



ADVANCING INTERSECTIONAL APPROACHES:

Exploring Culturally Responsive Collaborations to Build Inclusive Practices and Trauma-Informed Care

Pathways to Prosperity National Conference

Halifax, Nova Scotia | November 24-25, 2025





Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that we are in Mi'kma'ki (mee-gah-mah-ki), the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq (meeg-gah-mah) people. We recognize their ongoing stewardship and deep connection to these lands, waters, and resources. Today, as we present virtually from Halifax, we honour the Peace and Friendship Treaties signed in this territory.

Achév is based on the Treaty Lands and Territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, and we also recognize the Anishinabek, Attawandaron, Haudenosaunee, Huron-Wendat, and the Métis peoples whose histories and contributions continue to enrich these lands surrounding the Great Lakes. Anishinaabek (Ah-nish-in-a-bek) Haudenosaunee (Hou-den-no-show-knee) Attawandaron (Add-a-won-da-run)

We acknowledge that we are all Treaty People, including those who came as settlers, immigrants, or involuntarily through transatlantic slave trade and we pay tribute to the ancestors of African and Indigenous origin and descent whose resilience continues to guide us today.

Common Agreement



Keep Microphone Muted



Write in Chat / Raise Hand



Speak Respectfully / Concisely

Outline



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3

Offers free one-on-one counselling, safety planning, and resources to help individuals live safely and independently.

4

Peer-led support and advocacy for those affected by Gender-based Violence (GBV).

Senior Director - Programs & Services

Ayesha Bhikha



Manager - Women, Youth & Specialized Services

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Samantha Iyere



Chair of the SAFE Committee & SAFE Board Member

Lorraine Rollo



Community Liaison Officer

Harpreet Kaur



GBV Prevention and Support Counsellor

Divya Fernandes



Curriculum Developer/Trainer

Felicia Gisondi



Creating a **Faster Path** to **Prosperity**

- Achēv is a leading non-profit provider of employment, language, newcomer, women, youth and IT services in the GTA.
- Each year, we put more than **100,000 clients on a faster path to prosperity** by making it easier for them to access the services they need – when and where they want them.
- We offer over **50 programs and services** online and in person at 8 GTA locations.



Programs and Services

(6 Pillars)



Employment Services

One-stop-shop for all employment needs to assist in finding meaningful employment.



Youth Services

Providing access to the employment and life skills necessary for youth.



Newcomer Services

Multilingual staff provide up-to-date information and community referrals to meet settlement needs.



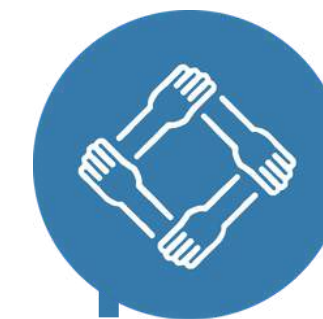
Language Services

Language assessment services for immigrants, and support to the language training community.



Women Services

Programs and services supporting women and girls in education, community, and workforce needs.

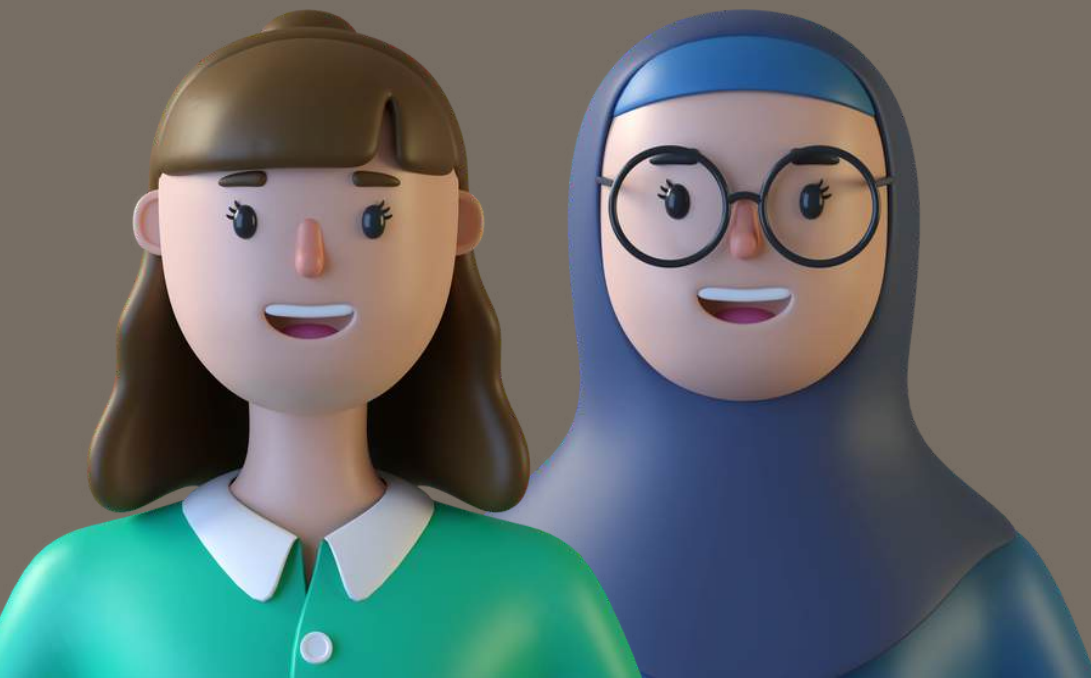


IT Solutions & Services

Seamless access to essential programs and services for clients and settlement agencies in Ontario.

