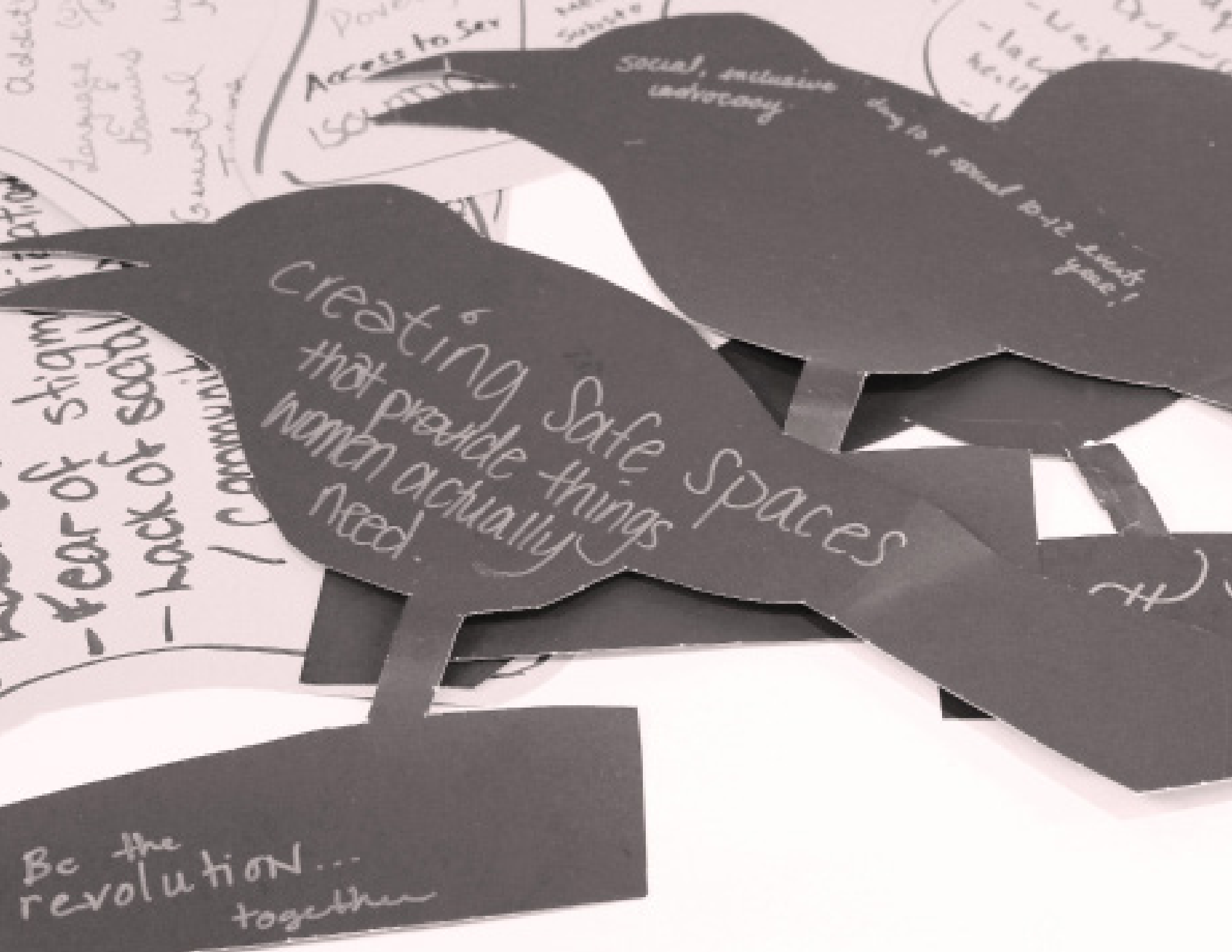


# WOMEN ARE CHANGEMAKERS

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Community insights & artwork from the  
2017-2018 collaborative art project





creating safe spaces  
that provide things  
women actually  
need.

Be the  
revolution...  
together

- fear of stigma  
- lack of social  
support

social, inclusive  
advocacy

- lack of  
resources

every 2-3 years  
every 1-2 years

44

Access to sex  
education

Gender  
equality

Language  
barriers

Address

# Acknowledgements

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This project has evolved out of collaborative visioning that explores the question of how to creatively engage communities in ways that honour the experiences of women's health and collectively create positive change. The insights and artwork, collected through this collaborative approach, tell their own story of how communities in Ontario navigate the personal, interpersonal and systemic factors that impact women's health.

Multiple voices have shaped this work. Women, service providers and community partners all took on the role of artmakers and storytellers, adding to a collective understanding of health and well-being.

This work was championed by Molly Bannerman and Amanda Leo, the leadership at the Women and HIV / AIDS Initiative (WHAI), who continuously imagine new ways to further WHAI's strategic vision and create impact. They implemented the project with regional partners and have presented it as a useful tool to acknowledge women as powerful changemakers across the province.

Collective inputs were also made by WHAI Coordinators who implemented and tailored the project based on their local community contexts, integrating the invaluable voices of community members across Ontario. Although not all regions could participate, it is important to note the contributions of all the Coordinators in moving this work forward. Many Coordinators developed artwork with their community to be featured here while others facilitated the engagement tool but were unable to submit artwork. Coordinators have also been using the resources developed from this project in their continued work of actively building capacity and creating change alongside their communities.

The project was spearheaded by a consulting team at 7.10 stories comprised of Vijaya Chikermane, Lori Chambers and Shaz Islam, with artistic support from Lyndsay Moir. 7.10 Stories specializes in arts-based models of community engagement and in modeling new ways of storytelling to further social change.

This work would not be possible without funding from the AIDS Bureau (AIDS and Hepatitis C Programs, Ministry of Health and Long Term Care). Their support for innovative and meaningful projects across the province is highly appreciated and valued.

Most importantly, thank you to the people across Ontario who participated and shared their experiences, and who continue to work together to create individual, community and systemic change.



Resilience

Family

Community  
ange makes

Community

Family

SELF  
LOVE +  
CARE

Authentic

Family

Fun &  
Laughter

Love  
Laughter

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# Background

In 2017/2018 WHAI partnered with consultants at 7.10 Stories to explore creative ways to foster WHAI's Coordinated Collective Impact Initiative (CCII) work being done across Ontario. This CCII work is grounded through seven (7) priority areas of focus identified by communities in the province. These include: Women and Harm Reduction; Gender Based Violence; Stigma, Discrimination and Institutional Violence; HIV Disclosure; Community and Emotional Wellness; Economic Insecurity; and Health Care Centred on Women's Needs and Lived Experiences.

