

Trans Latinas Rompiendo Barreras

PROJECT REPORT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- “Trans Latinas Rompiendo Barreras” (TLRB) was a collaborative project between frontline workers at the Center for Spanish Speaking Peoples (CSSP) and researchers of the University of Toronto (U of T) with members of the trans Latina community participating in the group Trans Latinas Ontario (TLO).

- TLRB came about in response to the radical socio-economic exclusion of trans Latinas in Toronto, who navigate the intersecting challenges of being transgender and being migrants.

- The project included a series of 12 biweekly workshops (Phase 1) and a six-month peer-led monthly Self-Care Peer Advocacy (SPA) get-together (Phase 2).

- The workshops were designed in collaboration with TLO and were responsive to members changing needs. They included sessions in three major areas: self-care, belonging (or social inclusion), and economic inclusion.

- The workshop series were evaluated and received generally positive feedback from participants.

- **Challenges included:** Finding resources and programs tailored to the needs of migrant transwomen; budgetary restrictions in securing wholesome and nutritious meals; and political and economic structures that made it difficult for women who identify as trans and do not have immigration status to access services, programs, and benefits.

- **Positive components included:** participants reported feeling grateful and proud that they had a space to call their own; participants were referred to Women’s Health in Women’s Hands Community Health Centre for clinical care; and some participants were hired as Peer Leaders/Peer Volunteers by CSSP.

- As a result of this experience, the TLRB team has a number of recommendations to others developing programs for migrants transwomen and vulnerable populations .

- **Phase 2 of the project is underway and being led by graduates of the workshop series with the support of an advisory committee.**

INTRODUCTION



This report summarizes best practices, evaluation results, and next steps for the Trans Latinas Rompiendo Barreras (TLRB) project, which took place from June 2017 to September 2018. The project was a collaboration between members of the trans Latina community in Toronto, practitioners at the Centre for the Spanish Speaking Peoples (CSSP), students and researchers from the Global Migration and Health Initiative (GloMHI) and the University of Toronto (U of T), and advisors from Toronto and Latin American organizations. Given the radical forms of exclusion experienced by trans Latina individuals in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), this program represents a collective search for community resilience through meaningful learning, the promotion of supportive relationships, increased access to resources, and practices of self-care.

The Trans Latinas Rompiendo Barreras project was made up of two main activities, a series of twelve bi-weekly workshops and a monthly self-care and peer advocacy (SPA) drop-in group organized by workshop graduates. We measured the impact of the workshop series using pre- and post-intervention questionnaires, hand mapping, focus groups, and through continuous evaluation such as field notes, participant feedback forms after each workshop, and workshop facilitator notes. Our goals were: (1) to be socially responsive, building on the current political momentum over the last several years, to advocate for trans social inclusion locally and globally; (2) to create a community-building model based on local and international stakeholders' expertise, scientific literature, and trans Latinas' needs assessment which will be evaluated and shared through knowledge mobilization strategies; and (3) to point to transformative directions (ideas, practices, relationships and resources) that can be scaled up for trans communities, particularly trans immigrants.

At the end of the Workshop Series, participants graduated and became Peer Leaders who launched the sustainability phase of the project, the Transwomen SPA Pilot. Transwomen from all backgrounds were invited to the SPA, a free monthly self-care evening – run by volunteers and led by workshop graduates – for community, self-care, useful information, and fun.





PROJECT OVERVIEW

The project had three main stages (see Figure 1):

- 1 Project Development:** This involved establishing the collaboration between the Center for the Spanish Speaking Peoples, Trans Latinas Ontario, and the Global Migration and Health Initiative, and identifying funding opportunities.
- 2 The Workshop Series:** Twelve bi - weekly workshops were delivered and structured around three themes: Self-Care, Social Inclusion, and Economic Inclusion. Each session opened with a mindfulness activity. Workshop evaluations involved pre- and post-workshop evaluation as well as continuous evaluation of the sessions and designing and implementing the workshop series. The workshops are the focus of this evaluation report.
- 3 The Transwomen Self-Care Peer Advocacy (SPA) Get Together:** A pilot self-care and Peer Advocacy drop-in group held monthly, facilitated by graduates from the workshops. The get togethers were an opportunity for workshop participants to take on the role of peer leaders by organizing monthly events for all transwomen.

Figure 1: Project Overview

PROJECT OVERVIEW

1 PROJECT DEVELOPMENT	2 WORKSHOP SERIES	3 "SPA" SELF-CARE PEER ADVOCACY
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Trans Latinas Ontario• Centre for Spanish Speaking People• Global Migration and Health Initiative (GloMHI) researchers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 10 participants• 12 sessions• 3 units: Self-Care, Social Inclusion, Economic Inclusion• Visiting speakers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Workshop participants plan and facilitate drop-in transwoman - friendly space.



PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

PROJECT CONTEXT

According to the World Health Organization, transgender individuals suffer from higher levels of discrimination, oppression, social isolation, and suicidal ideation, as well as poorer mental and sexual health. Being socially excluded leads to low levels of education and employability, poverty, and frequent sex work becomes a survival strategy (Kirby, 2016; Lo & Horton, 2016a; Singh, 2013; Bauer et al, 2013; PAHO, 2014). The experience of trans Latinas is made more challenging by their histories as “others” and as migrants. The politics of transphobia and neo-colonial racialization affect their lives at all stages of the migration journey – in their communities of origin, once they decide to migrate, during the migration process itself, and upon arrival in Toronto. Trans Latinas leave contexts of radical exclusion hoping to find basic rights in Canada, but arrive to continued exclusion based on their gender, ethnicity, histories of trauma and violence, and migration status (e.g. Hunt and Pelz, 2016; The Economist, 2018). This radical socio-economic exclusion has a powerful dehumanizing effect - participants in Trans Latinas Ontario have felt they are treated as “*lower level human beings*” and “*vampires*”. They are silenced, obliterated, erased. The complex needs of trans immigrants require an intersectional approach to address the idea that different social identities are interlinked and are products of systems of oppression (Hankivsky & Christoffersen, 2008; Manalansan, 2006).

PROJECT HISTORY

The project was based on a collaboration between the members of Trans Latinas Ontario (TLO), the Centre for Spanish Speaking Peoples (CSSP), and the Global Migration and Health Initiative (GloHMI) (see Appendix A for a full list of the project team members). TLO was founded in November 2015 by Bilbao-Joseph, an HIV/AIDS Mental Health Clinical Counsellor for the CSSP and Co-Principal Investigator of the TLRB project. CSSP is a non-profit organization based in Toronto, Canada, serving new immigrants from 22 Spanish-speaking countries. It is the largest and oldest Spanish Speaking center in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), offering services designed to overcome barriers based on language, race, age, gender identity, and sexual orientation.