Scenario

Settlement Worker and Client



Settlement Worker

Welcome, Uzma. Let's get started with your intake. I see you're 37 and living in Toronto.

Client
Yes, that's right.



Settlement Worker

You're looking for work in hospitality. Why did you leave your last job?

I had to leave due to a conflict with my manager.

Client



Settlement Worker

Sounds like you couldn't handle the pressure. Was it really that bad?

He made me feel unsafe and withheld pay.

Client



Settlement Worker

Women are so sensitive these days. Well, sometimes you must toughen up. That's how the industry works.

I was also trying to save money to leave my partner Jonah.

Client



Settlement Worker

I get it, I dated a man once, so stingy with their money.

I'd rather not talk about that.

Client



Settlement Worker

You're making this more complicated than it needs to be, no wonder you had relationship problems.

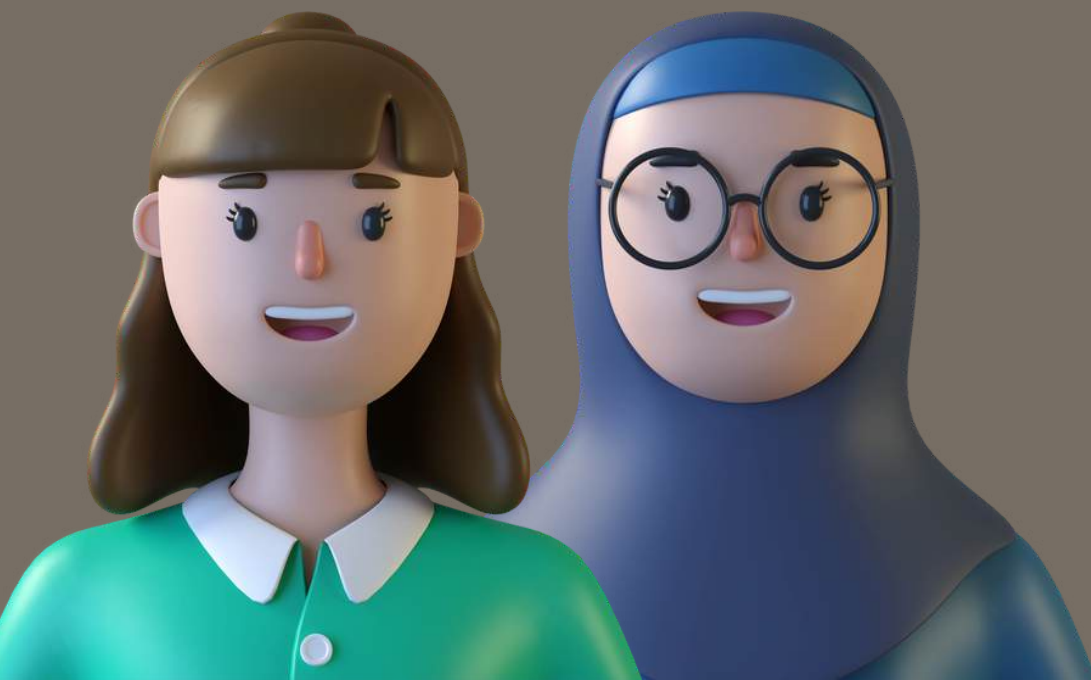
I just want support with finding a job.

Client



Scenario

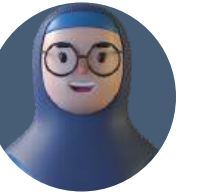
Settlement Worker and Client



Settlement Worker

Sure, but you need to fix your personal life first. We can't help people who aren't ready to help themselves.

Client



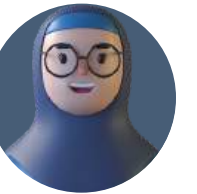
I'm doing my best.



Settlement Worker

Well, we'll sign you up for a resume workshop. But honestly, you'll need more than that if you want to be employable again.

Client



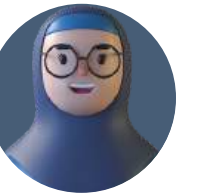
I'd really prefer not to.



Settlement Worker

Alright but just know that keeping things to yourself might slow down your progress. Anyway...

Client



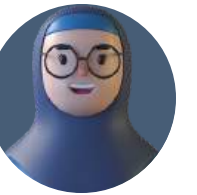
Thanks.



Settlement Worker

So, next steps. I'll sign you up for the resume seminar. And I'm going to refer you to counseling and legal services—trust me, you need them.

