

# HEALING ARTS FOR NEWCOMER FAMILY WELLBEING

## Knowledge Exchange to Support Newcomer Families



## Share and Receive Activity Cards

# Share and Receive Activity Cards

On November 12, 2025, Access Alliance hosted the Healing Arts for Newcomer Family Wellbeing event. The event featured an interactive activity titled **Share & Receive: Knowledge Exchange**, designed to engage participants with key findings from the project. The activity encouraged reflection, connection, and collective learning, and brought together individuals from the healthcare, settlement, and arts sectors to share cross-sector insights.

**Step 1:** Activity cards were developed based on five key project themes identified through pre- and post-program surveys. These surveys measured outcomes related to self-efficacy, knowledge and understanding, and mental health, which informed the selection of the themes. Each card included a question connected to one of the five themes.

**Step 2:** Participants were invited to respond to five different questions related to the project themes, fostering knowledge exchange and shared learning among attendees.

**Step 3:** After completing an activity card, responses were documented by a volunteer facilitator and then displayed on a pegboard. Participants were invited to hang one completed card and take another with them.

This document highlights the knowledge and insights shared by attendees during the event, demonstrating how cross-sector collaboration can support newcomer wellbeing.



# ● Share & Receive Knowledge Gained as Domestic Violence Survivor



## **Knowledge Gained as Domestic Violence Survivor**

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

# What mental health and recovery support services have you found helpful and would recommend for survivors of domestic violence?

- Any space that is nurturing, empowering, and healing. Elizabeth Fry is a good organization. Street Haven is another.
- Peer led supports. Mentorship for survivors to become involved in the field and paid. Support groups involving expressive arts, somatic and skill sharing groups. Intersectional feminist frameworks. Engaging survivors in activism. Believe survivors. Healing isn't linear.
- Connecting women with children to services that support their children's wellbeing as well. Ensure that their children are recognized as victims as well and are helped.
- Services that represent the cultural and linguistic identities of the community of need can help to build a trusting connection. Although, we have also seen how stigma, judgment and discrimination can occur within cultural groups too. Asking is always the best policy.
- Accessing your own capacity to "walk alongside" a client is essential. Often the needs of survivors or those at risk of GBV is a long term commitment. Referring clients to other service providers can be jarring and fragmented causing more stress and trauma within the system.
- Culturally and linguistically matched services help build trust, especially for newcomers, racialized survivors, or those with limited English. The best practice is to ask survivors what they want and not assume. Cultural safety must be survivor-defined, not provider-assigned.

# Share & Receive

## Co-Engaged Co-Design Approach



### Co-Engaged Co-Design Approach

Participants valued being co-creators and/or cultural consultants in program development leading to increased active engagement and capacity building of transferable skills like communication, planning, and group facilitation.

# What have you used or seen to facilitate effective collaboration and co-design with participants and others involved?

- Story sharing on a theme, improvisation to imagine options, drawing on themes and sharing, what's behind them seeing commonality, open invitation.
- Hosting a creative workshop with other facilitators. Have participants actively participating in the workshop. Include group discussions and feedback communication.
- It's always a learning path. Asking participants in a creative way what they need. It is easier if you use a simple prompt, this makes them think and share their desires. Keeping the door open and invite them to collaborate.
- Different art modalities, somatic exercises, relational therapy practices.
- Workshops and design thinking sessions: interactive sessions where participants are engaged in a co-design processes. Arts engagement can build confidence and community connection.
- Hiring those with lived experiences. Providing and optional anonymous feedback form post-group including how we are meeting their social, spiritual, physical, mental, creative needs. Offering honorariums.
- Having the participants set intentions and group norms from the start to encourage buy-in and engagement.

# Share & Receive Access to Interdisciplinary Art Programming



## **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.

# What have you used or seen to support accessibility of art-based programs for newcomer and marginalized communities?

- I can create welcoming environments, places that have music flowers, painting walls, I can make feel people comfortable and ease. I can share with people how to mindfully crochet a winter hat.
- As an expressive art therapist (in training), I've designed & ran workshops and group therapy programs for BIPOC women in the city on grief.
- Using supplies that are accessible to participants at home (e.g., natural dyes using turmeric, handmade cardboard looms) so they can continue to use expressive arts for self- and co-regulation outside of the program.
- Offering family programming where whole families (e.g. parents, children, youth, grandparents etc.) are able to attend helps to strengthen family relationships.
- Accessibility starts with removing practical barriers before the art-making even begins. Providing transit tokens, childcare, flexible drop-in formats, and programs scheduled outside of traditional work hours makes a huge difference. Food is also a form of welcome, it shifts the space from "service provision" to community care.
- Safety planning must be integrated throughout. For some newcomer survivors, participation can raise risks related to partners, sponsors, or immigration status. Coordinating with settlement workers, counsellors, and legal supports ensures the art space remains safe, and not a burden.