Bilbao-Joseph had noticed a significant increase in transwomen clients in her counselling sessions at CSSP, and a lack of programming directed at trans communities in the GTA. A preliminary environmental scan and literature review corroborated that there was a gap in knowledge about the sexual, mental, and physical health needs of newcomer transwomen, resulting in a gap in services tailored for this community. Due to the impact of the social determinants of health (e.g. education, race, gender, migration, social exclusion), trans Latinas do not have access to the same health services as their gender conforming peers. Stigma, discrimination, transphobia and ignorance are still prevalent among larger Spanish-speaking communities, affecting transwomen's well-being. Similarly, programs aimed at transwomen from different backgrounds were not always attentive to intersectionality. For instance, these programs neglected the needs of women who identified as immigrants or experience racism.

As a result, Bilbao-Joseph began facilitating a weekly psychoeducational/support group to respond to this gap in services. Currently the group meets every other week and includes an average of 15-20 participants, all of whom identify as transwomen who are migrants from 8 Latin American countries. The mission and goal of TLO is to create opportunities for trans Latinas to access sexual and mental health services, as well as to share their unique experiences and to learn from each other while becoming their own social network.

Members of TLO and Bilbao-Joseph were interested in ways to expand opportunities for community building, health services access, and economic inclusion for this group. As a result, Bilbao-Joseph began a collaboration with colleagues from the University of Toronto and, in particular, GloMHI to create an educational intervention, identify funding for this group, and evaluate the intervention. Funding was secured through a \$25,000 Seed Grant from the Institute for Global Health Equity and Innovation, University of Toronto and a formal project team was convened and led by Bilbao-Joseph (Workshop Lead, Community Principal Investigator) and Uttam Bajwa (TLRB Lead and Principal Investigator).

PROJECT TEAM

Key team roles included:

- **Principal Investigator and Project Lead:** Uttam Bajwa
- **Community Principal Investigator and Workshop Lead :** Celeste Bilbao-Joseph
- **Peer Leader:** Evana Ortigoza, a member of Trans Latinas Ontario
- **Project Coordinator:** Sandra Godoy
- **Workshop Co-Facilitator:** Caro Castro
- **Mindfulness Facilitator:** Auxi Sanchez Ledesma
- **Evaluation Lead:** Denise Gastaldo
- **Student Investigator:** Gerardo Betancourt

The project was organized into two main subgroups: the workshop team led by Bilbao-Joseph and the evaluation team led by Denise Gastaldo. Both groups were overseen by Bajwa. Cortinois was responsible for all budgetary issues. Additional ad-hoc groups were formed around knowledge translation and exchange and specific projects, including the SPA Advisory Committee. For a full list of team members see Appendix A.

PARTICIPANTS: TRANS LATINAS IN TORONTO

The intervention was designed for the benefit of migrant transwomen in Toronto whose primary language is Spanish. Ten participants who self-identified as TLRB participated in the workshop series. One participant was a community representative on the planning committee. For this reason, she was not included in the evaluation of the workshop. All participants were also members of TLO. The group was very diverse. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 65 years old and came from a variety of Latin American countries (see “Evaluation” for more information about participants). The Transwomen SPA component of the project had a more expansive audience and included anyone who self-identified as a transwoman, with particular attention to individuals who feel excluded from other services provided to the trans community.

TRANS LATINAS ROMPIENDO BARRERAS OBJECTIVES

Based on feedback from participants, the project team identified five main objectives:

1

Reduce public, community, and self-stigmatization

Enabling social recognition and creating a supportive environment for the social integration of transgender women.

Increase social capital

Building social capital and providing an opportunity for transgender women to expand their social networks by facilitating social trust and cooperation, strengthening existing peer support groups, and enhancing their future career prospects.

2

3

Enhance employability

Increasing trans community members' knowledge and skills to help them find meaningful and trans-friendly work.

Promote best practices for transwomen

Developing and sharing expertise in best practices for working with trans communities, particularly transwomen immigrants.

5

4

Improve overall well-being and access to health services

Identifying and connecting individuals to trans-friendly health-care services and promoting self-care and other well-being best practices.



THE WORKSHOP SERIES

DEVELOPMENT OF WORKSHOP SERIES

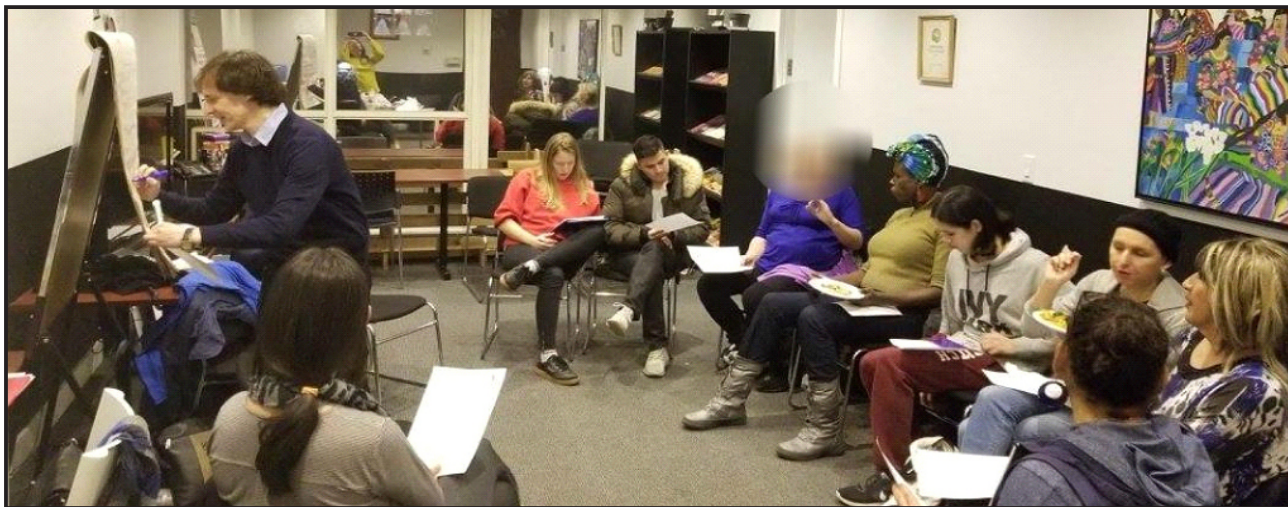
Migrant transwomen from Latin America, as the primary beneficiaries of the project, had a central role in designing the workshop series. The project team reviewed existing interventions for transwomen globally and findings from previous consultations with members of TLO to develop a preliminary program. In June 2017, the program was shared with workshop participants during a focus group for feedback and was revised to address their interests (see “*Evaluation*” for more details about the pre-workshop consultation process).