Client



The resume seminar sounds good. I'm not sure about the other services right now.



Settlement Worker

You should be sure. These services are designed for people like you. You'll never move forward if you keep avoiding help.

1

What went wrong in this conversation?

2

What could have been done differently?

3

What are the key takeaways or lessons from this example?

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WHAT WE HEARD FROM

Employers, Policy Makers & Community Leaders, Professional Associations & Licensing Bodies, Employment Service Providers, HR Professionals, and Women & Youth.



IMMIGRANTS AND RACIALIZED WOMEN / YOUTH

- **Foreign credentials** and **experience** undervalued
- **Bias** and **barriers** in hiring
- Limited access to **networks** and **mentorship**
- Skills-job **mismatch** and **underemployment**
- **Cultural insensitivity** and **microaggression** at work



EMPLOYERS

- Difficulty **assessing** foreign credentials
- Gaps in understanding **inclusive hiring practices**
- Limited **cross-cultural awareness**
- **Underrepresentation** in leadership and skilled roles
- Need for stronger **DEI Supports** and **retention strategies**



The Paving the Way (PTW) program seeks systemic transformation to advance **women's economic security** and **prosperity** by enabling them to achieve their full potential in Ontario.



Addresses barriers to **entry, retention, and success in the workplace** for Immigrant and Racialized Women.



Training and interactive sessions with organizations to apply **Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, & Accessibility (DEIA)** principles in their practice.

#InspireInclusion

What We Aim to Achieve

01



INCREASE EMPLOYMENT

Create more job opportunities for Immigrant and Racialized Women.

02



ENHANCE LEADERSHIP

Develop leadership capacities among the target group.

03



DRIVE SYSTEMIC CHANGE

Promote systemic changes for equitable workplaces.

04



ENGAGE STAKEHOLDERS

Consult to assess workplace challenges, build capacity to advance DEIA practices.

05



ACTIONABLE INSIGHTS

Customized briefings / recommendations to guide employer interventions.

PAVING THE WAY

Free Certificate Training at
No Cost to Employers

Funders



Women and Gender
Equality Canada

Femmes et Égalité
des genres Canada

Canada

Project
Focus

Provide DEIA training with employer
organizations in Ontario.

Outcomes

Advanced DEIA toolkit and best
practices manual for employers.

Partners

SEASONOVA



Avesbury Consulting
Business Development and Marketing Consulting

Duration

July 2024 – March 2026

HOW WE SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONS

Strengthen your organization's DEIA efforts with fully funded training and support.



Enhance workplace inclusivity through tailored DEIA workshop with flexible scheduling.



Access to assessment frameworks to address workplace inequities.

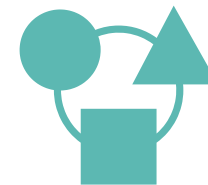


Strengthen workplaces with DEIA strategies and research-based resources .



Employers and participants will receive certificate of completion.

TRAINING PLAN



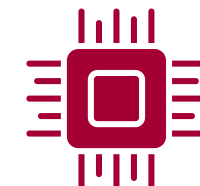
DEIA AWARENESS



DEIA AUDIT AND
ACTION PLAN



PSYCHOLOGICAL
SAFETY AND INCLUSIVE
WORKPLACE



EMBEDDING DEIA LENS
IN EVERYDAY LIFE

TRAINING OUTLINE

Session 1: DEIA Awareness Training

- Introduction to DEIA terms
- DEIA in Canadian context
- What is Truth and Reconciliation

Session 2: DEIA Audit and Organizational Action Plan

- S1:** Cultivating senior management buy-in for DEIA
- S2:** Conducting an organizational DEIA assessment
- S3:** Developing a DEIA action plan

Subtopics: allyship, ERGs, EAPs, and legal case discussions.

Session 3: Psychological Safety and Inclusive Workplace

- S4:** Establishing a respectful workplace policy
- S5:** Providing accessibility and accommodation supports
- S6:** Making DEIA training available to all employees

Subtopics: microaggressions, unconscious bias, neurodiversity, and visible and invisible disabilities.

