

Creative pathways – how to implement an expressive arts program for newcomers and their communities

September 29, 2026

Session agenda

1. Land Acknowledgement
2. Context: Art-based intervention in the Settlement & Healthcare Sector - HEAL Project
3. Platform: Arts for Family Health website
4. Learn: Creative Pathways learning course
5. Q&A
6. Interactive interpreter discussion

Land acknowledgment



At Access Alliance, we confirm that as individuals and community groups, we continue to benefit from living in Tkaronto, known as Toronto, today on lands that belong to many indigenous nations, including the Huron-Wendat, the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, and the Mississaugas of the Credit.

We are an organization with a mandate to work with most marginalized immigrants and refugees facing barriers to access and addressing systemic inequities. As individuals and as members of communities who have come here as settlers, immigrants, newcomers in this generation or generations past, as well as those of us who came here forcibly, particularly as a result of the Trans-Atlantic Slave trade, we recognize the ongoing impacts of colonialism on Indigenous, Metis and Inuit people.

This includes understanding the impact that: the forced removal from their land, the genocide perpetrated against them and the enforcement of residential schools, have on Indigenous Peoples, their culture and communities. We honour and respect the resilience and resistance of Indigenous peoples and nations across Turtle Island.

We are all treaty partners, and as such, are responsible and accountable for peacefully sharing and caring for the Great Lakes region. We commit to addressing and opposing any and all colonial violence and strive to practice solidarity with Indigenous peoples by listening, learning, building relationships, and taking action.

Truth and Reconciliation



The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada provides two specific Calls to Action related to newcomers and seven related to health.

	Implement the health-care rights of Aboriginal people	Provide sustainable funding for existing and new Aboriginal healing centres
Update the Oath of Citizenship	Establish measurable goals to identify and close the gaps in health outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities	Recognize, respect, and address the distinct health needs of the Métis, Inuit, and off-reserve Aboriginal peoples
Revise the information kit for newcomers to Canada and its citizenship test	Increase the number & retention of Aboriginal professionals working in the health-care field, provide cultural competency training for all healthcare professionals	Learn through formal education about Aboriginal health issues, including the history and legacy of residential schools



Public Health
Agency of Canada

Agence de la santé
publique du Canada



Access Alliance
Multicultural Health and Community Services



Disclosure

This presentation represents the project titled: "HEAL - Hubs of Expressive Arts for Life" funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada (Arrangement # 2223-HQ-000042) for Preventing and Addressing Family Violence for a period of 4 years.

This project is approved by the REB of the Community Research Ethics Office (Canada) Corp., c/o Centre for Community Based Research, 190 Westmount Road North, Waterloo, Ontario, N2L 3G5 (CREO REB file # 277).

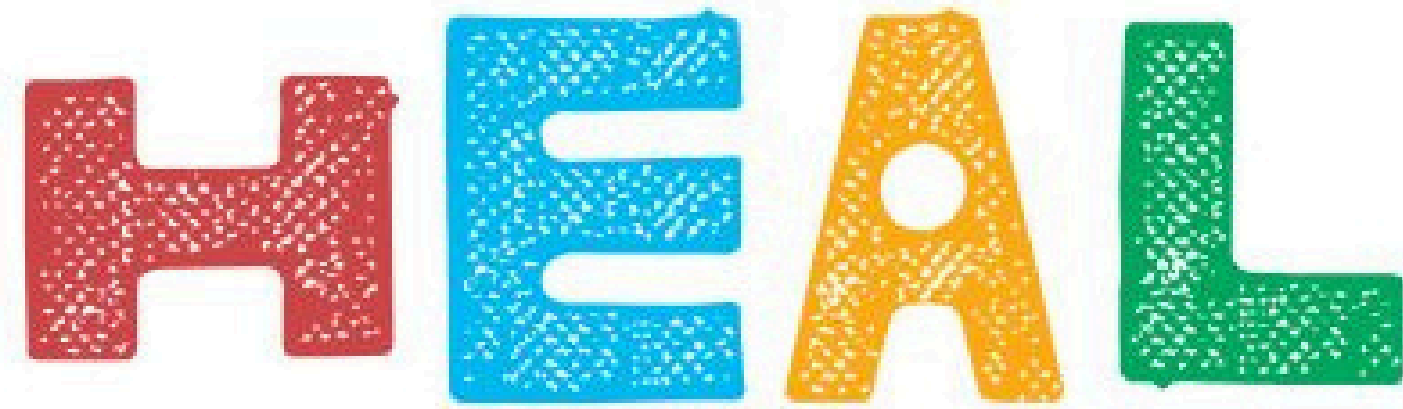
Email: creo@communitybasedresearch.ca. Telephone: 1-888-411-2736.