Using a framework of narrative storytelling, a collaborative art project was initiated that included a community engagement tool, an implementation plan and the development of two (2) resources to share messages emerging from the collective artwork. In keeping with WHAI's CCII work and seven areas of focus, the project aimed to:

- » Center the experiences and knowledge of women, communities and organizations in relation to WHAI's priority areas of focus and offer creative methods of engagement, expression and dialogue;
- » Share women's voices with larger communities using an intersectional and creative lens;
- » Demonstrate the connectedness of women's communities across the province and to further positive change through collective local action; and
- » Build a supportive space for communities to engage in CCII work with self, peers, service providers and organizations through creative representation.

The well-known Aesop's fable of the *Crow and the Pitcher* served as the foundation for the initiative. The three primary elements of the fable, namely, **the crow**, **the pitcher** and **the pebbles**, symbolized specific aspects of people's lived experiences.

*“On a hot day a thirsty crow comes upon a pitcher of water only to find that the water sits too low in the pitcher, out of reach of the bird’s beak. The bird then throws pebbles in the pitcher such that the water rises to the top allowing her to drink.”*

- The crow symbolized an agent of change who overcomes barriers;
- The pitcher symbolized personal, interpersonal, social or systemic challenges;
- The pebbles symbolized strengths or facilitators that enable the crow to meet the challenges identified.

Using this narrative framework, WHAI Coordinators in regions across Ontario held multiple discussions with women, service providers, partners and community members. The fable and symbols were adapted by local communities in varying ways, for example, some communities preferred to symbolize a different bird in the story, instead of the crow. These adaptations enabled local voices and perspectives to frame the engagement tool as needed. In each session, participants visualized and renamed the symbols to demonstrate what was important to them, what their strengths and barriers were and what positive change meant to them. Each site developed creative and inspiring artworks ranging from detailed collages to 3-dimensional recreations. The labels and words participants used to describe the symbols of the story acted as the qualitative data that was collected, synthesized and analyzed using thematic analysis.

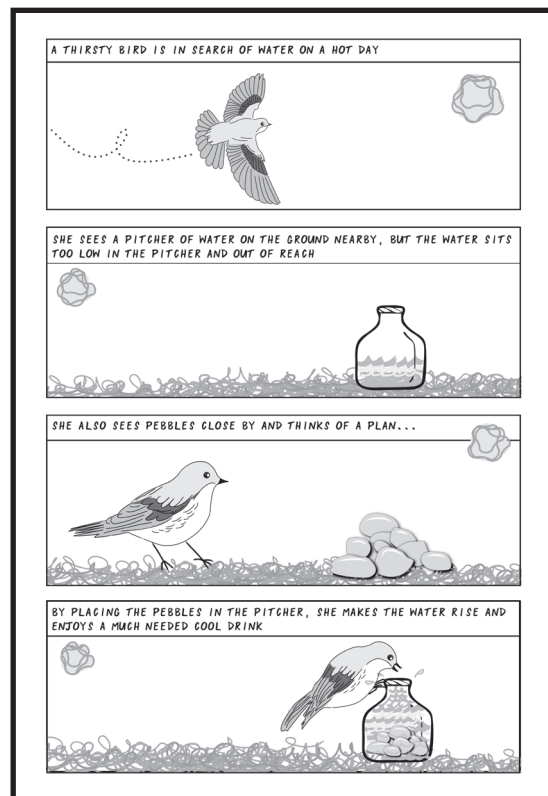
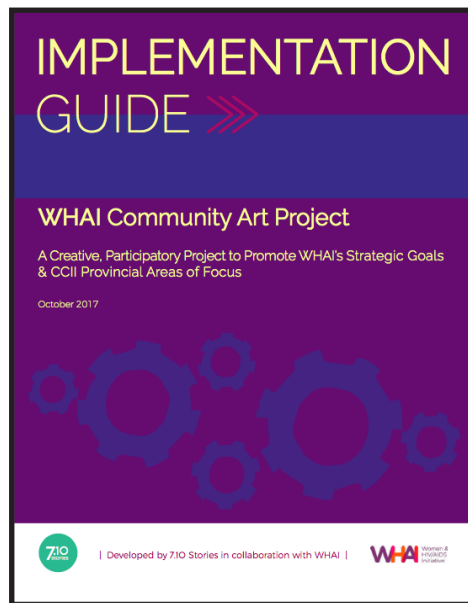
Overall, the project resulted in creative and thoughtful renderings of the fable and a collection of beautifully crafted interpretations from dynamic women and service providers in their communities.

# Snapshot of Project Resources

Women Are Changemakers Poster,  
Launched International Women's Day 2018

## Story Engagement

## Implementation Guide



# Thematic Analysis

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Using a narrative based community engagement tool, WHAI Coordinators held multiple sessions creating space for women, service providers, and/or community partners to become artmakers and storytellers.

With the symbolic representations of the bird, pitcher and pebbles as the foundation for dialogue, participants discussed challenges or barriers to health and well-being; factors that might enable change; and, the people or groups they believe to be agents of positive change. While the water was not assigned as a symbol for this project, participants in three (3) of the sessions self-assigned water to symbolize the environment necessary for change to occur, or to describe what change looked like to them.

The words participants chose to represent barriers, facilitators, change environments and agents of change were collected and formed the basis of the thematic analysis. The experiences shared by participants reflected the intersectionality of women's lives and touched on all seven (7) of WHAI's CCII provincial areas of focus.

Stories related to disclosure, harm reduction, violence, stigma, emotional well-being, community supports, family and systems of care, demonstrated the interconnectedness of communities across the province. The description of change agents (the "birds") emerged as a central theme shared across sites and so the content was arranged according to how participants viewed agents of change in their lives.

Based on the predominant personal, interpersonal and social aspects identified as agents of positive change in each session, three (3) birds were selected as the focus of the analysis:

- **Personal:** "Myself" (the most predominant agent)
- **Interpersonal:** People such as family, friends or peers
- **Social:** Organizations, institutions or agencies

Then for each bird, content was identified and organized as:

- **Enabling positive change** (the pebbles)
- **Impeding positive change** (the pitcher)
- **Foundational aspects/environment required for positive change to happen** (the water)

Using this approach, common themes that resonated amongst the women and participants were extrapolated. These themes, discussed in the following sections, are reflective of all of WHAI's seven (7) provincial areas of focus and especially touch on issues related to community and emotional well-being.



# Common Themes

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Despite the diversity of session participants and geographic locations, there were many commonalities among the recorded artwork and resulting discussions from participating WHAI sites. Common themes are outlined below. Overall, there was an overwhelming sense of power, strength and resilience that shone through in the discussions and art created. The project

was entitled 'Women Are Changemakers' because of what was reflected in the words that women, service providers, community leaders and partners had assigned to their artwork and the discussions that ensued. These words spoke to a belief in oneself, one's partners, friends, and family, one's community, and institutional representatives in society as leaders, advocates and changemakers.

## Self (personal)

Participants predominantly saw themselves or the women in their lives as changemakers. Women also felt that with the proper resources, they could empower themselves to be agents of change.

The bird offered a relatable character for participants where their resourcefulness, tenacity and ability to overcome difficulty were mirrored in the bird's determination to raise the water in the pitcher.