Session 4: Embedding DEIA Lens in Everyday Life

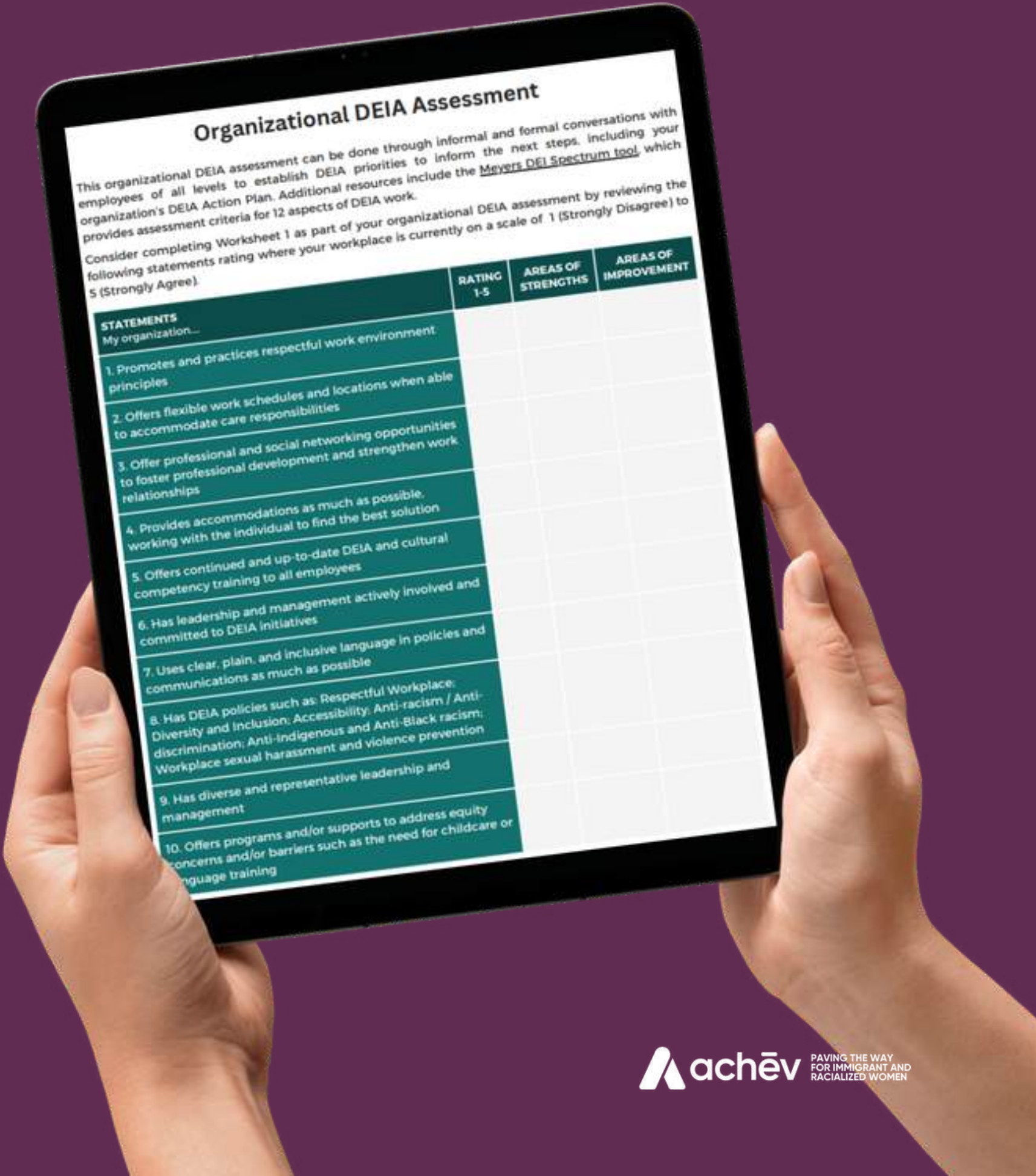
- S7:** Integrating DEIA into employee engagement and workplace culture initiatives
- S8:** Integrating DEIA into communications
- S9:** Introducing the use of a DEIA lens in the workplace
- S10:** Integrating DEIA principles into the hiring process

Subtopics: inclusive language, DEIA lens in procurement and hiring, diversity calendars, and cultural empathy.

ORGANIZATIONAL DEIA ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST



SCAN TO READ LATER



DEIA Self-Reflection Activity

STATEMENT 5

Offers continued and up-to-date **DEIA** and **cultural competency training** for all employees.

STATEMENT 6

Has **leadership** and **management** actively involved in and committed to **DEIA initiatives**.

1

2

3

4

5

Rating scale: 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree



Website
achev.ca/paving-the-way



Contact Us
ptw@achev.ca



Register for PTW
achev.ca/ptw-register

4 ORGANIZATIONAL DEIA TRAINING SPOTS AVAILABLE

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STRONGER TOGETHER: GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND SUPPORT

Violence Affects Us All.
So Does the Solution.



Stronger Together addresses gender-based violence (GBV) through confidential, trauma-informed one-on-one counselling, peer support groups, and customized staff training or community workshops. The program promotes education, early intervention, and survivor empowerment to strengthen frontline response and foster lasting change across the GTA. Services are available online and in-person.

EXPLORE OUR SERVICES

Looking for a Safe Space to Talk?

Register to access cost-free, confidential one-on-one

Interested in Hosting Training or Workshops?

Discover our free psychosocial and skills-based

Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

Harmful acts directed at an individual based on their **gender** or **socially ascribed differences**.



Physical

Anything involving unwanted, aggressive, forceful or painful physical contact.



Sexual

Any sexual activity that occurs without consent, often involving force, threats, or deception.



Emotional & Psychological

Deliberate actions or words that cause harm, often by denying or criticizing someone's lived experience.



Financial & Material

When one person exerts control over another's finances or resources, often leading to isolation and dependency.



