



KEEPING  
**BALL**  
ROOM

COMMUNITY

**A L I V E**  
NETWORK

# Mission

## of the Keeping Ballroom Community Alive Network

The Keeping Ballroom Community Alive Network (KBCAN) seeks to actualize liberation through confronting systemic oppression by building power, organizing ballroom styled direct actions for narrative change, and connecting the House and Ballroom Community (HBC) to resources. KBCAN will educate and advocate through radical love by addressing trauma, emphasizing health and wellness, protecting safe and sacred space, and intentionally lifting up the self-care and self-determination of the House and Ballroom Community.

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# Origin Story of the Keeping Ballroom Community Alive Network

The getR.E.A.L Initiative at the Center for the Study of Social Policy launched the very first Keeping Community Alive Network meeting on August 21st, 2015 as a part of the inaugural NYC Ballroom Symposium. At the launch meeting, House parents and leaders came together to strategize what a network could do to support the infrastructure of the House and Ballroom Community, fight against systemic oppression, advocate for systems-change and lift-up the voices and experiences of LGBTQ youth impacted by deep-end systems (child welfare, mental health, homelessness, criminal justice). Network members engaged in a variety of topics ranging from grassroots mobilization, asset mapping, leadership development, expanding visibility, building power, and growing the collective knowledge and consciousness of Black and Brown queer communities that participate in the house/ball culture.

As the Keeping Community Alive Network began to narrow its focus and define the specific projects that have started to come into fruition, several cornerstones to the work were made clear from the very beginning:

It is important that the get R.E.A.L Initiative values (Recognition, Engagement, Affirmation, & Love) are interwoven into the creation process of this network. These values have shaped not only the outcome of the work, but the process

used to reach those outcomes. It has always been critical that a co-creation and co-investment model is used. That is to say, this is not a “network” built by the getR.E.A.L Initiative, rather, it is an opportunity to bring together members of the Ballroom Community to ensure that this community can engage, strategize, and create solutions to many of the problems they face.

This network was created to serve, explore and identify how the House and Ballroom Community (HBC) is an example of a subculture that young LGBTQ and GNC people of color have created to meet a need and fill a gap that government systems have historically and consistently failed to meet. This network seeks to learn from what the Ballroom Community has created and use those lessons to make broken systems do better to provide positive outcomes when serving Black and Brown queer, trans and GNC communities.

# The Keeping Ballroom Community Alive Network (KBCAN) currently serves several functions:

## Internal Capacity Building:

KBCAN will provide the House and Ballroom Community with support in existing infrastructure, leadership development, and capacity building. There will be a results based approach to gathering data to better understand the resilience and lived experiences of house/family culture with this community.

## Advocacy, Education and Training:

KBCAN will provide the House and Ballroom Community with support in existing infrastructure, leadership development, and capacity building. There will be a results based approach to gathering data to better understand the resilience and lived experiences of house/family culture with this community.

## Technology, Resources and Narrative Change:

KBCAN will provide the House and Ballroom Community with support in existing infrastructure, leadership development, and capacity building. There will be a results based approach to gathering data to better understand the resilience and lived experiences of house/family culture with this community.

# Starting a House and Ballroom Movement: Voices from the Launch Meeting

The Keeping Ballroom Community Alive Network has to be "Uncut-Grass-Roots." It will only be successful if it is driven by the people who have investment in the HBC and investment the survival of those who live in the HBC. There was a discussion around stigma, and how the HBC can cultivate a space that allows youth to navigate systems and often create their own response to the needs that impact their lives. engage mutually with all of our identities, struggles, and intersections. We want to bring our full-selves to the table.

The network will strategize as to how to get young people more access to resources. This network needs to be about sensitivity, leadership, funding and accountability.

What is the process of becoming "socially conscious" and how we can use the network for internal consciousness and external trainings to those we interact with for resources?

There has to be an equal balance of grassroots mobilization in addition to strong effort to provide legitimization of the network, through grants and scholarships with national organizations. This will help keep the network thriving, but also expand reach to create visibility of how the HBC fills a need that systems cannot.

This network is about building up leaders that are able to voice the needs that are met inside of the HBC, and the gaps that systems have perpetually failed to meet. The network must serve as a way to empower participants in the HBC to be able to create stronger internal bonds, and become active and shifting the systems that seek to make our lives better, but often fail and make our lives worse in the process.



