



HUMAN, NOT NUMBER

LIVED EXPERIENCES OF SEXUAL MINORITIES
IN NIGERIA

A PHOTO DOCUMENTARY BY THE INITIATIVE FOR EQUAL RIGHTS (TIERS)



APPRECIATION

We extend our profound appreciation to everyone who made this project possible.

To our documentary subjects for being graceful enough to allow us photograph them, and tell their stories.

To Photo Voice for providing training and funding for this project.

And to the PITCH project for creating an enabling environment.

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For the Initiative for Equal Rights (TIERs)

PREFACE

For the past four years, The Initiative for Equal Rights (TIERs) have collected and published the human rights violations reports. Blatant violations of fundamental human rights continue to plague those who self-identify or are perceived as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer and/ or intersex (LGBTQI).

People commonly refer to, and treat LGBTQI rights like they're different from fundamental human rights, but they are not. They are basic human rights. It is easy to read the numbers in the violations report and forget that these are people, human beings who by virtue of their humanity become protected under human rights laws and are entitled to basic human dignity.

This advocacy project is directed at getting people to understand that LGBTQI persons are human beings who deserve to walk the streets of their county without fear of harassment, discrimination, violence or in extreme cases, death. With this photo documentary, we aim to humanize the realities and lives of the victims of such violations and encourage others to humanize LGBTQI persons.

LGBTQI persons often live in isolation because they have been rejected and ostracized by family, many are homeless and depend on the support of friends and sometimes strangers to continue to survive. This is not an ideal condition for any human being. A lot of LGBT persons have jobs, live decent lives but cannot function in society because of harassment and attacks of all types. Discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity is not uncommon. These are dire conditions experienced by LGBTQI persons and this project seeks to show that LGBT people are human beings who have lives, hopes, dreams, pay taxes and contribute to society.

We hope that this book will be able to speak to the humanities of people, so they will understand that persons who are sexual minorities are human beings first, and every fundamental human right extended to human beings, should be extended to them as well.

JAMES

[Blackmail and Extortion, Rape]

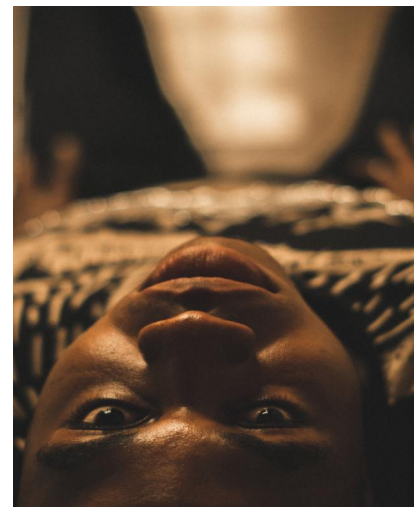
James was kidnapped, blackmailed and raped by a man who claimed to be a friend. He met a man on Facebook and after some days, James, ignoring his intuition which made him feel unsafe about the man, decided to visit him. On the agreed day, James made his way to FESTAC, Lagos. On getting there, he was picked up at the bus stop by his host who was later joined by two strange men. They proceeded to search his pockets for cash, and when they found none, asked him to call people with his phone to transfer money to his account. He was held for over 24 hours and was in danger.

James reached out to TIERS via a phone call. Officials at TIERS were able to instill the fear of arrest in the kidnapers, and they agreed to let James go. But before releasing him, James was raped by his kidnapper.

A few months earlier, James' birthday party had been invaded by policemen who arrested several of his guests, accusing them of cultism and homosexuality. James narrowly escaped arrest after hiding in the ceiling of the hotel where the party was holding.

James has been suffering from depression since these incidents happened. He has lost his job, and several of his family and friends have cut ties with him. His sister, who he used to live with, has also put him out. He now squats with various friends, to avoid being homeless. James constantly feels like an outcast, getting treated as less than human because of his sexuality.

