

Belong & Grow

**Building
our future
together**



From Surviving to Reconnecting: A three year of journey of Healing and Belonging

Building resilience, connection, and wellbeing among
newcomers in Nova Scotia (2022–2025)

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LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

ISANS acknowledges that we are in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded past and present territory of the Mi'kmaq people. We are all treaty people.

At ISANS, as we help settle newcomers to Nova Scotia, we also teach them about the history and rights of Indigenous Peoples in Mi'kma'ki. We honour the enduring presence and contributions of the Mi'kmaq people, and we are dedicated to fostering meaningful relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

AFRICAN NOVA SCOTIAN AFFIRMATION

We also acknowledge that people of African descent have been in Nova Scotia for over 400 years, and we honour and offer gratitude to those ancestors of African descent who came before us to this land.

ISANS Newcomer Community Wellness Program

The Newcomer Community Wellness Program offers counselling and workshops in a supportive space to help newcomers build resilience, connection, and belonging in their new home

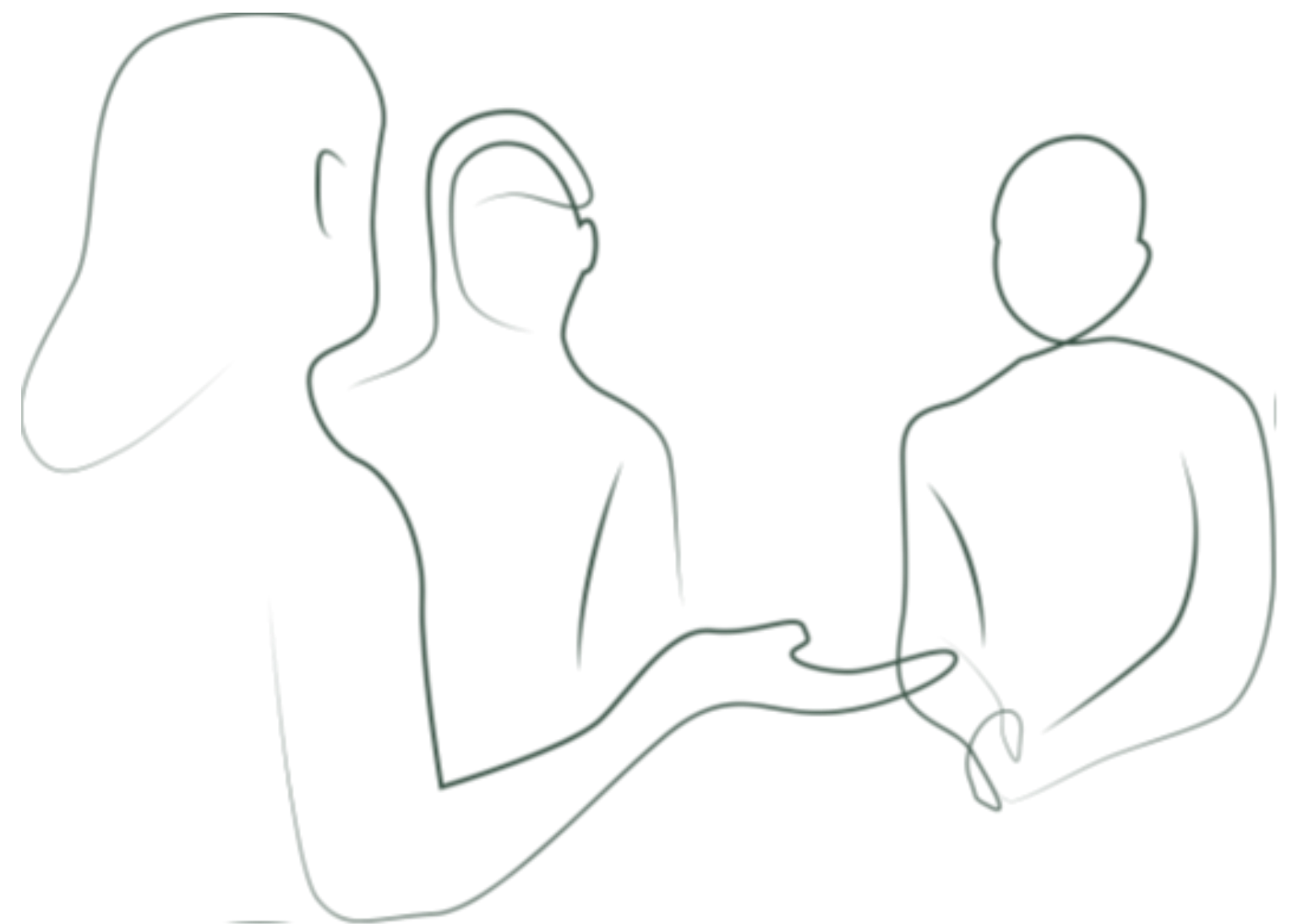
Program Components:

