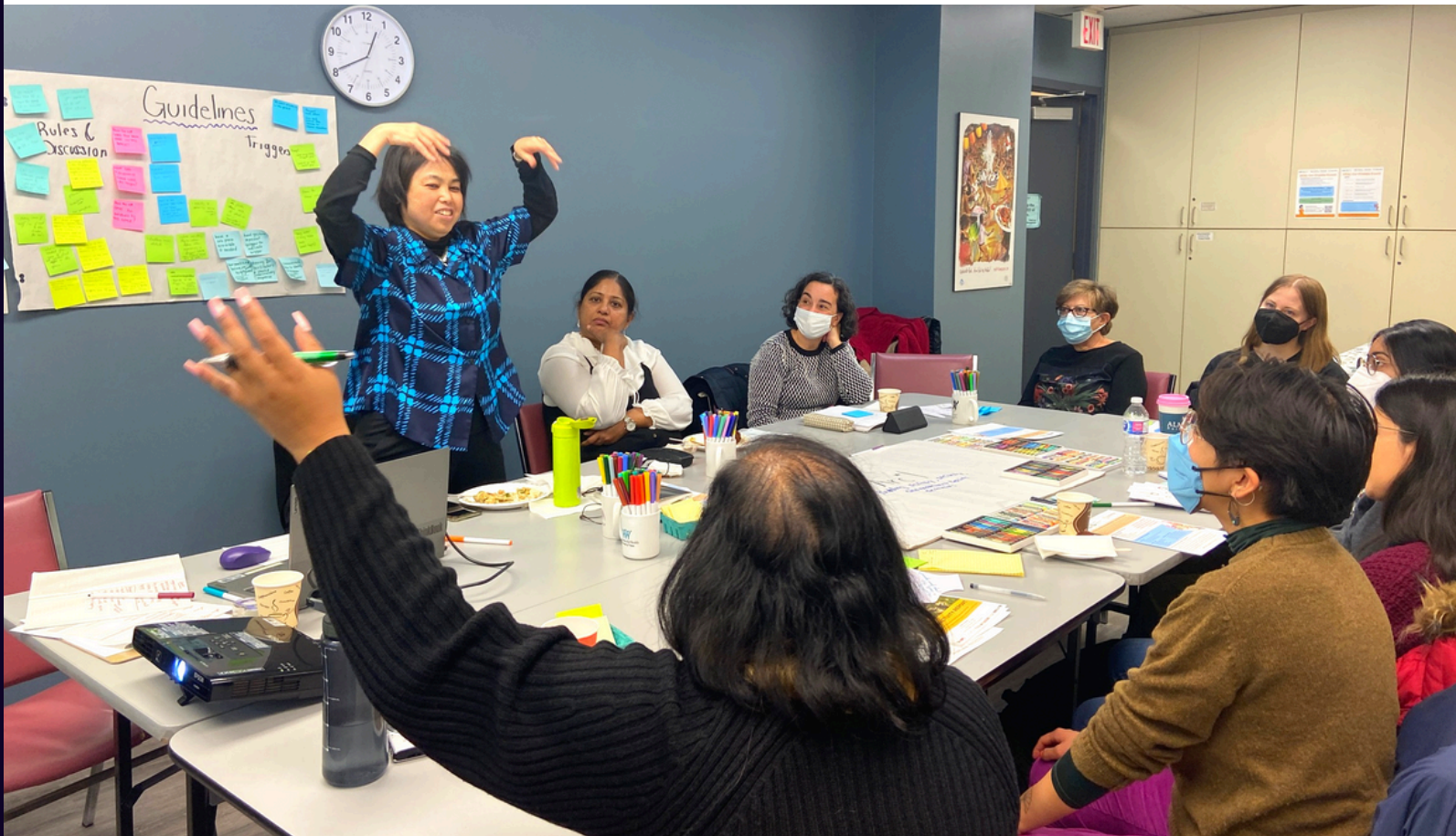


CO-CREATE SESSION REPORT

Access Alliance Multicultural Health and Community Services

December 14, 2022 (10 - 3 PM)



Session Facilitators:

Akm Alamgir, Research Lead

Christen Kong, Project Coordinator

Oeishi Faruqzaman, Research Fellow

Context

On December 14, 2022 (10am – 3pm) Access Alliance hosted the HEAL Co-Create Session at Access Alliance College site. Attendees included experts in the field of expressive art therapy, community based participatory research, social workers, and those working alongside domestic violence survivors to support the development of the 12-week HEAL program. Participants were guided through a series of co-design activities and discussions. Data collected will be used to inform the HEAL Program Arc and contribute to expressive arts programming at Access Alliance and beyond. About the HEAL Project [click here](#)

Participants Profiles

Participants were selected based on their relevant experience and connection to the HEAL Project. Two participants are active HEAL Advisory Members, Izumi Sakamoto and Ruth Wilson. Four participants had extensive experience in art based facilitation as a community artist, art therapist and/or expressive art therapist. Additionally, many participants had experience working with the identified HEAL implementation groups. Organizations and institutions that were represented included:

- Barbra Schilfer Commemorative Clinic
- FLOURISH Collective, University of Toronto Scarborough Campus
- Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work at the University of Toronto
- Ontario Expressive Arts Therapy Association (OEATA)

We acknowledge the wealth of knowledge and wisdom of individuals that were unable to attend the session and seek to gather learnings in other ways. We give gratitude to the collaborative sharing of each individual.

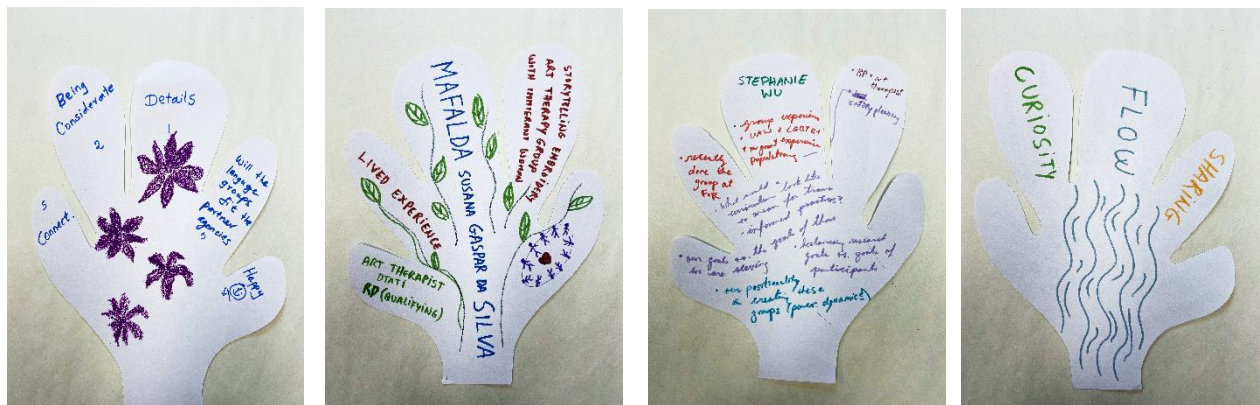


Photo: Images of the check in and check out activity creatively responded to by participants to learn more about each other.

*“What are possibilities for arts within the health care and settlement sector?
What does it look like empowerment through the arts?” - Participant*

Methodology

Co-Creation is the joint creation of stakeholders to identify a specific type of value based collaboration between providers and users. It involves discovering unique and collective perspectives about systems in which we live together. The HEAL Co-Create Session actively implements the principles of co-design including inclusivity, respect, participatory, iterative and outcome focused. Co-creation provides a space to be creative and share insights on existing live experiences to further the benefits of expressive arts for newcomers. The following method of data collection was implemented:

Co-design Agenda view [here](#). Participants were guided through the components of an expressive arts program arc by responding to question prompts (see chart below). Similar to “mind mapping”, radiating ideas from a central theme, participants shared their insights on flip chart paper and sticky notes. Following, a guided discussion was documented and used as raw data.

