

SURVIVORS  
HEAL + THRIVE  
BOOK



2020

# TO ALL SURVIVORS,

You matter. We believe you.  
You are so valuable.  
You are the reason we do what we do.



Women and Gender  
Equality Canada

Femmes et Égalité  
des genres Canada

**All art by YallaRoza.**

# FOREWORD

Through our partnerships with the City of Toronto and WAGE (Women and Gender Equality Canada), we were funded from July 2019-2020 to host and deliver a year of free workshops and resources for survivors of gender-based violence. We wanted to create something that celebrates survivors' ability to reclaim and thrive across experiences. Topics ranged from healing the body, surviving trauma, thriving in community, and reclaiming our voices, stories, and truths. They highlighted the expertise, knowledge, healing, power, skill, and advice of community leaders and survivors. Workshops were 2-3 hours and held 10-15 people (+ the facilitator, a staff member, and a peer supporter). We had the honour serve over 200 survivors through 15 community-based and survivor-centred workshops, in person and online.

At the end of our series, community knowledge was translated into:

- Our online [Resources for Survivors](#) package. This curated guide offers diverse supports, resources, and services for all survivors of gender-based and sexual violence. This is a living document that we will be updating and maintained with community input.
- This Survivors Heal + Thrive Book, which is a curated combination of art, affirmations, and facilitator knowledge for survivors. This means that facilitators are able to share their knowledge and the Dandelion Initiative is able to amplify their skills beyond the people who attended each workshop.

Thank you to Micah and Laur, without you both none of this would have been possible. You are both a light in our communities and we thank you for your hard work and dedication throughout this entire series. Thank you to Toronto Rape Crisis Centre / Multicultural Women Against Rape for their partnership and endless, valued work. Thank you to Yalla Roza for illustrating this book based on photographs of Dandelion Events through the years, using affirmations we hold dear. Your work radiates joy.

We hope this book serves as a reminder of the incredible knowledge and power survivors hold and how beautiful our lives can be when we support one another.

Viktoria Belle (she/her)  
Executive Director & Founder

# INTRODUCTION

## **A SERIES FOR SURVIVORS TO HEAL AND THRIVE, TOGETHER.**

In July 2019, we had the foundation set for a year's worth of survivor-centred healing. Little did we know that the program, initially aiming to engage around 60 survivors with 6 workshops, would reach 200+ survivors with 15 workshops. Our three-person-capacity office also gave us the gift of strengthening our connections with community spaces like Unit 2, Tranzac Club, Kula Yoga Studio, Milk Glass, Union Yoga + Wellness, Glad Day Bookshop, and the Toronto Public Library. We thank you all for offering a space for survivors.

When safer spaces are created, bravery follows. Watching survivors of all genders enter, often nervously and knowing no one, then assert their autonomy and value was transformative. For many, the Heal + Thrive series was their first healing space, their first acknowledgement of survivorhood. Survivors across experiences, some new in their trauma, some ongoing, and some twenty years past the experience, came together as a community in ways that honored both their shared and unshared experiences.

This project was funded by the City of Toronto. We are so thankful and we want to continue healing and thriving. Our future vision for our survivor programming is to offer a:

- Multi-workshop survivor-centred peer support skills program to give our communities the tools to support one another in ways that prioritize autonomy, justice, consent, and healing.
- Heal + Thrive cohort program where the same 10-15 people will spend multiple months building tools and community together through trauma-informed, survivor-centred workshops and care.

These aren't far off goals. We can achieve them with your support.

## **THE IMPACTS OF THE WORK SPEAKS FOR THEMSELVES.**

Through our Heal + Thrive series, participants felt more resourced and empowered. We wove stronger nets, every new stitch pointing to where support can be found: "it's great to know that as things happen and triggers arise there's still a safe place to come. I've never experienced that" (Survivor, 2020).

Phonebooks were filled as we became aware of the wealth of trustworthy people in our city: "overall feeling better knowing there's a whole community full of beautiful and strong people" (Survivor, 2020).

We fine-tuned our maps and filled our bags with equipment to navigate our journeys: "I've been geared up and given a shield of protection" (Survivor, 2019).