## Community (interpersonal)

Participants considered people in their lives such as family, friends, peers or community members to be agents of change.

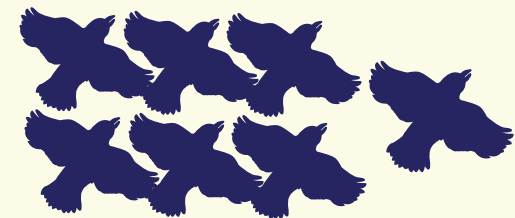
Other notable change agents identified by participants included significant others such as "my children", "my partner", other women in their lives "my mother", and "my sister".



## Social Systems (social)

While institutions were often identified as barriers to change, participants also cited organizations and their representatives as agents of social change.

Particularly, social workers, educators, health professionals, media representatives and researchers were identified as being important resources in bettering social systems.



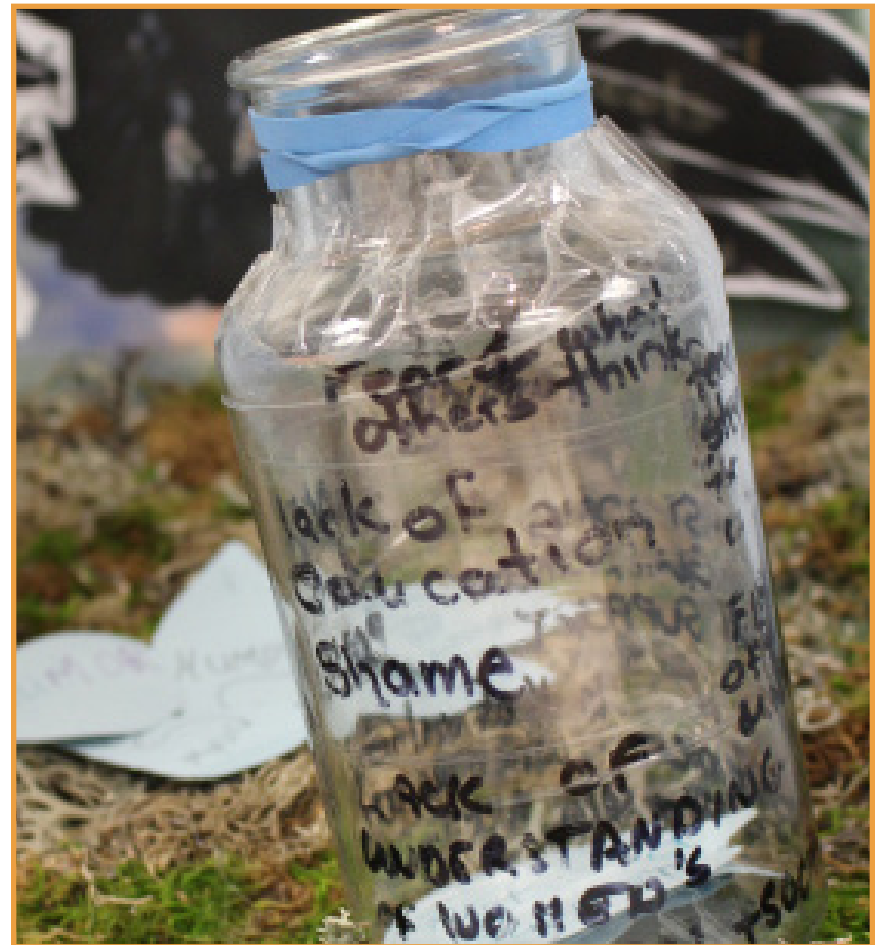
## 'Self' as Changemaker

When identifying self as a changemaker, participants discussed the barriers that impede women from becoming agents of change as well as the enabling factors that facilitate their leadership.

Participants identified psychosocial factors such as fear, anxiety, grief and depression as significant challenges that shape decision-making, self-worth, well-being and quality of life. Fear of failure was discussed as a factor that sometimes prevents women from taking steps to make change happen for themselves and for their communities. Stressors attributed to co-occurring mental and physical health concerns were discussed alongside the stressors of paying bills or securing income.

### A note on **Shame**

Shame was frequently identified as a repeated barrier for women desiring to better their health and their lives. Shame was described as an unhealthy preoccupation in how women were perceived by others and the impact this has on self-perception or self-worth. Some participants cited how they were made to feel unimportant or incapable, compounding their sense of shame.



*Pitcher labeled with barriers;  
AIDS Committee of Durham*

[illegible]

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11

Several approaches to self-care were named to address psychosocial factors that women had to navigate in their lives as part of the process of creating positive community change. Self-care strategies included accessing counselling and dealing with trauma; journaling; engaging in self-love and positive regard for oneself; having forgiveness towards self and others; finding joy; and enjoying humour, food and fun. Specifically, self-care was described as a mental process that required mindfulness and time. Participants also recognized the importance of creating supportive, affirmative, enabling environments where change could happen. They strategized various ways of how to invest in 'self' and in turn, create community change.

Self-affirmation was described as believing in oneself and included courage; faith; determination; hope; an understanding of self-worth, and resiliency. There was also an aspirational outlook as participants described their hope for the future where they could dream, imagine, achieve goals or speak truth. Self-affirmation was seen as an important step towards creating community connectedness and walking a pathway to change.

Community work and advocacy was frequently highlighted as part of self-empowerment and building self-esteem. Women positively referred to their participation and involvement in change movements and activism as a way to support themselves, their communities and affect systemic change.

These self outlooks were transformational as participants described steps that would transform their lives such as getting work, finding better housing, getting their children back, taking anger management, and accessing education. As such, self-transformation is interwoven with community and structural change making.

The strongest duality was described in the role of family and intimate partners. Both were often described as sources of strength but also as sources of violence, trauma, exclusion, rejection and loss. Experiences of violence, trauma and abuse in varying forms, such as vicarious trauma, intergenerational trauma or history of abuse were prominently featured as barriers to personal change. Gender-based violence was discussed not only as a substantial barrier for individual women but also as a systemic barrier that traumatically impacted communities to which women belong.

To counter these barriers participants identified community mobilization strategies that could further collective engagement towards change. Peer advocates were named as a vital resource for women living with HIV and women who use drugs. Participants talked about how they support people in their communities by checking in on peers or showing up when needed, and noted the value of reciprocating these acts of social support to build caring networks. They also identified the importance of building supportive and inclusive social spaces for women living with HIV and women who use drugs, and particularly mothers who use drugs, by practices of kindness, listening, learning and acceptance.



## 'Social Systems' as Changemakers

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Social workers, educators and health professionals that support women in navigating social systems were described as changemakers; however, institutions such as health care systems, child welfare, the law and some social agencies were often described as major impediments for women desiring to improve their overall health and well-being.