# Share & Receive

## Broadening Trusted Support Systems



### **Broadening Trusted Support Systems**

Increased awareness of support services and resources within the Domestic Violence, Healthcare, and Settlement sectors and its services leads to greater confidence and trust in system navigation.

# What practices have you found helpful for service providers and users to navigate domestic violence and settlement supports?

- It's important for service providers to go beyond offering isolated services, and instead focus on understanding the system issues individuals face. Making systemic change is key. A holistic approach that addresses mental health, legal concerns, and meet where they are at is essential in helping them feel safe and supported.
- Implement trauma-informed practices in service delivery to ensure that all service users feel safe and free from judgement. Openly communicate rights and restrictions to confidentiality.
- Work as a team with the client and ask how you can best support them (e.g. accompany them to appointments, follow up with referrals).
- Use your network to find trusted referrals and support service users to make direct connections.
- Bringing flexibility into service delivery is also crucial. Evening hours, virtual options, childcare availability, and allowing drop-ins or short sessions all make it easier for participants to access support safely.
- Cultural humility plays an important role as well. Rather than assuming what is appropriate based on cultural background, asking open questions about safety, family dynamics, and community pressures helps providers understand the survivor's reality without imposing assumptions.
- One practice that has been consistently helpful is creating clear, gentle pathways for survivors to move between services without having to retell their story multiple times.

# Share & Receive

## Sense of Belonging and Community Engagement



### **Sense of belonging and community engagement**

Participants experiences of peer support in the program is a catalyst for a stronger sense of belonging, active community connections and deeper community engagement

# What strategies have helped survivors of domestic violence build meaningful connections and supportive communities?

- Having spaces where survivors don't feel judged or dismissed. Having survivors that speak the same language be able to communicate with one another. Building child-friendly space where children can also exist/participate in activities.
- Taking care of your inner child and give care for!
- Weekly get together with the community. Skill exchange programs. Skill building programs.
- Courage of speaking up, vulnerability is a choice, and not an easy one! Beneath the trauma of violence lies strength and wisdom and embodied knowledge.
- A focus on cultivating joy, fun, and building belonging. It's an opportunity to de-center a focus on pain, and emphasize joy, movement and connection.
- Consistent and supportive resources that are tailored to the individual. There is a need for safe & inclusive spaces for survivors to heal & further build lasting relationships.
- Digital communities have also become important. Private WhatsApp groups, moderated online circles, or virtual creative workshops give survivors a way to stay connected when transportation, childcare, or safety concerns make in-person participation difficult.
- Including cultural expressions in community-building helps survivors reconnect with identity and pride.

# Share & Receive Resource Card



# **Share a resource or knowledge to support the mental health and wellness of Toronto's diverse communities.**

- We can practice mindful eating with a mandarin; acknowledging the story of this piece of food; using our sight, touch, smell, and hearing to have a special moment eating this delicious food.
- Kids help phone, Toronto community, music school, ask a foodbank, Fred Victor. Thank you for being part of our community.
- Shadowland Theatre, Light & Shadow workshops for newcomer young people and video game Light&Shadow free on stream.
- Libraries. Community centers with free programming. (e.g., Secord Community Centre)
- The Al and Malka Green Artists' Health Centre is a health team that caters to artists, art students, and art educators. Operates out of UHN (Toronto Western). [Self-referralform@artistshealthcentre.ca](mailto:Self-referralform@artistshealthcentre.ca)
- Lumenus: mental health services, Early Years intervention services, developmental services, autism services. Surrey Place: Autism, developmental, and sensory-related concerns.
- Toronto Rape Crisis Centre/Multicultural Women Against Rape offers intersectional seminars peer support. They also have a program for Spanish speaking survivors. 24/7 Crisis line: 416-597-8808, for all other supports: 416-597-1171.
- Survivors of domestic violence and human trafficking can apply for the Special Priority Program to be prioritized for Rent-Geared-to-Income housing in Toronto. Information on the City of Toronto website or visit your local Housing Help Centre.
- There are lots of free community arts programming. One in particular that provides newcomers services and resources is Mabelle Arts. Another well kept secret is Wildseed Centre. Surrounding yourself with Arts will heal your heart.



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