



FACTOR-INWENTASH
FACULTY OF SOCIAL WORK
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO



Sharing in the Healing Journey:

Results from a Mixed Methods Evaluation of Expressive Arts Programming to Promote Healing after Gender-Based Violence

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presents:

Innovations in Addressing Gender-Based Violence and Trauma- and Violence-Informed Health Promotion

A NATIONAL CONFERENCE

Oct 1–2, 2025



Land Acknowledgement

We wish to acknowledge our privilege to work on the land on which the University of Toronto operates.

For thousands of years, it has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and the Mississaugas of the Credit.

Today, this meeting place is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land.

We hope that our work here goes on to help to promote equity and restore rights that have been denied to so many, also working in solidarity to prevent and end gender-based violence.



elle:

Our Project Team



Housed at the **Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work (FIFSW), University of Toronto** (UofT), the **Youth Wellness Lab** (YWL) is a hub for youth, academic researchers, and community-based partners to collaborate on research and change-making efforts to improve youth and community health and well-being.

The YWL engages young people, ages 29 and under, as researchers and whose identities and lived experiences reflect those that are too often excluded from but most impacted by issues of access and equity across public systems.

Many YWL researchers are young people of colour, and some are 2SLGBTQ+, people with neurodiversities, and/or with disabilities. The YWL is also comprised of researchers who have intersectional lived experiences and/or research interests in areas of homelessness, child welfare, family violence, and reproductive justice.

All team members for this project are social workers and social work students!

METHODS: What we did

- We developed interview guides, pre-post surveys, and pre-post children's handouts with input from YWCA staff
- Sought and received approval from UofT Health Sciences Research Ethics Board (REB) to ensure all study procedures were covered by ethical and secure protocols
- Prepared our project team to engage in trauma-informed data collection on sensitive topics, adhere to secure data storage procedures, and conduct data analysis tasks

METHODS: What we did

- YWCA staff led outreach, recruitment, and intake for all Here to Help (H2H) and Adventures in Sharing (AIS) group participants, also training and hiring all facilitators
- After receiving informed consent from mothers (and consent/assent for their children to participate), we attended the first night of H2H group, the last night of H2H group, and the last night of AIS groups to engage in data collection activities

METHODS: procedures

Beginning of H2H:

- Mothers completed quantitative survey on Qualtrics
 - Asked questions about Social Connectedness, Hope, Healing from Gender-Based Violence, Parent-Child Relationship, Mental Well-being, Coping, Parenting Stress, Arts and Self-Expression
- Children wrote or drew answers on kid-friendly handouts designed by our team

End of H2H:

- Mothers completed same quantitative survey again to establish pre-post measurements
- Children wrote/drew answers on similar post-project handout
- Mothers engaged in one-on-one interviews about experiences in H2H (by phone, Zoom, some in-person)
- Facilitators (after providing informed consent) participated in interviews (by phone or Zoom) about their experiences in group and what they observed in mothers/children

End of AIS:

- Mothers completed same quantitative survey again to establish (sustained) repeated measures insights to include AIS
- Children wrote/drew answers on similar post-project handout, also extending to AIS
- Mothers engaged in one-on-one interviews about experiences in AIS (connecting back to prior H2H involvement)
- Facilitators participated in interviews about their experiences in AIS group and what they observed in mothers/children

Kids' handouts (excerpts)

Name: _____ ID: _____

Circle your age, or write it in the box:

3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

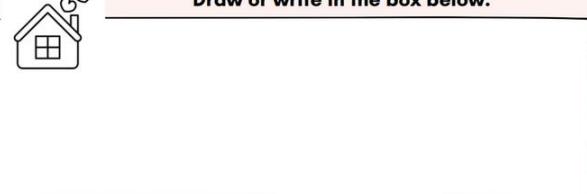
Circle your grade, or write it in the box

JK SK GR.1 GR.2 GR.3 GR.4 GR.5

What activities do you like to do?
Draw or write in the box below.



