

ANNUAL REPORT 2024

PROMOTING EMPOWERMENT
THROUGH AWARENESS FOR
LESBIANS AND BISEXUAL
WOMEN

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ABOUT PETAL

Promoting Empowerment Through Awareness for Lesbian and Bisexual Women

(PETAL) was officially incorporated on December 29th, 2015 as a not-for-profit organization which eventually attained non-governmental organization (NGO) status in 2020. From 2011, years prior to its official designation as an NGO, the organization based its work on “Conversation” which have become a critical component of its work to foster social, economic and gender justice for women with a particular focus on lesbian and bisexual women. The development of the methodology for “Conversation” was critical as it ensured a safe and interactive learning environment for women, especially lesbian/bisexual women.

OUR FOCUS:

PETAL aims to empower women, especially lesbian and bisexual women, by increasing their knowledge of a wide cross section of issues that directly or indirectly, impact them. For this reason, our activities ensure that accurate and relevant information is available and provided to anyone who attends our events.

MISSION:

To achieve social, economic and gender justice for all women in Belize, especially lesbian and bisexual women, through advocacy and empowerment.

THINGS WE DO:



Over the years, PETAL has added to the list of empowerment opportunities, having grown from providing Conversations for lesbian and bisexual women to now being able to provide support in much needed areas such as psychosocial support, financial literacy and economic empowerment.

These events have been open primarily to women who identify as lesbian or bisexual women but PETAL's work is intended to benefit all women who wish to participate in our activities.

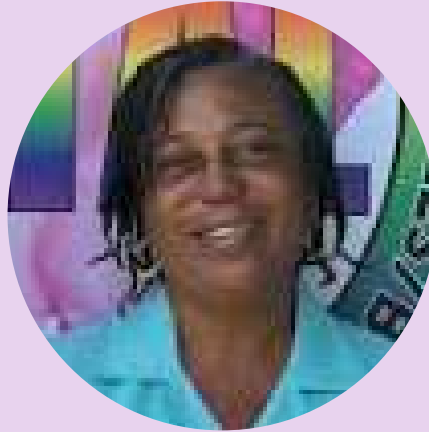
In 2023 the list continued to grow with the addition of a Legal Review Desk which supports a community paralegal and access to pro-bono lawyers. A Legal Literacy Course which focused on several areas of the law that needed reform and strengthened to better aid women. The Inclusive Prevention Promotion project geared at engaging non-traditional stakeholders and partners to assist with ending Gender Based Violence (GBV) within their immediate communities, and the Education Campaign on the Draft Equal Opportunities Bill (EOB). The EOB education campaign was launched in order to further educate not only the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender + community but also the wider Belizean population on the understanding of the importance of the Draft Bill in order to make an informed decision whenever it becomes necessary.



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PRESIDENTS MESSAGE:

PRESIDENT, PETAL

Good afternoon, distinguished members, supporters, and friends of PETAL. It is my profound honor to welcome you to PETAL's 2024 Annual General Meeting. This gathering not only marks the culmination of a year of hard work, dedication, and perseverance but also sets the tone for what lies ahead as we continue to drive our mission forward.

Reflections on the Past Year

2024 has been a transformative year for PETAL. Together, we have strengthened our commitment to advancing social, economic, and gender justice for all women, with particular focus on lesbian, bisexual, and queer women. We have expanded our reach, amplified the voices of the marginalized, and fortified the foundation upon which PETAL's future stands.

Our work in Gender-Based Violence prevention, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights advocacy, and the protection of Human Rights has empowered communities to challenge societal norms and demand equity. One standout moment this year was our launch of the paraprofessional course aimed at enhancing mental health and wellness interventions. It is initiatives like this that demonstrate PETAL's unwavering dedication to equipping service providers and uplifting historically marginalized communities.

Acknowledgments

None of this would be possible without the collective effort of our members, staff, partners, and volunteers. To each of you, thank you for your tireless dedication and the passion you bring to our shared vision. I especially want to acknowledge our founder, M. Simone Hill, whose bold vision over a decade ago continues to inspire us.

