



PHASE 2

Collective Painting

HEAL Hubs of Expressive Arts for Life

 **Access Alliance**
Multicultural Health and Community Services

New Beginnings for Newcomers.

 **Public Health Agency of Canada** Agence de la santé publique du Canada

Notice, observe and feel

Art is meant to be felt, not just seen. Allow your own background, experiences, and intersecting identities to shape how you engage with each painting. At your own pace, notice, observe and feel.

Next to the booklet's page numbers you'll find quotes from HEAL project participants. We invite you to pause and reflect on their meaning. Consider your own responses, and let them guide your journey through the exhibition.



What colours stand out to you?



What symbols or images catch your eye?

What does the painting make you feel?



If the painting had soundscape, what sound might you hear?



What questions come to mind when viewing (or looking at) the painting?



Does the painting remind you of any personal experiences or memories?

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Collective HEAL painting in progress.

Overview

In 2022, Access Alliance Multicultural Health and Community Services (Access Alliance) embarked on a multi-year project funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada. Over four years, Hubs of Expressive Arts for Life (HEAL) Project gathered more than 50 newcomer women to connect, create, learn, imagine, and engage in a 12-session program to improve their mental health and wellbeing. The HEAL project was designed to prevent and address family violence using expressive arts as the foundational approach.

Alongside a interdisciplinary team of artists, healthcare, and settlement workers, the HEAL program was implemented across six distinct newcomer communities.

Participants engaged in artful collaboration to produce two collective paintings. Each painting showcased a culmination of participants' lived experiences, thoughts, feelings, and attitudes.

This gallery booklet features six collective paintings produced by Phase II HEAL program subgroups including: 2SLGBTQI+, those with shelter experience and Tigrinya-speaking newcomer women survivors of gender-based domestic violence. This is a glimpse into the transformative power of art as an approach to mental wellbeing, knowledge and skills development.

Come along with us to explore the symbols and stories shared on these canvases.



(Top left) Bilateral (painted with both hands) self-portraits by HEAL participants.

(Bottom left) Participant's clay sculpture showing growth.



(Top right) Participants' nest building activity.

(Bottom right) Participants display their identity-themed sculptures.



(Top left) Participants contribute to collective painting.
 (Top right) Preparing a Buna ceremony—for gathering and discussion—on the Access Alliance green roof.
 (Bottom right) Tigrinya participant sharing details about collective painting.
 (Bottom left) Participant clay sculpture showing growth.

