



ACCESS ALLIANCE ARTS REPORT 2023 - 24

Access Alliance Arts Report 2023 – 24

The Peterson Foundation awarded Access Alliance \$250,000 (April 2022 – March 2027) to support expressive arts initiatives for newcomers. This year, we focused our efforts in three key areas:

- Co-created interdisciplinary expressive arts programs by connecting community artists with healthcare providers. Funding supported artists, materials, and accessibility resources.
- Strengthened organizational capacity by delivering training sessions for healthcare providers on integrating arts-for improving newcomer mental health
- Expanded partnerships with local galleries, museums, and cultural institutions to support social prescribing and create more inclusive, community-based mental health pathways.

These efforts are shaping how we understand and support newcomer mental health by culturally tailoring programs through the arts, fostering resilience, connection, and healing.

Each year, we build upon participant and facilitator feedback to improve the delivery of programs and to spark new ideas.

Participants reported:

- Improved sense of belonging through community connection.
- Increased self-efficacy to help them make better decisions about their health and wellbeing.
- Gained knowledge on how to access health resources and services.
- Increased awareness on arts and culture opportunities in Toronto.
- Adapted mental wellbeing techniques in their daily lives with their families.

Service Providers reported:

- Art-making helped participants retain healthcare and settlement knowledge.
- Community artists are important health workers.
- Inviting participants into program development fosters cultural sensitivity and trauma informed approaches.

Let's take a look at this year's highlights!



ANNUAL OUTCOME STATISTICS

300+ Participants
860+ Encounters

225+ Adult
25 + Youth
50+ Child

38 Art-Based Sessions

8 Programs/Workshops
3 Presentations
4 Events

8 Art-Based Facilitators

6 Community Artists
1 Music Therapist
1 Movement Facilitator

35 + Interdisciplinary Support

Access Alliance Service Providers
Partner Organization Staff
Placement Students
Community Volunteers

Photo: Tiffany, music therapist, leads children and their caregivers in co-regulation techniques using music and movement.





OVERVIEW OF INITIATIVES

Events

Asian Heritage: Wishing Tree
May 16, 2023

Among Friends: PRIDE Event
June 23, 2023

**Corporate Team Activity:
What is Meaningful Work?**
October 16, 2024

**Project Launch: Social
Prescribing for Youth
Wellness Hub**
October 20, 2023

Presentations

Program Planning Day
Access Alliance
January 27, 2024

**Cultivating Art-Based Practice
for Service Providers**
YWP Mental Health Conference:
Wellness in Challenging Times
March 1, 2024

Art and Health Course
University of Toronto, UTSC
March 26, 2024

Programs & Workshops

Focus on Newcomer Women: **Children's World Music**
Children (0-3 yrs.) & Parents
Once per month

Women's Wellness
May - June 2023

Women's Wellness BONUS
June 2023

Community Makers
October 2024

Colours of the Earth
November - January 2024

Light & Shadow
Newcomer Youth (13-18 yrs.)
November - December 2023

Movement Among Friends
LGBTQ+ Newcomers
Bi - monthly

Music, Mind & Mood
Seniors April - June 2023

CO-CREATION: ARTIST & HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS

Access Alliance uses interdisciplinary teams to provide holistic care to newcomers. Our team brought together community artists and healthcare providers to co-create programs. Together they facilitated sessions combining expressive arts, mental wellbeing, and healthcare knowledge.

Participants reported the art-making process helped to decrease their stress and anxiety. They felt more confident to make healthier decisions for their mental health. Many continued to make pigments in their own home with their children and families.

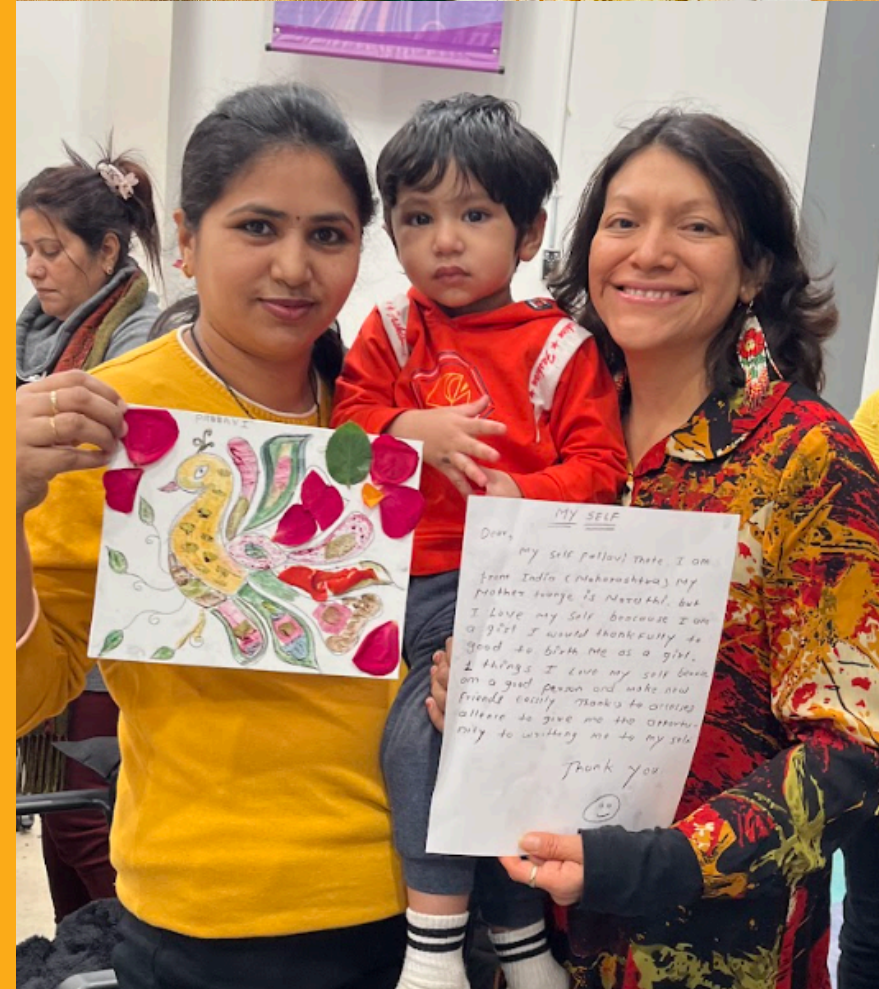
“I am ready to express what is in my inner heart. In one place we have access to knowledge which is together: food resources, self-care, and other important topics” - Natural Dyeing Participant

