

SHARING SETTLEMENT AND INTEGRATION PRACTICES THAT WORK MIRRORS: A REFLECTION OF IMMIGRANT WOMEN BUILDING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

S.H.A.D.E. (Safe Housing and Directed Empowerment) Inc.
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Area of Practice:

Programs to Address Gender-based Violence

Video:

<https://youtu.be/KQ5claKh6Kg>

A Pathways to
Prosperity Project

May 2022

Funded by:



Immigration, Refugees
and Citizenship Canada

Financé par :

Immigration, Réfugiés
et Citoyenneté Canada



**PATHWAYS TO
PROSPERITY**
Promoting Welcoming Communities in Canada



**VOIES VERS LA
PROSPÉRITÉ**
Promouvoir des communautés accueillantes au Canada

BACKGROUND ON THE ORGANIZATION AND IMPETUS FOR THE PROGRAM

S.H.A.D.E. is a non-profit organization that serves and supports immigrant and refugee women who have been impacted by gender-based violence/domestic abuse and/or family violence. S.H.A.D.E. was incorporated as a charitable non-profit organization in 2014 and became CRA registered in 2016. Since 2020, S.H.A.D.E. has been offering services that fall into two main categories: psychosocial counselling and practical supports. Psychosocial counselling includes trauma, abuse, and healing counselling and is offered one-on-one or on a group level. The practical supports offered are related to finances, housing, transportation, education, employment preparation, child school enrolment and daycare, and legal supports and information. S.H.A.D.E. ensures inclusion by providing flexible meeting dates, times and locations; the arrangement of transportation to and from meeting locations; the use of interpreters; and the provision of childcare for some of the programs. All services are delivered in a culturally sensitive manner and follow a Canadian rights-based framework.

The impetus for the program “MIRRORS: A Reflection of Immigrant Women Building Healthy Relationships” was the observation that immigrant and refugee women who experience gender-based violence/domestic abuse and/or family violence face a variety of challenges when attempting to access already existing resources. Some of these challenges include, for example, language barriers, difficulties finding psychosocial assistance, as well as difficulties accessing and navigating housing, legal assistance, education, transportation, childcare, employment, and financial assistance. In response to this observation, S.H.A.D.E.’s Executive Director scanned and mapped the existing service portfolio for immigrant and refugee women impacted by gender-based violence/domestic abuse and/or family violence in Winnipeg, Manitoba. This also included conducting interviews with representatives of community organizations and with immigrant and refugee women who had experienced gender-based violence/domestic abuse and/or family violence. These efforts showed that while there were supports available for these immigrant and refugee women, there was no comprehensive program available that offered trauma healing, in-depth education about abuse and Canadian rights, and confidence building in a culturally sensitive manner. Furthermore, community stakeholders requested such a program indicating that they had been encountering an increasing number of calls and walk-ins from immigrant and refugee women disclosing that they had been living in an abusive home environment. Based on these findings, S.H.A.D.E.’s Executive Director developed MIRRORS. MIRRORS is a group-level program that offers psychosocial counselling and practical supports to immigrant and refugee women. As a complement to the MIRRORS program, S.H.A.D.E. also offers psychosocial counselling and practical supports at the individual level through its Directed Empowerment one-on-one support services. Today, MIRRORS welcomes immigrant and refugee women from all over the city.

OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAM

Name:

MIRRORS: A Reflection of Immigrant Women Building Healthy Relationships

Description:

MIRRORS is a multi-week group program for immigrant and refugee women impacted by gender-based violence/domestic abuse and/or family violence living in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Once a week, program participants meet in the evening for 2.5 hours to focus on healing from abuse and to learn about healthy relationships. During each meeting, participants first receive a healthy meal. Then, they

participate in a workshop. The workshops offer psychosocial counselling on a group level and address a range of topics (e.g., the cycle of violence, trauma awareness and resilience, safety and support systems, etc.). The workshops also include several activities (e.g., Silhouette activity, creation of a vision board, and the *Blanket of Blame* enactment) and guest speakers (e.g., from Immigrant Women's Counselling Services and the Winnipeg Police Service). During the workshops, participants also receive handouts to read and reflect on further during their leisure time until the next workshop. At the beginning of each workshop, previous lesson material is reviewed and any questions are answered. At the end of the program, there is an Empowerment Ceremony, during which program participants share their vision boards with the group.