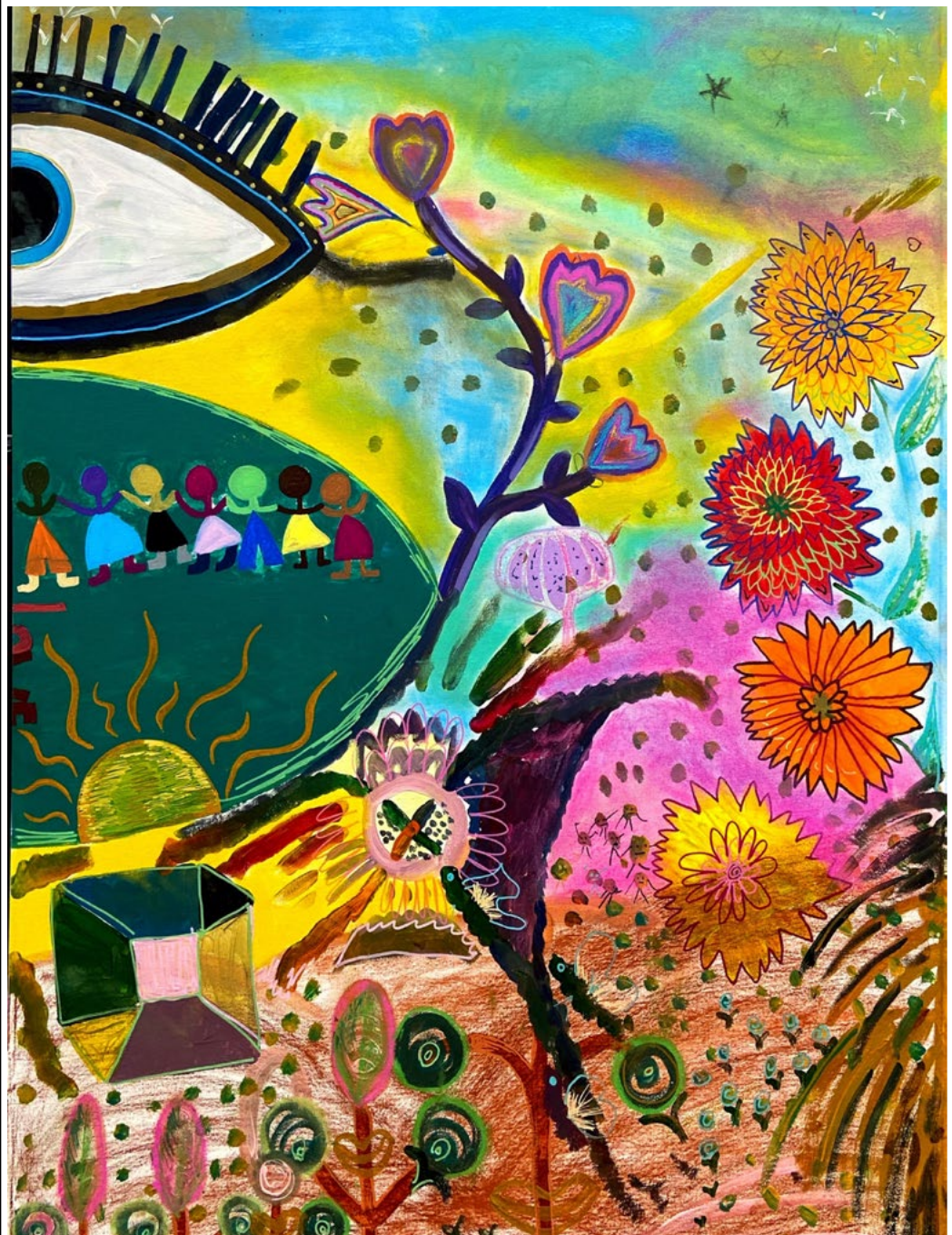


Tigrinya participants working on collective painting.

Preventing and addressing family violence by promoting mental health and wellbeing

Newcomers experiencing gender-based domestic violence often face unique challenges that can hinder their ability to seek help. The trauma of violence can lead to mental health issues, such as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Many newcomers may feel isolated, unsupported, fear stigma and the complexities of navigating unfamiliar legal systems can prevent them from reaching out for help.

Ample research and literature have confirmed that, in addition to psychotherapeutic healing effects, expressive arts group can provide survivors with skills for healing. Art serves as a powerful tool for trauma recovery. Engaging in artistic activities can support healing by fostering self-discovery and resilience. It can help individuals process their trauma and build confidence. These are not just paintings, but an avenue to share the lived realities of newcomer survivors of gender-based and/or community violence.



A Portal to Us, Peaceful Meadow



Sherbourne Health
2SLGBTQI+ HEAL GROUP

All text on this page were provided anonymously by participants of the 2SLGBTQI+ HEAL group.



The **eye** represents future thinking. A reminder to embrace diverse perspectives and to challenge our understanding, leading to inspiration. The eye is about broadening views to uncover new horizons.



The group of **colourful people** represents togetherness, love, and community. It highlights the beauty in our differences. When we unite, we can achieve great things like positive change.



Small flowers represents encouragement I feel when someone believes in me. I feel I can accomplish what I once thought was impossible. I look forward to the new us and hope it impacts all our futures.



Purple flowers represent me as a child. Now I am more drawn to black because of my personal journey. These flowers remind me of my growth and blooming, embracing the process of discovering my "why".



The **colourful petal flower** illustrates the unique energy of everybody in the group, like our own village of people. It represents a sense of safety and calmness creating a sense of home and connection that is difficult to express.