Challenges and Opportunities Ahead

As we look to the future, we recognize that challenges remain. The policy environment in Belize still struggles to adequately address systemic inequalities, particularly for vulnerable populations. This year, we faced fierce opposition to essential reforms, but our resolve has only grown stronger. Our work on legislative advocacy, including efforts to address socio-economic disparities and advance the Equal Opportunities Bill, remains central to PETAL's agenda. We will continue building coalitions, strengthening grassroots movements, and ensuring that marginalized voices are not just heard but heeded.

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Vision for the Future

The next year will be pivotal. PETAL's vision remains rooted in fostering communities where justice, equity, and inclusion thrive. We aim to:

1. Expand activities like our 'Conversation' to engage more women across Belize.
2. Advocate for robust policies that dismantle barriers to justice, health, and opportunity.
3. Embrace innovative approaches to self and collective care, ensuring that activists and advocates in this space can sustain the fight for gender equality.

A Call to Action

I call on each of you today to reaffirm your commitment to PETAL's mission. Whether as members, donors, or advocates, your role is crucial. Let us continue to challenge oppression, inspire change, and create a legacy of justice that will outlive us all.

In closing, PETAL's journey has been one of courage and resilience. Together, we will build on our achievements and rise to meet the challenges that lie ahead. With your support, PETAL will remain a beacon of hope and change for years to come.

Thank you for standing with us, for believing in our vision, and for making our collective dream a reality.

Together, let's continue to empower, advocate, and transform.
Thank you.

PETAL'S HOUSE



The dream of having a larger space for the organization came to fruition on August 10, 2021, when PETAL's House was launched, in celebration of PRIDE Week, and the support came from Equal Rights in Action - National Democratic Institute (ERA/NDI). In addition, the support being provided for the space includes a Gender Based Violence (GBV) prevention space. This space can house a victim/survivor of violence for up to one week inclusive of meals.

The organization now has a space, enabling activities to be conducted at PETAL's House which is easily accessible to our membership, volunteers, supporters and the wider community. As the space continues to be operational, the provision of psycho-social support sessions has been and continues to be an essential component of the organization.

For 2023, the cases of gender-based violence have increased instead of decreasing. This means that LGBTQIA+ persons still cannot access the necessary support that one usually does through the Domestic Violence Unit (DVU). The reports continue to be made through regular reporting under the Criminal Code.

One cannot access restraining orders or shelters as these are granted to individuals who report through the DVU.

CARSI-ESF



This project is a two year grant continuing from 2023. This project will end September 2025. It focuses on corruption free public service delivery. For 2024, we have established several monitoring groups within the targeted communities. These monitoring groups are also a part of the capacity development being provided and hosted three paraprofessional training cohorts. A total of 120 public servants, 15 community workers, 25 youth leaders, and other 35 service providers.

The training course was conducted over five training days for each training cohort. Participants successfully completed the Paraprofessional Psychosocial Support Course enhancing their knowledge, skills, and practical abilities in providing psychosocial support utilizing a human rights approach to support individual, community, and societal well-being.

Next year there will be the completion of GBV awareness raising sessions held, legal literacy and monitoring and evaluation of the participants that have completed the course. How the training has impacted, benefitted and or changed their attitudes and behaviour when engaging their public and private domains.

CAISO-ASTRAEA



This project was successfully completed over the course of seven months. It focused on enhancing the GBV space with necessary furniture and appliances as well as the provision of care packages and meals for the Safe Space. Over 68 persons have benefitted from utilizing the space and services. Within the LGBTQIA+ community there still remains a growing number of persons that suffer violence at the hands of their partners and family members which most of the time leaves them to be ostracized from their families and in need of somewhere to stay which is non-judgemental and safe. PETAL continues to provide these services and does its best to maintain and ensure that LGBTQIA+ persons are able to access a space free from discrimination and does not make them feel that they have lost their dignity.