Topics	Questions
Guidelines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are common guidelines implemented in previous group programs? • What are activities to engage participants in guidelines creation? • What are the protocols and/or process to address triggers in the group?
Check in / Check out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are examples of check in and check out activities during group programs? • Why is it important to have consistent opening and closing activities?
Part I Building Safety & Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are activities implemented to share about safety and security? (themes can include trust building, team work, group cohesion etc.) • What are examples of movement (somatic) activities that can be used to engage participants in building safety and security?
Part II Identity, Culture, and Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How have you explored identity, culture and community when conducting expressive arts programs? • What are examples of activities to explore the topics to engage participants? • What are promising and best practices to be culturally sensitive when discussing participant’s culture, community or identity?
Part III Towards Resilience, Hope and Future	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How have you engaged participants in group programming on topics including resilience, hope and future? • What are example activities to help participants through visual arts and journaling? • What are promising practices you have used to introduce the themes in Part III?
Closing the program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are effective practices when putting together a celebratory art showcase for participants and their community? • What are best practices when discussing “goodbyes” and the ending of a program? • What are ceremonies and rituals implemented that have helped prepared participants to end the program and to continue beyond?
Special Considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are special considerations when considering the diversity in implementation groups? Especially for women living in shelters and LGBTQ+ newcomer populations • What are considerations when working with implementations groups of different languages? How are interpreters integrated if so?

Thematic Analysis Approach

The Research Fellow, Project Coordinator, and placement students synthesized the data collected in January 2023. For raw data responses. The thematic analysis approach is outlined below.

Step 1. Data (sticky notes and facilitator notes) were collected flip chart paper and collectively read by team.

Step 2. All raw data was transcribed and responses were grouped together based on theme, topics and relevance.

Step 3. Overarching themes, topics, program considerations, and art activities were identified for the session arc.

Step 4. The Research Fellow, Project Coordinator and placement students engaged in thoughtful discussions on each subgroup identified. Themes, art-based activity examples and questions were extracted that were relevant to the expected outcomes of the HEAL project.

Step 5. Summaries for each part of the program arc were finalized and this report was produced to share findings and implications for the HEAL project.

“The diverse experiences of newcomer women should be at the center when developing community and expressive arts programming” - Participant



Photo: Co-design session, Access Alliance College, showing participants responding to a prompt question provided by facilitators.

Findings

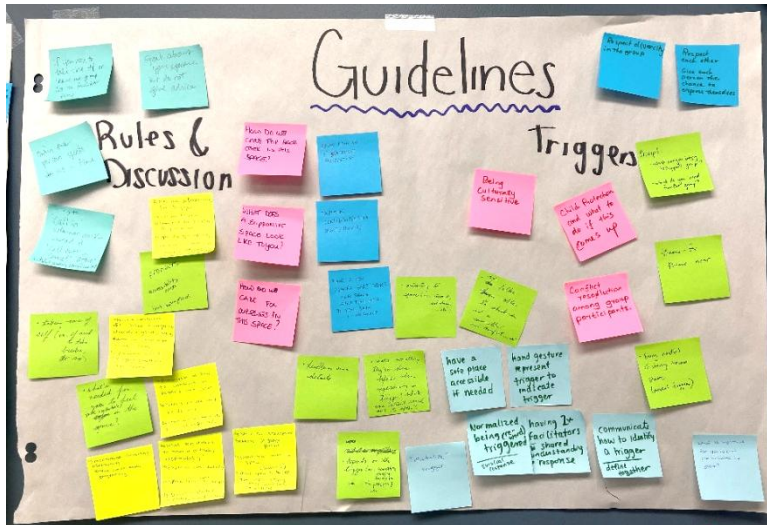


Photo: Co-design session, showing participant responses on sticky notes to a prompt question.

Guidelines

A common practice in group programs, especially in expressive art therapy groups, is establishing guidelines at the beginning of the program. This ensures a shared understanding of boundaries and expectations for participants and facilitators. It offers an opportunity to collaboratively think through how we are engaging with one another. Group guidelines will be accessible and available at all program sessions to reinforce this collective agreement.

Summary of notable responses:

- **“Respect each other, give each person the chance to express themselves.”** Guidelines can include respect, attentive listening, and confidentiality.
- **“Taking care of self, e.g., if need to take breaks, do so.”** Allow for participants to take breaks for self-care when necessary without requesting permission from the facilitator. This can reinforce autonomy and reinforce self-care during sessions as needed.
- **“Orienting to the space, locating doors and exits”** and **“If you need to take time off or leave the group, let the facilitator know.”** Allow time for participants to orient to the space to feel comfortable.
- **“What’s needed for you to feel more comfortable in this space?”** Recommended to have a discussion with participants on what they need to feel comfortable and safe in the group as well as their expectations for the group.
- **“Child protection and what to do if this comes up.”** Facilitators recommended to develop a strategy/procedure to address difficult situations that may arise, including circumstances involving as child protection, conflict resolution, overwhelming distress and crisis intervention etc.
- **“Aim of group is not to eliminate triggers, but to learn together how to manage triggers (e.g. difficult and overwhelming emotions and feelings).”** Guide participants in defining what a “trigger” is and collectively co-creating how the group will respond if it arises during or following the program. This may include practicing grounding exercises to ease back into a session.
- **“Speaker from an “I” statement perspective”** and **“Try to “call in” whenever possible instead of “call out”** It is important for facilitators and participants are mindful of how they share, using “I” statements and language that is encouraging can enhance group bonding and alliances among all members.
- **“Ensure participants understand post program boundaries with other participants and confidentiality policies.”** Confidentiality during and post program is crucial to foster and maintain healthy relationships.