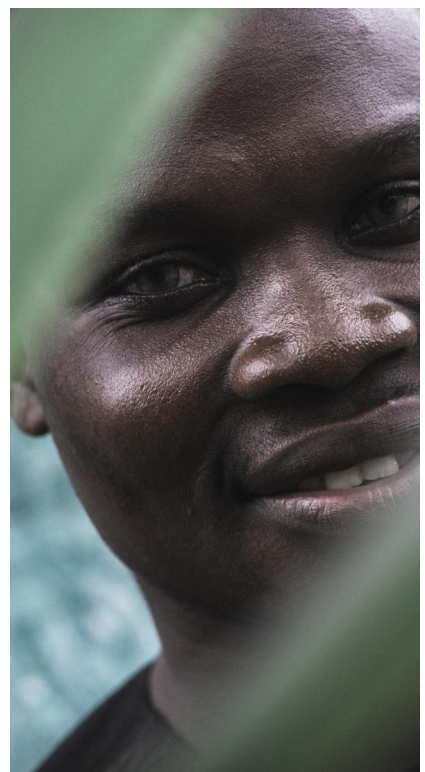
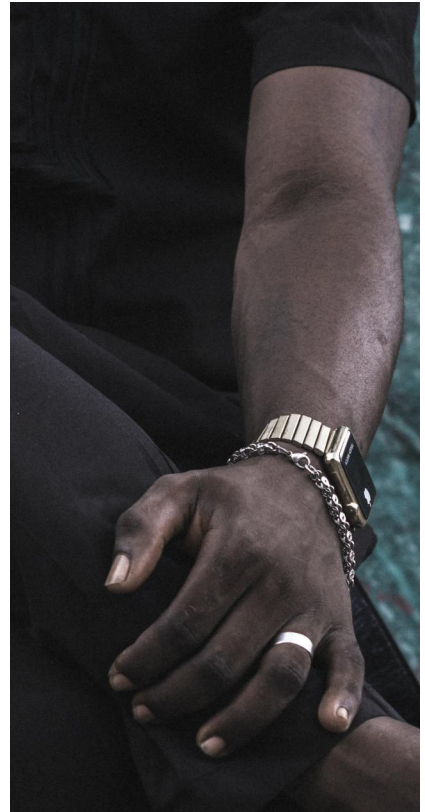
Despite all he has been through, James always has a smile on his face. According to him, *"Sometimes you just need to let some things go. Like they say, we learn every day. I see these things as a lesson. They've happened to me already, so they can't happen again."*



EDET

[Religious Abuse, Conversion Therapy, Rape]

When Edet was in secondary school, his teacher reported to his parents that he was gay. His father, a police officer, subjected him to beatings for several days. He was then sent to a reverend father at a catholic church for deliverance. Edet, who was still underage at the time, was at the church for seven days. Throughout this period, the reverend father raped Edet repeatedly.



IFECHUKWU

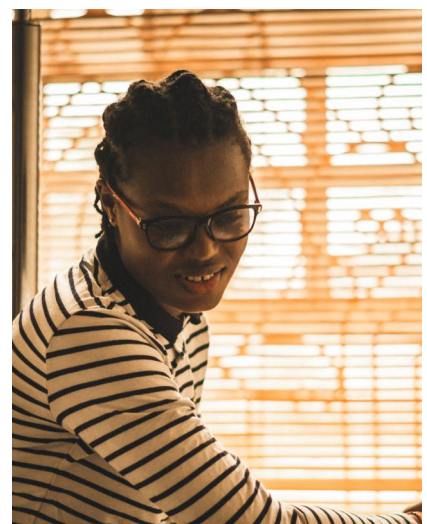
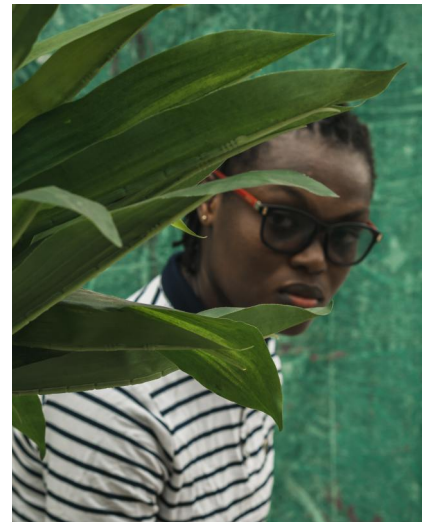
[Forced Eviction]

Ifechukwu was at Dutse, Jigawa state, for her NYSC programme. She pooled funds together with a fellow corps member and they both rented a room together. A while later, her roommate began to make passes at her. Ifechukwu refused to act on these advances bearing in mind the sharia laws, penal code, SSMPA and the NYSC by laws which all forbade homosexual relationships. This refusal did not sit well with Ifechukwu's roommate who decided she no longer wanted to live with her. She began to use her knowledge of Ifechukwu's sexual orientation as a blackmail tool. She asked Ifechukwu to leave the house they both rented stating that she could not live with a demon. Ifechukwu having nowhere else to go, refused to leave.