WORKSHOP THEMES

As a result of this iterative process, the workshops were organized into three units (See Appendix B for a complete list of presenters and workshop titles):

- 1 Self-Care:** This unit focused on self-care as a way to address health (physical and mental) as well as identity and belonging, but it was also meant to be fun and to support community building. The four modules in this unit covered:
 - 1) yoga,
 - 2) make-up application & skin care,
 - 3) hair styling, and
 - 4) physical and sexual health.
- 2 Social Inclusion:** In this unit, participants were introduced to:
 - 1) a community building activity (cupcake challenge),
 - 2) trans housing rights and responsibilities, and
 - 3) trans-friendly health care access and services.
- 3 Economic Inclusion:** This final unit introduced participants to professional skills and professional culture in Toronto and Canada. The modules covered:
 - 1) financial empowerment (taxes, benefits, and tax credits),
 - 2) the job application process,
 - 3) finding a job, and
 - 4) employment rights and trans-friendly employers.
 - 5) A final workshop was led by Bajwa and Godoy to begin planning the Phase 2 Trans women SPA.

All three units included psychosocial, community-building, and economic inclusion elements. The modules within each unit were iterative: continuous evaluation as well as formal and informal conversations with participants at the end of each unit guided the development of each subsequent workshop. The team also sought input from experts on the workshop topics.



Workshop Session

WORKSHOP STRUCTURE AND COMPONENTS

The workshops took place every second week and were facilitated by Bilbao-Joseph and co-facilitator Caro Castro. The project team invited identified experts to deliver sessions. Each presenter was provided a “*Trans Training*” session to introduce them to best practices for working with trans communities and were offered modest honoraria – though most presenters chose not to take this honorarium. There were a total of 11 presenters (see Appendix B for a list of presenters and workshop topics). The facilitators were joined by mindfulness facilitator Auxi Sanchez Ledesma and a field note taker, usually a student volunteer, who also assisted with set-up and clean up. The sessions followed a standard format (see Figure 2). During the final workshop in each Unit, there was a 15 minute-open discussion – facilitated by Bajwa or Godoy – to ensure participants were still interested in the upcoming topic areas and to make any adjustments to the program based on emerging needs.

Figure 2: Workshop Format

	TIME		COMPONENT	
Duration	15 min	4:30-4:45	1	Socializing/ Coffee/ Snacks (Food Delivery) Set-up
	15 min	4:45-5:00	2	Mindfulness
	15 min	5:00-5:15	3	Check-in
	90 min	5:15-6:45	4	Presentations and Core Session
	15 min	6:45-7:00	5	Wrap up and Participants Evaluations
	30 min	7:00-7:30	6	Clean-up / Evaluation and Field note wrap-up

Orientation for Presenters (“Trans Training”)

Not all workshop presenters had experience working with trans communities – though all were screened in advance by the TLRB leads. To ensure presenters were prepared for their workshops, Bilbao-Joseph developed a short “Trans Training”, which was provided preferably in person, but also on the phone, in advance of their presentations. The goal was to ensure presenters understood specific characteristics of the trans community, like trans inclusive language, and to avoid the risk of re-traumatizing participants, who experience substantial transphobia and anti-immigrant prejudice in their daily lives. Bilbao-Joseph has experience delivering these kind of workshop to frontline workers and focused on trans-specific knowledge (gender identity, pronouns, vulnerable population and minority stress concepts, trauma-awareness, and possible triggers to avoid) as well as workshop logistics and an overview of the TLRB project. Overall, presenters were very open to receiving this training and shared that it was very useful.

WORKSHOP FORMAT

The entire TLRB contributed to set-up and take-down, though the facilitator (Bilbao Joseph), co-facilitator (Castro), and student note takers did most of the clean-up. The most important logistical components of the workshop were:

1 Space

It was important that the event took place in a trans inclusive and immigrant-friendly space. Members of TLO were familiar with the CSSP downtown location. It was centrally located and transit accessible. Space was provided in kind by the CSSP.

2 Transportation

All participants were provided with transit fare to and from the event, in the form of subway tokens, without this form of support many participants would not have been able to attend the workshop series.

3 Participants Reminders

Extensive reminders through WhatsApp, Email, and telephone calls, were required to ensure attendance.

4 Themed Gifts

At each event, participants received a small themed gift that related to the event theme. The most expensive gift was a yoga mat, but more typically they received self-care items (nail polish, hand cream, styling products) or notebooks and other office products.

Food 5

A substantial hot dinner was provided for all workshops. The team initially underbudgeted for meals, but it became clear that some participants had major challenges around food security and this was sometimes participants’ only meal of the day. Food was ordered in from local restaurants and supplemented with grocery store purchases. One added challenge was the diverse food preferences of the group and their desire for healthy food options.

Volunteer Time 6

Due to the nature of community work, research, and funding schemes many responsibilities can be collapsed into one role. Despite having a large team, we faced many challenges associated with time constraints and human resources. Many individuals volunteered their time to support the program, whether it was through research, searching for healthy food options, delivering food to the sessions, and volunteering to be reimbursed for program expenses.

Budget

Typical expenses (in Canadian dollars) for each event included:

Table 1: Typical Workshop Costs

ITEM	COST PER WORKSHOP
Facilitator Honorarium	\$200
Presenter Honorarium	\$100
Food (for 10 people)	\$150
Gift (\$5 x 10 people)	\$50
Other supplies	\$20
Total	\$520

Socializing

All participants, facilitators, presenters, and volunteers began each session by socializing over dinner.

Mindfulness

Each workshop began with a mindfulness exercise developed and led by TLRB team member Sanchez Ledesma, a mental health nurse and trained mindfulness facilitator. Each mindfulness exercise was conducted in Spanish and lasted about 15 minutes. The facilitators observed that it set a positive, calm tone to the entire workshop. The mindfulness exercise was chosen based on Sanchez Ledesma's experience working with marginalized communities and because of evidence suggesting mindfulness can reduce anxiety, depression, and pain in some populations (Khoury, Sharma, Rush, & Fournier, 2015). Mindfulness exercises were frequently connected to the workshop topic and designed in response to the feedback and particular needs of the participants.