Part I: Building Safety & Security

Part I of the program is focused on safety and security within the group. Building trust, safety and security among participants and facilitators is essential to supporting participants in their healing journey. Co-creating a safe environment promotes a sense of belonging that can enhance meaningful participation in the program. Using movement (e.g. Somatic resources) is an approach that recognizes that trauma lives in the body. Equipping participants with self-regulating and enhancing those that exist contributes to safety and security. **Summary** of example activities:

- **“Mindfulness with objects/clays.”** Making use of objects to guide participants through mindfulness engages participants in kinesthetic and sensory modal responses.
- **“Humming – navigating space, creates a collective piece”, “Deep sigh”, and “Synch. Breathing.”** Humming can make aware participants individual voice while being part of a collective, this can reinforce both self and collective self-regulation through sound making.
- **“Tapping/patting,” “Wiping”, “Hug Activity,” “Shaking things,” and “Massage chest –bring in an object.”** Simple movements and/or gestures can be utilized.
- **“Yoga,” “Tai Chi exercises – let out stiff energy,” “Cooking,” Start movement and pass it along” and “Finger painting.”** These are example of other movement based activities.
- **“Mirroring movement (would introduce later in group and depending on group),” and “Mimicking (later on).”** Mirroring can be incorporated later in the program to enhance trust among participants.



Photo: Co-design session, showing participant responses on sticky notes to a prompt question.

Part 2: Identity, Culture, and Community

Part II focused on identity, culture, and community, supporting clients to think positively about themselves and their communities they identify with. When discussing culture and community, facilitators are encouraged to gather insights from participants directly empowerment them to lead the discussion on their own identity, culture, and communities they are connected to, in Canada and their country of origin.

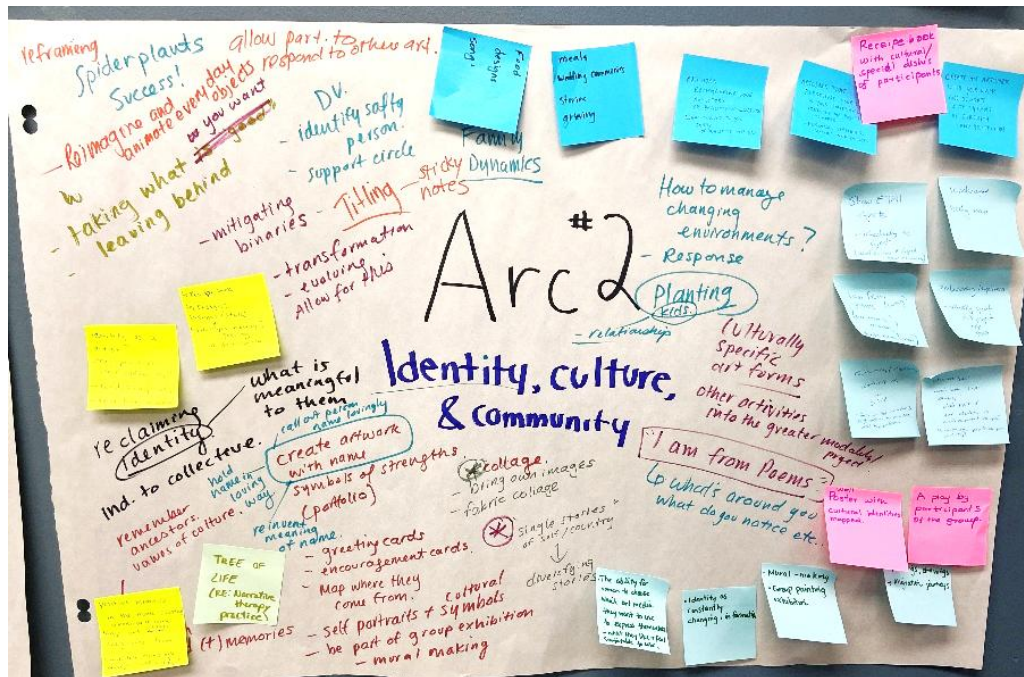


Photo: Co-design session, showing participant responses on sticky notes to a prompt question.