Who are the people in your family?
Draw or write in the box below.



How do you feel at home?



I feel _____

MY FAMILY

Things I love about my family



Something I would **Change** about my family



When something bad happens,
how do you remind yourself it
is not your fault?

ART

What kind of art have you done before?

How do you feel when you
do art?



When I do art, I feel:

How do you feel about coming
to this group each week?



I feel _____.

Program REFLECTION

What did you like about this program?



What did you learn in this group?

How did you feel after you
met with the group each
week?

I felt....

What did you learn to help calm
down after big feelings?



Favourite art activities?

How did doing art make you
feel?

Art activities you did not like?

What did you like about doing this
program together, as a group?



How was sharing what you made
with other people?



What did you like about seeing
what other people made?



How did this program help your family talk
about feelings?

What helps you with talking
about hard things that
happened in the past?

What else would help your family
to talk more about your
feelings?



You are not responsible for the fighting that
happened between adults in your home. How did
the activities you did in this program remind you
that it's not your fault when that happens?



How do you think it helped your family to spend time with other families
at this program?

I think....

"MY BRIGHT IDEA"

ON HOW TO MAKE THE PROGRAM BETTER

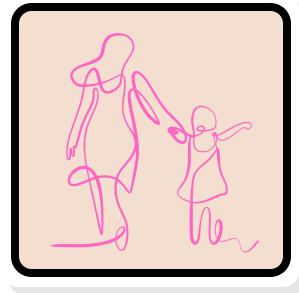
Things that we can add
to the program



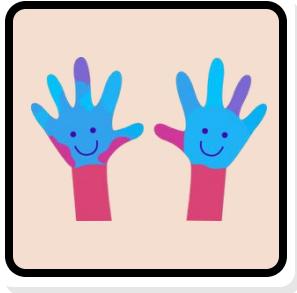
Things we should remove
from the program

Other ideas

RESULTS: What We found



Mothers (n=52)



Children (n=78)



Facilitators (n=30)

Insights from Mothers: Survey finding highlights



Social Connectedness & Hope

- Of any measure in the evaluation, results showed the most positive increases regarding **Social Connectedness**. **94.4%** of mothers also said that H2H and AIS provided meaningful opportunities to connect with other families.
- Mothers' scores on measures of **Hope** also showed positive trends. After H2H, **72.2%** said they were excited and hopeful about the future; this rose to **83.3%** after AIS.



Parent-Child Relationship & Parenting Stress

- Mothers reported consistent increases in average scores on **Parent-Child Relationship** across Pre-H2H (mean=2.13), Post-H2H (mean=2.33), and Post-AIS (mean=2.79).
- Mothers indicated increased **feelings of having new ways for effectively managing the stress** they feel related to parenting (pre-H2H: **52.7%**, post-H2H: **66.6%**, post-AIS: **91.7%**).





Insights from Mothers: Survey finding highlights

Sustained Healing & Growth

- After completing **H2H**, **91.7%** of mothers answered **Strongly Agree** or **Agree** to indicate that the program gave them and their children new tools that helped their healing and growth.
- After completing **AIS**, **100%** of mothers answered **Strongly Agree** or **Agree** to indicate that the program gave them and their children new tools that helped their healing and growth.



Healing after Gender-Based Violence

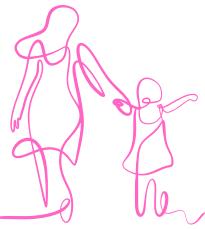
Participants' average scores on the **Healing after Gender-Based Violence Scale** climbed steadily across Pre-H2H (mean=2.58), Post-H2H (mean=2.78), and Post-AIS (mean=3.23). This suggests that attending these programs may be associated with measurable positive impacts on mothers' healing after their experiences of gender-based violence.