“Check-in”

Following the mindfulness activity, each workshop also included a brief “check-in”, led by co-facilitator Castro. Participants were invited to briefly describe how they were feeling at the moment or provide a quick overview of their day. They were also asked to reflect on the workshop topic of the day – what they knew about it and what their expectations were.

Workshop Content

After the mindfulness activity and check-in, the facilitators introduced the guests who gave presentations, demonstrations, facilitated activities, or were available for questions and answers. In cases where presenters were not Spanish speakers, facilitators provided simultaneous interpretation for the few participants who were not proficient in English.

Workshop Profile: Community-Building Event

To kick-off the unit on “belonging” the TLRB team organized a cupcake decorating event, which all TLRB volunteers and workshop participants took part in. The idea came from the TLRB team, but participants were very enthusiastic. The event took place at a nearby location, Women’s Health in Women’s Hands Community Health Centre (WHIWH-CHC) to expose participants to the space and services offered.¹

Two TLRB volunteers baked 132 cupcakes – including vegan and gluten free options – and set up supplies for cupcake decorating. They also identified a local bakery willing to donate cupcake boxes so participants could take their decorated cakes home. While the event required substantial volunteer effort, it was fun, creative, and gave participants and the TLRB team a chance to share an informal activity.

A positive outcome was that several participants subsequently became clients of WHIWH-CHC and are accessing trans-friendly health care services. WHIWH-CHC is now partnering with CSSP on the SPA phase of this project.



Cupcakes decorated by participants and team members



Participants and team members / community building activity

GRADUATION

At the end of the workshop series, the TLRB team organized a graduation for all of the program participants. The goal of the graduation event was to not only celebrate their commitment to the program, but to instill a sense of community, support, and belonging, which are pillars of the TLRB project. The graduation was held at Glad Day Bookshop at the request of program participants.

Glad Day is one of the world’s oldest LGBTQ2+ bookstores and has a long history of being a friendly and

¹Women’s Health in Women’s Hands Community Health Centre (WHIWH-CHC) provides primary health care services to African, Caribbean, Black, Latina, and South Asian Women living in the GTA and surrounding areas. WHIWH-CHC is a trans-inclusive health centre, that welcomes all trans-identifying individuals to access their services and programs.

safe space among the LGBTQ community in Toronto. All workshop presenters, TLRB project team members, and participants were invited. Participants were encouraged to bring a guest. During the graduation ceremony, each participant was given a diploma and a letter confirming participation. Many chose to share a few words about their experience. The ceremony was followed by a reception with appetizers and dancing.



One of the participants and peer leader receiving the diploma after finishing the workshop series with Celeste Bilbao-Joseph.



EVALUATION OUTCOMES



Example of workshop participant hand map

Pre and Post Workshop Evaluation

In July 2017 and in January 2018, respectively, the TLRB evaluation team conducted pre- and post-workshop evaluation sessions (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Workshop evaluation structure

WORKSHOP EVALUATION

PRE

- Focus group
- Socio-demographic questionnaire
- Hand mapping

PROCESS

- Field notes
- Facilitator notes
- Individual workshop evaluations

POST

- Focus group
- Socio-demographic questionnaire
- Hand mapping

The evaluation team utilized socio-demographic questionnaires, focus groups, and hand maps (which are a modified form of body mapping, developed by Student Principal Investigator, Gerardo Betancourt) to compare participants' perceptions about the workshop process and its impact.

THE STARTING POINT

Who Were the Participants?

The women who participated in this project migrated to Canada in search of acceptance, freedom, and the opportunity to start a new life. Being migrants to Canada, some documented and others undocumented, they faced language barriers, a lack of social networks, as well as often unrecognized job credentials that, combined with their gender identity, had an impact on their health and well-being as well as their social and economic integration in Canada.

Participants included nine transgender Latina women. There were ten participants in total, but one was a community representative in the planning committee. For this reason, she was not included in the evaluation of the workshop.

Participants were from Honduras, Mexico, Argentina, Ecuador, Venezuela, Colombia, Brazil, and Trinidad and Tobago, most of whom had been residing in Canada for several months to 10-15 years. Most participants migrated to Canada directly from their countries of origin; however, some of them migrated to the United States before arriving in Canada. One of the participants had previously migrated to Brazil and Italy.

In terms of language barriers, many had difficulty communicating when they arrived, but most of them have lived in Toronto for years and are able to communicate well in English, although some are not fluent yet.

Participants had a range of educational backgrounds, including completed professional technical education, incomplete university degrees, and completed secondary education, and several were students. When the program started, five of nine women were employed, however all of them have experienced considerable exclusion from the job market because of their trans identity. They described their occupations as "dance instructor," "actress," "train attendant," "writer," "janitor," "park gardener," and "housekeeper." They experienced limited job security, few opportunities for employment, as well as intense harassment and transphobia in their job search and at work, sometimes associated with racism and anti-immigrant prejudice. Three had full time positions, however, many worked part time (14 to 30 hours per week) in precarious labour conditions. The majority of the women, or in some cases their entire families, received an income of \$1,000-\$1,500/month or less (average of \$9/hour compared to the provincial \$12/hour minimum wage in 2017). Therefore, all the women except for one lived below the poverty line in Ontario.

Participants' Workshop Expectations:

Prior to the workshops, participants were consulted to establish topics of interest. After workshop planning, they were further consulted during a pre-workshop focus group in order to include their input on the workshop organization and content. The focus group facilitators (Bajwa and Godoy) presented an outline of the proposed 12 sessions to participants. For the participants, one central idea behind the workshop was that by the end of the sessions, the women would have the capacity to facilitate their own project in the community, creating an open space for trans folks to come together. Overall, participants wanted to feel empowered, gain confidence and new information, and be able to use this acquired knowledge to strengthen the community. Despite some initial ambivalence in the group, participants decided that the space should be specific to Latinas, and that, above all, a safe space should be prioritized.

One highly discussed area was the importance of making time to learn about beauty and aesthetics. The women expressed a desire to learn new makeup techniques and hair styling, for instance, as some spoke about how, during their transition, it was difficult to properly apply makeup. On the topics of economic inclusion and housing, participants were motivated to learn more about access to disability programs, low-income housing options, and lawyers and accountants for legal and tax help. In terms of health, participants were eager to learn yoga and mindfulness meditation. More importantly, however, was the issue of food security and transportation. Each workshop included a meal, tokens for public transportation, and a gift related to the topic of discussion.