ASTRAEA INTERNATIONAL

There was a contract signed earlier in 2024 for a term of 2 years to provide organizational support. Much of the funding is what has allowed for the organization to continue to regularly engage its membership through conversations, and taking care of any other support needed for the organization. This support spans to the different membership fees that the organization has to make yearly such as being a member of International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association-ILGA, Belize Network of NGOs-BNN, Belize Chamber of Commerce and Industry-BCCI, Belize Companies and Corporate Affairs Registry-BCCAR and any other organizational commitment that may arise. The funding for the AGM 2024 is currently being supported by ASTRAEA and UNTF.



UNITED NATIONS TRUST FUND (UNTF)

The project cycle for this grant concludes in August of 2026. Over the past 2 years a number of skills building sessions have been held, legal literacy training, business mentoring and coaching, the provision of psycho-social support, GBV education and outreach, personal and professional development, financial literacy, women engaging as vendors, and board development.

August concluded the second year of funding with PETAL being approved through the financial and narrative reporting on the various outcomes and indicators projected for the project. As a part of being a UNTF grantee, PETAL was represented in October at the ACT Convening held in Cape Town South Africa. The convening brought grantees together to share, learn and network with each other. While in Cape Town, Ms. Talbert also co-facilitated a session on self care and wellness.

At the end of November there was a highlight of the project through the economic fair that was held at the Ramada for the BCCI Christmas Extravaganza.

At the end of the project PETAL hopes to have 300 women become entrepreneurs, be better able to budget, advocate for themselves and be self-sufficient.

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UNITED NATIONS TRUST FUND (UNTF)



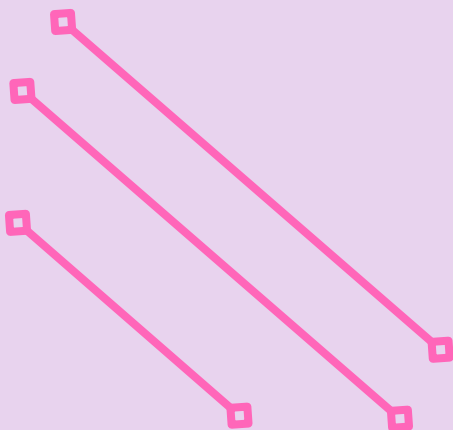
CSO HUB



Twice in this year the CSO Hub provided support to PETAL to continue providing psycho-social support to its membership and the wider community of women we engage. The support has allowed the organization to continuously fulfill the gap that exists for resources allocated to provide psycho-social support.

The funding from the CSO Hub comes directly out of the Global Fund grant currently being available in Belize. The CSO Hub has advised through a formal letter that GoBelize will no longer be serving the CSO Hub as its secretariat.

There has not been any entity identified as yet that will be managing the CSO Hub.