Soon after, Ifechukwu got attacked by thugs repeatedly. On one of the occasions, she was beaten badly and her teeth broken. She was left by the gutters several times. Her roommate soon owned up to sending the thugs after her, promising to do worse.

Ifechukwu sensing the gravity of the situation, decided to leave. Having lived as a hermit, she had no friends to turn to. She stayed in a church for some time, and a school for some time before she could gather funds from friends back home and rent another place for herself.

For the rest of her stay in Jigawa, she lived in fear, feeling vulnerable and in danger. She became more secluded, fearing attack. She opted out of activities and duties she had been participating in before the incident. She could no longer associate freely with people and resented them, believing that she was better off living in isolation.



SEGUN

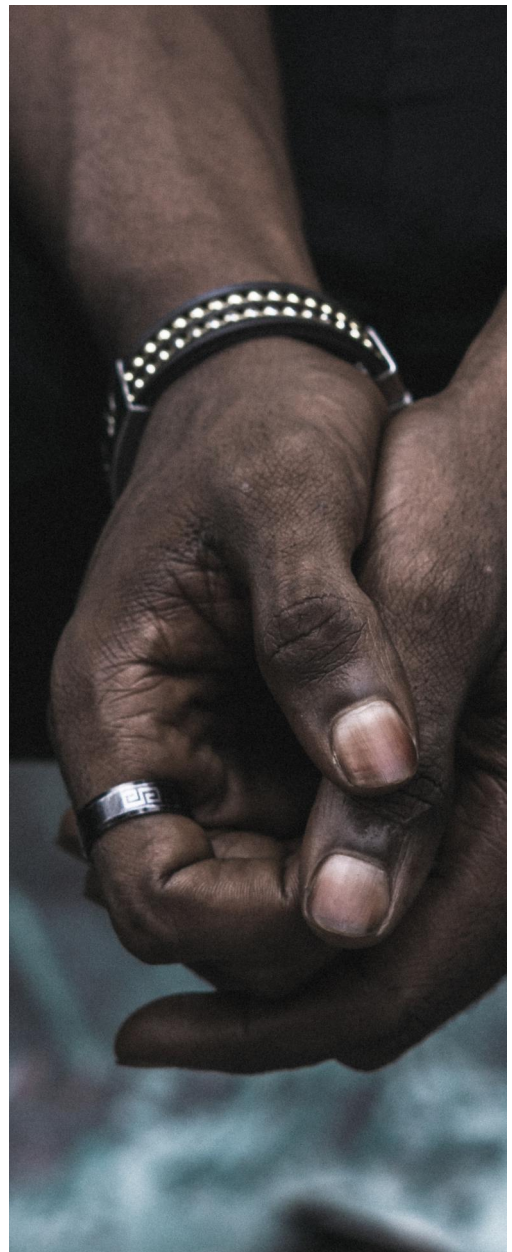
[Police Brutality and Arbitrary Arrest]

For three weeks, Segun was kept in inhumane conditions at a prison cell, suffering violations from prison officials and fellow inmates.

Segun was attending his friend's birthday party when about thirty police men stormed the venue at 2a.m. The police men rounded up and arrested all the men in attendance. When he first got to the cell, he was subjected to beatings from the older inmates. He was made to contact his family to send money and airtime for 'bed space', which they did. Failure to do so would have seen him spend his nights standing upright. The food he was given, which was not often, was unhygienic and inedible.

His head was shaved by the prison wardens, who despite protests from the arrested men, used the same razor blade to shave over 30 persons ignoring the risk of HIV and other possible infections. Any resistance of this treatment was met with beatings and more violence.

Segun was released after three weeks, but was met with even more difficulties. He has now lost his job and has become estranged from his family and friends.