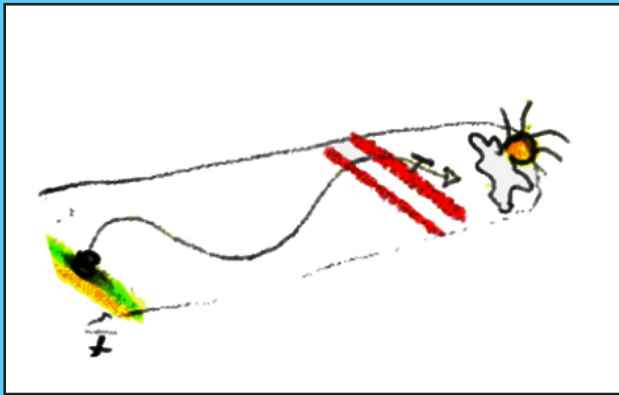
Finally, continuous feedback was sought by workshop facilitators. An evaluation tool was used in each workshop and suggestions shared by the group were incorporated to subsequent workshops (e.g. the community building activity).

Life Circumstances: Social and Economic Inclusion, Self -Care, and Beyond

Economic Inclusion

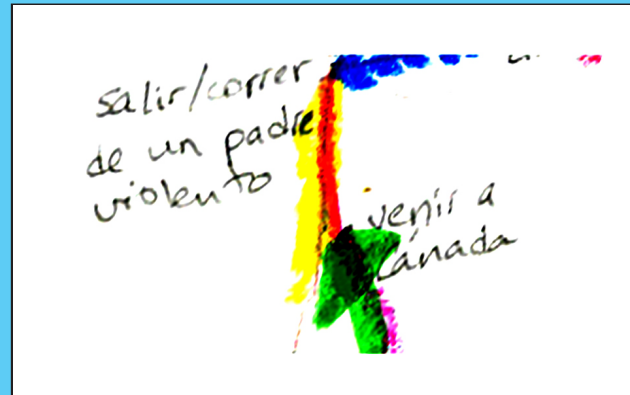
As outlined above, participants fled from discrimination and violence in their countries of origin and were looking for dignity, social justice, integration, and job opportunities.

However, once in Canada, they found themselves in continued situations of exclusion and transphobia that resulted in precarious employment, low income status, and challenges finding safe housing conditions. One example of radical discrimination was that of a participant who had a stable job in the transportation sector and had to go on sick leave due to the aggressive transphobia and harassment she experienced.



"People do not understand human rights, the [idea] that we are all equal. For this reason, I could not continue my life in [country], my life was interrupted. (...) [Now] I'm here, in Canada, where people get respected" (Florencia).

Figure 4: Migration from country of origin to Canada



"Coming to Canada, to leave/run away from a violent father"(Julie)

Figure 5: Migration to escape violence

Given the intersections of immigration, ethnicity, and trans identity, finding safe employment and housing was very difficult for most of them. This situation affected their ability to present themselves as a feminine woman, which requires considerable financial resources, as clothes and beauty products are more expensive for women than men. They also struggled with internalized shame and lack of self-confidence due to frequent discrimination, transphobia and sexism.

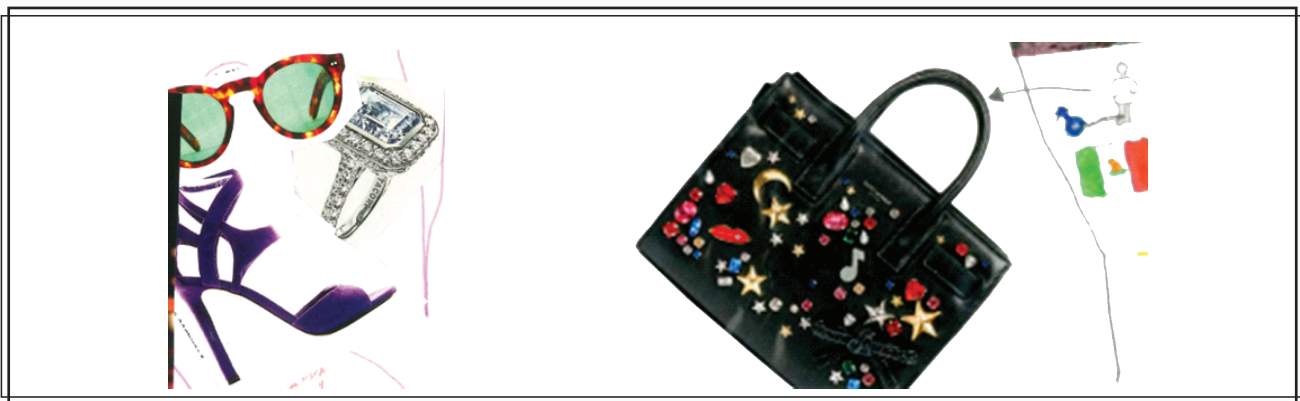


Figure 6: Self-presentation as a feminine woman requires financial resources
(note chain to masculinity on the right)

Social Inclusion

The McArthur Ladder was used to evaluate participants' perceived social positioning. In relation to their social position in Canada, participants situated themselves on the lowest rungs of the ladder, scoring themselves an average of 3.6/10. Even within the LGBTQ community, average scores were low at 3.8/10. Seven of them shared that they were treated as a visible minority in Canada.

Participants felt very supported about their gender identity or expression by transgender friends, cisgender friends, and their chosen family. However, they did not feel supported by roommates, co-workers, their extended family and children. In general, they felt more supported by mothers than fathers, sisters than brothers, and by their chosen family than extended family.

Due to the intersection of migration and gender identity, some participants experienced limited social networks with 5 to 6 friends (range of 1-20) and 2 to 3 relatives (range of 0-10) with whom they felt comfortable interacting. All of them belonged to a virtual community, such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, or Transgenderdate. The majority were in frequent contact with these family members and friends back home, using the before mentioned virtual communities. Despite feeling excluded from communities in their home countries, most women identified a strong sense of belonging to their birthplace. Having strong LGBTQ+ and Latinx² communities around them was considered very important, and they felt overall supported by members of these communities in Toronto. However, sometimes they felt unwelcome by some Latinx folks because gender conformity, being it cis or trans, is rejected by some members of the Latinx community.