Most importantly, we externalized harm that was never our fault to begin with. For more than 50 concentrated hours (and many more hours of planning) we asserted, again and again, that survivors deserve to, can, and will, heal and thrive.

Thank you for sharing space with us.

To continuing.

Micah (they/them)  
Program Coordinator

# YAMI MSOSA

*SEEDS Yoga*

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*"When and if you feel ready, I'm inviting you to breathe in in a way that feels most authentic to you."*

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## The person

Yami (Ze/Hir) is a grassroots community organizer and movement practitioner that has over ten years of experience supporting survivors of sexual, racial, and gender-based violence. Yami is interested in decolonial anti-racist practices of healing justice that center the most marginalized and support the healing and thriving of folxs. Ze is a member of Brown Girls Yoga Collective and Restore Collective with Hill Insider. Yami founded SEEDS yoga in May 2017.



## The work

SEEDS Yoga is a series of classes that center healing-centred engagement/trauma-informed practices that incorporates teaching methods of Transcending Sexual Trauma Through Yoga with Zabie Yamaski. SEEDS Yoga is about connection and choice, allowing participants to choose the level of engagement with body and breath. Thriving can look different, sometimes it is moving for 60 minutes or becoming conscious of breath or even just showing up. SEEDS is about reclaiming connection to yourself on your own terms.

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I MAY BE WOUNDED,  
BUT I AM NOT  
BROKEN



# MAYA NADEEM

*Reclaiming the Body After Sexual Assault, Reclaiming Space: Taking Back Your Power, Feeling our Feet on the Ground*

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## The person

Maya (she/her) is a Trauma Informed Coach and Facilitator who has been immersed in community healing and support work since 2007. Passionately committed to her own trauma healing journey and creativity, Maya created the Heart of Flow Method combining creative expression and movement to help others transform their struggles and reach desired goals while softly easing into connection with their bodies and emotional landscapes. Her unique approach helps build self worth, emotional resiliency and well being, equipping people with life long resources and deeply nourishing support. With a BA in Sociology from University of Toronto, she has post grad training in Spiritual Psychotherapy from Transformational Arts College, and over 150 hours of certification in Creative Empowerment Facilitation from PYE global. She is a certified Relationship Coach also trained in Trauma Informed Movement and Trauma Sensitive Mindful Meditation. As part of the Dandelion Initiative family she facilitates workshops for survivors of gendered violence. She has thirteen years of experience volunteering at the Toronto Distress Centre as a distress responder and grief facilitator for survivors of suicide and homicide loss.



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## The work

Maya's work with survivors focuses on helping them softly ease their way back into connection with themselves and their bodies so they can reclaim their right to take up space and assert healthy boundaries. It provides resources and tools that are accessible to use and integrate into their lives so they can feel resourced and cultivate stable ground within themselves. A sense of humour and playfulness helps balance the depth of the work we do together as difficult emotions are processed to expand the capacity for feeling joy and intimacy.



TAKE A BREATHE, I GOT THIS FAR, KEEP GOING



# VIKTORIA BELLE

*Surviving Behind the Bar, Healing Through Monsters, Survivor-Centred Peer Support*

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## The person

Viktoria (she/her) studied in education and trauma/recovery, receiving honours for community advocacy and program development. She went onto teach and work in the early years sector on and off the floor until 2016 when she left her beloved position at the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care and started the Dandelion Initiative, where she is now the Executive Director and Educator/Peer Support Counselor as part of a small team of 2-3 staff. She is a survivor, Romani immigrant, LGBTQ+ community member and lives in Ontario with her wife and dog, Buffy.



## The work

Healing Through Monsters is a trauma care workshop that uses storytelling, narrative, and ritual to guide participants in creating their own monster or creature to protect them through flashbacks and triggers. Participants were able to leave this workshop with one more tool, ally or protector for times when we need them the most.

Surviving Behind the Bar is a survivor-centred workshop for women working in the nightlife industry over the holidays. Living with trauma can make the rush of the holidays even harder on our bodies, spirits, and minds. We cover a range of trauma care, resiliency tools and communication boundaries to empower us through a guided conversation and knowledge sharing.