CVC

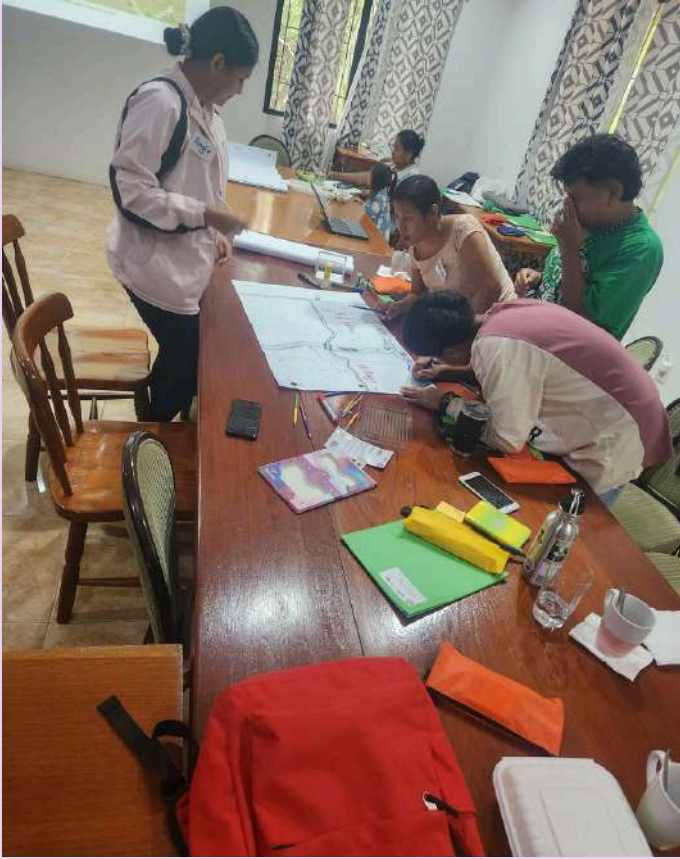


The Caribbean Vulnerable Communities reached out earlier in the summer regarding a project that they wanted PETAL to be a part of. The project was an eight month grant to work with two smaller communities within Belize that are currently either being affected by climate change, or addressing some issue that they foresee as a result of climate change.

Two groups were referred to PETAL by one of the environmental groups. Those two communities undertaking the development and execution of an action plan are within the Southern District. They are Trio and Big Falls Village.

They each replicated the training they received earlier in September with their respective communities with the hope of a clearly defined action plan. This project will run until April of 2026.

CVC



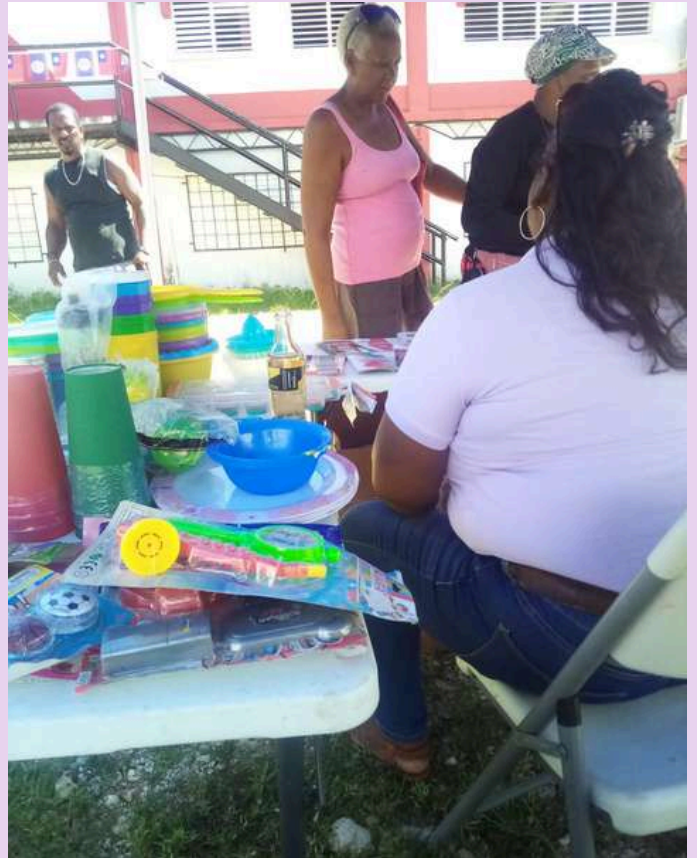
GBV



Since 2018, PETAL has maintained a steadfast commitment to addressing Gender-Based Violence (GBV) through our monthly education and awareness sessions. These sessions serve as a vital platform for engaging communities, providing critical information, and fostering dialogue to challenge and change societal norms around GBV. This initiative has been made possible through the generous support of key funders, including the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women (UNTF), the U.S. Embassy, and the ASTRAEA Lesbian Foundation for Justice.

In 2024, PETAL has strategically expanded its reach to amplify the conversation on GBV. Our participation in prominent spaces such as the Belize Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCCI) Expo and the global 16 Days of Activism campaign demonstrated our dedication to creating visible and impactful advocacy. Additionally, our feature on Hot off the Press brought increased public attention to the urgent need for action on GBV, emphasizing our role as a leading voice in this critical area. These efforts reflect PETAL's ongoing mission to educate, empower, and advocate for a violence-free society where all women can thrive.