“COLOURS OF THE EARTH” FAMILY PROGRAM

Newcomer artist, Mercy Verdugo, and the dietician team hosted “Colours of the Earth” Program. Across five sessions, participants learned to make paint pigments from spices, herbs, and food. Concurrently, dieticians shared about healthy and mindful eating. In the final session, women and their children painted with turmeric, spinach, and more! This activated all their senses emphasizing the mind and body connection.

“This was something new to me. I never knew art-making could help me understand the connection between learning a new skills and dealing with stressful life situations.”

- Women’s Wellness Participant



CO-CREATION: ARTIST & HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS

Newcomer Community Arts facilitators are a valuable resource in engaging community members in wellness techniques, art practices, and knowledge gaining on mental health concepts. They offer expertise in different art modalities to promote play, imagination, and place-making. Community arts provides creative social connectedness to help newcomer express in non-verbal ways. Community artists have the unique skills to gather people from diverse backgrounds and languages.

“LIGHT & SHADOW” YOUTH PROGRAM

Shadowland Theatre is a community arts organization focusing on puppetry and theatre. Their team developed an online shadow puppetry game for young people vulnerable to anxiety and depression. Artists, game developers, and a youth advisory worked together to bring this idea to life. Access Alliance hosted a 4 session pilot with youth participants.

They engaged in theatre activities, lantern making, and dialogue with the game designers. Many reported a sense of hope knowing there is light admits the darkness. Another “Light & Shadow” program will be hosted at Access Point on Jane in 2024 - 25.

“I will accept that as a human I have the right to feel feelings, and express my emotions and needs. I learned that is it okay to ask for help.” - Light and Shadow Participant





ARTS & CULTURE VISITS: ENHANCING SOCIAL PRESCRIBING

Research has shown that engaging people in art and culture can improve health and wellness. Benefits include alleviating social isolation, promoting physical and mental well-being, and fostering connections in the community. Access Alliance is expanding our expressive art-programs in partnership with galleries and museums in Toronto.

“COMMUNITY MAKERS” WOMEN PROGRAM

Participants attending our women’s support group with the settlement team engaged in the Community Makers Program at the Textile Museum of Canada. Newcomer Artist, Destinie Adélakun, explored themes including confidence and practicing self-love. Women’s art work contributed to the public exhibition, The Secret Codes. [Read more about Access Alliance Community Makers Program](#)

Photo: Participants experiencing a guided tour of textiles from around the world. Women shared about their home and traditional practices across generations inspired by the garments, tapestries, and textiles. Many have returned to the museum following the end of the program with their families and friends.

“I feel the strength and confidence when I sew because I know I can do it. These sessions changed me a lot, now I can encourage people in my community to get involved to do things they have never done before and try new things.” Community Makers Program Participant



ONGOING LONG-TERM IMPACTS

- **Ongoing support from a Community Health Worker** helps to: expand expressive art initiatives, assisting with program implementation, partnership development, and capacity building.
 - **Equipping healthcare and settlement staff** with art-based approaches can complement service provider practice. "Learn it, Lead it" sessions delivered to internal and external staff throughout 2024 - 25 (virtual and in-person).
 - **Continued programs with community artists** and healthcare providers to offer tailored newcomer programs. New art modalities piloted and evaluated for effectiveness.
 - **Expanding arts and culture partnerships** across Toronto to foster avenues for social prescribing. Collaborate with galleries and museums as sites for mental wellness for newcomers.
 - **Conducting research activities to build evidence** on community arts as an approach to mental wellbeing for newcomers. In partnership with the FLOURISH Collective, University of Toronto Scarborough.
- Thank you to the Peterson Foundation for financially supporting expressive arts initiatives at Access Alliance Multicultural Health and Community Services.