While the workshops are delivered in English, multiple interpreters are available to offer on-the-spot interpretation. The program also offers childcare and transportation subsidies (bus tickets in good weather and Uber or taxi rides in inclement weather). Between 2020-2021, a total of four MIRRORS cycles were held. The first three cycles were 10 weeks long while the fourth cycle was expanded to 12 weeks based on participant feedback. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, some weekly sessions were held via video conference.

Goal(s):

The main goal of MIRRORS is to give voice to immigrant and refugee women who experience gender-based violence/domestic abuse and/or family violence and to provide them with knowledge, a sense of community, and practical supports to help them heal and build confidence, strength, hope, and resilience.

The three objectives of MIRRORS are:

1. To empower participants to strengthen their mental health and build confidence to establish healthy relationships with themselves, their children, and others.
2. To reduce participants' isolation and increase their sense of belonging, safety, and confidence in life in Canada.
3. To reduce and/or eliminate participants' exposure to and incidence of violent and abusive situations.

Target Client Group(s):

The target client group includes immigrant and refugee women who are 18 years old and above and who have experienced gender-based violence/domestic abuse and/or family violence. Immigrant and refugee women are eligible for the program regardless of their length of time in Canada and immigration status.

Delivery Partners:

MIRRORS' delivery partner for one workshop – the workshop on trauma – is the Mennonite Central Committee's Abuse Response and Prevention Department.

Human Resources:

MIRRORS is administered by a lead facilitator who is a registered social worker, a support facilitator who has years of experience in settlement, a counselor, and guest speakers (e.g., Winnipeg Police). The program also relies on childminders and professional interpreters. To provide the meals, MIRRORS works with several caterers and local restaurants.

Besides co-facilitating the program, the lead facilitator is responsible for screening all potential participants, for ordering supplies, and for the preparation of handouts. The lead facilitator also mentors the support facilitator, and tends to administrative duties such as grant writing, program evaluation, and program promotion. The co-facilitator shares similar duties as the lead facilitator with the exception of conducting the screening interviews and administrative duties. The childminders are responsible for supervising and engaging the children of program participants. The interpreters provide on-the-spot interpretations during the workshops and, at times, also translate the handouts.

Funding:

MIRRORS is currently funded by The Winnipeg Foundation and the Jewish Foundation of Manitoba. Past funders include The Winnipeg Foundation, the Manitoba Real Estate Association Shelter Foundation (MREA Shelter Foundation), the WRHA Healthy Together Now Department (Seven Oaks Healthy Living), and Mid-Town Ford.

KEY FEATURES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THIS BEING A PROMISING PRACTICE

Effective:

Several factors contribute to MIRRORS' effectiveness. These factors include the professionalism of each person in the MIRRORS team and the skill set of both facilitators and the counsellor. Also, the program content is delivered in a culturally sensitive manner. In addition, by mitigating barriers such as the need for interpreters, transportation and child care, the program is able to be more inclusive and accessible to immigrant and refugee women. Finally, the healthy meals and the interactive nature of the workshops allow program participants to better retain workshop information, which in turn leads to greater self-reflection and transformation.

Efficient:

The facilitators' passion, compassion, professional and personal skill sets, and group facilitation skills help to create a culturally safe space in which program participants can articulate their experiences, which often is an exhilarating relief for many participants. In addition, the program follows a detailed, sequenced lesson plan which guides each participant in their understanding of their own and others' experiences of violence and abuse. Furthermore, to be as efficient as possible, the program relies on interpreters and translated handouts (on an as-needed basis). Also, plain English is used as much as possible and some vocabulary learning is also incorporated.

Relevant:

MIRRORS breaks the silence and isolation that many victims of gender-based violence/domestic abuse and/or family violence experience. By sharing their experiences, program participants learn that women of all ages and backgrounds have had similar experiences and that they are not alone. The women in the program feel safe and united and look forward to the weekly meetings. As they progress through the program, the women experience transformations on a cognitive, emotional and behavioural level and become much healthier. Many of the women also develop friendships that extend beyond the program.

Sustainable:

During and at the end of each cycle of MIRRORS, the facilitators collate the information from the evaluations to further improve the lesson plans for the next cycle of the program. Additionally, MIRRORS continually expands its donor and funding base, as well as its referral base.

Transferable:

The program is set up on a 12-week basis with a detailed lesson plan that includes written objectives, a listing of required equipment and material/supplies, links to video clips, and handouts. This lesson plan could be replicated anywhere as it is not geographically contingent. The program could also be adapted for other groups of women who experience gender-based violence/domestic abuse and/or family violence, such as Indigenous women or women who are highly trained professionals.