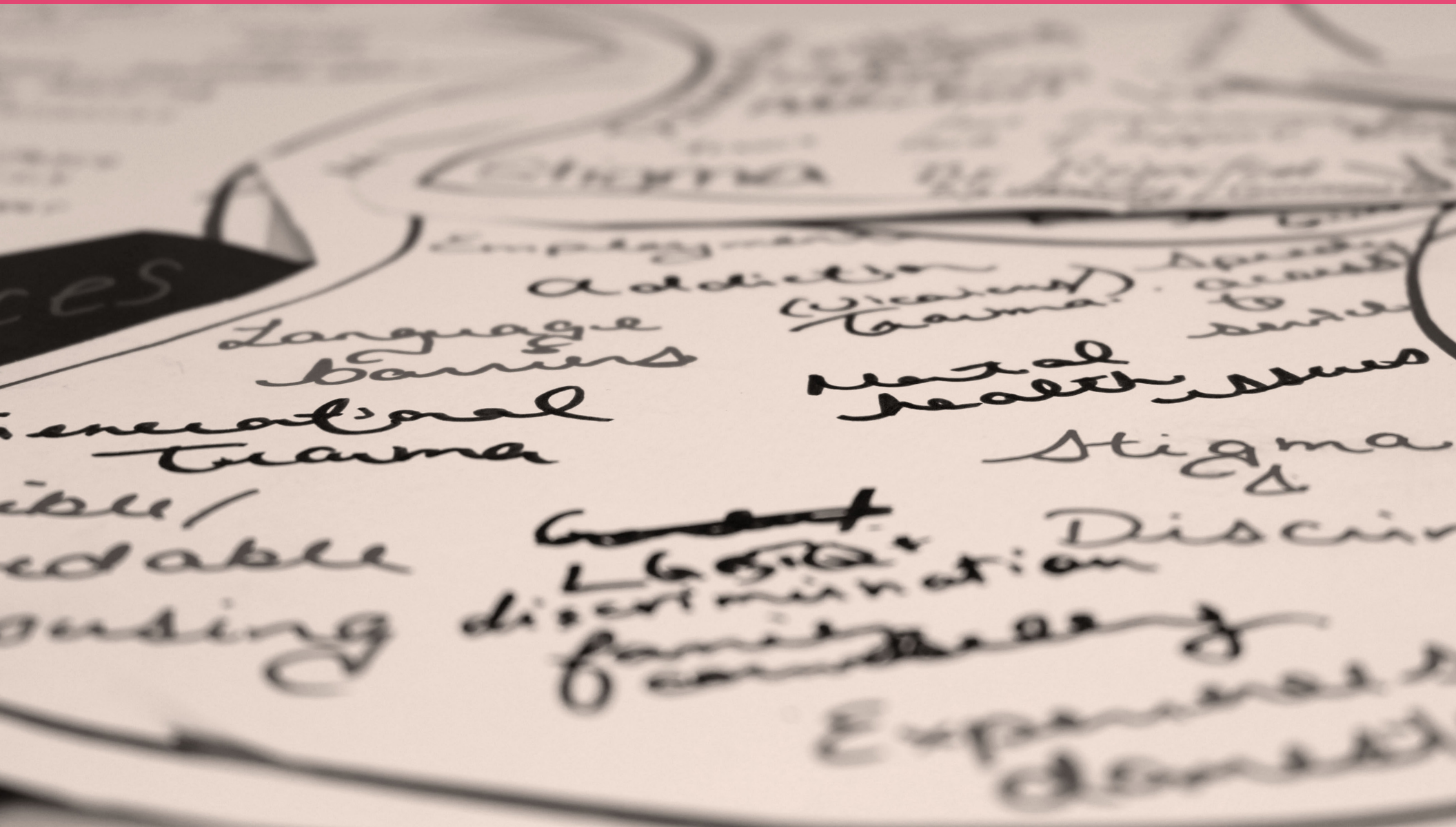
Structural barriers included lack of affordable housing, underemployment or unemployment, language barriers and income and food insecurity. Institutional violence such as legislation and criminalization of drug use and HIV disclosure were also cited. Lastly, inaccessible health and social services were identified in the form of waitlists, lack of access to child-care, poor follow-up by service agencies and lack of safe sites for drug use.

Participants identified social advocacy movements and the power of activism as valuable pathways to affecting change and addressing the systemic challenges noted above. They saw themselves as strong advocates in influencing systemic change and suggested that social institutions could play prominent roles to promote public education, paid work opportunities, affordable drug coverage, affordable child-care and women-centered health care. Strategies included GIPA/MEPA or "nothing about us without us" in practice and an environment that ensured sustainable and stable living, free from discrimination and stigma.



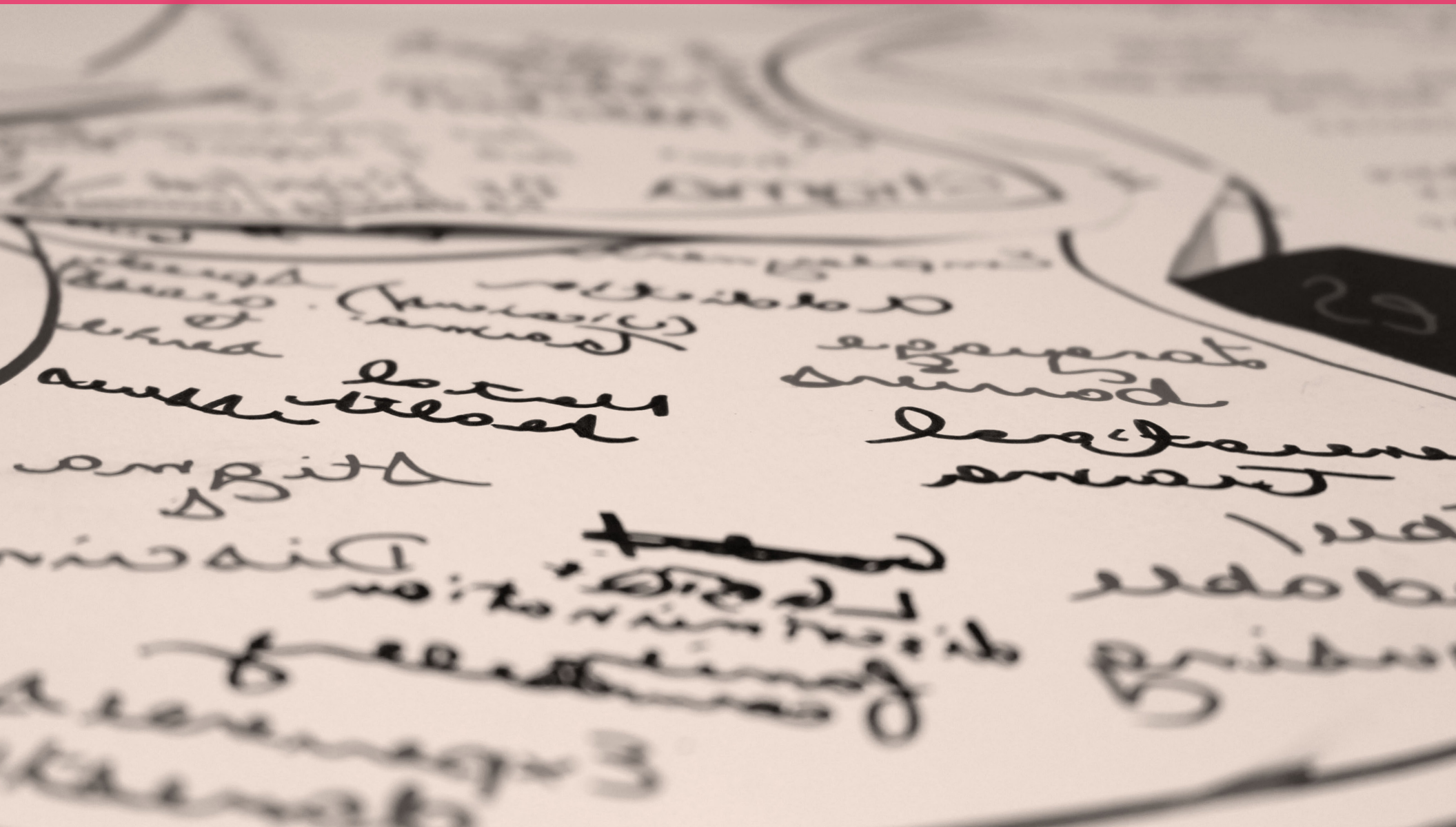
Change environment; WHAI Provincial Office in partnership with Peel HIV/AIDS Network