Self-Care and Well-being

Social exclusion, lack of harassment-free employment, and safe housing highlight the intersection of several social determinants of health for these women. Most participants indicated they felt comfortable talking about trans-specific health needs with a doctor, and that health care services in Toronto were mostly trans-friendly. However, since arriving in Canada, participants perceived their health to have worsened over time. In response, some participants indicated intentions to improve their health within the following year through exercise, eating well, and therapy. With respect to self-care, some participants identified that they participated in activities like volunteering, reading, watching movies, going to church, spending time with friends, painting, and exercising.

Despite these attempts to promote their well-being, some participants' mental health was poor and some were struggling with addiction issues. At least three participants identified situations in the past 12 months where they needed mental health care, but did not receive it due to access barriers (resources for mental health care in Ontario are scarce). Some women felt very dissatisfied with their lives as a whole, while others were more or less satisfied.

This issue seemed to relate to their physical appearance as those dissatisfied with their life were also unhappy with their appearance. Overall, some participants were very unsatisfied with their appearance (3/10), while others were quite satisfied (7 or 8/10). One woman who suffered from poor mental health and low physical appearance satisfaction declared:

"People aren't convinced by my appearance. I have too many masculine traits."

² "Latinx" is a gender neutral, inclusive term that refers to the Latin American community, including Latinas, Latinos, and all other gender identities.

Making Sense of One's Life Circumstances

The messages shared by participants at the beginning of the project were mainly related to their experiences of discrimination (Ana: *"Let me live"*; María: *"Treat others the way you want to be treated"*), claims of freedom (Margarita: *"We are free to do what we want"*), and strategies to overcome discrimination (Mari Ángeles: *"Be yourself without having self-prejudices"*; Florencia: *"Information is life"*). Likewise, their life slogans were also related to experiences of prejudice (Cristina) and strategies to overcome it through demonstrating to others their value (María y Mari Ángeles) (See Table 2).

Table 2. Life slogans in pre-workshop hand maps from selected participants

CRISTINA	MARÍA	MARI ÁNGELES
Peace. Live and let live	Mediocrity never ever	Regia. Make it work.

POST-WORKSHOP EVALUATION

Two months after the end of the workshop, seven out of nine participants took part in the post-workshop evaluation. The other two participants did not attend enough sessions to be included in the full evaluation process.

What Were the Changes?

In general, these seven participants' knowledge of social and health services available in the GTA increased, they improved their social network, and enhanced their self-confidence. As a group, they acquired new social skills, learning to interact with others in a constructive way, respecting different opinions, and consolidating themselves as a group. After the workshop, most participants described feeling empowered and more in control of their lives, having new employment or social integration opportunities and engaging in more health care and self-care activities.

One participant explained her process as follows: *"(...) you start by believing in yourself, that you are worth it, that you matter; and, in the process of challenging the way you are treating yourself and being perceived, [you] show that you are actually better than they think or that I think. Six months or a year ago, I was very pessimist, I didn't want to believe there would be any social inclusion or that society would change its ways, but now I feel that to create a change I had to change my own process, to feel more empowerment."* (Cristina)

Evaluation of Process

Feedback on Workshop Series

Participants rated the workshops very positively, but one participant without status thought she had fewer benefits from participating. At the beginning of the project, participants wanted to learn about personal care and beauty, self-esteem, interpersonal skills, the trans community, and gain social support. One of them expected the workshops would help her find a job.

After the workshop, they revealed that they greatly appreciated learning about economic inclusion topics: taxes, benefits and credits, job application, cover letter writing, interview tips, labour rights, and budgeting. Secondly, they appreciated content related to self-care: yoga, meditation, make up, and trans-friendly services. They said they would like to learn more about self-care issues (one session per topic was not sufficient for some). Participants referred to this new knowledge as contributing to their feeling of being more positive about life.

For most participants, one of the highlights of the workshop was the graduation ceremony. They appreciated the event (in a bookstore, with guests, photos, refreshments, and dancing) and were proud of receiving a certificate as proof they achieved the goals of a Canadian educational workshop series. Maria draw in her hand map “I, Maria, was here”, referring to the graduation ceremony.



Figure 7: Pride in graduating from workshop series

Empowerment

Participants felt empowered, useful, connected to each other, and safer because of the information shared in the group. They also learned to be more confident in their social presence, believing in themselves more, and searching for new knowledge.

Three participants shared that they would like to become involved in activism. They referred to helping others now that they feel more empowered and giving back to the community due to a sense of responsibility.

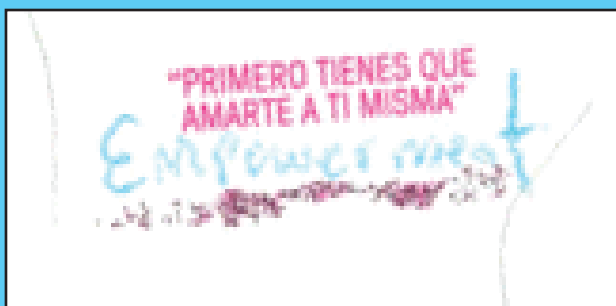


Figure 8: Empowerment process ("First you have to love yourself" – Empowerment)

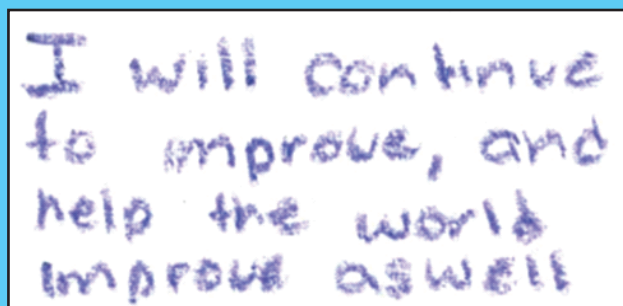


Figure 9: Activist message to others

The empowerment that participants felt was also palpable in the focus group at the end of the workshop, which was attended by all. As one of the participants noted, by the end of the workshop there was much more interaction and discussion among them. They shared that they brought open-mindedness, trust, opinions, sharing emotional issues, connecting with others, while they learned from others humility, how to speak in public, information, opinions, and perspectives.

"How I feel about me after being through this journey. Having more knowledge, confidence, information, sharing with somebody, trans, not trans..." (Katy)

Additionally, they described having learned new vocabulary, concepts and techniques, including self-care, trans rights, leadership, self-awareness, and mindfulness practices.

Life Circumstances: Social and Economic Inclusion, Self-Care, and Beyond

Participants realized that the three areas of the workshop series were integrated in everyday life (see Figure 10). As they started doing more self-care activities and improving their self-esteem, they were more confident and increased their social network, which in turn promoted their economic integration.