Individual Counselling (IWK Shared Care)

Orientations and Wellness Workshops

Wellness Support Groups:

- Women's Group
- Mixed Gender Group
- Men's Group
- 2SLGBTQIA+ Group
- ***Trauma Stabilization Group***



Trauma Stabilization Group Overview

Finding Your Power and Strength in Difficult Times

Trauma Stabilization Group

Launch Year: 2016

Purpose: To address the mental health needs of Syrian refugees arriving in Halifax and to provide a model of healing adaptable to diverse newcomer communities.

Program Developers:

Lesley Hartman, M.A., Kay Jenson, M.Sc., and Carmen Celina Moncayo

The Trauma Stabilization Group offers a safe, structured environment where participants can learn coping skills, share experiences, and begin rebuilding a sense of stability and self-trust after trauma.

Trauma Stabilization Group

Relaunched in 2022 to support Ukrainian and Afghan refugees fleeing war and conflict.

Material was adapted to the unique needs of the current newcomers by Whole therapy and ISANS



Trauma Stabilization Group - Ongoing Stressors

Challenges Faced by Participants

Participants in the Trauma Stabilization Group often experience ongoing stressors that affect their mental health and settlement journey, including:

- Feelings of survivor's guilt
- Uncertainty regarding immigration status
- Financial instability
- Language and communication barriers
- Challenges of resettlement and adaptation
- Experiences of grief and loss
- Separation from loved ones and concern for family abroad