# Artwork





# & Site Summaries



# AIDS Committee of Durham

## *“A place to go”*

The community in Durham recreated the entire story of the crow and the pitcher to allow for people to interact with the symbols and creatively add to the piece. Together they created a 3-dimensional scene of green and brown moss, with polished stones placed near the edge of the miniature landscape, a full sized glass jar and a larger than life crow with wings spread and feathers to write upon.

A sense of place featured strongly in the artwork and accompanying labels provided by participants, which seems apt given the physical creation of a space as an adaptation to the community engagement tool. The idea of space as discussed on the labels was not only physical, but referred to a place for women, community and allies to support, listen, celebrate their faith, share in humour and happiness and simply care for one another.

While the barriers named focused on ‘shame’, ‘fear of others’ or were systemic in nature such as ‘lack of education’ or ‘lack of a gendered lens in policy’, many of the facilitators for change were identified as personal and community based where women were centred as agents of change.

Participants also described how they viewed enabling environments for change and identified the importance of women as community advocates in the creation of such environments. Therefore, investment in women through self-care and self-affirming strategies such as giving time for love, humour, and music were pronounced. The labels on the wings of the crow reveal the multiple supporters identified as change agents in addition to women themselves, including family, men who love women, faith leaders, and quite simply, everyone, evoking feelings of solidarity, collective action and unity.







# AIDS Committee of Toronto

*“I wish for happiness within myself and for others”*

WHAI Coordinators in Toronto organized two (2) sessions using the community engagement tool, one with women living with HIV at Africans in Partnership Against AIDS (APAA) and the other with women facing systemic risk for HIV at Sistering, a multi-service agency that serves women who are homeless or precariously housed.

Both agencies used an assortment of craft materials to create their art work including Bristol board, feathers, miniature wooden blocks, sticky labels, plastic water jugs, toy handmade birds, colour markers and paper.

The two sessions invited participants to interact with the various components of the art. For example, people could “pour” the water out (blue craft paper) so they can read the written responses to the question about the environment that is needed to support positive change. They could also take the wooden blocks out of the plastic bag and place them in the jug. The art pieces were positioned on the Bristol board in a way that encourages people to merge them in order to see the whole story, and as a way to engage people through various sensory abilities primarily touch (different textures of the materials) and sound (dropping wooden blocks into the pitcher).

The interactive nature of the artwork demonstrates the importance of putting words into action and engaging not just the makers of the art, but also those who are looking at it.





Challenges as expressed in the artwork were connected to structural and systemic barriers including precarious housing, income insecurity, access to education, and lack of stable employment. Fear of laws on disclosure was named as a major impediment to access, “*fear of going to the hospital*”, “*Not able to access the education I desire because of HIV status.*”

*I wish for...*

Women placed considerable focus on symbols for the water, which to them represented 'wishes' or what women required to live healthy and affirming lives. They wished for "self-care", for "happiness to themselves and those in their lives", they wished for "loving, supportive relationships." Some of the wishes were specific, personal and transformative; "I wish I had the ability to stop my abusers."



# AIDS Committee of Windsor

## *“Many women as one...”*

The artwork created through community sessions organized with the WHAI Coordinator in Windsor involved multiple cutouts of birds to be labeled, three (3) glass jars and paper for participants to crumple and place in the jars.

Having multiple birds reflects the multiple people and skills that contribute to women's resilience and wisdom. Self was repeatedly identified as an agent of change and elements that strengthened 'self' were also named such as *“my future, my choices.”*

The community of changemakers also included other people in women's lives who have contributed to transformative change, notably family and other women including, *“my sister, my mom, my family, grandmother, my granddaughter, my children always, strong female boss and employees.”* Through these labels the theme of *‘many women as one’* stands out as an important one for participants.

The participants wrote on and then wrapped green adhesive tape on three glass jars to indicate barriers. Added barriers are the corks that block access to the jars' interiors and the tape itself that blocks view of the contents in the jars. Through this artwork, the barriers are realized in a physical way challenging access to life-sustaining elements. The piece also contains crumpled paper 'stones' that participants labeled and placed inside the jars. These can be unfolded to reveal all the multiple enablers of change such as *“loyalty, honesty, and respect from others, speaking up for the self, and the role of communities of women to inform, inspire, and act for change.”*

Participants of the Windsor community session discussed barriers in a highly personal way emphasizing the direct effects of stigma, fear, discrimination and mostly shame. Women discussed how the stigma and discrimination they faced was represented in their interactions with others and diminished their sense of self, for example, *“they think I'm angry, others say I'm not smart.”* Psychosocial and emotional barriers also included *“jealousy, being afraid and competition.”*

Some participants noted the fear they faced as *“feeling unsafe walking home alone”* and spoke to the interconnectedness of gender inequality and women's risks of gender-based violence.

Similar to how participants so personally expressed challenges they also were very personal about the ways in which to bring about change in their lives. Some noted their personal desires and how foundational these can be to bringing about change, *“getting my kids back, finding a place to live, working all together”*

Many of the women recognized community members as pivotal to personal and social change returning to the theme of many women as one. They expressed desire to affirm others in their lives with *“respect, loyalty and honesty”*; to collectively *“advocate for empowerment”*; and to share in the development of *“supportive spaces where women could share and hear each other's stories, create women's groups, and access mentorship from community advocates.”*





# HIV/AIDS Regional Services (HARS)

*“Strength in self”*



The community in Kingston intricately created a self-contained, 3-dimensional version of the story. The black bird made of styrofoam sits perched on a glass jar filled with tulle fabric to represent water while stones and sticks placed in the jar represent pebbles.