GBV



PRIDE 2024



Celebrating PRIDE 2024: "I am who I am, there is nothing wrong with me. I am living my life"

In 2024, PETAL proudly hosted two dynamic PRIDE events that celebrated the resilience and vibrancy of the LGBTQ+ community in Belize. These events showcased our collective journey, highlighted ongoing efforts for equality, and brought the community together in meaningful ways.

The first event, held on August 8th, was a Walk-Through Gallery that told the rich story of PRIDE in Belize and the evolution of the LGBTQ+ movement. The gallery highlighted the trailblazing work of various LGBTQ+ organizations—past and present—demonstrating how far we've come and the relentless efforts that continue. It served as both an educational experience and an inspiring reminder of the power of collective action.

The following day, August 9th, PETAL's President, joined by a couple of Board members and two members, attended a Breakfast Buffet hosted by the British High Commissioner. At this gathering, our President was invited to share insights on the current state of the LGBTQ+ movement in Belize, offering an opportunity to advocate for continued support and collaboration with allies.

This dialogue underscored the importance of partnerships in advancing equality.

The celebrations culminated in a lively Soca Night on August 10th at PETAL's House. Over 50 members of the LGBTQ+ community and their allies gathered to revel in music, dance, and togetherness. The event brought out individuals who hadn't been seen in years, those who typically stay away from public events, and even attendees who traveled from afar to join the festivities. The night was electric, filled with joy, connection, and the freedom to simply be. It was truly a night to remember and a testament to the strength and unity of the LGBTQ+ community.

Through these events, PETAL reaffirmed its commitment to fostering spaces where the community can celebrate, reflect, and thrive. These moments of togetherness remind us of the importance of both honoring our history and building a brighter, more inclusive future.

PRIDE 2024





MOTHER'S DAY EVENT

An Evening of Elegance: Celebrating Mothers in Style

On May 11, 2024, PETAL hosted a heartfelt Mother's Day event that radiated warmth, appreciation, and community. Traditionally, the organization has engaged in a Wellness Day celebration during this time of year. However, with limited funding, we shifted our focus to an intimate yet impactful event dedicated specifically to honoring mothers.

Dubbed an Evening of Elegance, the event provided a delightful experience for each mother in attendance. Guests were treated to a hearty meal thoughtfully prepared to nourish both body and spirit. Each mom also received a carefully selected gift, ensuring they left feeling celebrated and appreciated.

A stunningly decorated backdrop served as the perfect spot for mothers to capture cherished memories with loved ones. The atmosphere was lively and interactive, with a trivia session featuring questions about PETAL's work. Participants who answered correctly were rewarded with prizes, creating a fun and engaging way to deepen understanding of our mission.

The event was well-attended, with mothers expressing their joy and gratitude for being celebrated in such a special way. For PETAL, this gathering was more than an occasion—it was a reminder of the invaluable role mothers play in their families and communities, and our commitment to fostering spaces where they feel seen and appreciated.

This Mother's Day, PETAL once again proved that even with limited resources, meaningful moments can be created to honor the women who nurture and inspire us.

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MOTHER'S DAY EVENT



ECS PROJECT





WOMEN'S FORUM

Championing Change: Annual Women's Forum 2024

In 2024, PETAL hosted its much-anticipated Annual Women's Forum, a cornerstone event that brings women together to engage in critical conversations, share experiences, and chart pathways to empowerment. This year's forum built on the momentum of previous gatherings, focusing on intersectional challenges faced by women and offering actionable solutions to foster equality and justice.

On March 19, 2024, PETAL convened its Annual Women's Forum at the UWI Global Campus Auditorium in Belize City, uniting diverse voices to explore this year's theme: Equity, Diversity, Inclusion: Corruption Free Service Delivery. The forum brought together women leaders, advocates, and allies to address pressing issues and share strategies to foster a more inclusive, equitable society rooted in integrity.

The half-day event featured three powerful panel discussions, each delving into a core aspect of the theme:

Equity: Panelists explored systemic disparities that hinder women's access to resources and opportunities, highlighting solutions to create fairer outcomes for all.