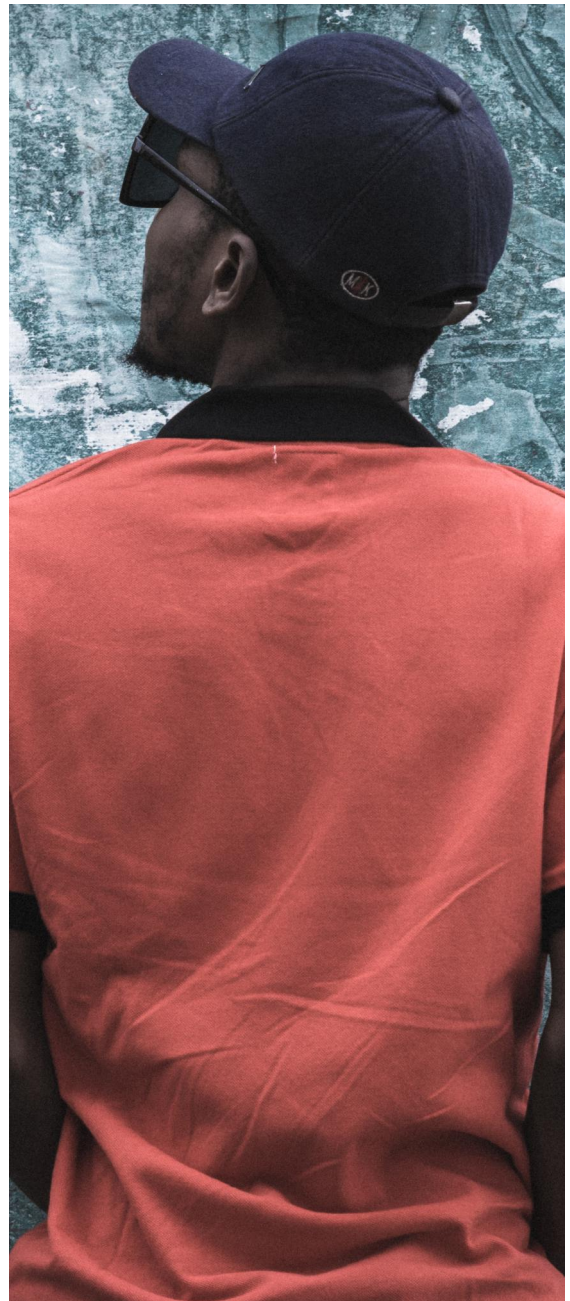
ANDY

[Gang Rape and Violence]

"Trying to be myself in a very harsh environment like this takes a toll on me. I have like... I won't even say a double life; I have like hundreds of lives. I go to certain places and I must act differently. I can't wear what I want to wear all the time. It's not easy, but it's who I am and there's nothing I can do about it."

Andy, a feminine presenting man is constantly harassed by policemen and other law enforcement agents because of his perceived sexuality. In 2017, he was stopped by policemen and his phone was searched illegally. They found text messages in his phone and claimed that he was a homosexual and took him to a police station. He was forced to write a false statement, beaten, and photographs of him were taken. He eventually got himself out of the station by bailing himself with money.

A few years ago, he was attacked by four men, drugged and gang raped. Going to the police was not an option for him because of the bias law enforcement agents have against men like him. He became depressed, suicidal and felt shattered because of the incidence. He deferred his education to find a way to feel better.



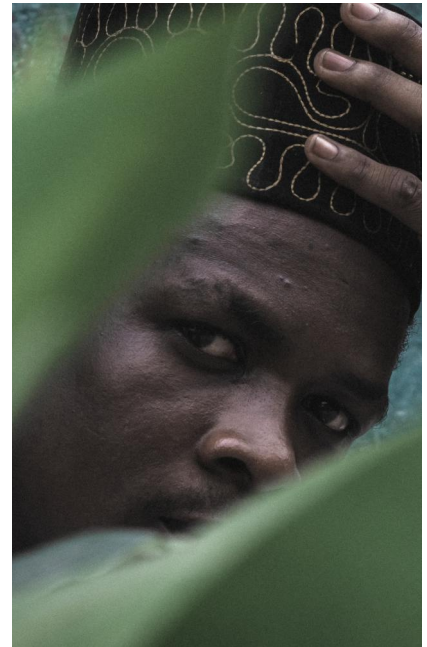
WEALTH

[Arbitrary Arrest and Police Harassment]

Wealth was buying drinks at the bar of a hotel during a birthday party when nothing less than thirty police men came in and proceeded to arrest everyone present. They barked orders at them, "Sit down on the floor!", "Take off your clothes", "Kneel down". They were beaten into submission and their belongings destroyed. Over fifty men were taken to the police station that night in commercial danfo buses. The men were accused of cultism.