The barriers and challenges are affixed to the interior bottom half of the jar. The tulle provides a different kind of texture and creates the illusion that the water is about to overflow out of the jar, which can be seen as abundance spilling forth. The upper half of the piece draws more attention than the bottom half creating an interesting response since all the negativity of the barriers collects at the bottom, while the other pieces represent the more positive elements and language of the narrative.

People would have to hold the jar up to read all the barriers, but everything else is easily accessible by sight, so either intentionally or unintentionally, viewers of the art may notice a stronger focus on those elements that facilitate and promote a better quality of life.

Participants identified a considerable number of challenges including psychosocial barriers such as shame, fear and depression; co-occurring health concerns such as addiction and chronic illness; social exclusion; abuse and violence; trauma; systemic and intersecting oppressions such as race, poverty, sexism, income insecurity and structural barriers such as lack of access to child care.

Conversely, the strategies for change were personal care strategies or the importance of cultivating strong interpersonal relationships and supportive communities and overall reflected a theme of strength in self. Characteristics required to bring about positive change were highly emphasized such as bravery, courage, resourcefulness, intelligence, perseverance, and forgiveness.





# HIV/AIDS Resources & Community Health (ARCH)

*“Authenticity, resiliency and self-love”*

Artwork created by the community in Guelph was creatively constructed with multi-coloured feathers, wiring, a thin wooden circular frame, a glass vase, small marble-like stones and craft paper; the resulting artwork could be likened to a wind chime and hung up above an entryway or community organization to create a warm, welcoming space.

Four (4) colourful and decorative birds carry words that represent the agents of positive change. When the artwork is held up, the birds appear to be flying around the vase, which is plastered with the barriers written on small adhesive labels. The marble-like stones feature handwritten words that speak to the facilitators of change. People interacting with the piece could place the stones in the vase before hanging it up.

The weight of the piece is felt and can offer a sense of being grounded despite the multiple barriers represented on the vase. The weight and feel of the stones can be equated to strength and solidness.







Changemakers in women's lives that were named included friends, peers, family, community activists, ASOs and support workers.

Fear of disclosure, interpersonal violence, stigma, judgment and depression featured as prominent challenges or barriers that impede women from fully engaging in community.

The art embodied movement and the important role that the self plays in advocating for change. When women take care of themselves, they are able to better advocate for themselves and their communities. But care includes the idea of self-transformation, and how such internal or personal shifts in consciousness through authenticity, kindness and resiliency can bring about external manifestations that may improve women's quality of life.



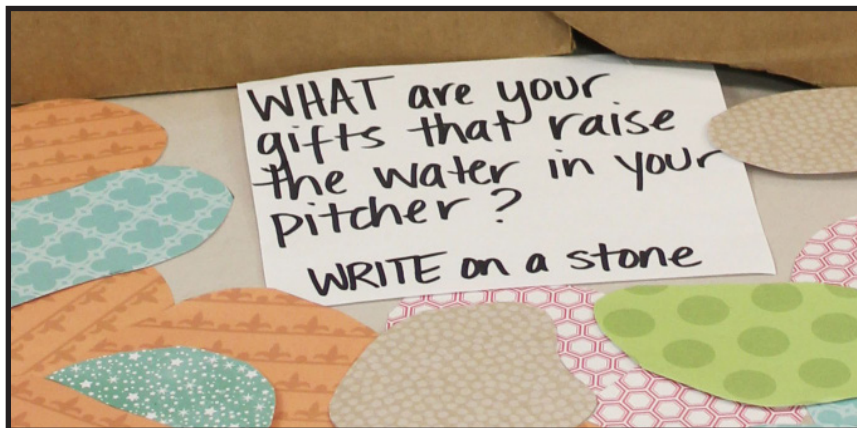
*“Speak your truth”*

While no challenges were discussed at the school event, young women and the community leaders present identified multiple areas of focus for women in the areas of self-affirmation, community mobilization and social supports. These included “*Seeking out resilient people,*” “*accepting encouragement from others*” and collaborating to create a support system. A recurring theme was on authenticity and encouraging women to “*speak your truth.*”



This second event at PARN was primarily comprised of men who partake in a community meal program. The Crow and the Pitcher activity was offered as part of an evening art space facilitated by the WHAI Coordinator for people who stayed behind to chat after the program. Arts and craft sessions were held as a way to attract women to the space; however, a number of men showed interest challenging assumptions about men's interest in arts-based activities.

Primarily led by an enthusiastic young man who was fascinated by the crow and pitcher fable, the participants created artwork that named their challenges and strengths. The work they produced emphasizes people's positive traits written on the various paper stones that have helped them work through tough times. The focus was on the self through the naming of "imagination, ambition or perseverance" and on systemic change such as "work opportunities, affordable childcare, social support groups and more labeled below.



While community networks including family or peers were not as well presented in the art, by attending to the role of the self and social systems, those involved in this activity identified factors that contribute to individual triumph over adversity.



# Regional HIV/AIDS Connection

*"We are one"*



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The community of women in London handcrafted the beautiful blue ceramics featured here to create a life-size pitcher and pebbles labeled with factors that the women saw as essential to foster positive change.

The surface of the big blue pitcher is covered with intricately carved birds and patterns similar to the depiction of myths and fables. The pebble with the question mark invites anyone interacting with the art to name it and contribute to the overall construction and narrative of the piece.

Participants in this space primarily focused their labels on naming facilitators of change rather than on challenges, barriers or the characteristics of changemakers. The few barriers named were situated in either personal or interpersonal contexts- such as family, broken trust; or within the context of the health challenges they faced, including compounded health concerns and medication side effects, among others.

In response to the question of ways to bring about change, women identified self-care and self-reflection as primary catalysts and drivers. Additionally, the women recognized the importance of positive affirmations, naming the qualities they desired in both themselves and others such as "kindness"; "strength"; "courage." Further, the women recognized the importance of collective care and identified the necessity of collective advocacy and working together to bring about change - represented by the idea that "we are one."

In keeping with the theme of self-reflection, the women also highlighted that there was much that remained unknown to them regarding both self advocacy and social advocacy; however, they also recognized that this questioning could create room for more dialogue around how to bring about change in the lives of women living with or impacted by HIV.