Arts & Self-Expression

- 94.4%** of mothers said they **Strongly Agree** or **Agree** to: **"There were moments when creating art helped me to express things that I would have found difficult to express if only using words."**
- 86.1%** of mothers said they **Strongly Agree** or **Agree** to: **"Doing artistic things helps my children process their thoughts and emotions."**





In their words: Mothers

ART AS A POWERFUL TOOL:

“It’s magical, actually. We both [mom + child] could feel a bit like kids again.”

“It was helpful to have options other than just talking and writing.”

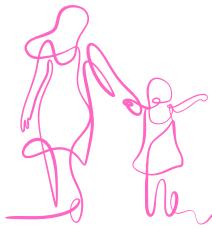
“Having something tactile is so important; They couldn’t open up until they had art to help them actually express themself.”

OPENING NEW LINES OF COMMUNICATION:

“Mama, it’s okay to be mad. It’s okay to be sad.”

“It’s eye-opening now.”

“Now they can ask what’s going on with Mom, too.”



In their words: Mothers

Moms described their kids as:

- "Relieved"
- "Lighter"
- "Happier"
- "Doing better and engaging more at school"
- "More expressive"
- "Have new friends who can relate"

Moms described themselves as:

- "Liberated"
- "Connected"
- "Not as isolated"
- "Not alone in these experiences"
- "Empowered"



In their words: Children

KIDS' PERSPECTIVES:

"I'm proud of myself. I worked hard."

"I remind myself that I didn't do anything." (not at fault)

"I made new friends."

"Our family got off our devices more."

"I liked doing this with my family."

"I learned that I actually liked going."

"I feel happier and we are in a better mood now."

What are things you love about your family?

I love about my family is they love me.

How do you feel when you do art?



When I do art, I feel:
Happy than ever.

How do you feel at home?

I feel sad sometimes because my dad's not at home with us anymore but also happy because I'm in a new place

How do you feel about coming to this group each week?

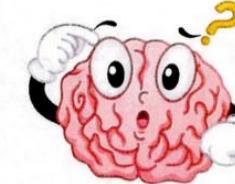
I feel happy

Things I love about my family

I love mommy, that's it.



When something bad happens, how do you remind yourself it is not your fault.



How I remind my-self is that I try to remember what happened in the argument and say I didn't do anything bad.



In their words: Facilitators

“Yeah, so I was in green group, which were the teens. They did come with a different attitude. And they didn't want to be here. They were quiet or shy, or they didn't find it cool. However, I noticed by the last weeks, they were more excited, they were enthusiastic. They put aside their shyness, and they wanted to be involved in the activities.”



In their words: Facilitators

“One child - I have this image of her...for example, there was one time when everyone was painting and she was playing with the water. I told her, ‘you can feel the water, but don't throw it on the floor. It's gonna make a mess and someone will fall.’ She's like, ‘okay, fine.’ And then suddenly, I'm just looking around the space and I look at her and she locks eyes with me, whoa. She would just test boundaries in that sense. So we started working with that, like ‘this is fun, but let's just do it in a safer way.’ And over time, she's just became so much more communicative. She would come back and say, ‘I want to rip something today.’ But she would say that and then not actually rip up her notebook. I think there was something about them developing that safety in there and just connecting.”

Implications + Recommendations

- These programs, and the approaches through which they are delivered (e.g., expressive arts; whole-family focus), are effective, affirming of families' needs and lived experiences, and operate through a lens of cultural humility
- More survivors/families would benefit from having access to such opportunities, and funding and capacity should be thus be bolstered to support further programming
- Such funding should also ensure that group facilitators are well-trained and mentored prior to and during groups, with trauma-informed practices centred in all preparation (especially so for groups that may be offered in new locations / settings as part of such expansions)

Thank You

Questions? Please e-mail: stephanie.begun@utoronto.ca

Youth Wellness Lab: youthwellnesslab.com / [@youthwellnesslab](https://www.instagram.com/youthwellnesslab) (Instagram)

Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work: <https://socialwork.utoronto.ca/>