City Council forums, and mobilizing over 5,000 first-time Black voters.

Back at The Mahogany Project community center, we held our grand opening of our new space. With the opening of the community center space, we created the Diamond Stylz Clothing Closet program, which provides gender affirming clothing and shoe options for our folks who need it most. The Mahogany Project launched the TGNC Summit series- a series of convenings harnessing the imagination of Black trans and gender nonconforming people to cross pollinate and develop a new theory of change for Black trans liberation in the South. We also launched new initiatives with high impact: an At-Home HIV Testing campaign and initiative to expand education on HIV/AIDS for Black trans and queer people, and the Sex Worker Liberation Project- a partnership Black & Pink National.

As we come into 2024 more prepared to fight the battles ahead- I want to Thank all of you for your unwavering support of our work. It means a lot to me that you all support our work and day to day organizing in so many ways. Without your support, this project wouldn't be able to make the difference and impact that it does- and it's because of you! To everyone who donates to clothing and food pantry programs- THANK YOU. Every dollar counts. To all of our incredible sponsors and partner organizations: THANK YOU for helping make these dreams a reality for our people.

And with that, we're ready. 2024- we got you, girl!

In community,

Verniss McFarland
Founder & Executive Director



A YEAR'S OVERVIEW

OUR MISSION IN ACTION

The mission of The Mahogany Project is to create and provide safe social spaces for/by transgender and non-binary people in Houston, Texas.

We believe that everyone deserves access to economic stability, dignified housing, quality healthcare, resources, community, and opportunities for healing. We provide and connect the most marginalized to programs that help individuals and communities thrive. We advocate throughout the State of Texas and throughout the Southern United States for the civil rights, equal rights, safety and empowerment of Black Transgender, Non-binary, and queer people.

OUR PRIORITIES

**EMPOWERING TRANSGENDER AND
LGBT COMMUNITIES AND BUILDING
STRONG COMMUNITIES.**

**PEER-LED RESOURCE NAVIGATION AND
CRISIS RESPONSE INFORMED BY OUR
LIVED EXPERIENCES.**

**ADVOCATING FOR SAFETY AND CIVIL
RIGHTS FOR LGBT COMMUNITIES IN
THE SOUTH.**

**CELEBRATING OUR HISTORY, CULTURE
AND RESILIENCE.**



OUR MISSION IN ACTION

Founded in 2017 by advocate Verniss McFarland, The Mahogany Project aims to reduce social isolation, stigma, and violence that our most marginalized communities often face daily. A pillar of our work—creating safe spaces for transgender and queer communities of color in Houston, Texas—has allowed our work to impact the lives of trans communities in our local city, and across the United States.

The only Black trans-led/peer led community center in the state of Texas, The Mahogany Project provides supportive services, ranging from emergency housing resource navigation, food pantry, clothing closet, and case management support.

In addition, we provide recreational and arts activities— from our media center/ recording studio to painting classes to community celebrations— all with the aim of providing empowerment and safety for communities who have nowhere else to turn to for peer-led support. We believe that everyone deserves access to economic stability, dignified housing, quality healthcare, resources, community, and opportunities for healing. We provide and connect the most marginalized to programs that help individuals and communities thrive.

NUMBERS & STATISTICS

2023 DEMOGRAPHICS

The Mahogany Project is proud to serve as both a resource and a social empowerment space for our community. This year- and every year since we've started our work, we have been able to support thousands of people in our day to day programs, special events, and our community organizing. Here is a snapshot of our demographics this year:

2,600
OF PARTICIPANTS ENGAGED IN OUR SERVICES & PROGRAMS.