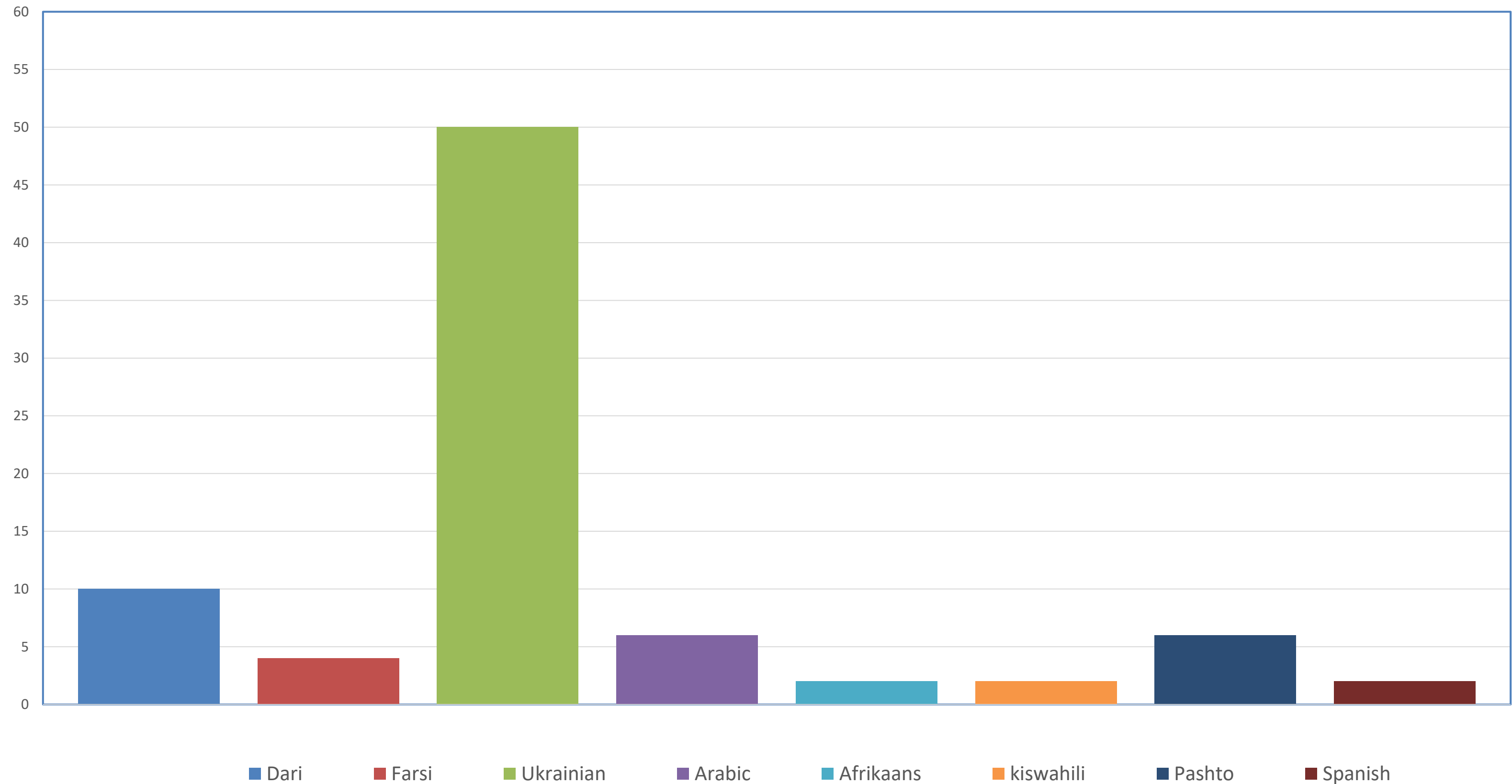


Program Impact (Fall 2022 – Fall 2025)

- **8 groups delivered**
- **79 participants**
- Representing **14 countries**
- Speaking **8 different languages**
- Each group creates a space where participants can rebuild trust, develop coping skills, and strengthen their sense of belonging within the community.