HEAL Project



Public Health
Agency of Canada

Agence de la santé
publique du Canada



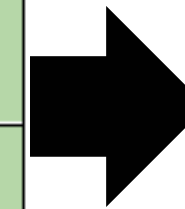
Hubs of Expressive Arts for Life

HEAL was an inter-sectoral, creative, culturally safe multipronged, capacity enriching project preventing and addressing family violence against vulnerable newcomer populations.





Welcome and Orientation	Part I: Safety & Stabilization			Part II: Identity, Culture, & Community			Part III: Towards Resilience, Hope, & Future			Ending & Culminating Event	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12



Arabic speaking
Bengali speaking
Farsi speaking

Tigrinya speaking
LGBTQ+ Newcomers
Women living in shelters

Research Questions

- Which Expressive Art Therapy practices can improve health and wellbeing of gender-based domestic violence survivors?
- What are the baseline needs of newcomer survivors of domestic based violence?
- What changes can we expect and measure in participants' attitudes, knowledge, and practices during and after their participation in an Expressive Arts Therapy program?
- How can the successful interventions be scaled up, shared, and adapted to other populations?

Program Objectives

- To evaluate whether the planned activities have contributed to improving participants' mental health and well-being.
- To assess the amount of effectiveness of these interventions to prevent and address domestic violence.
- To measure the changes in participants' attitudes, knowledge, and skills pre, during and after the program
- To identify the extent of the changes attributable to the intervention.

HEAL learning

Expressive Arts Activities Improve Mental Health



Participating in expressive art activities fosters emotional well-being, enhances self-expression, and is an effective coping mechanism, leading to mental health benefits for participants.

Personal Growth



Participants enhance their self-awareness, build self-efficacy, and cultivate self-compassion, leading to personal empowerment, improved self-acceptance, and continuous growth.

Effective and Empowering Program Experience of Self-Determination



A nurturing, safe environment fosters emotional well-being, personal growth, and meaningful connections, enabling participants to feel supported, reflective, and empowered in their healing.

Knowledge Gained as Domestic Violence Survivor



Domestic violence survivors gain essential knowledge on mental health, support services, stress management, and healthy relationships, empowering them to improve their well-being and build stronger social connections.

HEAL learning

Sense of Belonging and Community Engagement



Experiences of peer support in the program are a catalyst for a stronger sense of belonging, active community connections and deeper community engagement.

Peer-Engaged Co-Design Approach



Participants valued being involved as co-creators or cultural consultants, leading to increased active engagement and enhanced capacity-building in transferable skills such as communication, planning, and group facilitation.

Expressive Arts as a Tool for Personal Growth



Expressive arts helped increase self-expression, adopt emotional regulation strategies, and manage difficult emotions.

Access to Interdisciplinary Art Programming



Participants recognize that interdisciplinary, multigenerational art programs support family well-being, and expanding access to such programs can strengthen community well-being.

HEAL learning

Continued Empowerment to Invest in Self



Positive change in participant attitudes and behaviours led to sustained improvements in mental well-being and a greater ability to seek and accept help.

Implementation of Knowledge Gained



Participants gained new knowledge, leading to a change in perspective, increased self-autonomy, healthier relationships, and greater positivity towards life.

Broadening Trusted Support Systems



Increased awareness of support services and resources within the Domestic Violence, Healthcare, and Settlement sector, and of their services, leads to greater confidence and trust in navigating the system.

Participant Retention



They emphasized the value of continued support, connections to relevant resources, and the overall enjoyment and usefulness of the program, which contributed to their commitment and eagerness for sustained engagement.

Access Alliance Arts for Family Health

We're advancing arts in healthcare and settlement



This digital platform serves as a central source of knowledge for practitioners, management, researchers and academics seeking to integrate or learn more about arts-based mental health interventions.

By sharing knowledge and best practices, we aim to strengthen the integration of arts-based approaches across newcomer services and support systems.

