



Community Impact Statement

Tess Richey – We Say Her Name

March 25, 2020

**By: Becky McFarlane, Senior Director, Community Programs and Services,
The 519**

The 519 is in a unique position to provide this community impact statement.

We are an organization that has provided support and resources to those directly impacted by the loss of Tess Richey. Additionally, and importantly, we are an organization committed to responding to issues of violence and safety in our local neighbourhood, and the countless ways in which violence impacts LGBTQ2S communities' daily realities. We have been in the courtroom everyday throughout this trial and continue to fight to keep our streets and communities safe. We work to respond to violence in its many forms as an important part of our function as a community centre at the heart of the Church and Wellesley neighbourhood.

Kalen Schlatter murdered Tess Richey in November of 2017; a time when Toronto's queer and trans community was grappling with an incredible sense of vulnerability. A time when we did not know why men were going missing from our community, and that a serial killer was responsible. It was a time when we did not know who killed Tess Richey, and as a result, was a time when we did not feel safe in our own neighbourhood, our gathering spaces, our social venues, our parks, our streets. We did what we could to share information with the community when we were made aware that Tess went missing and we did what we could to mobilize resources when her body was found by her mother - right across the street from our building - four days later.

During this time, we had to find new ways to look out for one another and novel ways to share our whereabouts and movements. We established buddy systems, leafleted bars encouraging people to move in groups, used texting applications to share our locations, organized group walks to transit locations, and some of us didn't go out at all after dark. This heightened vigilance made it even more difficult for our community to access queer and trans programs, services, and spaces and hindered our ability to actively engage in community life. The impact of this senseless violence is still felt in our community today. Its impacts extending in relentless ripples throughout our diverse communities.



In January 2018, The 519 expanded our anti-violence programs and hired additional staff to help support the community through counselling, crisis support, and programming. We also developed several new programs that respond to the lack of safety felt by the community, including self-defence classes and access to justice programming that has sought to increase the number of people reporting violence in our communities. We have also engaged in the development of rapid response and crisis response protocols as well as missing persons protocols to ensure that we are mobilizing resources as quickly as possible when violence occurs. Our work continues today.

Over the past two years we have continued to support all efforts to realize justice for Tess – because Tess’s life matters – because Tess matters. We continue to fight against the kind of violence that Tess endured – perpetrated by Kalen Schlatter – because women have the right to go out at night, to walk on our streets, to laugh with their friends, to eat veggie dogs on the sidewalk, and to go home when they want to go home.

Kalen Schlatter stole from Tess, he stole her life. He took her from family and her friends – forever changing the way they will live in this world. He stole from our community too – the LGBTQ2S community – one that he was a part of as a self-identified bisexual man and as someone who spent weekends dancing and drinking in Church Street bars. Spaces that were created by queer and trans people who came before him – people who were seeking safe spaces free from homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia, free from misogyny and free from violence. Our community built those spaces – and Kalen Schlatter frequented them – benefited from their openness, their relative safety, their magic. Safe spaces carved out in a world that doesn’t much like queer and trans people – and then he betrayed our community in the most unimaginable, unthinkable way.

During the trial, we learned that Kalen Schlatter said that he liked going to gay bars because it was easier to pick up ‘straight girls’. It was a disquieting and insidious assertion and one that was never fully explored. To imagine that there are women who seek out spaces where they might be objectified in less aggressive ways, where they can dance without being hit on or groped by men in the same ways they are used to in straight clubs – and then to imagine that there are men like Kalen Schlatter who take advantage of that fact is as chilling as it is enraging. Queer bars and clubs have played a revolutionary role for marginalized communities, they are, for many of us, an oasis in a world that is largely unsafe. Kalen Schlatter’s predatory behavior, his manipulation of our safe spaces, his violent actions, the life he stole from Tess, the life he stole from her family and friends cannot be quantified or qualified or comprehended. There are no words.

Misogyny is the hatred of women, and it is especially a hatred towards women who violate patriarchal norms and expectations. A hatred of women who don’t serve male interests the way they are supposed to. As the Crown so simply stated, Tess told Kalen Schlatter no. And Kalen Schlatter murdered her because she said no. It is as plain as that. It is a shocking and yet familiar reality.



I am a queer woman who came to court every day for the last eight weeks with other queer women (and queer men too) from The 519 because Tess is our sister. Tess's mom is our sister too. And Tess's sisters are our sisters. The Crown Attorneys who argued this case – they are our sisters too. We have all grown weary of this violence – the senseless tragedy of it all.

In the matter of R. vs. Schlatter we are fighting for Tess Richey. We Say Her Name.
