



turning points

IMPACT
REPORT

THE WARRIOR'S
JOURNEY

YWCA TORONTO'S
CONTINUUM OF CARE



NATIONAL ADVOCACY.
COMMUNITY ACTION.



United Way
Greater Toronto
FUNDED AGENCY

MARCH 2024

PHOTO: Avery, Breakthrough participant



A NOTE FROM OUR CEO

Heather M. McGregor

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As we move into spring and enjoy the emergence of new blooms, I am reminded of the roses, thorns and buds mindfulness exercise used to reflect on successes, challenges and possibilities.

One of YWCA Toronto's recent "roses" was our significantly successful end of year campaign, which raised both awareness and funds to support women and gender diverse people fleeing intimate partner and gender-based violence. Not only did nearly 1,400 people sign our petition to the provincial government urging them to declare intimate partner violence an epidemic and provide greater support to the violence against women sector, but we also raised over \$152,000 for our programs that help those fleeing violence to find safety and heal.

These efforts are much needed, as we navigate a surge in the frequency, complexity and severity of gender-based violence each and every day. We see this challenge reflected both in our own programs and in larger provincial trends. Ontario femicide

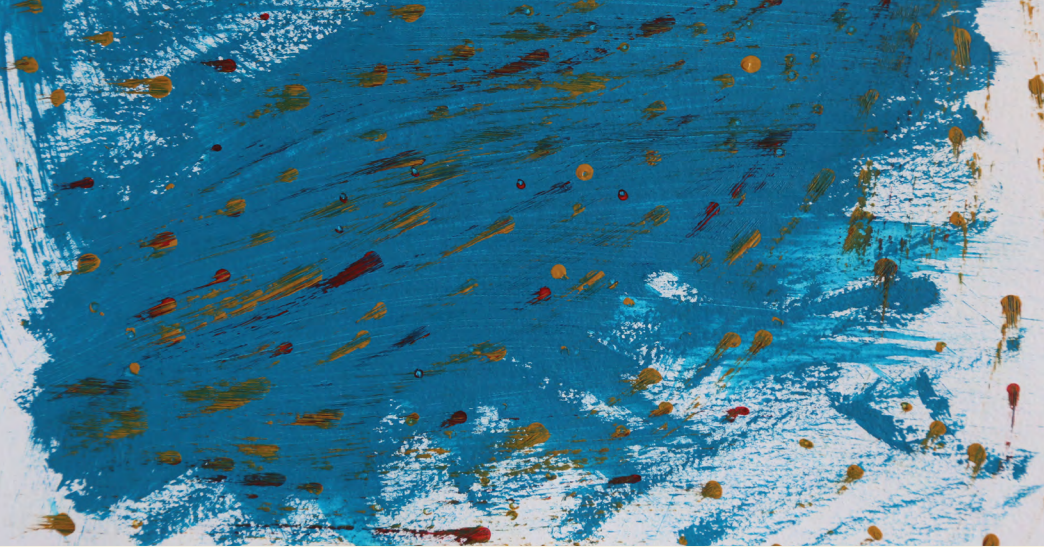
rates have remained high since 2020 when the recorded number of people killed by intimate partner or gender-based violence increased by an alarming 57% from 2019. These numbers have unfortunately remained high with 52 women killed between November 2021 and November 2022 and 62 women killed between November 2022 and November 2023. That is more than one femicide a week.

While we feel the immense weight and sharp "thorn" of these numbers, we also see great possibilities, "buds," in recent actions taken to address gender-based violence in the province. To date, more than 90 Ontario municipalities, including Toronto, have declared intimate partner violence to be an epidemic and more than 100 community organizations signed our open letter to the province urging them to declare IPV an epidemic. There is no denying the growing severity of this issue, and we hope greater awareness and the local declarations lay the foundation for tangible action to end intimate partner and gender-based violence.

TURNING POINTS NEWSLETTER

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PHOTOS: From our Breakthrough participants. Current Page by Shanna; Opposite Page (left) by Seren, (right) by Jennifer.

THE WARRIOR'S JOURNEY

On the front, textured flourishes of paint blend to form an abstract storm of light and dark blues, while a statement on the back simply, yet powerfully, offers, “May you feel safe to exhale fully.” This is one of the many Warrior’s Journey cards created by YWCA Toronto participants from our Breakthrough and Adventures in Sharing programs.