Economic Inclusion

Half of the participants had new employment opportunities after the workshops, which improved their economic inclusion.

For instance, one of them got work through networking during the meetings, two were hired by CSSP for peer leader positions, and two are official volunteers within the Centre. The participant who had just arrived to Canada still faced language barriers, but she felt more connected with a wider network that could potentially facilitate her economic inclusion.

The workshop also increased their motivation to look for new or better jobs, which is probably related

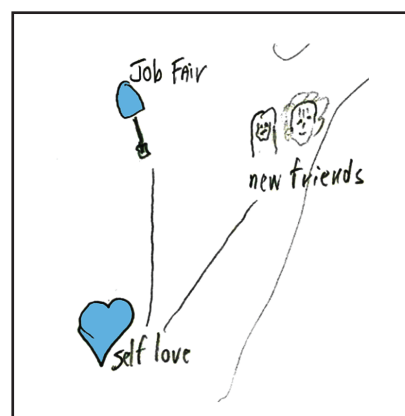


Figure 10: Self-love related to social and economic inclusion

to the increased understanding of labour rights and sense of safety, the identification of tools to deal with discrimination, and feeling that they can be themselves at the workplace.

"I work in the summers for[company] and collect employment insurance (...). More than anything, there was an emotional barrier that did not let me work in the winter; it was like I could not pass that invisible barrier (...). After the workshops, I am motivated to improve my situation" (Consuelo)"

"[We learned about] how we can move around in the workplace being transgender" (Ana).

"If they make your life difficult in the workplace, you have a place where to go to complain about it" (Consuelo)

Social Inclusion

Despite perceiving themselves in a low social position in Canada before and after the workshop, participants saw themselves with equal or better positions in Canada (4.7/10) and in the LGBTQ+ community (5.8/10) after the workshop.

When asked about their sense of belonging, four participants shared that they felt closer to the trans Latina community after the workshop. They described how participating in the workshop changed their relationship with people by establishing friendships with other women and people at CSSP, making them feel more confident. One participant felt much safer in Toronto because she became part of a network, which she can consult regarding risks for transwomen in the city.

At the beginning of the project, participants reproduced some of the exclusion they experienced, being disrespectful to each other. However, at the end of the workshops they recognized their shared vulnerabilities, improved their dialogical skills, and increased their acceptance of differences.

Self-Care and Well-being

The seven participants who completed the workshops claimed that their health is fair to excellent now, which is an improvement. Four of them said that their health improved in the last six months through several practices. Two of them remained unhappy with their life and physical appearance (these items continue to be related, as before), while the rest felt satisfied or very satisfied. Overall, participants described improved self-care practices, like better eating habits, integration of meditation and yoga in their everyday lives, and minimizing harmful practices (e.g. bingeing).



Making Sense of One's Life Trajectory

As mentioned above, at the beginning of the project, participants' messages were related to the discrimination they suffered. However, at the end of the project, most of participants' messages to share were related to their empowerment process. They talked about taking control over their lives (Cristina), boosting self-esteem and possibility to grow (Florencia) and activism (Ana) (See Table 3).

Table 3. Message for others in pre and post-workshop evaluation

	CRISTINA	ANA	MARÍA	FLORENCIA
Pre-workshop	Where does your sound come from?	Be the change you want to see in the world, treat others the way you want to be treated	Déjame vivir (Let me live)	Information is Life
Post-workshop	To be able to grow, you gotta be able to challenge your own process	I will continue to improve, and help the world improve as well	Hoy vivo de pura ilusión, porque nada es mío – ando en una cuerda floja (Nowadays I'm living an illusion because nothing is mine – I'm walking on a tight rope)	We are as big as our dreams

CHALLENGES FROM PARTICIPANTS' PERSPECTIVES

Including participants with and without legal status in Canada was a challenge because undocumented participants could not utilize the information or access the services offered to permanent residents. For instance, one participant said she felt *"the workshops are not for people that are out [of the system]"*, which made her feel she was not in a safe space to speak. In fact, she shared that she would benefit more from a specific group for undocumented people. However, even though she mentioned she did not feel integrated in the trans Latina community, she obtained some job opportunities through the workshop and access to health care, which were beneficial for her.

When asked about participation, everyone wanted to be equally or more involved in the workshop than they were. In order to increase their involvement, some of them suggested granting more time to express feelings, to deepen the topics discussed in the workshop, and to include more mental health topics. While these are laudable ideas, it would have made each workshop and the whole workshop series longer and more support group-oriented which was not their original idea. This would have been more resource-intensive and expensive.

Lastly, another challenge we observed was the gap between what participants asked for (content-heavy and serious/formal workshop) and the workshop they mentioned they actually enjoyed most (more interactive ones, opportunities for informal conversation, some fun-oriented activities).

CONCLUSIONS



BEST PRACTICES

- **Commit** to a community-based approach to intervention design by consulting early and often with intervention participants and including community members and experienced frontline workers in the project committee.

- **Encourage** presenters to incorporate more interactive approaches (such as role playing or hands-on activities) to any training sessions involving participants and to facilitate engagement.

- **Create** opportunities for less structured community-building activities for participants and project team members, like the cupcake decorating event.

- **Consider** the needs of people without immigration status or citizenship documents in designing programming and identify resources that are accessible to these groups.

- **Be aware** of the substantial volunteer or staff time needed to run an intervention of this nature. Ensure you have a minimum roster of 2 volunteers who can support with program delivery. Be transparent with them about reimbursement policies and processes; ensure volunteers waiting to be reimbursed are limited to team members who are financially secure.

- **Evaluate** interventions appropriately to ensure they are meeting participants' needs and can be improved on the go.

- **Set aside** a few hours a week to reach out to participants and confirm their attendance.

- **Provide** participants with a space where they feel comfortable and safe.

- **Budget** for transportation when working with vulnerable or marginalized communities.

- **Ensure** you understand the group's socio-economic reality, eating needs, habits, and desires; budget accordingly.

- **Prepare** workshop presenters in advance to ensure the safety and comfort of participants and as a learning opportunity for individuals interested in engaging more with trans communities.

- **Ensure** participants' confidentiality and consent are respected in every step of the intervention.

- **Provide** participants with materials to be engaged with during sessions and materials required to remain engaged with the topic in their day to day lives. When working with economically vulnerable populations, setting aside money for materials can really make a difference.