Participants and languages



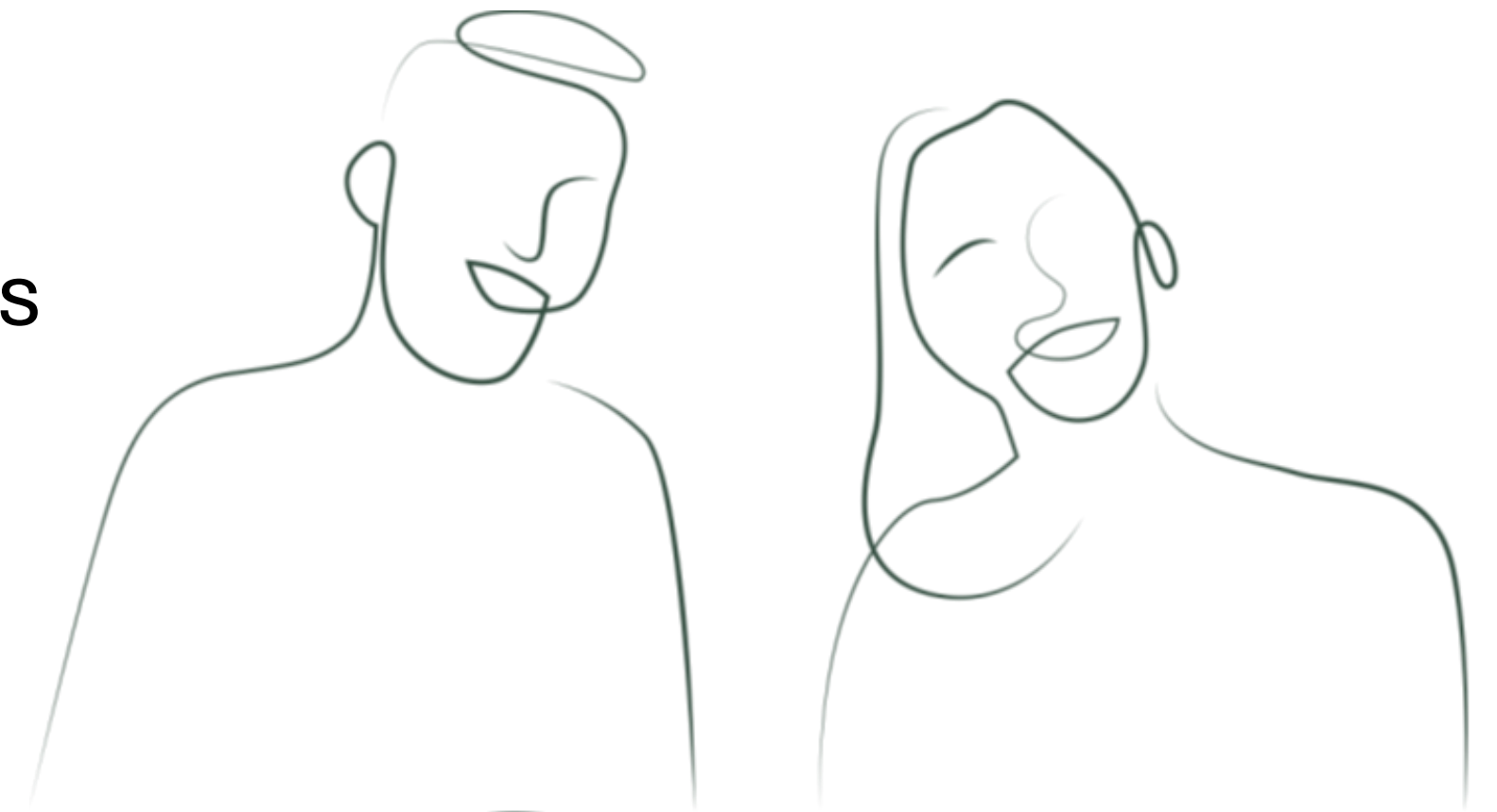
Pre-Group Phase

Preparation and Planning

Before each group begins, the team invests time in building safety, understanding, and readiness among all participants and facilitators.

Pre-Group Activities Include:

- Interpreter orientation and training
- Team preparation meetings
- Participant recruitment and intake interviews
- Initial assessment sessions



Program Format

- Duration: **10–12 weeks**, offered **3 times per year**
- Session length: **2.5 hours**
- Group size: **8–12 participants**
- Team: **3 facilitators and 2 interpreters**
- Supports: **Childcare, refreshments, and a calm, welcoming room**
- This structure ensures that every participant enters the group feeling informed, safe, and supported.

Group Structure

Each session combines psychoeducation, mindfulness, and peer sharing.

Participants explore emotions, body awareness, and coping techniques within a supportive and culturally inclusive environment.



CHECK-IN
WITH PAST
WEEK AND
HOMEWORK



GROUNDING
EXERCISE



CONTENT



10-15 MIN
BREAK



CONTENT



CHECK-OUT
AND
HOMEWORK

Evaluation and Feedback Process

The facilitation team developed a multi-step evaluation model to measure both individual and group progress:

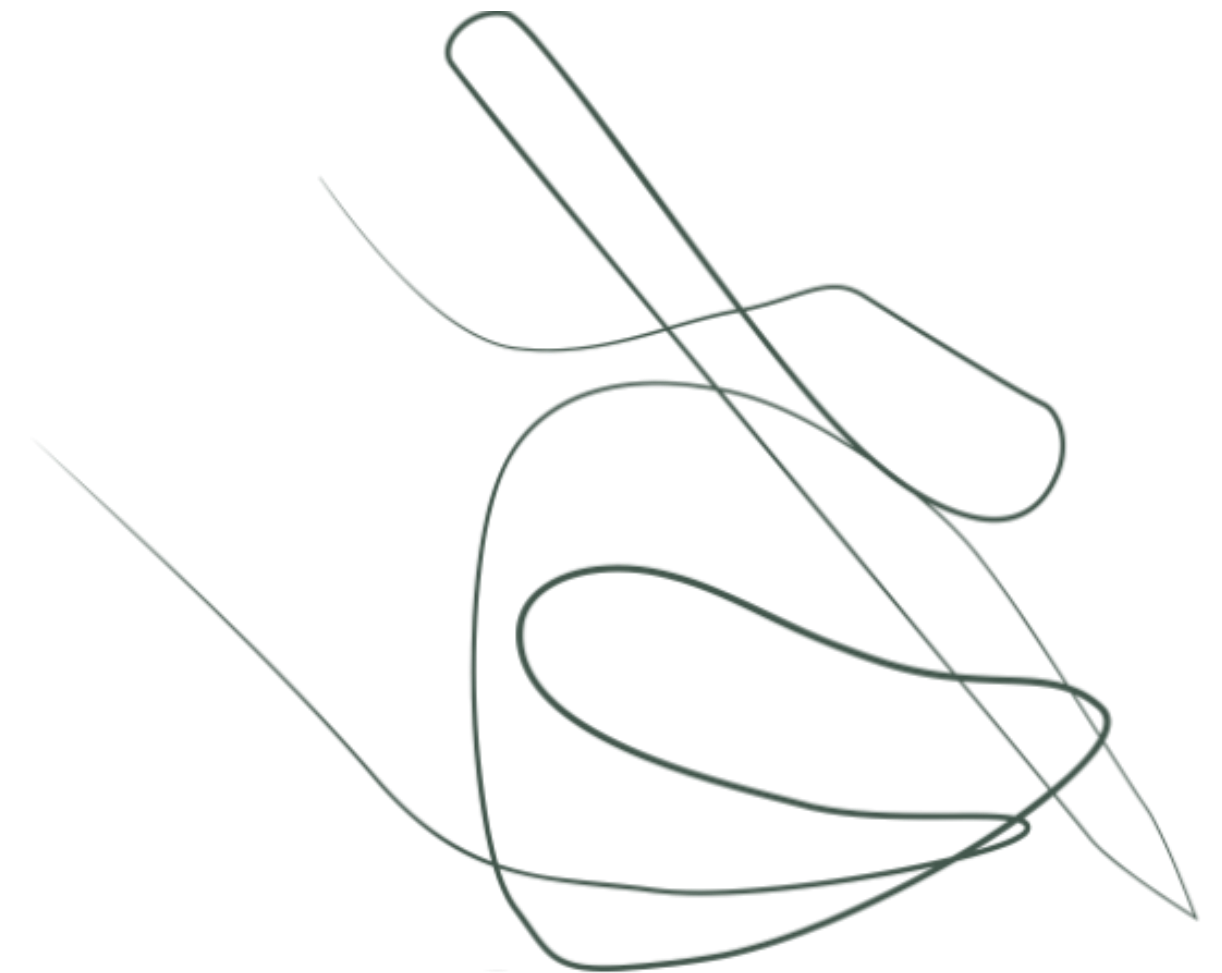
- Oral assessment interviews
- Written evaluations
- Group feedback discussions
- VAST Questionnaire (Vancouver Association for Survivors of Torture)

This process helps identify the program's impact on well-being, coping, and connection — guiding future improvements.

Assessment Approach

Initial Assessment (Before Program Start)

- Duration: **1–2 hours**
- Conducted through an **oral interview**
- Covers:
 - Basic demographic information
 - Migration and relocation experiences
 - Mental health and coping mechanisms
 - Past difficult experiences
 - Expectations for the group



PROTECT – Mental Health Questionnaire

I am going to ask you ten yes or no questions about your health. Are you OK with this? When answering, please keep in mind your experience over the last two weeks.

Note: The term “Often” below means more than usual and causing suffering

	YES	NO
Do you often have problems falling asleep?		
Do you often have nightmares?		
Do you often suffer from headaches?		
Do you often suffer from other physical pains?		
Do you easily get angry?		
Do you often think about painful past events?		
Do you often feel scared or frightened?		
Do you often forget things in your daily life?		
Do you find yourself losing interest in things?		
Do you often have trouble concentrating?		
Number of questions answered “Yes”		

0-3	4-7	8-10
Low Risk	Medium Risk	High Risk

Follow-Up Assessment (After Program Completion)

A follow-up survey and oral feedback are conducted to measure changes in:

- Sense of well-being
- Social connection
- Engagement in the community

Participants are asked:

“What was the most important thing for you about being part of this group?”

“What will be your next step in your healing journey?”

Anonymous written feedback is also collected to ensure openness and honesty

Evaluation:

Anonymous Feedback of Participants

Please use the following scale to evaluate your experience in our group

- 1- Strongly Disagree
- 2- Disagree
- 3- Neutral
- 4- Agree
- 5- Strongly agree.

Please evaluate the following statements:

- 1) The topics and content of the group was helpful.
- 2) I found skills and practice useful.
- 3) Group discussions were helpful and useful.
- 4) Connections I made with other participants was helpful for me.
- 5) Connections I made with facilitators was helpful for me.
- 6) Working with my interpreter was a helpful experience.
- 7) The group felt like a safe place for me.
- 8) I have noticed positive changes in myself since beginning the group.
- 9) After completing the group, I feel more prepared to cope with difficult experiences.
- 10) After completing the group, I've noticed an improvement with my mental health.
- 11) Overall, the group met my expectations.
- 12) I would recommend this group to others who had difficult experiences.