The Warrior’s Journey project, funded by Women and Gender Equality Canada, guides participants through a unique program using expressive arts, peer support, grounding and meditation techniques to heal from experiences of violence. At the end of the project, participants’ art and words are collected to create a beautiful and meaningful deck of cards that

extends their wisdom and healing into the community.

“The expressive arts process can create such safety around [working through trauma],” says Breakthrough program facilitator, Tania Iski. She elaborates that expressive arts allow participants to externalize trauma, put it into a “safe container” and attain new insights about their experiences and feelings.

Tania’s words also hold true for Adventures in Sharing, where the Warrior’s Journey project created a special opportunity for mothers, gender diverse parents and their children to process the trauma of domestic violence together and create their own unique set of cards. When discussing the impact of Warrior’s Journey, Tania describes

it as one of empowerment, where participants are able to discover their voice, know that “my words are valuable,” as she puts it, and tap into the transformative potential of artistic expression. She also emphasizes the impact the completed cards have had on new participants as they interact with them.

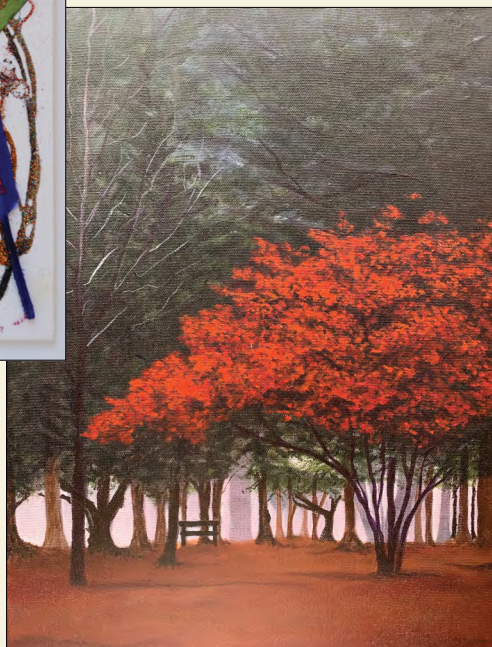
“To see them choose a card and to flip that card over and to weep and say ‘this is exactly what I needed to hear’ and to share why and how their perspective aligns with the card and the words and the wisdom of the person who created it, it’s like this ripple effect of being seen.”

Tania would love to see this ripple eventually become a wave with the project’s messages of courage,

resilience and healing spreading, via YWCA Toronto’s broad network of community connections, to other programs that support survivors of violence.

“The thought of these decks traveling across Canada or going to a different country feels really special.”