Discriminatory

Actions or attitudes that marginalize based on attributes like race, gender, sexual orientation, and disability.



Digital

Deliberate, unwanted, and targeted online harm through digital media platforms.

Gender-Based Violence: Canadian Context

Self-Reported Canadian Data (2018)



ONLINE HARASSMENT

- 50% of bisexual women • 21% of lesbian women • 18% of heterosexual women



FINANCIAL CONTROL AND EXPLOITATION

- Forced to give money/possessions:
 - Indigenous women 16% vs. non-Indigenous 6%
- Denied access to employment/money/resources:
 - Indigenous women 13% vs. non-Indigenous 3%

Men / Boys

Dual reality: victims and primary perpetrators

DISPROPORTIONATE PERPETRATION

- Men and boys are **overrepresented** in violence
- Root causes include harmful social norms, such as **misogyny** and **patriarchy**
- These norms discourage **emotional expression**
- They also **discourage acknowledging trauma**, impacting **behaviour** and **coping**

INTERGENERATIONAL CYCLES

- Boys who **witness domestic violence** are more likely to perpetrate intimate partner violence (IPV) later in life (Roberts et, al., 2010)

MEN AS VICTIMS

- 36% of men in intimate relationships report experiencing IPV (Cotter, 2021)
- Men are more likely to experience **physical assault**, while women face higher rates of **sexual violence**

Men / Boys

Prevention and Allyship



CHALLENGING HARMFUL NORMS

Men and boys can disrupt toxic masculinity, patriarchy, misogyny, entitlement, and silence around violence.



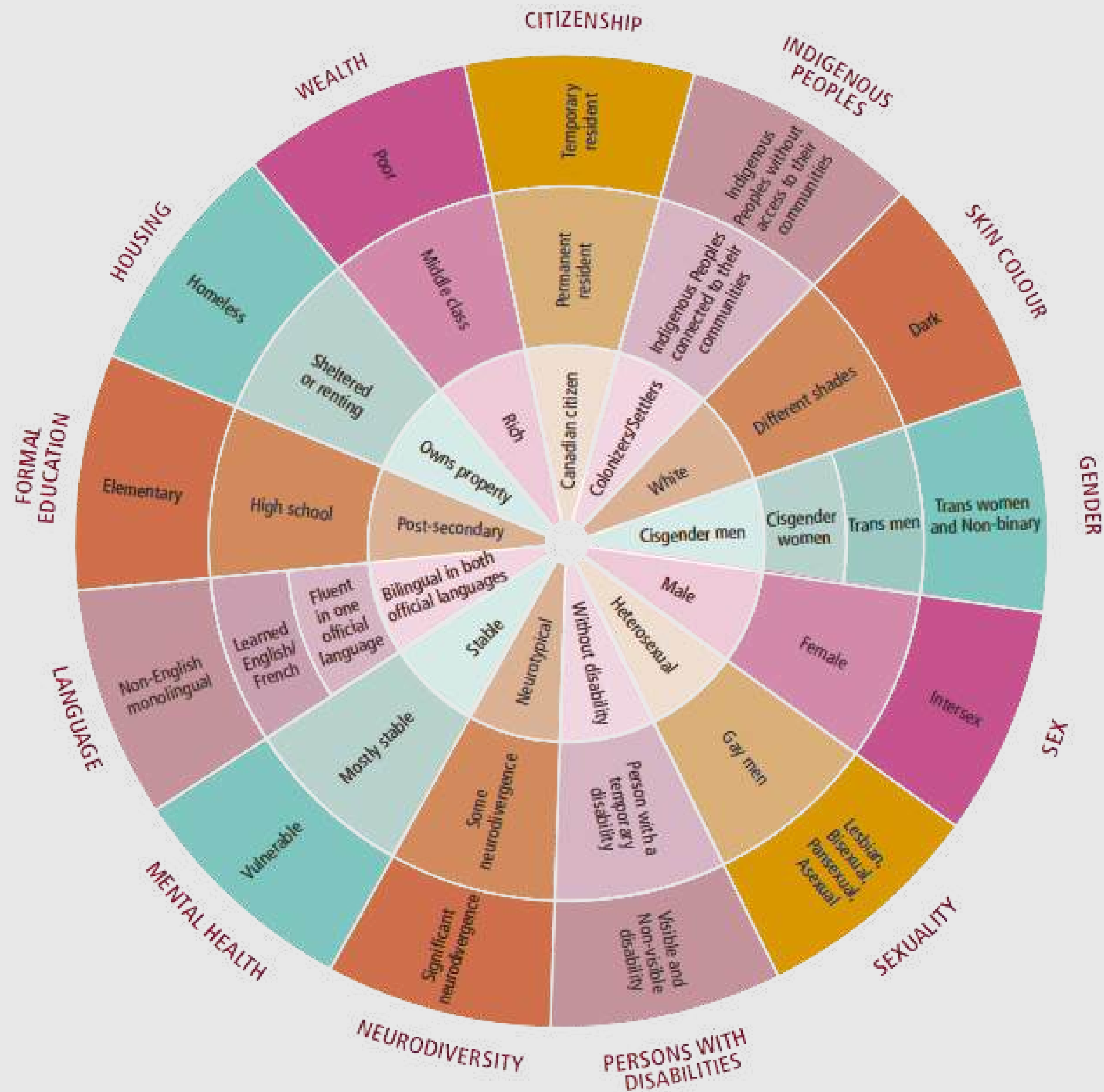
MODELING HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

Teaching empathy, consent, and emotional expression from a young age.