What was the most helpful part of the group?

What is something that could be improved for the next group of participants?

Are there any topics you wish we covered more of or less?

Is there anything we did not address that you hoped we would?

Participants' Feedback Summary

High Satisfaction

All evaluation statements received “*agree*” or “*strongly agree*” responses from participants.

Positive Impact

Participants described the group as *very helpful*, sharing that the sessions met or exceeded their expectations.

Well-Being Benefits

Many reported noticeable improvements in their mental health, stress management, and overall sense of well-being.

Group Dynamics

The group's success was strongly linked to mutual respect, cooperation, and the acceptance of differences among members.

“I learned that I’m not alone — we all share similar struggles, and we can heal together.”

Anonymous Feedback of Interpreters

Please use the following scale to evaluate your experience in our group

- 1- Strongly Disagree
- 2- Disagree
- 3- Neutral
- 4- Agree
- 5- Strongly agree.

Please evaluate the following statements:

- 1) The topics and content of the group seemed helpful to the clients
- 2) I found skills and practice useful for the clients.
- 3) Group discussions were helpful and useful for the clients.
- 4) Connections made between participants seemed helpful to them.
- 5) As an interpreter, I was able to connect well with the facilitators.
- 6) As an interpreter, I was able to connect well with the participants.
- 7) The group felt like a safe place for me as an interpreter.
- 8) The group seemed like a safe place for the participants.
- 9) I was comfortable interpreting for the number of participants I had.
- 10) As an interpreter, I was comfortable with having 3 languages spoken (Ukrainian, Farsi/Dari, and English).
- 11) Overall, the group met my expectations as an interpreter.
- 12) I would recommend this group to others who had difficult experiences.
- 13) The planning meetings prepared me sufficiently for my role as an interpreter

What is something that could be improved for the next group of participants? What is something we could improve for the next interpreters?

Are there any topics you wish we covered more of or less?

Is there anything we did not address that you hoped we would?

Were there enough sessions?

What do you think was the most helpful part of the group?

Please include any other comments or feedback that you have for us:

Key Findings

Interpreters play a key role in building trust and safety in Trauma Stabilization Groups.

After each cycle, they share feedback and reflections.

- All responded “agree” or “strongly agree” to evaluation statements.
- They emphasized collaboration, emotional awareness, and clear communication.
- Many described personal and professional growth.
- One interpreter shared: **“This program helps interpreters not only *translate words but also connect hearts and emotions.*”**

Change We Have Noted

Since the launch of the Trauma Stabilization Groups, several positive trends have emerged:

- **Growing demand** — a consistent waitlist shows the program's strong reputation and relevance.
- **Word of mouth** — many participants join through personal recommendations from past group members.
- **Self-referrals** — increasing number of individuals proactively reaching out for support.
- **Re-engagement** — previous participants returning to other wellness activities or volunteering to help new groups.

These changes reflect a community that is healing, sharing, and supporting one another beyond the group itself.



Success Story: Ukrainian Choir

Client Testimonials

“I’m both happy and a little jealous for those who will attend next — because here, I found silence, peace, and the warmth of sincere Canadian hearts.”

“I learned many new things and began to look at stress differently, which means my reactions will never be the same.”

“Because of this group, I’ve become more aware of my emotions, behavior, and decision-making.”

“After the tragedy in Ukraine, meeting this group helped me adapt, find new friends, and see life differently.”

“I was skeptical at first about the group, but I have learned so much. I used to ignore my emotions and feelings, but now I know better. Thank you for providing this calm and safe space.”

“It was fruitful for me joining the group. I am grateful because I have learned new knowledge and I am applying it in my daily life. Thank you so much.”

“My hand used to go numb — I was anxious and thought I was losing control of it. I didn’t realize it was stress-related until I joined this group. After practicing the skills, the feeling changed — and I started to laugh again.”

“I was so lonely. But during these ten weeks I have found big progress. I have less worry, and my mindset is better. I have become a better person. My life has progressed.”

“I was skeptical at first — different cultures, languages, and experiences — but this group turned out to be helpful. Thank you so much.”

“I have learned a lot of skills and have become more resilient.”

“I didn’t realize how helpful this would be. The most important thing I learned was to separate *noise* from *signal* in my worries — and I practice it every night.”

Thank you!



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