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WE DO NOT HEAL  
AS COMPETITORS  
WE HEAL AS A  
COMMUNITY



# SHADA MORRIS

*R o o t e d*

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## The person

Shada Morris (she/her) is the founder & CEO of Forè, a botanical design studio based in Toronto. Growing up you could either find her in a garden or in a tree. From an early age she knew being surrounded by nature brought her a sense of calm and connection and her purpose is to share that feeling. Forè combines her love for nature with design to create breathable interiors that not only look good but are good for you.



## The work

R o o t e d was a terrarium building workshop where participants chose from a wide selection of succulents, cacti and decorative accessories to create their own mini ecosystem. Collectively, we were able to take the time and space to create something beautiful while learning to assess the needs of plants, creating a deeper connection with them. In turn, we were able to create a deeper connection with ourselves as we got to explore what we need to not only grow but thrive in our given/chosen environment.

**LEARN MORE**

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WRITING A NEW  
STORY IS PART OF MY  
— HEALING —



# JUNGLE FLOWER

*A Room of One's Own*

## The person

Jungle Flower (she/her) is a Toronto based poet, photographer, interviewer, and humanitarian. Over the course of her 18 year career in the arts, she has travelled the world and worked with high profile personalities and entertainers—but nothing has impacted her life more than her work within the survivor community.

Her humanitarian journey began after she escaped a psychologically abusive relationship at the age of 21. Since then she has sought out ways to add positivity to the world, discovering her purpose in 2012 when she founded Reclaim Your Voice, an organization that curates safe spaces where people who have experienced abuse and sexual violence can share their stories.




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## The work

A certified trauma-informed writing guide, Jungle Flower has developed workshops that support survivors of abuse and sexual violence on their healing journeys. These sessions focus on writing/sharing ones story, exercising the imagination, creating boundaries, and self forgiveness—all practices which studies have shown are monumental to the healing journey.





I DESERVE TO FEEL  
JOY, IN MY BODY AND  
IN MY SOUL.

# NAS

*Digital Safety and Privacy*

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## The person

Nas (she/her) is a Cybersecurity and Management consultant based out of Toronto. A seasoned Non-Profit and Charity Professional, Nas has several community recognitions in Leadership and Activism. Nas has served on Boards, Advisory Groups and volunteered for several local organizations including the United Way, UNICEF, Scarborough Women's Centre, UTSC Women's Center, The Redwood and ASAAP. She is a passionate advocate for women's rights and privacy – and committed to making the digital world a safe and positive experience for everyone.



## The work

Survivors deserve safer online spaces. Survivors deserve control. Want to know how to secure your computer? Have concerns around your security online? Concerned about online gender-based violence like cyberstalking and revenge porn? This workshop is designed as an introductory workshop for adults to help manage and control their private information online. Participants will also learn to recognize common threats to their privacy and understand how to implement preventative measures.

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I AM NOT  
ALONE.



# HANA SHAFI

*Art + Affirmations with Frizz Kid*

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## The person

Hana Shafi (she/her) is a writer and artist who illustrates under the name Frizz Kid. Both her visual art and writing frequently explore themes such as feminism, body politics, racism, and pop culture. Her first book, *It Begins With The Body* was recently selected by CBC books as one of the best poetry books of 2018. Her second book, *Small, Broke, and Kind of Dirty* is forthcoming September 22nd with Bookhug Press.



## The work

The affirmation workshop allowed survivors a safe space to get creative and make affirmative messages for themselves that range from soft and gentle to angry and political! It is a low pressure environment, where no prior artistic skills are needed. I designed the affirmation workshop so that survivors could have time to think solely about themselves and their needs. While I hope we can all find that time during our busy days and weeks, for so many of us, we forget to prioritize ourselves. Folks find the workshop helpful because it allots a designated time where you can solely focus on your own feelings, your own truth, and your own forms of expression. It is an absolute joy to see survivors delve into the workshop, use every crayon in the box, access their inner child and have fun making art that serves a healing purpose.