Diversity: This session celebrated the richness of Belize's multicultural identity, emphasizing the importance of representation and inclusion in decision-making processes.

Inclusion: Speakers unpacked strategies to build environments where everyone, regardless of background or identity, can thrive and contribute meaningfully.

The engaging discussions were complemented by thought-provoking Q&A sessions, where participants exchanged ideas on dismantling barriers to equity and building systems of accountability in public service delivery.

Held in a space symbolic of learning and progress, the forum was attended by representatives from civil society, academia, and government, fostering cross-sector dialogue. Attendees left with renewed commitment and actionable insights to advocate for corruption-free service delivery grounded in equity, diversity, and inclusion.

The 2024 forum underscored PETAL's role as a catalyst for change, reminding all participants of the collective power in driving systemic transformation.

WOMEN'S FORUM



AGM 2023



AGM 2023: Reflecting on Progress, Charting the Future

PETAL's Annual General Meeting (AGM) for 2023 served as a pivotal moment to reflect on the organization's accomplishments and set the stage for continued impact. Held on December 10, 2023, the AGM brought together board members, volunteer staff, and supporters to review the year's achievements, address challenges, and strategize for the future.

The meeting agenda included key updates from PETAL's leadership, financial reports, and a recap of major activities undertaken in 2023.

Highlights included the successful implementation of educational programs on gender-based violence, expanded community engagement efforts, and strengthened partnerships with local and international allies.

A key focus of the AGM was the presentation of PETAL's strategic priorities for 2024, centered around its three core pillars: Gender-Based Violence (GBV), Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), and Human Rights and Advocacy. Members engaged in robust discussions on how to enhance these initiatives, particularly in reaching marginalized groups such as LBQ women and youth.

The AGM also provided an opportunity to recognize the contributions of PETAL's dedicated team and supporters, whose efforts have been instrumental in advancing the organization's mission. There were no elections held in 2023.

As PETAL concluded its AGM 2023, the organization reaffirmed its commitment to fostering social, economic, and gender justice for all women. The meeting closed with a sense of optimism and a shared resolve to tackle the challenges ahead, empowered by the successes of the past year.

AGM 2023



FAMILIARIZATION MEETINGS



PETAL's Engagement in National Committees and Networks

PETAL remains actively involved in key national committees and networks that influence policies and drive systemic change for women and marginalized groups. Through our participation, we ensure that the voices of vulnerable communities, including LBQ women, are heard in the formulation of national strategies and legislation.

In 2024, PETAL continued its significant role in the National Commission for Families and Children (NCFC), where it advocates for child protection, family welfare, and the rights of women, particularly those facing gender-based violence and other forms of discrimination. Our contributions in this forum help shape policies that impact women and children at all levels, focusing on creating safer, more inclusive environments for all families. The biggest issues worked on in 2023 are to have the age for marriage be 16 and not 14 or below and addressing the media's portrayal of children being incarcerated/detained, children's faces being plastered across media postings and the age for child labor to be 16 and not 14 as was the previous age to work.

PETAL is also a valued member of the People's Constitution Commission (PCC), a vital platform for ensuring that the voices of Belizean citizens are included in constitutional reform discussions. PETAL is the substantive representative for the Belize Network of NGOs (BNN) on the People's Constitution Commission (PCC). In this role, we advocate on behalf of the broader NGO community to ensure that national reforms, particularly those related to the Constitution, consider the rights of all citizens. PETAL's advocacy focuses on inclusivity, gender equality, and the protection of human rights for vulnerable populations.

As part of the Belize Network of NGOs, PETAL works to strengthen collaboration across civil society organizations, share resources, and collectively address national issues that affect marginalized communities. Our role in these committees and networks ensures that PETAL is at the forefront of policy discussions, representing the needs of women, children, and LGBTQ+ individuals in national decision-making. Through our active engagement in these platforms, PETAL continues to amplify the voices of those often left out of the conversation, advocating for a more inclusive, just, and equitable Belize. Through this committee, PETAL works to address gender issues, advocate for the rights of LGBTQ+ individuals, and push for more inclusive language and provisions in the country's governing documents. This aligns with our broader efforts to ensure that the Constitution reflects the diverse needs and rights of all citizens.

