

# Subgroup Report

## 2SLGBTQ+ Identifying Newcomer Women

This report summarizes data from the 2SLGBTQ+ speaking HEAL Group. Delivered in partnership with the Sherbourne Health Centre, implemented from June 2024 to February 2025 with 10 participants total.

### Participant Profile

Screening data indicated that participants were interested in gaining greater knowledge about their legal rights and in learning how to identify abuse in their own lives. For some individuals, the name "HEAL" was associated with the concept of healing, which increased their interest in joining the program to access mental health support and to participate in art-based activities.

On a 10-point scale, participants noted an average of 8.2 in their rating of abuse/violence at home. All participants reported facing intense physical and emotional distress. 86% reporting repeated distressing memories or dreams and 71% noting feelings of traumatic events occurring repeatedly.

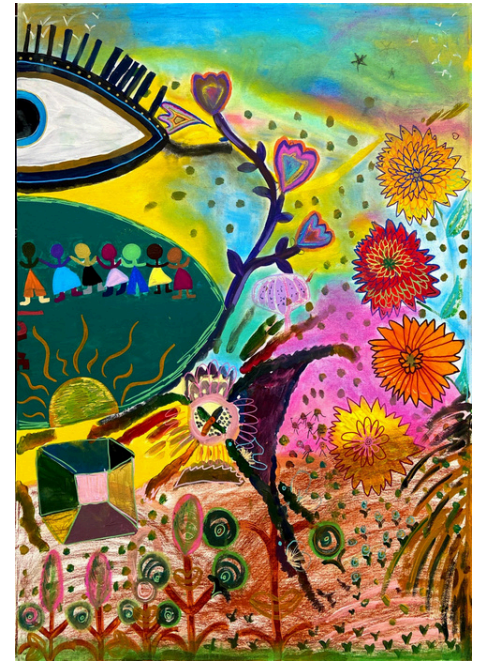
71% of the participants had avoidance behaviours related to thoughts, feelings or conversations about these experiences and 43% of participants avoided people, activities or places that reminded them of the experiences.

### Referrals and Support Needs

Key referrals included mental health and employment-related supports. Further, some individuals were also seeking support with legal procedures associated with immigration, housing, and upskilling through education for employment



A Portal to Us,  
Peaceful Meadow



Imperfect Togetherness,  
Landscapes of Love

75% of the participants were of the age group 25-44, and 12% in the age categories of 18-24 and 45-64 years.

63% of the participants were renting their home, 25% were in temporary housing, and 12% were in their own home.

38% of the participants identified as Middle Eastern (i.e. Egyptian, Iranian, Lebanese) and 62% identified themselves as Black- African (ex: Kenyan, Somali)

50% of the participants reported their annual family income as below 15,000. 75% of participants shared that they do not usually have enough money to meet their daily needs.



# Quantitative Findings

## 2SLGBTQ+ Identifying Newcomer Women

Quantitative data were collected using pre- and post-program surveys. It measured 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 tried to continue to see their situation more positively**

- 40% of the participants noted an improvement in trying to see their situation more positively and being able to address issues of violence, including discrimination and safety in their lives.
- In the pre-program survey, 70% of participants indicated they would access support services and resources to improve their situation, whereas in the post-program survey, 50% reported an intention to take action to access such services.
- Qualitative findings indicate that participants valued the comprehensive legal, settlement, and healthcare supports provided through HEAL referrals. As many needs were addressed during the program, fewer participants reported a need to seek additional services or resources following program completion.

### **Knowledge of Rights & Services: Participants noted improved awareness of support services**

- 60% of participants noted an increase in their knowledge and awareness of their rights in Canada, and of support services and resources relating to safety and violence.
- 50% of the participants had an improvement in their awareness of support services and resources relating to employment or settlement, and relating to physical or mental health

## Impact Summary

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

- 60 % reported improved ability to seek and receive emotional support through family and personal relationships
- 90 % reported improved social support, and community belonging
- 60 % reported improved Willingness to share/talk about their experiences with violence during sessions.