- **“Create an artwork with your name and decorate with symbols of strengths and protections.”** Introduce groups by using their names as an inspiration and a symbol of identity.
- **“Break free from ‘single stories.’”** Be aware that participants’ have multiple intersectional identity as a newcomer, women, artist, survivor or domestic based violence etc.
- **“Embroidery and other culturally specific art programs.”** Provide options for culturally specific art.
- **“Migration journeys,” “Map out where they come from,” “I am from’ poems” and “Wall poster with cultural identities.”** Facilitate a variety of map mapping activities to explore cultural identities.
- **“Symbols, songs, stories,” and “Show and tell.”** Connect to culture through food, music, storytelling, show and tell, providing space for reflection and debriefing.
- **“Reflect on positive memories, personal strengths, values, and beliefs” and “Artwork remembering your ancestors or beautiful culture.”** Harness strength based activities focusing on positive memories, inner-strengths, values, and beliefs of participants’ as a resource for resilience.
- **“Recipe book with cultural/special dishes of participants,” “Mural making, group painting exhibition,” and “Greeting cards or encouragement cards.”** Group activities allow participants to work collectively to reinforce group cohesion.

Part III: Towards Resilience, Hope and Future

Part III draws attention to resilience, hope, and the future. This part of the arc involves reflection of the previous weeks while planning for “what’s next!”

“Futures can bring uncertainty for some people, but imagining futures is also important for bringing hope.” - Participant

Summary of notable responses:

- **“Photo-voicing,” “An art show,” and “Collective poem.”** The group will decide what collective art piece they would like to work towards, can begin brainstorming and creation in the 6th session.
- **“Take an artwork or plant with them.”** Prepare art pieces that participants can bring home following the end of the program as a memento to continue the growth that has happened over the 12-sessions.
- **“Titling each other’s artworks.”** Titling each other art pieces provides a platform for discussion and appreciation, this can occur at any stage in the art-making process.
- **“Create an artwork representing three things you have received from this group that you would like to take with you.”** Engage in a ending wrap up activity that prompts participants to identify and reflect on a learning, memory or something they have received from the group.
- **“I was, I am, I could be’ bridge drawing activity” and “Artwork that represents what are you hopes and dreams for your better life.”** Engage in discussion and activities that reflect on the future.