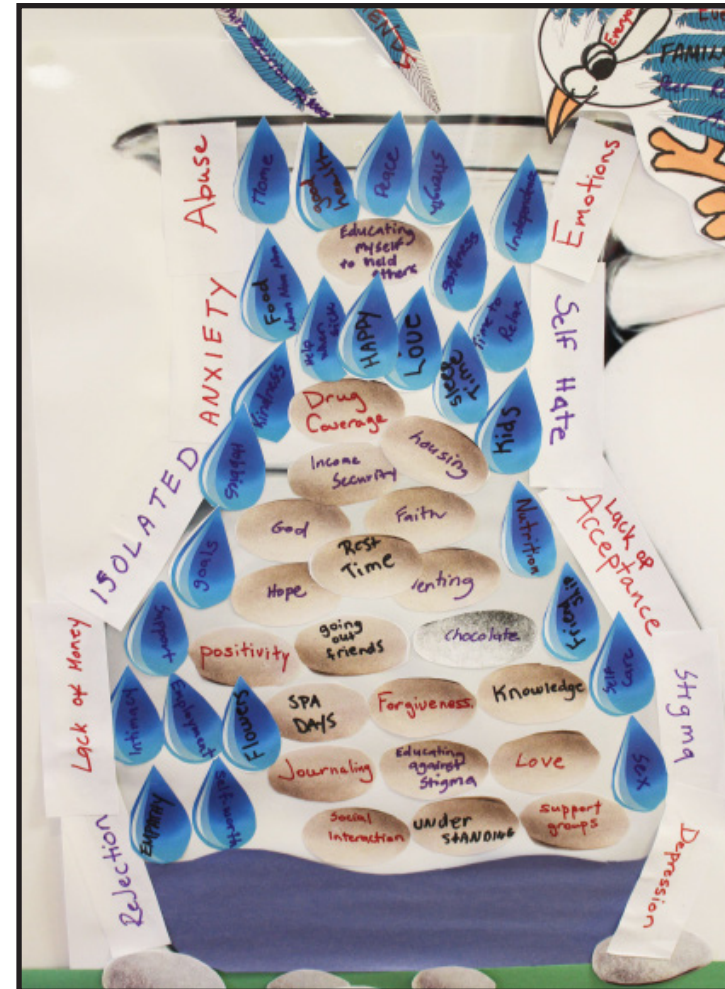
# The AIDS Network

## *“Love, faith and hope”*

The community of participants in Hamilton crafted a bright blue rendition of the story that depicts the action of water rising as a result of the pebbles as a central feature of the piece.

Barriers such as “lack of money”, “lack of acceptance”, “rejection”, “abuse”, “self-hate” and “stigma” line the pitcher. The pebbles in contrast focus on highly personal elements of change-making such as one’s faith and belief in God. Creating spaces within oneself and within community for love was named on the pebbles and also on the water to reflect what change itself can look like. The bird with its abundant bright feathers and labels that name ‘everyone’ as changemakers sits perched on the pitcher slowly making the water rise.

Participants placed considerable emphasis on describing the water, and used words including “happiness, love, intimacy, home, kids, peace, sex, independence” and more. The entire fable is depicted in the artwork in which the water almost seems to be splashing over the rim of the pitcher. The weight and strength of the pebbles seem to embody the things in life that heals, renews, and sustains, including “hope”, “understanding”, “faith”, and even “chocolate” along with all the other architects of positive transformation.

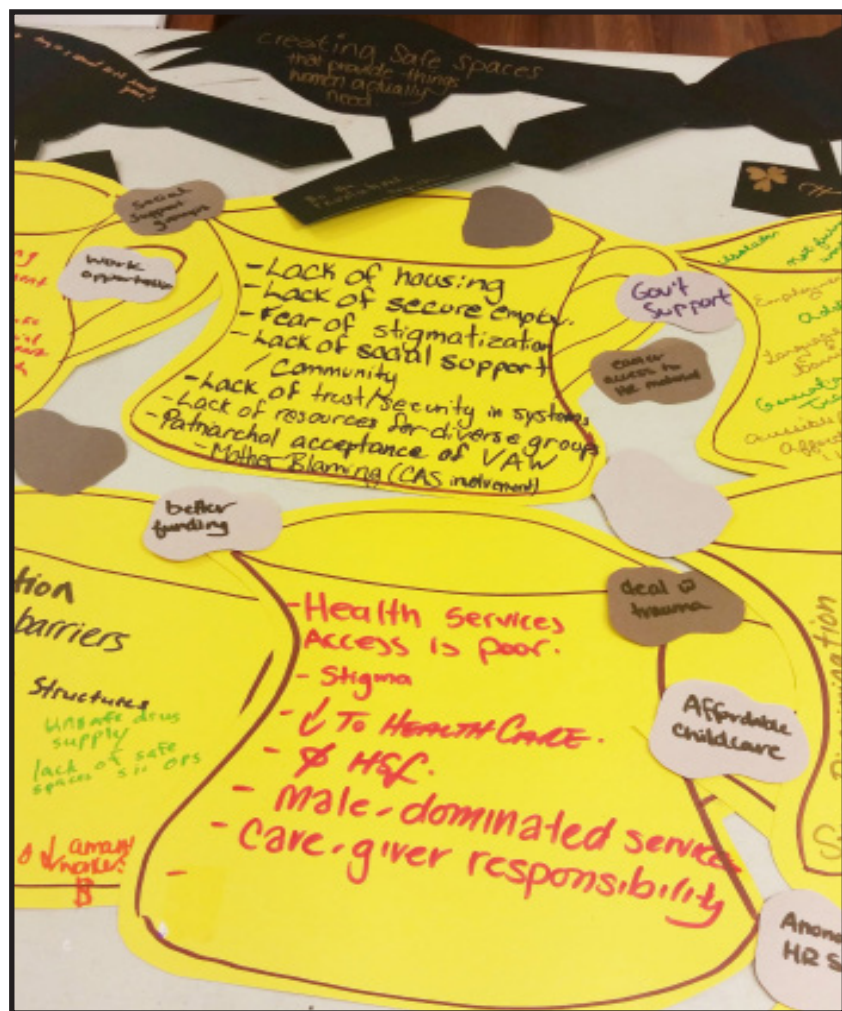






# WHAI Provincial Office in partnership with Peel HIV/AIDS Network and Thunder Bay Opening Doors Counselling Conference

*“Be the revolution together”*



The WHAI provincial office facilitated sessions in Peel and Thunder Bay during community Knowledge Translation and Exchange (KTE) capacity building workshops about harm reduction and women. One was held on International Day to End Violence Against Women and the other was a break out session at an Opening Doors Counselling Conference. The activity was used in the conference workshop to facilitate sharing of wisdom and knowledge in the room. Both sessions generated considerable ideas and discussion; one used cutouts of pitchers, birds and paper pebbles, and the other used cutouts of pebbles to symbolize raising the water level for the bird to be able to drink.