PROMOTING GENDER EQUITY

Advocating for equal rights and respectful treatment of all genders.



Gender-Based Violence: 2SLGBTQIA+ Communities



Self-Reported Canadian Data (2018)

TRANSGENDER AND GENDER DIVERSE INDIVIDUALS

- 59% reported experiencing sexual or physical assault in their lifetime, compared to cisgender individuals (37%)

BISEXUAL WOMEN

- 50% experienced online harassment—more than double the rate of heterosexual women (18%)

2SLGBTQIA+ WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES

- 71% experienced IPV since age 15

WORKPLACE HARASSMENT

- 49% of LGB+ women and 35% of LGB+ men experienced unwanted sexual behaviors in the workplace—higher than heterosexual women (28%) and men (16%)

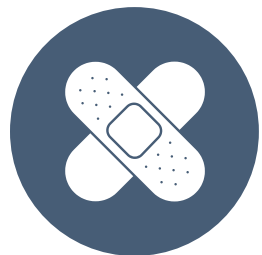
Violence Affects Us All. So Does the Solution.



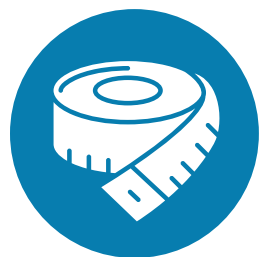
GBV impacts people of all genders and backgrounds.



Experiences of violence are shaped by identity and context.



This includes those who are **surviving, witnessing, perpetuating, or healing** from violence.



A one-size-fits-all approach risks leaving people behind.





Website

achev.ca/strongertogether



Contact Us

strongertogether@achev.ca

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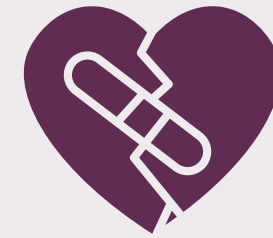


HOLISTIC TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE

From Philosophy to Practice

Healing-Centered Approach Across Systems

TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE



- **Guiding philosophy** recognizing trauma's widespread impact on safety, trust, and well-being
- Shift from "What's wrong with you?" to "**What happened to you?**"
- Promotes **safety**, **empowerment**, and **choice** as foundations of healing
- Applies at every level—from **frontline service to leadership and policy**
- When embraced system-wide, it transforms both **client experiences** and **organizational culture**

TRAUMA-INFORMED: SYSTEMS APPROACH



Build **safe, transparent spaces** where survivors can share at their own pace



Train staff to recognize trauma responses as protective mechanisms (e.g., *withdrawal, silence, mistrust*)



Review procedures to remove hidden power imbalances and prevent re-traumatization



Support **reflective practice** and **staff wellness**



For us, intake begins with **relationship-building** and **fostering trust**

HOLISTIC AND WRAPAROUND SERVICES

- **Trauma affects the whole person**—mental health, housing, finances, and family
- Wraparound supports integrate **counselling, housing, employment, and legal assistance**



- Connects clients awaiting **subsidized housing** to **transitional housing partners**
- Addresses **financial abuse** through **awareness, literacy workshops, and referrals**
- Offers **culturally and linguistically responsive services** to ensure safety and accessibility

COLLABORATION AND SYSTEMIC CHANGE



Trauma-informed care thrives through **collaboration** across GBV, housing, employment, health, and legal systems.



Shared protocols and referral pathways minimize clients re-telling their trauma stories.



RISE collaborates **internally** with Achēv's GBV and employment teams and **externally** with community partners like SAFE .



Collaboration creates survivor-centered ecosystems and drives systemic prevention.



PROJECT MODEL

1

Safety

2

Empowerment

3

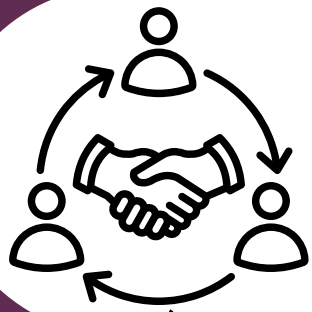
Connection

- **Trauma-informed, holistic support** to immigrant and newcomer women, and self-identifying women impacted by GBV
- **Counselling, housing referrals, support groups, employment readiness, and community engagement**
- **Cultural humility and language accessibility** in every service
- **Individual recovery with community transformation and empowerment**

“Healing happens when systems work together.”



Trauma-informed care is a **commitment** to do no harm and to promote **equity** and **safety** at every level.