# Current Initiatives

## of the Keeping Ballroom Community Alive Network:

### Crystal LaBeija Organizing Fellowship

In the 1970s, a Black transgender woman named Crystal LaBeija started the very first "House" in the House and Ballroom Community, it was deemed the legendary "House of LaBeija." This historic moment launched and solidified the contemporary HBC. Not only was this community founded by Black transgender women, but it was built as a response to discrimination and trans-misogynoir that Black transgender women and gender non-conforming individuals experience far too often. Thus, it is only appropriate for the KBCAN to further the often invisibilized Black radical tradition of transgender leadership, and launch the Crystal LaBeija Organizing Fellowship (CLOF). This initiative will identify 5-10 transgender and gender non-conforming leaders in the HBC, that will further the work of the Keeping Ballroom Community Alive Network. Each member of CLOF will receive a stipend to address the issues that most impact that lives of transgender women, transgender men and gender non-conforming people in the HBC.

### Annual Ballroom Symposium

The annual Ballroom symposium is a space for LGBTQ youth of color to participate workshops related to overall wellness, inter-generational panel discussions, educational engagement, resource connection, creative expression, celebration and reflection on Ballroom culture, its current power and future potential. The symposium was originally launched in New York City, but will take place in cities around the country annually.

## House and Ballroom Community Leadership Development & Advocacy Work

KBCAN will invite seasoned youth organizers, house parents and other leaders to engage in public speaking, content creation, leadership development and facilitation techniques towards the goal of building leadership and voice within the HBC, and preparing policymakers and system administrators to better meet the needs of LGBTQ youth of color impacted by deep-end systems (child welfare, homelessness, mental health and criminal justice systems).

### The Freedom Ball

(Developing Research Support Modules and Internal Consciousness)

This is a Ball themed around fighting against systemic oppression; The Freedom Ball tailors categories around specific issues (i.e. criminal justice, domestic violence, homelessness, survival sex, education, and mental health and child welfare). In preparation for the ball, there is a series of "Research Support Modules" (RSM) that are provided to any house that would like to host them. The RSM will provide house participants with research support relating to education in regards to anti-oppression and black-queer feminist lens.

### KBCAN Technology and Narrative Change

KBCAN will utilize the power of storytelling, technology and social media to create and support spaces that cultivates narrative change by highlighting the family o components . This will also be a space to post opportunities that connect LGBTQ youth of color to resources including, job opportunities, employment/vocational trainings, mental health facilities, transitional living programs. KBCAN will work in partnership with Think of US, to incorporate new technology into the Ballroom Community that will support in these efforts.



## Policy and Advocacy Outreach Teams

The KCA Network's Policy and Advocacy Teams will provide an avenue to pay LGBTQ youth of color in the HBC to be engaged in the policy and practice creation process through being interviewed, participating in focus groups and reviewing policy and practice guidelines that relate to the lives of HBC participants. It is important that we recognize that Ballroom participants, and all LGBTQ youth navigating systemic oppression, are the premium experts of their own experiences. Therefore, policy and practice guidelines created on local and national levels should be reviewed by the populations that will be centrally impacted. The Policy and Advocacy Outreach Team will be prepared to provide feedback and review policies related to survival sex, child welfare, homelessness, criminal justice and mental health.

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## Infrastructure & Sustainability for National House and Ballroom Community

The KBCAN network will survey HBC sustainability models and identify the key components to keeping a city's HBC healthy and productive, with a particular focus on the Kiki Scene towards the goal of building infrastructure for Kiki longevity and success in non-traditional House and Ballroom locations across the United States. This work also entails collecting testimonials, best practices, and innovative processes that have taken place to sustain the history, vibrancy, and collective power of the House and Ballroom Community and supporting these networks across the country.

# Meet KBCAN's Inaugural Cohort of Crystal Labeija Organizing Fellows!

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To further the Black radical tradition of transgender leadership, the Crystal Labeija Organizing Fellowship (CLOF) has identified 10 transgender and gender non-conforming leaders in the house/ballroom community who are furthering the work of KBCAN through ballroom styled direct action organizing, social justice and capacity building. Fellows have worked closely with KBCAN and ballroom community members to identify, plan, and implement projects that further the freedom dreams of Black and Brown Queer youth throughout the Ballroom Community.



