



George Floyd protest in Chico June 5.  
CN&R FILE PHOTO BY KEN SMITH

ness interviews are still in progress.

Vice Mayor Alex Brown has heard from many Chicoans disturbed by the attack. She directly followed up with the city manager and addressed the assault publicly on social media.

“My heart goes out to those who were attacked, and their families,” she wrote on Facebook. “Our community is not immune to racism and homophobia. Both exist right here in Chico, both are daily realities for many LGBT\*Q+ people and communities of color.”

While she couldn’t comment on case details, this subject matter is personal for Brown, as she identifies as queer and gender nonconforming. She told the CN&R that people often make disparaging comments about her gender identity “as if it makes me less than I am, or less credible.”

The more marginalized communities someone belongs to, the more it places them at risk, she added: “It’s weaponized and kind of turned against you.”

#### Safety in numbers

Floyd’s death ignited a groundswell of grassroots support locally, beginning with peaceful and passionate marches and protests in downtown Chico. The S.A.S.S. team was formed at that time in response to multiple demonstrations hosted by people of color that were canceled due to threats of violence. Stonewall assembled 20 volunteers and six team leaders with experience ensuring safety at previous Stonewall events.

Since then, S.A.S.S. has provided protection through observation and de-escalation at protests and events such as the local Juneteenth actions and celebrations.

Rae Flores-Owen, an indigenous Mexican-American woman, has volunteered for the S.A.S.S. team. She’s a co-facilitator of Chico Community Assembly and has responded when assembly members have been followed outside of events and has looked out for aggressive counterprotesters.

Chico Community Assembly formed amid local protests this spring. Founded, organized and led by people of color—some of whom are queer and/or trans, said Flores-Owen—the assembly’s main effort is exploring how “defunding” the Chico Police Department could lead to less police violence and more social services.

Lately, the assembly has moved its activities online, due to rising COVID-19 cases, but S.A.S.S. had shown up at its in-person gatherings in the City Plaza, where Flores-Owen was a speaker.

“Being up there and being outspoken, fighting [for] your community ... to speak out against injustices—you’re putting yourself out there,” she said. “I know I felt safer ... knowing [S.A.S.S. volunteers] were there, knowing I had someone that was just kind of keeping an eye out.”

She called the team a great example of the kind of programs the Community Assembly is advocating for when it comes to social services alternatives to policing.

#### More inclusive spaces

Stonewall as an organization has made mistakes in how it has allied with people of color, Larson said, noting that it has lacked diversity in leadership positions and its programs. The organization is trying to learn and grow, Hambley added, and has gone through a lot of cultural and organizational changes with the goal of centering, celebrating and including people of color.

The QT\*POC fund and the S.A.S.S. team are just small steps, organizers said. The work has to continue in the form of community members showing up at rallies and in the creation of unrestricted options for people of color to become civic leaders and decision-makers.

“One of the things we have learned is to watch and learn and listen, and try to step up to help where we know that we can, rather than trying to lead or direct,” Larson said.

For Flores-Owen, one of the most valuable things to come from the community work done so far has been creating a safe space and platform for the voices of people of color.

To truly see change, she said, “we need to make sure that we are putting the voices of the most marginalized in decision-making roles,” with programs that center the voices of queer people and people of color.

“Racism has permeated every single part of our community,” Flores-Owen continued. “We need action. ... We don’t have any more time.” □

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