Primary:

Frontline Settlement Practitioners
Settlement Practitioners
Healthcare Practitioners

Secondary:

Settlement & health care management/leadership
Arts-based therapists & Arts-based organizational reps
Women's shelters/anti-violence group staff/leadership

Key features

Hubs of Expressive Arts for Life (HEAL) Project

The Hubs of Expressive Arts for Life (HEAL) Project advances culturally safe, trauma-informed expressive arts approaches to support the mental health and well-being of newcomer women survivors of gender-based domestic violence, while strengthening community and system capacity to prevent and address family violence.

Access Alliance Multicultural Health and Community Services (Access Alliance) led the HEAL Project, funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC). It is a collaborative, culturally safe initiative designed to support vulnerable newcomer survivors of domestic and family violence in Toronto.

Working alongside peer researchers, community members, and academic and community partners, HEAL uses creative, trauma-informed expressive arts interventions to promote healing and well-being.

Through a co-designed, community-based participatory research approach, the project aims to strengthen capacity, improve physical and mental health outcomes, and identify promising practices for addressing family violence.



Stories & Articles

Explore our collection of participant testimonials and insightful articles on arts-based practices across the settlement and healthcare sectors. Participant voices are at the heart of this work, sharing lived experiences and cultural knowledge that have shaped the resources in our Hub. The articles offer short, accessible learning moments designed to spark dialogue, deepen understanding, and highlight the creative and healing work happening in our communities.



August 22, 2026

[Creativity, care and the rise of social prescribing](#)

Learn more about shifting questions from, "What's the matter with you?" to "What matters to you?"

Webinar series: Creative pathways #6

Creative Care Webinar series

We're advancing arts integration in healthcare and settlement.

July 22, 2026

[Creative care webinar #6: Continuing to mold](#)

Continuing to mold: What's next and what's possible

Resource Hub

The Resource Hub supports a wide range of professionals working in the arts, settlement, and healthcare sectors. Whether you are a manager or program coordinator leading community initiatives, an academic or researcher building an evidence base, or a practitioner working directly with newcomers, this hub supports your work. It offers practical, accessible, and evidence-informed tools tailored to your role.

Need help finding resources?

Book a brief consultation to discuss how to integrate an arts-based approach into your practice.

[Book a consultation >](#)

Search resources

Audience

Type of Content

Search Resources

Search

Reset

About HEAL Project

Stories and articles

Hub of diverse resources



WHAT – “Creative Pathway” learning modules

Creative Pathways learning course

Course modules

Module 1: Expressive arts & newcomer gender-based domestic violence

Module 2: Preparing the canvas, thoughtful preparations

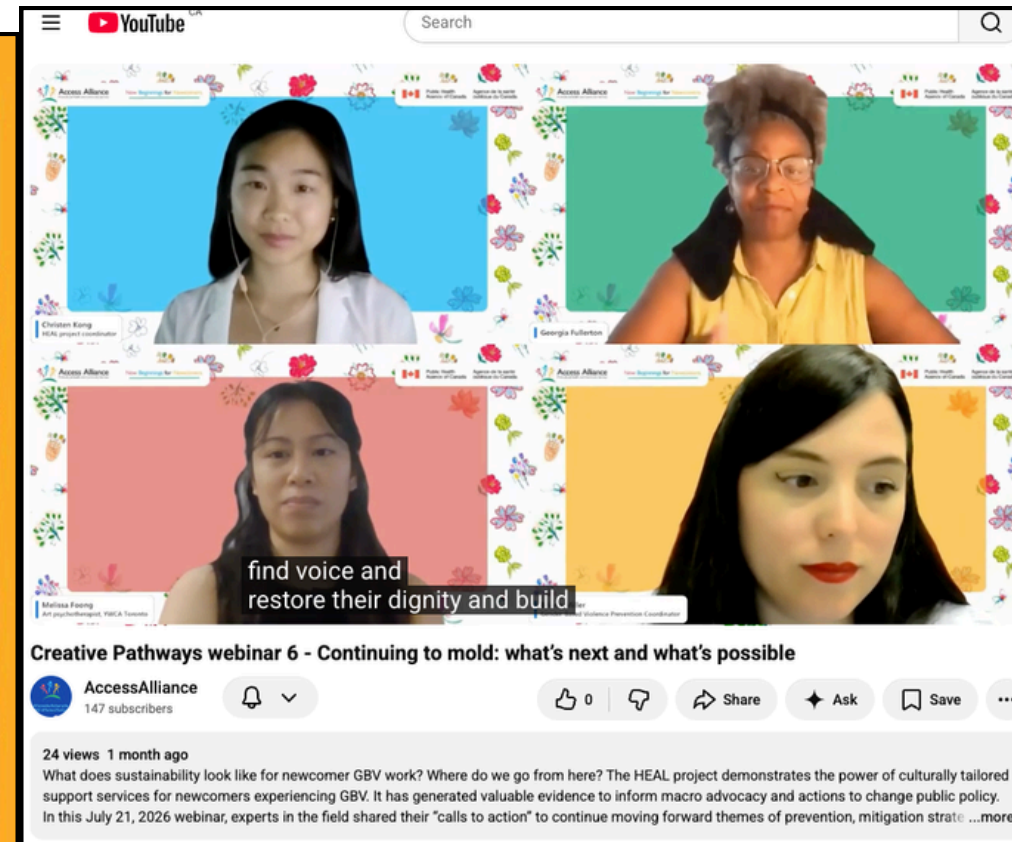
Module 3: Practical lay and impactful imagination