Innovative and Forward Thinking:

MIRRORS takes an intersectional approach and recognizes that immigrant and refugee women face barriers on many levels. For this reason, MIRRORS works towards reducing and overcoming these barriers by adopting a whole person approach. Besides providing knowledge about violence, abuse and relationships, the program reduces the language barrier by working with interpreters and translated handouts. The program also aims to be as inclusive and accessible as possible by offering free transportation, free childcare, and free healthy meals. Finally, the women are also provided with the opportunity to be supported through S.H.A.D.E.'s Directed Empowerment one-on-one support services.

Differs in Definable Ways from Other Similar Practices:

MIRRORS differs from other similar programs in the use of interpreters and translated materials, incentives such as free healthy meals prior to each workshop, free childminding services, and free transportation. In addition, the program is very comprehensive in terms of providing information about gender-based violence/domestic abuse family violence and how to overcome the victim mentality. It is also very interactive and offered in a convenient, safe location at a convenient time.

High Client Uptake:

To recruit clients, S.H.A.D.E. developed a program flyer. Before each cycle of the program, S.H.A.D.E. distributes the flyer in print and digital version among its network of community referral partners. In this way, immigrant and refugee women learn about and are referred to the program through various organizations. Some of the participants also learn about MIRRORS through the program's website or word-of-mouth. Interested individuals go through a screening interview before being enrolled in the program. Due to the nature of the program, there is a limited number of spaces available. On average, seven immigrant women participated in the program in each cycle, with the last cycle having nine immigrant women. Across time, MIRRORS witnessed continued referrals from stakeholders.

High Client Retention:

In total, 32 participants have completed the entire MIRRORS cycle. The women's need to be part of a community, as well as the many learning and self-discovery moments that the women experience during the workshops, support client retention. Also, at the end of each workshop, the women are offered self-care items to boost their sense of self-worth and need to feel valued. This gesture is much appreciated by the women who have often sacrificed much for their children. Finally, some of the women are also retained for the length of the program by engaging with them in other services such as S.H.A.D.E.'s Directed Empowerment one-on-one support services.

Strong Evidence of Successful Outcomes:

Across all four cycles of MIRRORS, the women reported feeling safe, heard, believed in, and supported while being part of the MIRRORS group and sharing their traumatic experiences with one another. For example, on a scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree, the women

provided an average rating of 5.00 to the statement “Being a part of this group has been a valuable experience for me.” Similarly, the statement “I feel encouraged by other members who have overcome problems they may at times still struggle with” had an average rating of 4.93.

The women also found the topics of the workshops meaningful and relevant, with an average rating of 4.94. In addition, they valued the professional skill set of the facilitators. For example, the women perceived the facilitators as knowledgeable (M = 4.86), warm and caring (M = 4.81) and trustworthy (M = 4.79). They also appreciated how well the facilitators and interpreters worked together (M = 4.93). The healthy meal provided each week was greatly valued (M = 4.64).

At the end of the program, the women also rated themselves as courageous (M = 4.80), believed that they had a strength and ability that they could tap into to overcome difficult situations (M = 4.73), reported that they no longer felt shame or blame about their experiences with domestic abuse (M = 4.60), and reported that they were putting into practice ways of coping that helped them to be healthier (M = 4.73).

Overall, MIRRORS broke the isolation that the women had been experiencing and the silence of gender-based violence/domestic abuse and/or family violence. The women learned to change their thinking, emotional outlook and behaviour in positive ways. They gained a sense of independent thinking, a vision for the future, and goal-planning skills. For example, some of the women embarked on new careers and education paths. By believing in themselves, they were able to succeed, and in doing so, to change their income levels, their ability to lead sustainable lives, and to care for their children and themselves.

PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION STRATEGY

MIRRORS relies on qualitative and quantitative data to measure and evaluate its performance. During the program, the facilitators document anecdotal comments made by the participants. In addition, given that S.H.A.D.E. supports the majority of MIRRORS participants through one-on-one services, S.H.A.D.E. also receives feedback about MIRRORS during these sessions. MIRRORS also documents any feedback provided by facilitators, interpreters, and community stakeholders.

During the last workshop of the program, MIRRORS distributes three surveys to program participants. Program participants are asked to respond to a series of statements on a rating scale to evaluate the group experience, the facilitators, and themselves. The surveys are translated into different languages on an as-needed basis. Based on all the feedback collected, MIRRORS has continuously improved the program for future participants.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

S.H.A.D.E.

<https://www.shadewinnipeg.org/>

Video Link to Workshop Goals and Activities

<https://youtu.be/5p9u6XxpsSc>