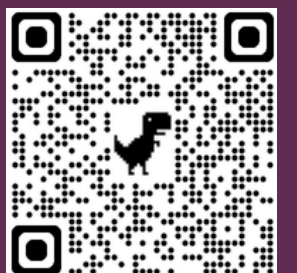
Embedding **trauma awareness** and **collaboration** helps survivors move **from crisis to confidence**.



Together, we can build communities that are **responsive**, **healing-centered**, and **just**.

Divya Fernandes
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achev.ca/rise



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SAFE

Survivor Advocates
for Empowerment

For Survivors, By Survivors

The Survivor at the Center

A supportive, compassionate approach that focuses on promoting **safety** and facilitating one's **agency**.

Empowerment

Healing



Survivor-Centered Approach



Priority = **SAFETY**



Exploring **control**



The power of **belief**



The power of **dignity**



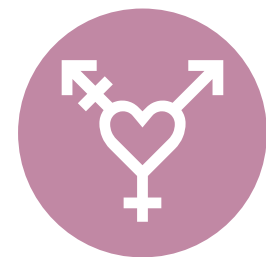
Identity Impacts Experience



Intersecting identities that shape GBV impacts:



Race



Sexual Orientation



Ethnicity



Socioeconomic Status



Disability

All of the elements that makeup a survivor's identity intersect.

Intersectional Harm



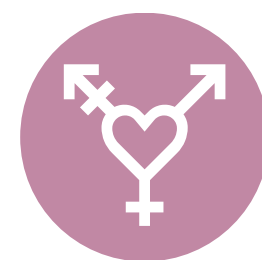
Indigenous women / girls



Racialized women



Women with disabilities



2SLGBTQIA+ individuals



Immigrant and refugee women

Culturally Responsive Practices



Remember: It's about the survivor



Risk versus protective factors



Heritage influences experience



An opportunity for the community

The Role of Trauma

Trauma impacts healing by creating **psychological, emotional, and physical** distress.

- Affects the brain and increases emotional dysregulation

Trauma-Informed Approach



Reducing triggers



Breaking down walls



Enhancing communication



Empowering

Supporting Survivors



What is it about?



Approach



Opportunities



Intersections



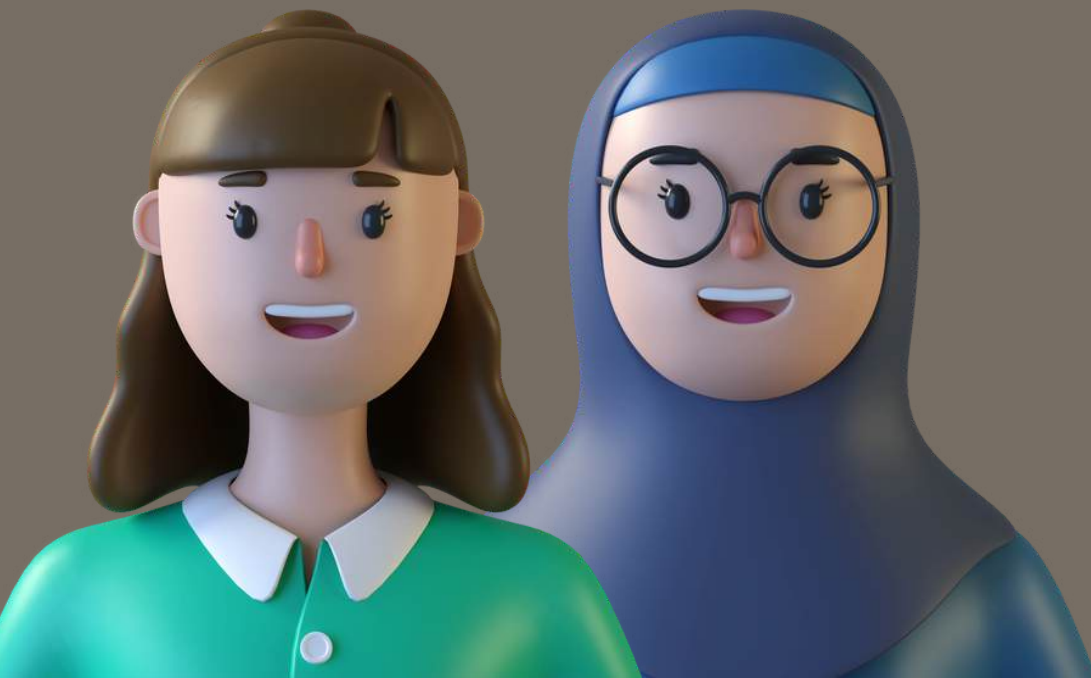
Looking forward



The Role of Lived Experience

Scenario

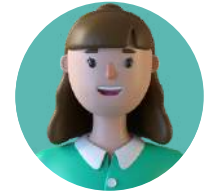
Settlement Worker and Client



Settlement Worker

Welcome, Uzma. Thank you for joining me today. I see you're 37 and currently living in Toronto—is that still accurate?