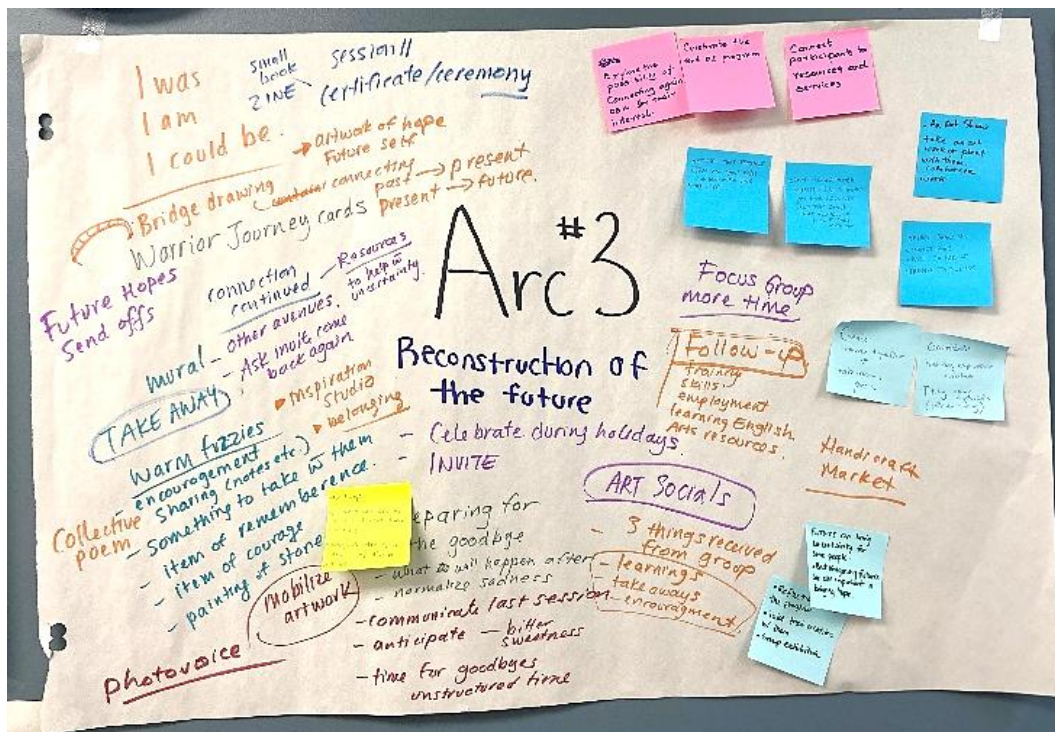


Photo: Co-design session, showing participant responses on sticky notes to a prompt question.

Closing Session

The 12 and final session is dedicated to a culminating art event, this consists of an art showcase, celebration, food and the gathering of community. The culminating event will be organized by participants, with support from facilitator team, to reflect what is meaningful to them.

Summary of notable responses:

- **“Follow up: training skills, employment, learning English, art resources.”** Encourage and assist participants in accessing external resources and/referrals including training, employment services, housing support, childcare, language services, and art resources etc.
- **“Session certificate.”** Recommendation to provide a certification at the end of the program. This can be paired with a ceremonial celebration to highlight the personal achievements of each participant.
- **“Time for goodbye, unstructured time.”** Allow for unstructured time where participants can say their goodbyes and make arrangements to stay connected.
- **“Continued connections... invite to come back.”** Explore the possibility of connecting again and allow participants to connect with each other. The HEAL team will notify participants of social gatherings following the end of the program.

Special Considerations

The HEAL project has identified six distinct newcomer women groups: Arabic, Bengali, Daria/Farsi, and Amharic and Tigrinya newcomer women speaking, LGBTQ+ newcomers and newcomer women living in shelters. Therefore, it is crucial that modifications to the HEAL arc are implemented to ensure the program is meeting the unique needs of each implementation group. **Summary** of notable responses:

- **“Retention considerations”** and **“Activities may need to change – no long term project.”** Due to the transient nature of women living in shelter, the HEAL program may need to be shortened to account for the many transitions that may occur.
- **“Workshop style – drop in.”** Consider a drop-in program for women living in shelters.
- **“May affect reporting – daily evaluation.”** Consider daily evaluations for women living in shelters as they may not attend all sessions to ensure feedback is being documented from participants that attend.
- **“During screening inquire about language preference, do not assume.”** Ensure language interpretations are provided as needed, do not make assumptions about participant’s language fluency.
- **“Having 2+ facilitator with shared understanding to response.”** Sessions should have at least two facilitators for the safety and security of participants as well as attending to logistics of each session.
- **“The ability for women to choose which art media they want to use to express themselves – what they like and feel comfortable to use.”** Allow participants to choose their art medium by providing a variety of art materials, this can reinforce autonomy.

Conclusion

The HEAL Co-Create Session is a concrete example co-design as an approach for community based participant action research (CBPAR). Based on discussions, see overarching recommendations below:

- Developing a program arc with flexible art-based activities allows for the expressive art therapist bring their own expertise and experience to each group. It also each art activity to be tailored to each distinct implementation group to meet their needs and comfortability with each art modality.
- Movement body based activity (e.g. Somatic) are useful during each session to help build a toolkit of self-regulation tools for participants that do not need additional materials.
- Adopting a strength based and trauma informed lens throughout the facilitation and program process is necessary to ensure the safety and security of participants.
- Center the diverse and unique experiences of newcomer women in developing and implementing the program will better inform the development of the HEAL arc and art-based activities.
- Plan and strategize referral pathways for participants during sessions and following the end of the program to ensure continues care is being provided that is appropriate the arising needs of participants.



Photo: Co-design session, showing participant responses on sticky notes to a prompt question.

For more information, please connect with our Program Coordinator, Christen Kong (ckong@accessalliance.ca) and Research Fellow, Oeishi Faruquzzaman (ofaruquzzaman@accessalliance.ca).

Gratitude to all the participants and their willingness to share their lived experiences, knowledge and wisdom with us to support the HEAL Project.

Acknowledgements

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