

YEAR II: Implementation & Data Collection MILESTONE REPORT

Following a full year of co-creation sessions, strategic planning and partner collaborations, on April 25, 2023, we hosted the very first HEAL program for Arabic speaking newcomer women in partnership with the Arab Community Centre of Toronto (ACCT). The program came alive in colourful and imaginative ways. Participants engaged meaningfully in discussions of domestic violence, mental health, and shared vulnerabilities part of their migration stories. Already many participants have reported a greater sense of belonging, increased awareness of boundary setting, and enhanced knowledge of self-regulating techniques. The program provided many initial learnings that helped to inform the other phase I programs.



Photo: Bengali HEAL participants engaging in dance ribbons to learn about somatic resourcing as an approach to self and co-regulation, Dentonia Park.

The second HEAL program was offered to Bengali speaking newcomer women, in partnership with the Bangladeshi – Canadian Community Services (BCS) on June 3, 2023. This group showcased the capacity for the HEAL program to meet diverse needs across a variety of age ranges.

Finally, on September 5, 2023, we facilitated the Farsi speaking newcomer women group in partnership with the Toronto Neighbourhood Group (TNG). This cohort built a “nest” of safety and trust allowing for togetherness to flourish. Across all HEAL groups, some are continuing to become peer

champions apart of Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI) gender-based violence initiative and others attend Access Alliance mental health workshops/community programs. Participants and partner organizations continue to stay connected far beyond the completion of the HEAL program.

Table 1

HEAL Subgroup	Arabic	Bengali	Farsi
Total Participants	11	11	14
Average Sessions Attended by group	10	9	9
Implementation Team	6	9	8
Guest Speakers	1	3	4

HEAL programs are hosted by an interdisciplinary team of professionals across the domestic violence, settlement, healthcare, and mental health sector. *Table 1* includes guest speakers as part of the

facilitation team to recognize the value of partnerships to mobilize subject matter experts within the program. In addition, the HEAL Project has engaged numerous students and volunteers to assist in the program and research components, see *Table 2*. Placement students were supervised by both the project coordinator and research lead from social work, public health, public policy, health promotion, and applied health sciences faculties from across five educational institutions.

Table 2

Placement Students	Program Volunteers	Language Support Volunteers	TOTAL Volunteers & Student engaged in HEAL Project Phase I
16	7	9	32



Staying Connected! December 1, 2023 marked the first HEAL arts & culture visit to the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM). These visits to arts and culture sites across Toronto, including the ROM, Art Gallery of Ontario, Textile Museum, and many more, help our team stay connected with participants following the end of the HEAL program. It has proven beneficial to increase the attendance at the 3-month interview check in and 6-months focus group discussion. Many look forward to seeing each other again!



Photo: Arabic HEAL participants visiting the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) for an arts and culture field trip, 2024.

Partnership Development New notable partnerships that have bolstered the education and knowledge exchange components of the program include, Nellie's Shelter, Women's Assaulted Helpline, Barbra Schlifer and OCASI. Guest speakers facilitate on topics such as healthy relationships, human rights, and empowerment self defense techniques. Participants have the opportunity to be exposed to other Toronto based domestic violence supports and resources increasing their awareness and accessibility. We are grateful for partnership contributions and will continue to invite them for phase II HEAL programs.

The Public Good Initiative and the Dalla Lana School of Public Health at the University of Toronto worked together to produce a policy scan focusing on current policies, strategies, and initiatives on gender-based violence in Canada using a newcomer lens. Access Alliance believes that policy impacts people. To raise awareness, the student team produced a pictorial representation of the policy scan, [click here](#) alongside a **"fact sheet"** **"myths and truths"** documents.