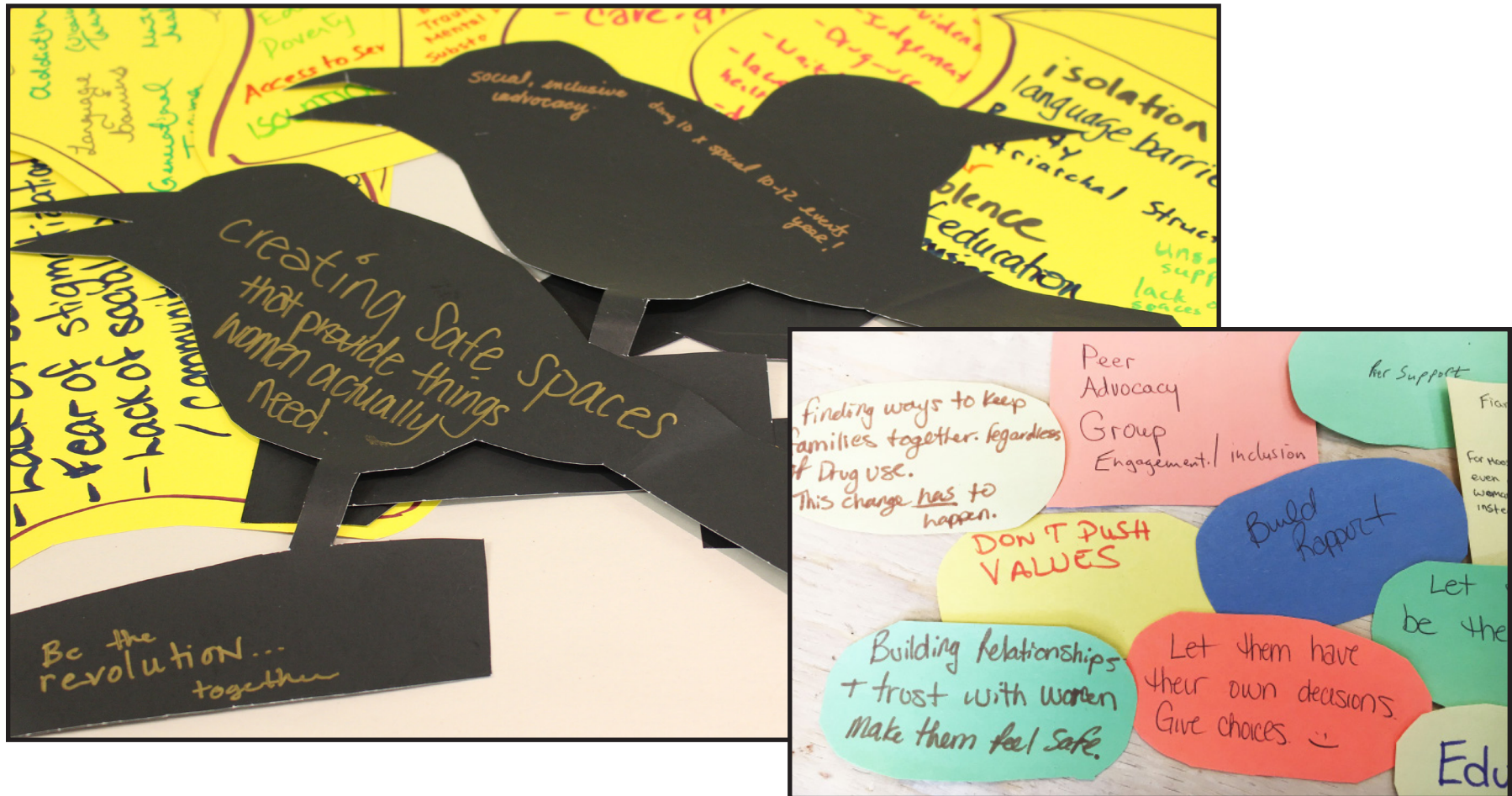
The pitchers contain writings describing the experiences that could hinder survival, growth, stability, and security amongst women. Written in lists, the challenges are extensively described from one pitcher to the next and are categorized into their own themes. Personal barriers include “mental health challenges, interpersonal violence, social isolation, loneliness, shame and not feeling worthy.” Systemic challenges are named as “lack of housing, financial insecurity, fear of family and child services, lack of access to family counselling, lack of status and immigration services, criminalization, and lack of access to education.” Intersecting challenges are also noted such as “racism, sexism, victim blaming, stigma, LGBTQ discrimination, lack of safe drug use sites for women, patriarchy and the persistence of male dominated services.”

The descriptors on the pebbles are holistic and focus on access to space, resources and people with lived experience as a means for women to strengthen their internal capacities in building positive change. The facilitating factors for change identified on the pebbles in the Peel session are “affordable childcare”, “education”, “better funding”, “more housing”, “work opportunities”, and resources to “deal with trauma”, among others.



Pebbles from the session in Thunder Bay listed multiple strategies for creating safe spaces that “accept women where they are at.” They included “education, peer support and advocacy groups; inclusion; finances, building relationships and trust with women to make them feel safer; and finding ways to keep families together regardless of drug use.”

While the challenges and facilitators of change span across the personal, community/social and systemic realms, the changemakers identified are entirely situated within the personal as ‘self’ and the interpersonal through ‘family and children’. This reflects one of the ideas for change described as “be the revolution together.” In the face of the extensive and intersecting barriers that women face, looking within ourselves and to each other moves the revolution forward.



# Concluding Notes & Implications

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This initiative has provided an incredible tool for the engagement of women, community partners and stakeholders in examining the barriers and enablers of community change.

It has created an opportunity to shift WHAI work from trainings and workshops to collective and community engaged dialogue about change making and community capacity building. It has been a tool for exploring WHAI's CCII work and has elevated the voices of women in relation to the seven (7) provincial areas of focus. It has created a vessel for invaluable insight about how women and communities in Ontario view positive change. These insights can inform the design and development of programs that aim to strengthen communities and foster women's health.

There are messages contained in this collection from women, their peers and the service providers who work with them on how they envision change. Some of those frequently named are:

- » A call to acknowledge and address gender-based violence perpetuated both through relationships and systems as a pivotal strategy in building positive health outcomes in communities across Ontario
- » A call to address isolation and social exclusion and to find meaningful pathways to build community and emotional wellness
- » A call for investment in communities as a space for women to strengthen a sense of self through connection, peer driven learning and sharing
- » A call for creating space for women's voices to be centered as a tool for reducing stigma, shame and building self worth, and to honour women as strong and wise leaders of change

There are many parallels that can be drawn between the experiences and wishes named by women in diverse parts of the province. This demonstrates an interconnectedness of experiences and is also an important step towards a strengthened sense of community. The interlaced themes and messages discussed here further WHAI's provincial areas of focus and support the collective impact work to drive community capacity building and foster local action.

This initiative also serves to highlight the usefulness of arts-based community engagement. This tool, which continues to be used across Ontario, provides a structure and framework for important conversations to centre the voices of women who are often marginalized. The use of creative engagement creates space to centre intuitive participation, tactile engagement, and heartfelt expression. These opportunities, while remaining adaptable to local realities and unique contexts, are applicable to a range of important voices including women and community stakeholders and place these voices at the helm of framing the future of our communities in Ontario.

## WHAI's seven (7) provincial areas of focus

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