## Jennifer Barnes-Babenciaga

is a 28 year old revolutionary Woman of Trans Experience who has dedicated her life to working to ensure the meaningful advancement of gender equity and inclusion for all people of the trans experience. She is a former youth HIV/AIDS policy advisor for Georgia Equality. Barnes, a 7-year resident of the City of Atlanta is originally from Hamilton, Ohio and holds numerous organizational affiliations, including membership in the illustrious House of Babenciaga, a leading institution in the House and Ballroom Community. Through the Crystal Labeija Organizing Fellowship Jennifer will be continuing her political and civic engagement work with Georgia State Representative Park Cannon, with a particular focus on name change laws. Jennifer is also donating a portion of her project funds to the Claudette M. Mason Scholarship Fund to support the professional and educational endeavors of trans women of color.



is an East Asian trans femme from Queens, New York. She was born on an island and longs to go back. Sen believes in a matriarchal world lead by femmes and knows that feminine energy is a unique power. She expresses herself through script writing and is currently working to share the stories of trans femme folks of color through film and other media. Through the Crystal LaBeija Organizing Fellowship, Sen will use her project funds to amplify the unheard voices within the trans and gender-nonconforming community. She will be finalizing an original script for a web series about Asian trans women exploring their intersecting identities. Sen will also be advocating for policy change in regards to identification, gender marker and name changes for trans women of color.

## Sen Ayané



## Jade Dynasty-Luna

is a community engagement specialist, organizer, advocate, activist, nightlife performer, drag artist and producer of Indonesian descent based in Seattle, WA. She is a member of the House of Dynasty, and mother of the Kiki Ballroom House of Luna. In 2017, she was awarded a Gender Justice Celebratory Award for her work in Gender Justice and creating spaces that celebrate the trans women experience. In her community engagement work, Jade brings her history of struggling with homelessness and intersectional violence to her work in community with homeless QTPOC as a counselor/ peer support specialist. In March of 2016 Jade organized the first ever QTPOC centered homelessness forum and resource fair in King County, WA at Peace for the Streets by Kids from the Streets located in Capitol Hill, Seattle. The forum included 16 local LGBTQ, Homeless, and youth focused organizations as well as a panel consisting of all QTPOC youth and young adults who were currently homeless or formerly homeless. In her advocacy work, she has fought on a city and legislative level alongside organizations like the Gender Justice League, Youthcare, and the Mockingbird society against LGBTQ & Homelessness discrimination laws & policies. She continues to use her platform and voice to speak out about the unique violence trans women of color face as well as uplift the voices of others in her community. Through her work with the Crystal LaBeija Organizing Fellowship she will be launching a KBCAN Ballroom Symposium to host a kiki ball, educational workshops, and organizing sessions for the local House and Ballroom Community.



## Gia Banks Mizrahi

is a Los Angeles based dancer, model, and activist who uses performance to ignite social change. She has performed for venues such as LA PRIDE, TransNation, and Alliance for California Traditional Arts. Since 2006, Gia has worked with REACH LA to link the West Coast House and Ballroom Community -- where she serves as Legendary Mother of the House of Mizrahi -- to both artistic platforms and HIV/AIDS-related services. Through her work with the Crystal Labeija Organizing Fellowship she will be continuing her work to link grassroots efforts (that take place on the west coast) with the KBCAN national network.



## Gia Love

is a trans woman of color from New York City. She is the Queen Mother of the House of Juicy, which is one of the many houses in the underground Kiki Scene. Gia's work in the Kiki ballroom community has extended from community activism to providing HIV and STI prevention services for at-risk LGBTQ youth. Gia lives her life as a courageous woman of trans experience who overcame adversity by living in her truth unapologetically and authentically. Through the Crystal Labeija Organizing Fellowship, Gia will be supported with her work visioner work building a youth movement in the Kiki Scene.

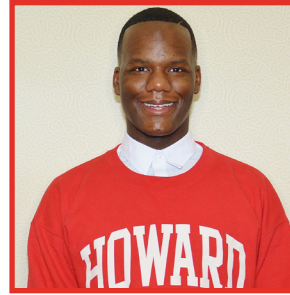


## Linda Labeija

is a multidisciplinary artist from Bronx, NY, whose work explores the complexities of living as a transgender woman of color in today's America. With origins in both Black America and the English/Spanish-speaking Caribbean, Linda's transnational experience of living at the intersection of embodied, social, and national borders hones in on the critiques of hegemonic power. As a performing artist, musician and author, Linda's work intervenes with confidence, politicized anger, and grace into a symbolic and literal economy which would otherwise render her bound and gagged. Her work aims to create space for transgender and gender non-conforming people of color in the arts. Through workshop facilitation and communal performances, Linda uses her autobiographical work to create greater social consciousness around transgender issues. Aside from her work on the stage, she devotes her time working at the Ali Forney Center helping LGBT homeless youth. Her skills and experience have brought her to working with groups and organizations such as Afropunk, helping organize their first Trans Awareness March in 2015 and The Iconic House of LaBeiija facilitating vogue and poetry workshops at schools, universities and juvenile justice centers. She can also be seen in the feature film "Pariah" directed by Dee Rees. Through the Crystal Labeija Organizing Fellowship Linda will be creating a community based story-telling incubation for the HBC. She will be launching a radical storytelling initiative and theatrical production that highlights the impact of strengths-based narrative change that brings nuance to the story of House and Ballroom Culture.