They were charged to court and remanded in prison. They were assaulted and battered by the wardens and inmates because there was information about their real and perceived sexual orientation. They were referred to as the 'gays'. They were placed in cells with terrible conditions, housing up to 170 people each. He lost a lot of weight due to the poor feeding conditions at the prison. Even when he received food, beverages or money from visitors, they were hijacked by the older inmates.

Wealth's family spent over sixty thousand naira trying to bail him out of the prison.



SMART

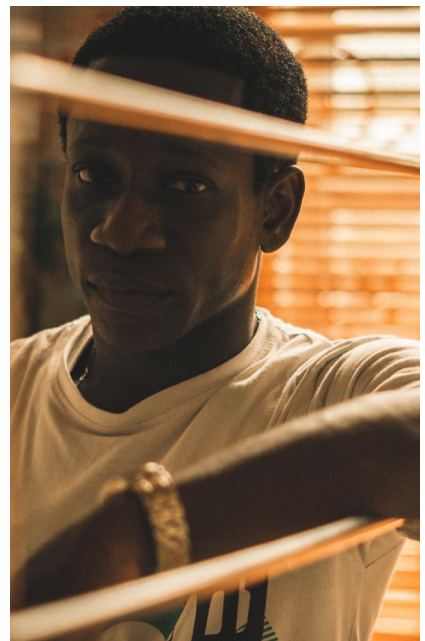
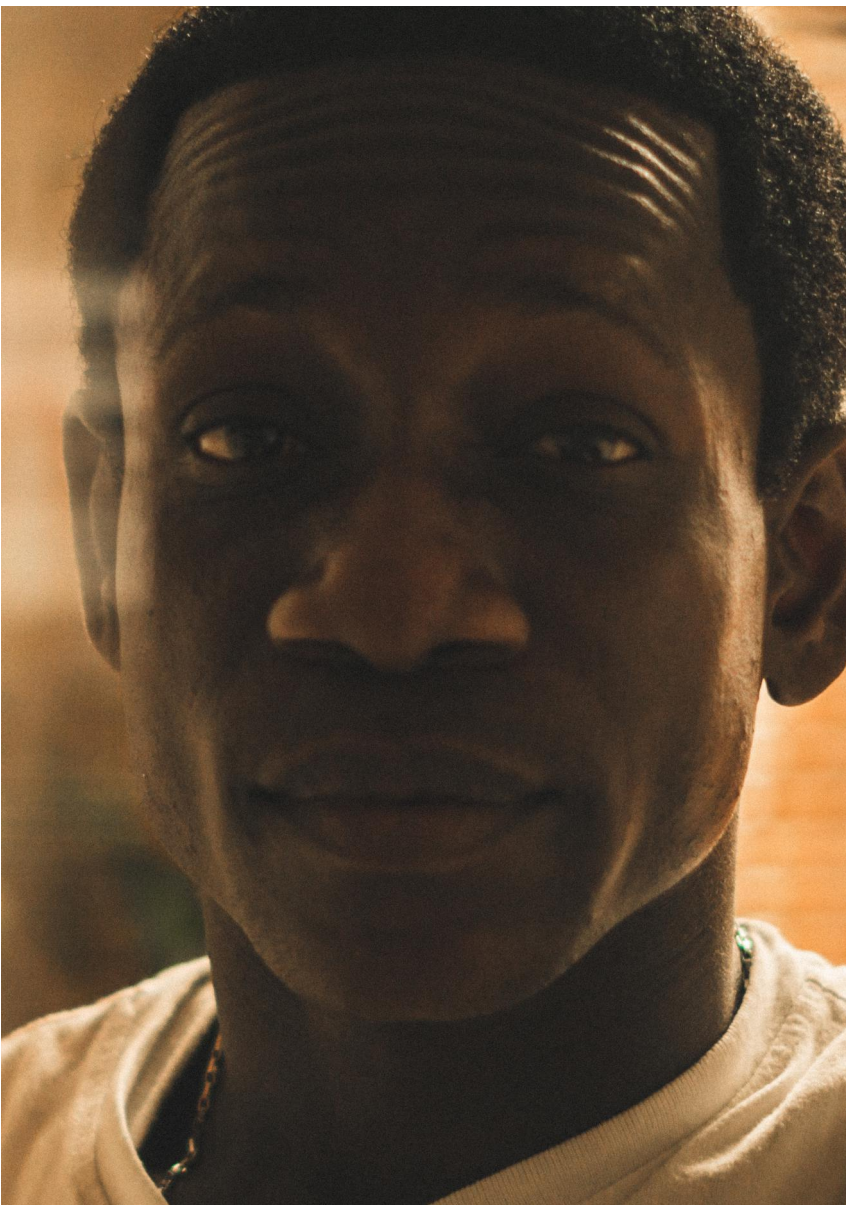
[Harassment, Arbitrary Arrest]

"I remember several times when my neighbors and people living in my neighborhood would call me gay because of the feminine guys that usually come to my house. The number of times they would harass them, beat some of them, while coming to my house."