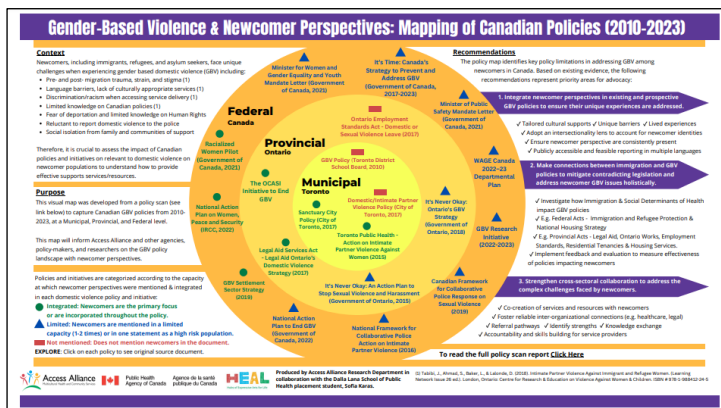


Image: Pictorial overview of the policy scan featuring Canadian policies and initiatives relevant to domestic violence with newcomer perspectives, 2024.

Shortly after, Access Alliance published a social media campaign for this year's #16DaysOfActivism against gender-based violence. The campaign showcased the evidence produced from the policy scan to increase knowledge and awareness of Canadian domestic violence policies that impact newcomer communities, visit out [Facebook page](#) to view the campaign.

Knowledge Exchange: Locally

On October 17, 2023, Axelle Janczur and Christen Kong presented at a collaborative event on Newcomer Employment and

Mental Health. We gathered knowledge on bridging programs, employment opportunities, and approaches to career mentorship from other immigrant serving agencies. This provided practical avenues for HEAL participants to access employment support that met their needs, many of which are accessing currently.



The past many years has seen many complex social and economic challenges magnifying new demands in the settlement sector. In response, many organizations have joined forces to co-create solutions to address these issues to support their clients. On February 7, 2024, the HEAL Project Coordinator presented and discussed on a panel at the annual TEQ LIP BRIDGES 2024 Collaborative and Partnership forum as part of the workshop “Adapting Together: Addressing Newcomer Challenges Through Non-Traditional Partnerships”. The project featured unique partnerships such as galleries, museums, and community arts agencies as collaborators to support newcomer mental health.

In addition, many partner organizations have reported the desire to learn more about art-based practice with newcomers to improve their mental wellbeing. The project coordinator led a two-part webinar series as part of OCASI’s Health Promotion Project and Initiative to End Gender-Based Violence. Webinars included:

- Cultivating Art-Based Practice for Newcomer Mental Health
- “Learn it, Lead it” – Art Based Approaches Where You Are At



Photo: Farsi HEAL participant contributing to the final collective painting titled: “Our Sun Will Also Rise”.

Nationally Our HEAL Immigrant Insight Scholar, Shangjucta Pooja, presented at the Pathways to Inclusion: Community-Based Research in Immigrant and Settlement Conference in Calgary, April 24 – 25, 2024. The presentation focused on the use of community-based research as the foundation approach for the HEAL Project. **Globally** Across oceans, Akm Alamgir and Christen Kong presented at the 7th International Conference on Gender Research, April 25 – 26, 2024 in Barcelona, Spain on the HEAL Projects approach to gender-based research using expressive arts therapy with an integrated evaluation framework.



Photo: Farsi HEAL Group Collective Painting, “New Beginnings Together”.

To further our global perspective, in 2016, the United Nations established [17 Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#) to achieve better and healthier futures for communities globally. The HEAL Project is relevant to the following SDGs, 3: Good Health and Wellbeing, 5: Gender Equality, 10: Reduce Inequalities. Access Alliance has an emerging interest to bridge the work that we do with the United Nations SDGs to showcase our global impact.

Overall, YEAR II Program implementation and data collection has been a gathering of “learnings on the go”, joys, and celebrations.

The HEAL team is looking forward to phase II implementation with the remaining partner organizations. We are continuing to embark on “New Beginnings Together” as we adapt and walk alongside participants through their program journey. More information contact research@accessalliance.ca