## Isaiah Maxwell

also known as Cameo Balenciaga, is a Black Queer/GNC activist who was born in St. Louis, MO and currently lives in Brooklyn, NY. In 2015, they graduated from Howard University with a Bachelors and Arts in Journalism. After graduating from college they were selected to participate in Interpublic Group's InterAct Associate Program, a selective professional development capacity building initiative that partners young professionals with entrepreneurial apprenticeships. Through the Crystal Labeija Organizing Fellowship Cameo will be developing a runway training and competition for young queer youth of color in Brooklyn, as a method of walking the runway for political resistance, personal agency and gender affirmation. The class will be taught in two tiers. The first tier will go through an intensive teaching and learning engagement with youth, emphasizing all the elements of House Ballroom Runway Culture. The second tier will focus on competitive runway competitions to engage the larger community in KBCAN values



## Phoebe Garcon-

is a Black Trans "artavis" residing in Philadelphia, PA. She works on issues relating to trans health, homelessness and sex work advocacy. She is a performance artist and lead curator of the #FreeTheBody Initiative. Through this initiative Phoebe aims to de-stigmatize and decolonize the bodies, needs and narratives of queer/trans people of color. Through the Crystal Labeija Organizing Fellowship, Phoebe will be working on a docu-series titled Blackness: The Multilith. This cultural production series will dissect the problematic singular narratives of blackness and queerness by highlighting the stories and everyday experiences of folks who identify as such with an emphasis on the history and present work of Black trans artist, activist and cultural workers.



## Omiona Brown

also known as Cherry Bomb, is a Black transgender woman from Gary, Indiana. She currently resides in Indianapolis, IN where she participates in various LGBT community initiatives, including Ballroom Ambassador in the Red Ribbon Rumble program, an HIV prevention program focused on cultivating ballroom leaders. She first became involved in ballroom in 2001 when she attended the very first ball hosted in Indianapolis, the House of Glory Ball. Cherry has been working with Brother's United in Minneapolis, Indiana. She participated as a Ballroom Ambassador as part of Indiana's PrEP grant. As part of this campaign, she hosted a series vogue nights and partnered with the local sex worker community to connect trans and cis women to health and wellness resources. Through the Crystal Labeija Organizing Fellowship Cherry will continue to advocate on issues around Indiana's policy regarding changing names and gender markers. Furthermore, Cherry plans to utilize her fellowship funds to support a new collaborative to connect Brother's United with other HBC organizations and community members.



## Londyn de Richelieu

is the founder of the Claudette M. Mason Foundation. Named after Londyn's grandmother, her foundation seeks to be resource for the transgender community, while leading a vision to support strategic direction for educational and professional success. The mission of the Claudette M. Mason Foundation is to advance the education of the transgender community and be a vessels for positive change. The Claudette M. Mason Foundation also provides a tailored scholarship program for trans women of color seeking post-secondary education. Each scholarship recipient is linked to a mentor and internships as they engage in customized community based project towards the goal of trans liberation. Through the Crystal Labeija Organizing Fellowship, Londyn will be supported with her capacity building and strengths-based initiatives that she is leading across the country.



# Meet the CLOF Faculty

## Dr. Ayana Elliott

earned her doctorate in Nursing Practice with honors from Chatham University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She is certified by the American Association of Nurse Practitioners, a member of the American Academy of HIV Medicine, and has clinical expertise in family medicine, medical oncology, HIV, and transgender health. Dr. Elliott's research focuses on health promotion, HIV prevention and treatment, and primary care for sexual and gender minorities of color. Her work includes co-investigating studies to identify structural barriers to HIV testing, prevention, and treatment among Black MSM and to determine methodologies to enhance the quality of care for HIV-positive transgender women of color. She is the principal and lead health consultant for The Elliott Group, LLC.