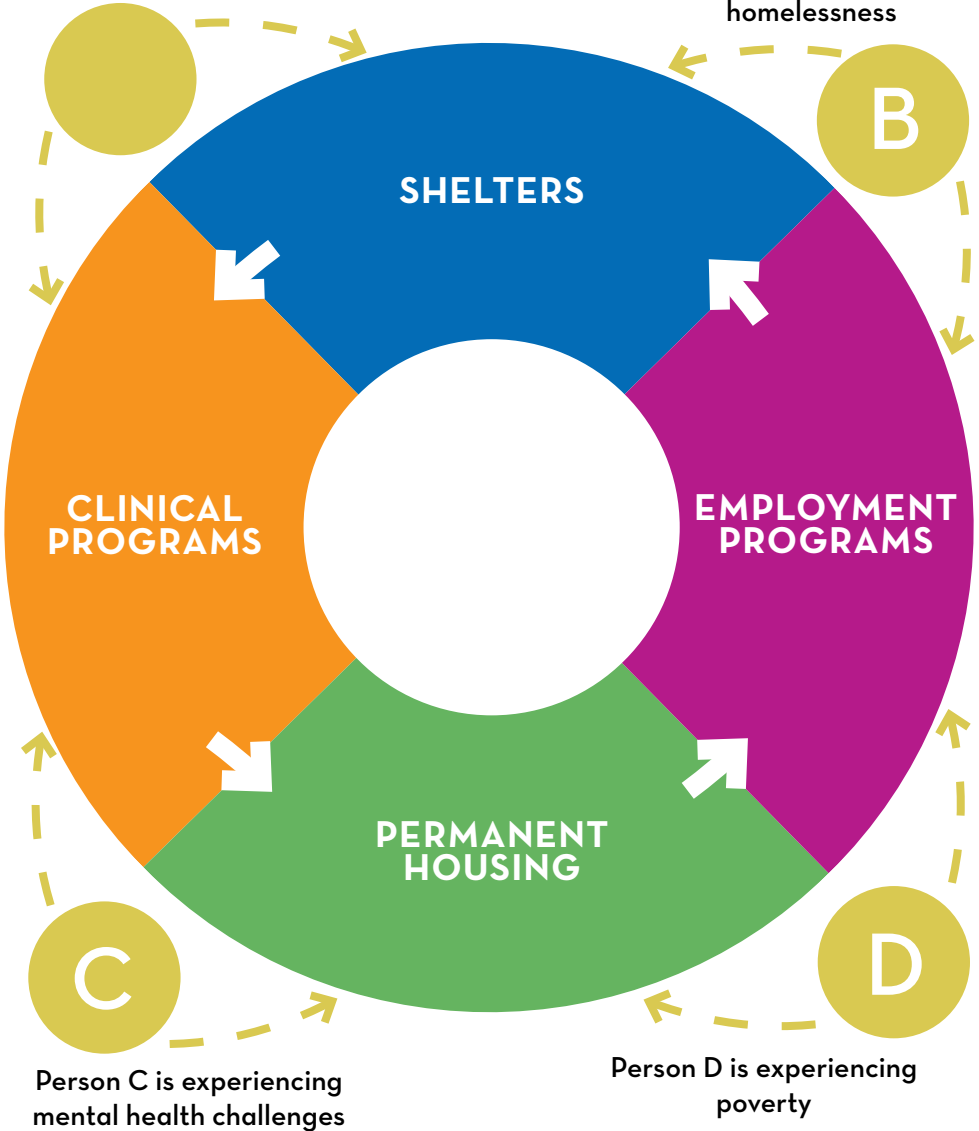
Regardless of where the decks travel to next, the Warrior’s Journey project has created an incredible community of healing for women, gender diverse people and children at YWCA Toronto. We are grateful to every participant who shared their art and words with us and their peers, and to Women and Gender Equality Canada for making this project possible.



YWCA TORONTO'S CONTINUUM OF CARE

Person A is experiencing
domestic violence

Person B is experiencing
homelessness



Person C is experiencing
mental health challenges

Person D is experiencing
poverty

DONOR LOVE

Paulette Minard, Director of Community Investment at the Shoppers Foundation for Women's Health, recognizes that women's health goes far beyond healthy eating and doctor's appointments.



“We know how women are so significantly impacted, how their health is significantly impacted, by experiences with poverty and with violence. It is just sadly so, so clear.”

Her thoughts reflect the broader aims of Shoppers Drug Mart's charitable arm, formerly known as LOVE YOU, which recently honed its mission to focus on improving systemic disparities related to women's health. A part of this new focus is a clear understanding that intimate partner violence (IPV) and women's health are deeply connected.

“[We've learned] about the connection between the prevalence of IPV and its impact on health, like physical, psychological, mental well-being,” she says. “It's very clear that those connections exist, and I think our way to help was to say, ‘we could turn an entire national campaign and direct it at this issue.’”

YWCA Toronto is fortunate to be one of the organizations generously supported by the Shoppers Foundation for Women's Health. In addition to years of individual stores giving campaigns and sponsorships of our Women of Distinction Gala, the foundation gave a \$100,000 grant last year to our programs supporting the health and well-being of survivors of gender-based violence.

We are incredibly grateful to Paulette and the Shoppers Foundation for Women's Health for their generosity and keen understanding of gender-based violence. Their contributions have meant that survivors have been able to find safety, heal and rebuild their lives.

**SHOPPERS
FOUNDATION
FOR WOMEN'S HEALTH**



Don't Miss Out on YWCA Toronto's Women of Distinction Awards Gala!

Thursday, May 23, 2024, 5:30 – 10 p.m.
Liberty Grand, Exhibition Place

Early bird tickets available now!

Scan the QR code below to purchase Early Bird Tickets.
To purchase a table, contact Anna Borges at 647.616.1528



NATIONAL ADVOCACY
COMMUNITY ACTION



MAKE YOUR VALUES YOUR LEGACY



YWCA Toronto's Monarch Society is a special group of supporters who, through a legacy gift today, will transform the lives of women, girls and gender diverse people tomorrow.



To learn more about planning your legacy gift, contact Monika Sormova, *Manager of Foundations & Planned Giving* at MSormova@ywcatoronto.org or 416.961.8101 x327.