Smart and several of his friends have suffered harassment in the hands of his neighbors for a long time. He gets called names whenever he walks on the streets. They even went as far as planning to 'teach him a lesson'.

In August 2018, Smart was arrested alongside other men at his friend's birthday party, and falsely accused of cultism. They were paraded on live TV by the Nigerian police force as a homosexual cult holding an initiation ritual. Smart was detained for two weeks. One of his neighbors went about telling everyone who cared to listen that Smart was gay and had been arrested for homosexuality.

After Smart returned home on bail, he has had to endure even more verbal harassment in his neighborhood. He would notice people nudging themselves and gossiping as he passed by, sometimes going as far as shouting homophobic slurs at him. He began to feel unsafe, and became depressed and suicidal.

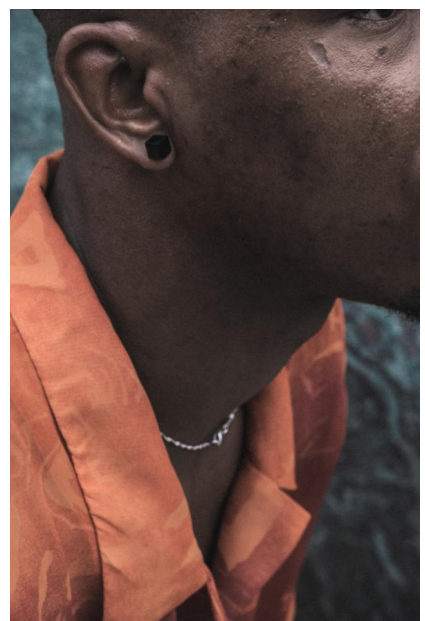
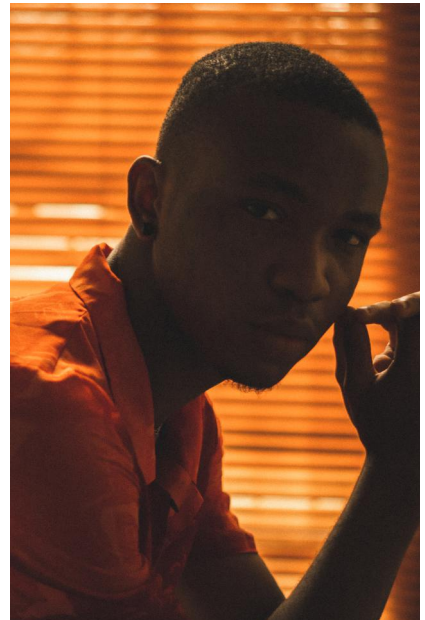


ASHLEY

[Religious Abuse, Conversion Therapy, Eviction from Home]

Ashley was 15, and living with his aunt when his cousin started to stalk him. Unknown to him, she was trying to gather evidence about him being homosexual, to expose (out) him. She began to screenshot his messages and record his phone calls. When she had gathered enough evidence, she confronted Ashley about his sexuality. Ashley denied twice before she presented all her evidence to him. She went ahead to inform the rest of the family, including her parents and the rest of Ashley's cousins. Ashley's head was shaved by his aunt and he was sent to a pastor for deliverance. The pastor took extreme measures to attempt to 'convert' Ashley. On one occasion, the pastor broke several bottles of "anointing oil" on his head. On his return home, his phones were seized and his movements restricted. He eventually ran away from his aunt's home to Abuja to live with a friend.

Years later, Ashley reconciled with his family and returned to Lagos to live with his aunt. An aspiring actor, he was already beginning to snag small television roles when the accusations of Homosexuality reared its head. Ashley's aunt has now evicted him from her home, leaving Ashley homeless, moving from place to place.





THE INITIATIVE FOR
EQUAL RIGHTS