Client
Yes, that's right.

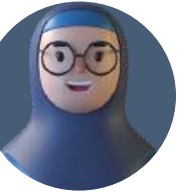


Settlement Worker

Great. I see you're interested in employment support, specifically in hospitality. Can you tell me a bit about your experience?

I worked at the ABC Hotel for five years—reception, waitressing, and eventually managing the lounge.

Client



Settlement Worker

That's a strong background. I noticed there's a gap in your resume after that role. Would you feel comfortable sharing what led to your departure?

I had to leave due to a conflict with my manager.

Client

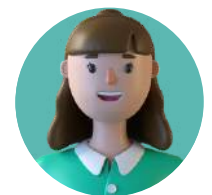


Settlement Worker

Thank you for sharing that. I want to acknowledge that workplace conflict can be very challenging. You're not required to go into detail unless you feel safe and ready to do so.

He made me feel unsafe and withheld pay.

Client



Settlement Worker

I'm really sorry you experienced that. No one should feel unsafe at work. You've shown a lot of strength by continuing to move forward.

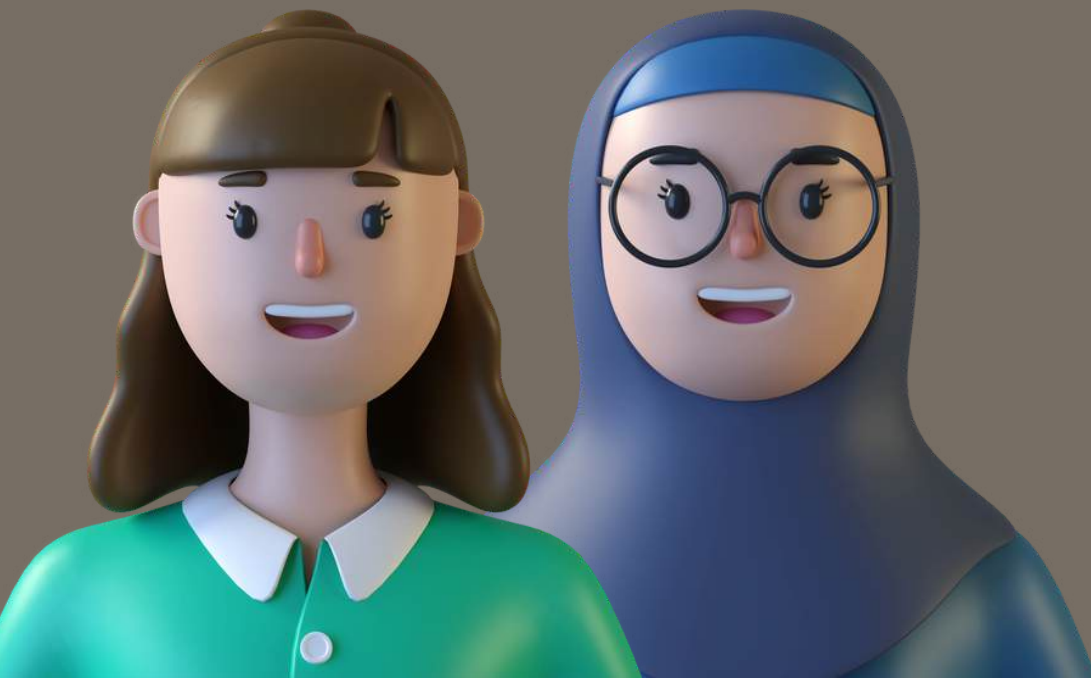
I was also trying to save money to leave my partner.

Client



Scenario

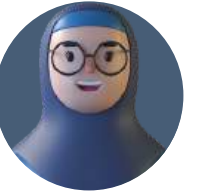
Settlement Worker and Client



Settlement Worker

That sounds like a very difficult time. Thank you for trusting me with that. If at any point you'd prefer to pause or shift the conversation, just let me know.

Client



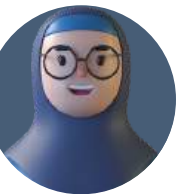
I'd rather not talk about that.



Settlement Worker

Absolutely. I respect your boundaries. We'll focus on the supports you're comfortable with.

Client



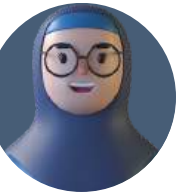
I just want help finding a job.



Settlement Worker

Of course. Let's start with that. I can register you for our resume-building seminar, and if you ever feel ready, we also have counseling and legal support available. No pressure—just options.

Client



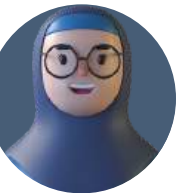
The resume seminar sounds good. I'm not sure about the other services right now.



Settlement Worker

That's completely okay. You're in control of what support you access. We're here whenever you're ready.

Client



Thanks.

1

How did this conversation go?

2

Was it trauma-informed? If so, what made it feel that way?

3

What did the worker do well to support the client's boundaries and needs?

Contact Us:





Thank You