FAMILIARIZATION MEETINGS



PCC MEETINGS





EXPLORING NEW OPPORTUNITIES WITH THE ARCUS FOUNDATION

In August 2024, PETAL was approached by Erica Lim, Senior Program Officer at the Arcus Foundation, who supports regranting in the Caribbean. Erica reached out to inform PETAL of a potential funding opportunity that could align with the organization's ongoing work on the Equal Opportunities Bill in Belize. This opportunity came after a conversation with one of PETAL's existing funders, who is supported by Arcus. Erica outlined several possible avenues for support, including strategic litigation, short-term policy objectives like legal gender recognition, and targeted campaigns aimed at advancing LGBTQ+ rights and gender equality in Belize. The potential grants offered were described as one-time opportunities, with funding durations ranging from 1 to 3 years.

PETAL is currently assessing how best to align its efforts on the Equal Opportunities Bill with the objectives of the Arcus Foundation's funding. This bill is a critical piece of legislation that PETAL and its partners have been advocating for, as it seeks to protect the rights of marginalized communities, particularly LGBTQ+ individuals, in Belize.

This opportunity opens the door for PETAL to strengthen its advocacy and legal initiatives, furthering its mission to advance gender justice, human rights, and the inclusion of all Belizeans, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.

A proposal was submitted and if accepted, we would have funding for the next two years to continue educating on the EOB. The response would come in January of 2025.



STRENGTHENING LEGAL AID THROUGH PARTNERSHIP WITH LAWYERS WITHOUT BORDERS CANADA

In November 2023, PETAL's President had a follow-up conversation with Richard Gorman and Mathilde Doucet from Lawyers Without Borders Canada (LWB). This conversation built upon an initial discussion in June 2023 about a project focusing on the rights of LGBT people in the Caribbean. LWB was seeking PETAL's perspective on the specific areas of focus within their project and exploring potential collaboration.

In November 2024, LWB reached out again to inform PETAL that their proposal to the Canada Fund was successful. The proposal, which highlighted PETAL's work in providing legal aid to the LGBT community, had secured funding, and LWB would be expanding its work into the Caribbean, with PETAL potentially being included in their plans.

During the week of November 26-29, PETAL's President had the opportunity to meet with Richard and Mathilde in person to further discuss the impact of PETAL's legal aid services and how the organization saw itself aligning with the proposed project outcomes. The discussions were productive, with LWB recognizing PETAL's operational capacity despite not having full-time staff. They were particularly impressed by the organization's commitment to capacity building, the development of operational documents, and their consistent utilization.

Additionally, Ahisha Williams, PETAL's part-time administrator, had the opportunity to meet with Richard and Mathilde to discuss her administrative responsibilities and the ways in which PETAL's internal operations supported its mission.

Although no formal agreements were signed, this collaboration signals an exciting opportunity for PETAL to benefit from the larger project's goals and outcomes, and to further strengthen its legal aid services and capacity building efforts in the Caribbean.



BEIZE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (BCCI)

PETAL recently became a member of the Chamber of Commerce in September of this year. This membership should bring about more exposure for the organization especially the skills building and entrepreneurial opportunities. One such opportunity came with the organization taking part for the first time in the yearly Expo and quite recently, the Christmas Extravaganza. In both spaces PETAL highlighted two of the projects we have undertaken, UNTF and CARSI-ESF. The UNTF project's focus is on entrepreneurial support and skills building and the CARSI-ESF which focuses on corruption free public service delivery and gender-based violence. At both the events, PETAL did an interview with Hot off the Press to further boost the post.

Upon a recent conversation with a representative of the Chamber I was advised that there are membership cards that PETAL members would be able to receive through payment from PETAL, that would allow them to get discounts from businesses registered under the Chamber as well.