

Subgroup Report

Arabic Speaking Newcomer Women

This report summarizes data from the Arabic-Speaking HEAL Group, delivered in partnership with the Arab Community Centre of Toronto and implemented from January to December 2023 with 11 participants.



Journey to Safety



New Beginnings Together

Participant Profile

Screening data showed that most participants entered the program without specific expectations. Over half (55%) joined primarily to build social connections and meet new people, while smaller proportions participated to improve their mental health (18%) or to explore an interest in art (9%).

Nearly all participants reported experiencing multiple symptoms associated with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The most frequently reported symptoms included:

- Intrusive negative memories: 60%
- Flashbacks: 53%
- Re-experiencing traumatic events: 53%

In addition, 80% of participants reported experiencing challenges affecting their mental wellbeing, such as sleep disturbances, heightened anger, difficulty concentrating, and persistent vigilance. The remaining 20% did not report these concerns.

All participants identified as women of Middle Eastern origin, with countries of origin including Syria, Yemen, and Egypt. Most participants chose not to disclose their sexual orientation.

- 82% were between 45 and 64 years old
- 18% were between 25 and 44 years old
- 45.5% were Canadian citizens
- 45.5% were permanent residents
- 9.1% were refugee claimants
- 64% were not actively engaged in the workforce
- 18% were employed full-time
- 9% were employed part-time
- 9% were unemployed

Referrals and Support Needs

- 3 participants requested assistance with securing employment
- 4 needed support in accessing professional services related to grief and mental health

Quantitative Findings

Arabic Speaking Newcomer Women

Quantitative data was collected using Pre- and post-program surveys. It measures changes in participants' self-efficacy and knowledge of available support services using a 5-point Likert scale. Results reflect group averages and overall outcomes.

Self-Efficacy: Participants reported increased confidence in managing challenges and accessing resources.

- 90% maintained a positive outlook and felt comfortable sharing experiences with others.
- Action-taking to seek support rose from 50% pre-program to 89% post-program.
- Reductions in loneliness, low self-esteem, and trauma-related anxiety were noted for 40–45% of participants, though 80% continued to experience self-blame.

Relationships & Community Connections: The program significantly improved participants' perceptions of emotional support.

- Before the program, 54% of participants were unsure or disagreed that they received support from others, while after the program, this number fell to just 9%.

Knowledge of Rights & Services: Participants knowledge and awareness improved across multiple areas:

- Understanding of rights in Canada 36% → 80%
- Safety/violence resources 33% → 78%
- Employment/settlement 42% → 70%
- Health resources 58% → 90%
- Barriers to service access 45% → 0%

Impact Summary

The HEAL program significantly enhanced participants' knowledge, skills, and wellbeing. All participants reported increased understanding of their rights, available services, and mental health strategies. Data indicates that the HEAL program had a positive impact on participants' wellbeing, social connections, and satisfaction with the program. Key outcomes include:

- 67% reported reduced feelings of loneliness
- 73% reported lower stress levels
- 100% reported improved social support and community belonging
- 73% highlighted satisfaction with the program's cultural sensitivity
- 100% stated they would recommend the program to others.

Takeaways

The HEAL program substantially improved participants' self-efficacy, knowledge of rights and services, and wellbeing. Participants reported greater confidence in seeking support, stronger social connections, and increased awareness of available resources. High levels of satisfaction and cultural relevance were noted, with all participants willing to recommend the program to others.

"I've started to feel stronger, I've started to have different skills...I have more faith in myself and I feel more comfortable." – Participant



Qualitative Findings

Arabic Speaking Newcomer Women

Qualitative data were collected through pre- and post-program surveys, in-program feedback surveys, focus group discussions, and follow-up interviews at 3 and 6 months. The purpose was to explore participants' experiences of the HEAL program.

Self-Efficacy Participants reported increased confidence and ability to manage stress and daily challenges. Many described improved self-understanding, calmer responses to stressful situations, and practical application of skills learned.

Expressive Art Therapy (EAT) Art was highly valued for self-expression, especially when language barriers existed. Drawing, painting, music, and outdoor sessions helped participants process emotions, reduce stress, and reflect on past experiences.

Community & Belonging The program fostered solidarity among participants with shared culture and language. Feelings of isolation decreased, with 91% reporting stronger connection to their community post-program. Collective art activities strengthened bonds and informal peer support networks.

Knowledge & Wellbeing Participants reported greater understanding of mental health, stress management, rights in Canada, and available support services. Many applied these tools in daily life, improving emotional regulation and overall wellbeing.

"Before this I didn't know how to control myself when I was angry, but now, I understand better." – Participant

Program Features & Satisfaction Participants appreciated the cultural sensitivity, safe group environment, and hands-on learning through EAT. Outdoor sessions, art supplies, and group outings were particularly valued. Suggestions for improvement included more field trips, nature-based activities, and extended practice of stress management techniques.

"The thing that I found valuable for me was sharing with others, we had the chance to express these things through our drawings." – Participant

"I am no longer hiding in the shadows of my past. Now, I have the knowledge and skills I need to live a good life. I can imagine a new future and dream again." - Participant



Takeaways

The HEAL program successfully enhanced self-efficacy, emotional wellbeing, knowledge of rights and services, and social connectedness. Expressive Art Therapy provided a meaningful outlet for self-expression, reflection, and skill-building. Participants reported stronger personal and community connections, improved coping strategies, and high satisfaction with the program's cultural relevance and practical tools.

"Whenever I feel nervous, I make some coffee and put on some quiet songs and make some art, simple art. This has really changed my daily life." – Participant

Future Considerations

Arabic Speaking Newcomer Women

Enhancing Engagement through Play and Art

The playful and creative aspects of the HEAL curriculum, including structured EAT sessions, were highly valued. Future iterations should continue to incorporate art-based activities that encourage self-expression, emotional processing, and enjoyment, which were key to participant engagement and wellbeing.

Strengthening Peer Support and Safety

Participants benefited from informal peer support within a culturally similar group, which created a sense of safety and trust. Future programs should continue fostering these dynamics, ensuring small, culturally cohesive groups where participants feel comfortable sharing their experiences.

Incorporating Nature and Experiential Learning

Outdoor sessions and field trips to cultural institutions were memorable and contributed to participants' wellbeing. Expanding opportunities for nature-based activities and experiential learning can enhance stress relief, creativity, and connection among participants.

Practical Application of Tools

While EAT tools were highly effective, participants noted the need for more dedicated time to practice and apply these techniques in daily life. Future programs should include additional sessions or follow-ups focused on integrating practical stress management and coping strategies.

Program Accessibility and Expansion

To broaden impact, similar culturally sensitive programs could be adapted for other Arabic-speaking communities and include male participants. This would address unique needs while promoting community wellbeing and inclusivity.

Cultural Sensitivity and Retention

The provision of culturally relevant materials, art supplies, and take-home items supported participant engagement and retention. Future programs should continue offering culturally tailored resources to maintain high participation and satisfaction.



Learn more at Access Alliance Arts for Family Health

Connect

Access Alliance Multicultural Health and Community Services
arts@accessalliance.ca

Arab Community Centre of Toronto
info@acctonline.ca
(416) 231-7746