12,000+
OF PARTICIPANTS SERVED SINCE THE MAHOGANY PROJECT'S INCEPTION

66%

IDENTIFY AS BLACK/AFRICAN AMERICAN

62.3%

IDENTIFY AS TRANSGENDER AND/OR GENDER NON CONFORMING

57.7%

OF SURVEYED PARTICIPANTS IDENTIFY AS HIV-POSITIVE

50%

OF OUR FOLKS IDENTIFY AS SEX-WORKERS

40%

OUR FOLKS HAVE BEEN INCARCERATED/FORMERLY INCARCERATED

NEARLY **10%** OF OUR PARTICIPANTS SURVEYED ARE UNAWARE OF THEIR HIV STATUS ; OF THE **10%** WITH UNKNOWN HIV STATUS.

84% IDENTIFIED AS TRANSGENDER, NON-BINARY OR GENDER NON CONFORMING.



66%

**OF OUR
COMMUNITY
CENTER
PROGRAM
PARTICIPANTS
IDENTIFY AS
BLACK/AFRICAN
AMERICAN**

62.3%

**IDENTIFY AS
TRANSGENDER
AND/OR
GENDER NON
CONFORMING**



PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Black Trans Empowerment Week: Our annual celebration of life, beauty, resilience and power of Black Trans and Gender Nonconforming People held in Houston, TX.

TGNC Summit: Our annual organizers & leaders convening that prioritizes coalition building and strategic visioning of Black Trans liberation in real-time.

COMMUNITY CENTER: OUR COMMUNITY CENTER PROVIDES THE FOLLOWING SERVICES DAILY:

- Mutual Aid & emergency cash grant assistance
- Food Service/Food Pantry/Groceries
- Clothing Closet
- Peer Led Case Management & Counseling Services
- HIV Prevention & Sex Education Workshops

- Name & Gender Marker Change Clinics
- Peer Navigation and Re-Entry into HIV Care/STD/HIV Prevention Services with Partner Organizations
- Self Defense Classes
- Computer Lab & Media Center
- Connecting participants to gender affirming health care providers
- Job Training Program
- Workshops and recreational activities

NEW PROGRAMS & INITIATIVES

Drag Rapid Response Fund & Texas Drag Fund

Clothing Closet with Diamond Stylz Boutique

At-Home Sexual Health Testing

Sex Worker Liberation Project in Partnership with Black and Pink

MILESTONES

- We proudly serve 2,600 clients/participants annually (250 participants monthly) through our community center and our transgender empowerment events and programs
- Provided over \$10,000 in rapid response funding to local entertainers.
- Collaborated with the ACLU of Texas, Transgender Education Network of Texas, Equality Texas, and other Texas-based organizations to secure a permanent injunction against SB12.
- Established the Texas Drag Fund, focusing on supporting BIPOC Drag Entertainers statewide.
- Advocating for recognizing LGBTQIA+ History Month with a dedicated proclamation for October.
- Partnered to host two Mayoral forums, including one for the run-off election.
- Distributed over 1000 pairs of socks, 300 deodorant sticks, and 200 hygiene kits.
- Partnered with Youth to The People, Sephora & Project Glimmer in providing gift bags, skincare, cosmetics & toiletries through our Community Center
- Distributed over two hundred banned books to community members for free, encouraging intellectual curiosity and access to literacy materials.
- Provided honorariums to local drag entertainers for pageants, preserving drag history and its impact on queer culture in Texas.
- Organized across the South and the State of Texas for expanded Black voter engagement and coordinated voter registration of over 5,000 Black first time voters.



PARTNERSHIPS



The Mahogany Project has partnered with incredible organizations prioritizing Black Trans and GNC organizing, including (but not limited to):

VIIV Healthcare, Southern AIDS Coalition, The Transgender District and Lavender Rights Project, ACLU Texas, Bunnies on the Bayou, Transgender Education Network of Texas (TENT) and Save Our Sisters United.

In addition, The Mahogany Project has lovingly received sponsorships from Lavender Rights Project, Fund for Trans Generations, Youth to the People, Sephora, Project Glimmer, VIIV Healthcare, and more to expand its programs and initiatives including Black Trans Empowerment Week and our annual TGNC Summit.