## Jamal Lewis

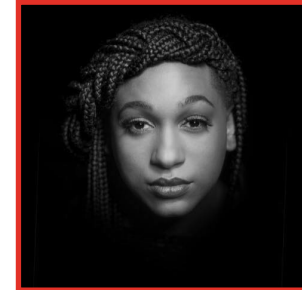
is an interdisciplinary artist, writer, thought leader, and communications professional living in Bedstuy, Brooklyn, hailing from Atlanta, Georgia. Named by Teen Vogue as one of the "coolest queers on the internet," Lewis is also known as 'fatfemme', a moniker that encapsulates life at the intersection of fat and femme identity -- "spaces that people are afraid to occupy," she names. A graduate of Morehouse College and The New School, Lewis produces work around the body, specifically exploring and interrogating identity formation, race, gender, sexuality, desire, beauty, and ugliness. She is currently in production for her forthcoming documentary, No Fats, No Femmes. Lewis's work has been featured in LA Times, New York Times, TriBeCa, & Tate Modern.





## Elle Hearn

was born and raised in Columbus, Ohio and currently resides in Washington DC. It is safe to say that she has always been a community organizer by nature. She is most noted for her service as Lead Organizer of the first Movement for Black Lives Convening held in Cleveland, Ohio in 2015. She would go on to serve as a Principal Consultant on The Movement For Black Lives Policy Platform. Elle is also founding member of the Black Lives Matter Network and has been a strategic partner since its inception. She is also the former National Organizing Director for the Black Lives Matter Network. This role required her to support the ongoing development of the network's structure and expanding its global reach.



Most recently, she is the Founding Executive Director of The Marsha P. Johnson Institute. This organization has been thriving since 2015 under her leadership. This vision flourished following her tenure as the Central Region Coordinator for GetEQUAL. Her organizing expands beyond paid positions. She has also volunteered as a Creative Ambassador for the Trans Women of Color Collective. Elle's writing have been featured in TruthOut, Huffington Post, and Ebony. Her work has also been chronicled by several outlets including Time, CNN, MTV, The New York Times, Alternet, Democracy Now, The Daily Dot, Fusion, Essence Magazine, and The Washington Post.

# Co-Founders of KBCAN



## Jonovia Chase

is a community organizer and production assistant residing in Harlem, New York. As a young community stakeholder and leader within the House Ballroom and Transgender communities Jonovia continues to mobilize youth and Trans folks to raise awareness on health and wellness. More specifically, she aims to create more voices for her community to unify and break systematic behaviors geared around stigma and the further marginalization of these communities. Humanizing the lives of people of Trans experience is what one of her most deep heart felt values are. She remains hopeful that the work being done by many will continue to affect the change needed in the world. Currently she is an active member and organizer of the House Ballroom leadership convening #HouseLivesMatter, Keeping Ballroom Community Alive Network, New York state's Ending The Epidemic TGNC Advisory Group and NYC Kiki Coalition. Jonovia is also working on the new Fox Fearless Network show POSE co-created by Steven Canals and Ryan Murphy, a House Ballroom centered show with the largest transgender cast in history.



## Jonathan Lykes

is a Black queer artist, activist and senior policy analyst and has been a CDG Pro member of the House of Garçon since 2016. He currently works at the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) as a Senior Policy Analyst and is the National Youth Organizer for the getR.E.A.L Initiative, addressing disproportionality and disparities that affect Black and brown LGBTQ and gender non-conforming youth impacted by the oppressive actions of deep-end systems (child welfare, mental health, homelessness and criminal justice). He is the former artistic director of Performing Arts for Effective Civic Education (PAECE) Program at the University of Chicago, where he used interdisciplinary art and performance to help youth realize their roles as civically active members of the community who thrive toward

## Martez Smith

is a first year PhD student at the University of Rochester, School of Nursing. Hailing from Columbus, Ohio, he developed an interest in research and social justice work by way of the house ball community. The house ball community is a subculture of Black and Latino LGBTQ life comprised chosen kinship groups (known as houses) which participate in elaborate pageant-like events (known as balls) for prizes, social status, and affirmation. His experiences as a member of the House of Evisu, now known as the House of Xclusive-Lanvin, led him to pursue education in social work (The Ohio State University '13, BSW; Long Island University Brooklyn '17, MSW). Currently, Martez is researching the impact of kinship on health disparities among African diaspora LGBTQ communities, and organizing for social justice with the Keeping Ballroom Community Alive Network (KBCAN), which he co-founded in 2015.



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