NEXT STEPS

- **Launch of SPA**

Several graduates from the workshop series are now peer leaders of the monthly “Transwomen SPA”. Sessions are planned and implemented by the peer leaders and follow a format similar to the workshop – with an informal “check-in”, a theme or topic of focus, and dinner. The sessions include all transwomen, particularly women who experience racism and anti-immigrant prejudice. The CSSP hired one of the workshop graduates as the SPA Peer Coordinator. An Advisory Committee (including some of the TLRB team members) was also created to support these peer leaders. With the support of our new Partner WHIWH-CHC, the SPA will be held at WHIWH-CHC.

- **Support for longer-term programming**

The TLRB team received \$5,000 in funding from the Tersari Foundation to support the Peer Coordinator and Peer Leader salaries, presenter honoraria, and supplies for one more year (Nov 2018-Dec 2019). As of November 2018, WHIWH-CHC will continue to provide space for the Transwomen SPA to meet once a month, provide food, and some human resources to support Year 2 of the SPA.

- **New peer-led projects**

In addition to the Transwomen SPA, the peer leaders created a clothing exchange bazaar for transwomen and have successfully solicited donations.

- **Ongoing trans awareness**

The CSSP has trained over 40 staff members at their two locations plus 30 staff members at WHIWH-CHC on how to better understand the lived experiences of trans people and what language to use when providing services with clients.

- **Knowledge sharing**

The TLRB project team is communicating project results through a number of knowledge translation activities including scholarly papers, academic and social service conferences, community events, and reports.

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APPENDIX A: PROJECT TEAM

- **Uttam Bajwa:** University of Toronto; Global Migration and Health Initiative (Principal Investigator)
- **Gerardo Betancourt:** Center for Spanish Speaking Peoples; University of Toronto (Student Principal Investigator)
- **Celeste Bilbao-Joseph:** Center for Spanish Speaking Peoples; Global Migration and Health Initiative (Community Principal Investigator)
- **Caro Castro:** Sherbourne Health Centre; Ryerson University
- **Andrea Cortinois:** University of Toronto; Global Migration and Health Initiative
- **Simran Dhunna:** University of Toronto
- **Nora Elmi:** Carleton University
- **Nicola Gailits:** University of Toronto; Global Migration and Health Initiative
- **Denise Gastaldo:** University of Toronto; Global Migration and Health Initiative (Evaluation Lead)
- **Valentina Gastaldo:** RTA Media Studies, Ryerson University
- **Sandra Godoy:** Women's Health in Women's Hands Community Health Centre; University of Toronto
- **Victory Lall:** Public Health Ontario
- **Marium Jamil:** University of Toronto; Global Migration and Health Initiative
- **Amy Lee:** York University
- **Evana Ortigoza:** Trans Latinas Ontario
- **Maria del Mar Pastor:** Universidad de Murcia, Spain; Global Migration and Health Initiative
- **Giancarlo Pflucker:** Center for Spanish Speaking Peoples
- **Alessia Pompilio:** University of Windsor
- **Auxi Sanchez Ledesma:** Mindfulness Educator; Global Migration and Health Initiative

APPENDIX B: LIST OF WORKSHOP TOPICS AND PRESENTERS

UNIT 1: Self Care

Yoga as self-care and introduction to mindfulness	Judith Mintz (Yoga Instructor); Auxi Sanchez Ledesma (Mindfulness facilitator)
Make-up application and skincare	Olivia Verikaitis (Make-up Artist)
Hair self-care: styling tips	Ower Oberto (Business Owner, Hair Stylish)
Physical/sexual health	Celeste Bilbao-Joseph; Caro Castro (Sexual Health Educators - TLRB project team)

UNIT 2: Belonging

Community Building Activity (Cupcake challenge)	TLRB project team
Trans Housing Rights	Marco Villa (LOFT Community Services)
Trans-friendly healthcare access	Nadine Idle (Sherbourne Health Center)

UNIT 3: Economic Inclusion

Financial empowerment (benefits, taxes, credits)	Tanya Raso – Jane & Finch Community Center
Job application process (resumes, cover letters, interview skills and roll playing)	Miguel Cubillos, AIDS Committee of Toronto (ACT) Employment Dept.
Job searching (online, networking, cold callings, hiring events and job fairs)	Anna Lamswood - Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work (CCRW)
Employment rights and trans-friendly employers (discrimination, violence and harassment at work, reporting accidents)	Julio Díaz – CSSP Legal Clinic
Preparation for Phase 2: the Transwomen SPA	Uttam Bajwa and Sandra Godoy (TLRB project team)

APPENDIX C: PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

The Centre for Spanish Speaking Peoples (CSSP)

CSSP is a non-profit, charitable organization serving new immigrants from 22 Spanish-speaking countries as well as members of other communities. The Centre was founded in 1973 and it is the largest and oldest Spanish Speaking center in the GTA. Its mission is to respond to the various needs of the Spanish speaking community, particularly newcomers. For this, it provides services through its main programs: settlement, legal clinic, women, youth, seniors, volunteer and HIV/AIDS prevention programs.

For over 40 years, the Center has been serving the needs of these groups by offering a variety of services designed to overcome barriers based on language, race, age, gender identity and sexual orientation. The Centre promotes equality and social justice through community development and participation in and representation of the whole community. Being situated strategically in between various high needs neighbourhoods, the Center is effectively able to serve many people from diverse backgrounds and with a multitude of needs.

Global Migration and Health Initiative (GloMHI)

GloMHI is a recently-formed group of scholars, students, practitioners, and advocates promoting and supporting applied research, advocacy, and social entrepreneurship initiatives to:

- Understand migration as a global determinant of health and explore causes, characteristics, associated lived experiences, and impact of migration;
- Advocate for all people to live a meaningful life and participate equally in society, regardless of birthplace;
- Adopt/adapt/develop solutions, resources and services aimed at improving the health status of migrants, their families and their original and new communities, globally.

Its vision is ***“Health for all, regardless of birthplace.”*** Most of the project team is affiliated with GloMHI and the Initiative will support KTE efforts, advocacy, fundraising, promotion, and volunteer recruitment.

Project Advisory Organizations

- AIDS Committee of Toronto (ACT)
- Centre for Critical Qualitative Health Research (CCQHR)
- Corposida (Canada, Colombia)
- Transvida Foundation (Costa Rica)
- Universities without Walls (UWW) and The Ontario HIV Treatment Network (OHTN)
- Women’s Health in Women’s Hands Community Health Centre (WHIWH-CHC)