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I DESERVE COMMUNITY  
CARE WHERE I AM SEEN  
AND HEARD



# LAUR KELLY

*Trans Care for Resiliency, Survivor-Centred Peer Support*

## The person

Laur's (they/them) work draws on survivor-centred principles, peer support, and their Buddhist practice. They believe that recovery is an ongoing possibility through creating safe moments, and restoring agency and self-worth. They are deeply invested in making mindfulness accessible by going slow, listening to survivors, and using trauma-informed practices. They are a counselor and educator with the Dandelion Initiative, a facilitator at the AIDS Bereavement and Resiliency Program of Ontario, a facilitator at 3 Jewels Recovery, and privately offer counseling, community support, and spiritual care.



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## The work

Trans Care for Resiliency is a space for trans survivors to explore what survival and resilience means to them, and how we can centre our transness in the care we give and receive. It is built on a foundation of trauma care, accessibility, and holistic resiliency that honours how we survive and thrive within the body, mind, spirit, and community. This is an interactive workshop that prioritizes sharing, reflection and witnessing.





MY ANGER IS VALID  
IT SHOWS MY  
BOUNDARIES

# YALLA ROZA

*Heal + Thrive Book Illustrations*

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## The person

Roza Nozari, known as YallaRoza (she/her), is an artist based in Tkaronto/Toronto. Her art is deeply rooted in the intersections and layers of who she is: a queer Muslim; an artist of colour; a cis-woman; a survivor of sexual violence; an educator; a settler of colour; an auntie; an activist; and much more.



## The work

YallaRoza uses her art to tell stories of trauma and healing, of oppression and injustice, and of both collective and individual resistance and care. Her art centres the stories of those often erased from our archives of “survivors,” mental health and wellness — those of queer, trans and two-spirit people; of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, Person(s) of Colour); of Muslims; of femmes and non-binary folks; and of many more.

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# FROM SURVIVORS

## Claiming Survivorhood

- "I think too though that just showing up, which was in a way admitting to being a survivor publicly for the first time, has been an incredibly important step on my journey. I feel like there's been a real shift forward for me." (Reclaiming the Body)
- "Sometimes I lose touch with how I feel affected by being trans in the world as a survivor and it felt good to be around people sharing these ideas that I didn't realize I needed to discuss." (Trans Care for Resiliency)

## Feeling Resourced

- "Just being encouraged to go slow and easy on my body made me feel so cared for and loving toward myself." (SEEDS)
- "I feel empowered to learn new skills and tools." (Digital Safety & Privacy)
- "I am feeling good that I tried something new and that there was so much to take away from the experience." (Art + Affirmations with Frizz Kid)

## Finding Community

- "I am really grateful for the opportunity to be a part of this. I needed it. It made my heart feel full and felt good to connect and talk to other women." (R o o t e d)
- "It made me feel like healing is possible & support is available in the community." (Reclaiming Space)
- "Overall feeling better knowing there's a whole community full of beautiful and strong people." (A Room of One's Own)
- "It really was a lovely experience and very much appreciated. It's nice to get together with others who understand you and make something beautiful, so thank you all for that experience." (R o o t e d)
- "Can't think of an organization that is this effective at creating safe spaces." (A Room of One's Own)
- "I'm feeling better overall - like I've been geared up and given a shield of protection. I felt so alone for so long and this truly helped me begin to climb out of this well." (Healing Through Monsters)



# Who We Are

*BY AND FOR SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE*

The Dandelion Initiative is a non-profit organization founded and led by survivors of sexual violence for survivors of sexual violence. We prioritize women, 2SLGBTQ+ survivors, racialized, and marginalized survivors. We fundamentally believe in the power of education as a form of resistance to gender-based violence. We work under an intersectional, trauma care framework and apply survivor-centric practices to all of our work.

The dandelion is symbolic of the resiliency of survivors of sexual assault and violence. It represents strength and the ability to grow and thrive in the worst conditions. Our intention as an organization is part advocacy and education but also project-based initiatives which partner with cross-sector supporters and promote internationality, community and survivor-centred practices. We fundamentally believe every survivor of sexual assault and violence has a right to a future that is not dictated by their past. Together we can thrive.



**Find more resources [here](http://www.dandelioninitiative.ca).**  
**[www.dandelioninitiative.ca](http://www.dandelioninitiative.ca)**