The **colourful lined flower** represents a place where people look out into the big world and witness the colours of the sky. The lines create a web of connection that brings joy, peace and things working together.



Notice, observe and feel

What colours stand out to you?

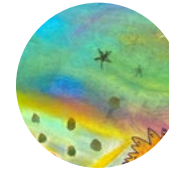
Imperfect Togetherness, Landscapes of Love

Sherbourne Health
2SLGBTQI+ HEAL GROUP

All text on this page were provided anonymously by participants of the 2SLGBTQI+ HEAL group.



This **landscape** symbol represents air, land, water, and trees under the sun from the Earth, reminding us that we are also part of nature. Nature provides us with fortunes and gifts that enrich our lives.



The **sky colours** reveal openness to newness. When I was uncertain about myself, someone else encouraged and believed in me. The sky is watching everyone in this colourful place of peace and joy.



The **sunshine** represents love as a constant force that shines brightly despite witnessing people's challenging stories. It is about unity, love sharing and connection. The sun welcomes everyone here.



The **umbrella** symbolizes safety that we all created together under one protecting force. It is a feeling that is difficult to put into words.



Little people represent the group coming together as wild and joyful. They live in a relaxing, perfect and beautiful village with everyone's distinct energy.



Notice, observe and feel

What symbols or images catch your eye?

Blessings of Legacy



Art + Health

TIGRINYA-SPEAKING HEAL GROUP

All text on this page were provided anonymously by participants of the Tigrinya-speaking HEAL group.



In the Orthodox religion, **hands** symbolize blessings and convey the message, “Whatever you step on may be good.” This highlights the significance of faith and positive intentions.



Coffee symbolizes the joy of sharing meals and bringing people together. Coffee is traditionally served in a clay pot to represent celebration and connections in these special moments.



Ethiopian rose, also known as the Abyssinian rose, is a beautiful and vibrant flower that blooms once a year in Ethiopia’s highlands. Its striking colors and rarity make it a symbol of resilience and beauty, deeply rooted in the country’s cultural heritage.



Cultural dresses are often handmade by mothers and passed down through generations. This attire holds deep significance, reflecting the values and traditions of the families that wear it.



The **Ethiopian Buna coffee ceremony** is a cultural tradition where coffee is roasted, ground, and brewed in front of guests. It symbolizes respect and hospitality, fostering community connection through conversation and celebration.



Traditional crosses remind me of words such as hope, happiness, forgiveness, love, and positivity. It celebrates themes of healing, generosity, and the spirit of upcoming holidays.



Notice, observe and feel

What does the painting make you feel?



Healing Goba Mountains

Art + Health

TIGRINYA-SPEAKING HEAL GROUP



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Ashenda is a religious holiday celebrated after a 16-day fast, where young women dress up, style their hair and embrace the possibility of engagement. This festive occasion coincides with blooming flowers and the arrival of the new year.



These **line drawings** remind me of monasteries in our home country. The architecture is similar and looks like sacred spaces. The familiarity in the design makes me feel connected to our cultural heritage.



The **Gobo mountains** symbolize strength, power and confidence. These mountains showcase the determination required to survive and thrive in harsh conditions. Villagers trek up and down the mountain, gathering food to feed the community.



The “New Year” celebration: I drew a **vase and flowers** to show change. Flowers are used to mark the passage of time and welcome new opportunities during the New Year festivities.



The **religious image** reminds me of the items we use in church, particularly the pitcher of water, which symbolizes renewal. It is a significant part of the religious rituals representing cleansing and starting fresh.



The words mean **salem** or **peace**. They also hold a sense of calmness and positivity that resonates with me deeply.



Notice, observe and feel

If the painting had soundscape, what sound might you hear?

The act of making art brings together experiences in new and imaginative ways.

Acknowledgements

Deepest gratitude to HEAL program participants who contributed their stories and artful expressions that are documented on these collective paintings. Many thanks to our art-based facilitators, who created safe and trusting spaces for these paintings to be made.

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