## Takeaways

The group observed improvements across several areas. Participants reported a greater sense of safety and trust in their current relationships, increased knowledge of their rights in Canada, and stronger awareness of safety- and violence-related support services and resources. However, participants also continued to experience anxiety stemming from past trauma and stress related to family relationships, underscoring the complexity and deeply rooted nature of these challenges. Such issues are often long-standing and may require sustained, in-depth individual support to achieve meaningful and lasting change.



# Qualitative Findings

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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.

**Knowledge & Wellbeing:** Participants acquired additional strategies to remain calm in stressful situations, including the use of art-based activities. These approaches played an important role in stress management and strengthening self-regulation during challenging circumstances. Increased knowledge of stress-management techniques contributed to improvements in participants' mental health. Additionally, psychoeducational components enhanced participants' self-awareness, enabling them to better understand their emotional responses and to identify and differentiate between healthy and unhealthy coping mechanisms.

The sessions also supported participants' integration into a new country by increasing awareness of available support services and their legal rights. Many newcomers were previously unaware of these resources or how to respond if their rights were denied. Group discussions emphasized realistic and practical approaches to seeking help, acknowledging potential delays and systemic barriers.

**Community and Connection:** The program fostered strong community connections by providing a safe, supportive, and caring environment. Many participants reported feeling less stressed and more healed, knowing that their well-being is valued. They also expressed a sense of moving toward a more positive future, away from anxiety and negativity, and gaining the confidence to engage more actively and build connections within the community.

**Building Healthy Relationships:** The sessions enhanced participants' understanding of body language as a form of communication alongside verbal cues and emphasized the importance of boundaries in relationships, helping them feel safer and more comfortable in social situations. Some participants reported gaining the courage to leave unhealthy relationships after recognizing them, while the social connections formed within the program served as a model for safe and healthy relationships.

*"Yes, it (view of healthy relationship) has changed. A healthy relationship is one where I have the choice to do what I want without being scared of the other party." – Participant*

## Takeaways

The HEAL program significantly improved participants' knowledge and well-being by providing strategies for stress management and supporting their integration into a new country. Participants formed social connections and developed relationships within the program, which in turn encouraged them to continue building and strengthening relationships within the broader community.

*"Being in a new country, these are now familiar faces. These are people I didn't know before, and now we talk. After I missed the museum program, some of them called me, asking why I didn't come. It made me feel that people are thinking about me and looking out for me." - Participant*



# Future Considerations

## 2SLGBTQ+ Identifying Newcomer Women



### Enhancing Trauma-Informed Mental Health Support

Participants reported high levels of trauma, including distressing memories, avoidance, and anxiety, highlighting the need for ongoing culturally and 2SLGBTQ+ affirming mental health support such as counselling, trauma workshops, and booster sessions to reinforce coping skills and address loneliness, self-blame, and family-related stress.

### Sustaining Social Connections and Community Belonging

The benefits of peer support was observed in the group. Future expressive arts programs can foster deeper sense of safety and trust when integrating peer support model. Examples may include, structured peer mentorship, buddy systems, or small-group meetups to reduce isolation, while offering community activities, volunteer opportunities, and cross-cultural events to strengthen belonging and practical skills.

### Tailoring Programs for Newcomer 2SLGBTQI+ Needs

Participants experience intersecting challenges related to 2SLGBTQ+ identity, newcomer status, and social determinants such as housing, employment, and healthcare access. Program content should be culturally sensitive and cover topics including healthy relationships, financial literacy, navigating healthcare and settlement services, and employment readiness.

### Expanding Expressive Arts and Psychoeducational Practices

Participants benefited from visual arts, music, dance, and movement-based activities for stress relief, emotional regulation, and confidence-building. Embedding arts-based therapeutic practices alongside take-home art packages, handouts, or digital resources can help participants continue these activities independently and integrate coping techniques into daily life.

### Improving Accessibility and Follow-Up for Support Services

Although participants gained knowledge of support services, barriers like language, stigma against 2SLGBTQ+, feelings of judgment and limited culturally relevant resources persist. Strengthening walking alongside referrals to specific service providers showed great effectiveness of service uptake. Offering follow-up support can also improve access, while continuous feedback helps tailor services to emerging needs.

## Connect

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