Module 4: Art prevails, sustainability and continuity

Module 5: Measuring artful mental health & well-being

Module 6: Knowledge mobilization and systems change

We're advancing arts integration in healthcare and settlement



5.1 Collective painting activity



Reflective Activity

Using any art materials available to you (e.g., paper, markers, paint, collage, or pencils) to draw or create a butterfly. There is no right or wrong way to create your artwork. Focus on the process of reflection and expression rather than the final product.

As you create, consider using each wing to explore a different aspect of your reflection:

- **Wing 1 – Voices and Stories:** Write words, symbols, or images that represent voices, experiences, or stories that deserve to be heard.
- **Wing 2 – Emotions and Memories:** Use colours, shapes, or textures to express emotions, memories, or experiences that have shaped you or your community.
- **Wing 3 – Strength and Hope:** Create patterns, symbols, or images that represent resilience, healing, courage, hope, or sources of support.
- **Wing 4 – Growth and Transformation:** Leave parts unfinished, layered, or altered to symbolize uncertainty, silence, personal growth, or transformation. Consider what is still unfolding in your own journey or in the journey toward healing and justice.



WHO are these modules for?

Leaders and frontline professionals in settlement and anti-violence organizations who want to strengthen their capacity to support newcomers who have experienced violence.

Health care professionals and service providers working with newcomers who want to deepen their understanding of gender-based violence and improve how they recognize and respond to it in clinical or community settings.

Art-based facilitators, expressive arts practitioners, and community arts leaders who wish to integrate trauma-informed and culturally responsive approaches when working with those impacted by violence.

Other professionals and practitioners working in community services, social support, education, or related sectors who want to build knowledge about gender-based violence affecting newcomer, immigrant, and refugee communities.



WHAT will you be exploring?

