

# Subgroup Report

## Farsi Speaking Newcomer Women

This report summarizes data from the Farsi-Speaking HEAL Group, delivered in partnership with The Neighbourhood Group Community Services. Program implemented from September 2023 to May, 2024 with 12 participants completing the program.



Unheard Voices of Butterflies



Our Sun Will Also Rise

## Participant Profile

Participants from the Farsi-speaking newcomer group noted multiple reasons for joining the HEAL program:

- 40% an interest in mental health,
- 90% an interest in artwork
- 50% to connect with others in the community.

On a self-rating scale assessing experiences of abuse at home (10-point scale ranging from 3 to 6), the group's average score was 4.6.

70% of participants reported PTSD symptoms, including flashbacks, re-living traumatic memories, and negative moods or thoughts, while 60% noted avoidance behaviors related to certain thoughts, feelings, activities, or people.

70% of the women reported PTSD symptoms, such as flashbacks, re-living of traumatic memories, and experiencing negative moods and thoughts.

Additionally, 80% experienced other symptoms such as trouble sleeping, anger management challenges, and difficulty concentrating. 92% born in Afghanistan and of South Asian descent, and Iran.

The majority of women 66% were ages 25-44, while 17% were 18-24 years and 45-64 years of age.

58% of women were unemployed and looking for work, 25% were full-time homemakers, and the remaining wished not to disclose their situation.

83% of women lived in rented housing, and 8% in subsidized housing

16% of women stated that they receive Ontario Works, and that they did not have enough money to meet their daily needs, while the rest preferred not to answer

## Referrals and Support Needs

Participants had complex needs across multiple areas including needing referrals to mental health support, physician, housing, settlement, employment, pre-natal resources, and higher education.

# Quantitative Findings

## Farsi Speaking Newcomer Women

Quantitative data was collected using pre- and post-program surveys measuring 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**

- Post program, 33% showed an improvement in their ability to address issues of violence, including discrimination and safety in their lives.
- Women taking action to access support services and resources increased from 75% to 92% post program.
- Post program, 42% reported improved comfort when having shared their lived experience with others in the program and with their families/friends.

### **Relationships & Community Connections: The program significantly improved participants' stress levels due to family relationships**

- Reports of stress due to family relationships decreased from 42% pre-program to 25% post-program.
- Post-program, 33% reported an improvement in their sense of belonging and safety in the community as well as trust in their current relationships.

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

- 50% reported an improved awareness of support services and resources in the community for needs such as body ailments and/or mental health.

## Impact Summary

The HEAL 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 HEAL program had a positive impact on participants' well-being, social connections, and satisfaction with the program. Key outcomes include:

- 92% reported improved Knowledge and skills to utilize mental health-improving tools and techniques.
- 83% reported improved Knowledge about healthy relationships.
- 67% reported a better knowledge of support services available
- 50% reported improved ability to seek and receive emotional support through family and personal relationships

## Takeaways

Overall, at least 50% of the women reported an improvement after the HEAL program, which included areas such as receiving emotional support, reducing anxiety from past trauma in their lives, and a greater awareness of receiving support services and resources that they can access in their community relating to physical and mental health.

*"My relationship has become very close to the program and I feel comfortable in every community, and I have become very social." - Participant*



# Qualitative Findings

## Farsi 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.

**Knowledge & Wellbeing:** Participants gained strategies for self- and co-regulation in stressful situations, including deep breathing, art activities, and drawing on connections formed through the program. Group discussions and story sharing offered peer support and increased awareness of challenging situations and helped to co-create solutions.

**Self-Efficacy:** Participants reported feeling more capable of addressing violence in their lives, family challenges, and mental health concerns. They gained confidence to face doubts and fears and drew inspiration from peers to pursue their own goals.

**Community and Connection:** HEAL sessions strengthened social connections among participants, contributing to improved mental health. Increased community ties also fostered a stronger sense of belonging in their new country for newcomer women.

**Self-Development:** The program decreased feelings of helplessness among participants. Many felt more equipped to manage difficult emotions such as anger, shame, and guilt by using different EAT techniques. Further, there is reduced sense of loneliness among the participants. Many have reported taking initiative in their community.

*"I have learned self-sufficiency and strength, and I have become more patient. This program has taught me a lot." - Participant*

**Program Features & Satisfaction:** Sessions provided an opportunity for participants to form informal social connections with each other, extending beyond the end of the program. A safe and trusting group environment developed due to shared common experiences and discussing challenges in their lives despite the range in age.

**Building Healthy Relationships:** Participants gained more knowledge and understanding of healthy relationships. Many increased their ability to express what healthy means to them including characteristics of mutual respect, effective communication and self prioritization. Many increased confidence in meeting others in their community and beyond.



## Takeaways

The HEAL program played a key role in improving self-efficacy, mental well-being, and social connectedness. Participants were able to both build and define healthy relationships and identify strategies to be more active in society, and build community.

*"At the beginning of this program, I was not feeling well and had a family problem. As I continue to participate in this program, I feel good and now I can find different ways to solve my problem."- Participant*

# Future Considerations

## Farsi Speaking Newcomer Women

### Community connection and peer support

Peer mentorship and support can enhance social connections and reduce feelings of loneliness. Family-inclusive workshops provide a platform for discussions on healthy relationships, gender-based violence, and human rights. Volunteer opportunities enable participants to practice English, gain work experience, and broaden their social networks.

### Skill-building and educational opportunities

Programs that combine mental wellness with practical skills, such as vocational training, creative arts, and life skills, offer holistic support. Accredited or certificate-based courses can advance employment and educational goals, while sessions on financial literacy, settlement navigation, and digital literacy help participants build independence and confidence.

### Enhanced mental health and self-efficacy support

Future programs should include access to mental health professionals alongside expressive arts sessions. Training in coping strategies for PTSD, anxiety, and anger management is recommended, and follow-up sessions can help reinforce self-efficacy and stress-management skills for women experiencing loneliness or self-blame.

### Strengthened knowledge of human rights and culturally tailored support services

Programs should provide in-depth workshops on Canadian laws, women's rights, and navigating social services to boost participants' confidence in seeking support. Guided referrals with direct introductions to professionals can enhance follow-through, while multilingual resources and interpretation support are essential, as most participants require language assistance to access services.

### Sustainability and long-term engagement

Ongoing programs and follow-up initiatives help sustain gains in self-efficacy, emotional regulation, and community engagement. Collaborations with settlement agencies, community centers, and health services provide continuous support for mental health, housing, employment, and social needs. Regular participant feedback ensures future programs remain relevant and responsive to emerging challenges.



Learn more at **Access Alliance Arts for Family Health**

## Connect

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