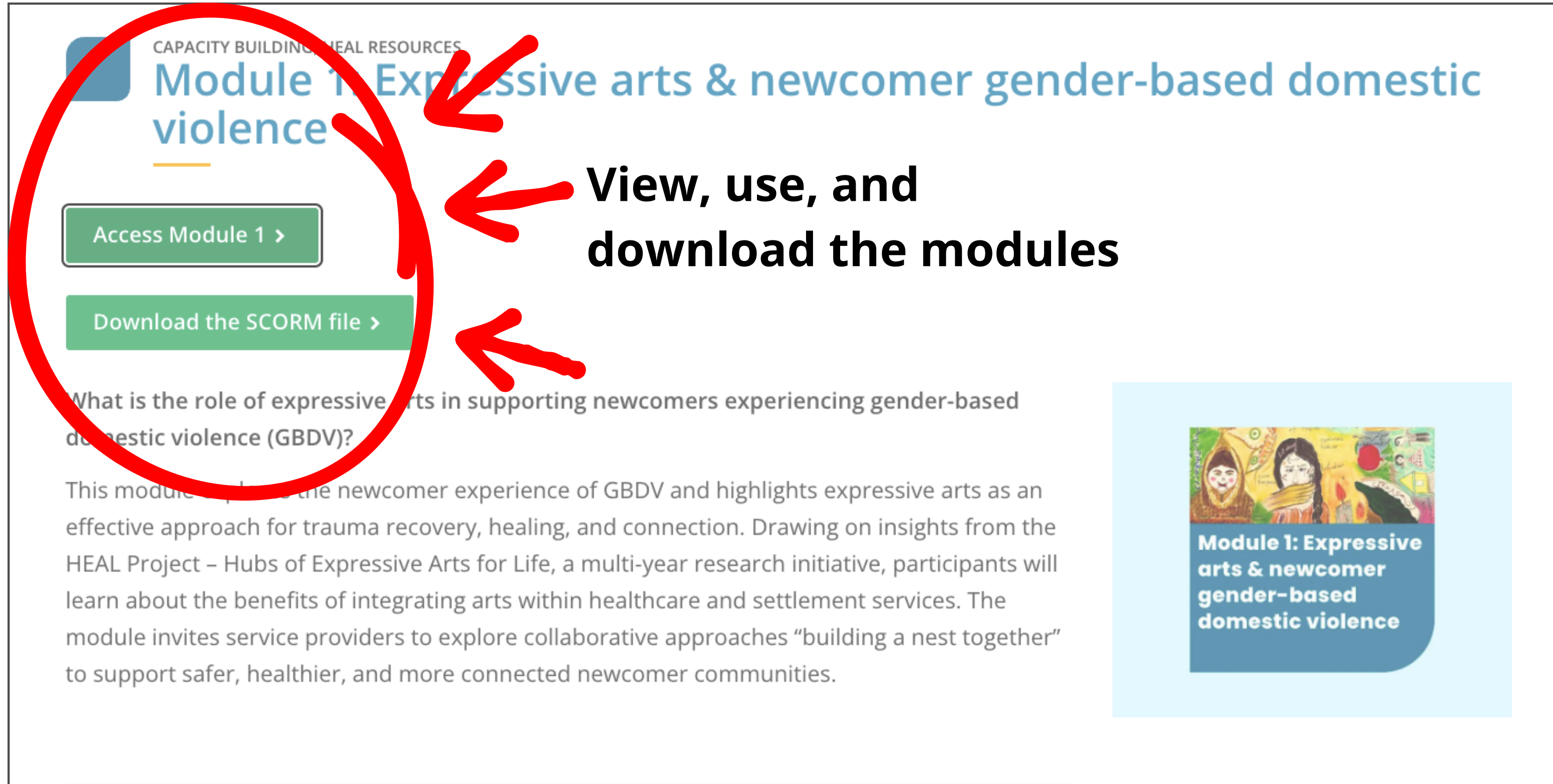
A learning journey across practice and systems

- The course introduces expressive arts as an effective intervention for mental health and wellbeing, while focusing on specific benefits for newcomers individuals and their families.
- The course provides introductory knowledge about using expressive arts with newcomer individuals and communities who have experience of trauma and violence.



**Creative Pathway
Learning Course**

HOW to engage and learn?



The screenshot shows a webpage titled "CAPACITY BUILDING HEAL RESOURCES" with the main heading "Module 1: Expressive arts & newcomer gender-based domestic violence". Below the heading are two green buttons: "Access Module 1 >" and "Download the SCORM file >". A red circle highlights these buttons, and three red arrows point from the text "View, use, and download the modules" to them. Below the buttons is a paragraph starting with "What is the role of expressive arts in supporting newcomers experiencing gender-based domestic violence (GBDV)?". Further down is another paragraph starting with "This module explores the newcomer experience of GBDV and highlights expressive arts as an effective approach for trauma recovery, healing, and connection. Drawing on insights from the HEAL Project – Hubs of Expressive Arts for Life, a multi-year research initiative, participants will learn about the benefits of integrating arts within healthcare and settlement services. The module invites service providers to explore collaborative approaches “building a nest together” to support safer, healthier, and more connected newcomer communities."

View, use, and download the modules

What is the role of expressive arts in supporting newcomers experiencing gender-based domestic violence (GBDV)?

This module explores the newcomer experience of GBDV and highlights expressive arts as an effective approach for trauma recovery, healing, and connection. Drawing on insights from the HEAL Project – Hubs of Expressive Arts for Life, a multi-year research initiative, participants will learn about the benefits of integrating arts within healthcare and settlement services. The module invites service providers to explore collaborative approaches “building a nest together” to support safer, healthier, and more connected newcomer communities.



The graphic features a colorful illustration of two women, one wearing a yellow headscarf and the other with dark hair, against a background of abstract shapes and colors. Below the illustration is a blue box with the text "Module 1: Expressive arts & newcomer gender-based domestic violence".



Thank you

Contact us: research@accessalliance.ca



New Beginnings for Newcomers.