



# KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE REPORT

## Mental Health Promotion in Immigrant and Refugee Serving Organizations



Funded by:

Immigration, Refugees  
and Citizenship Canada

Financé par :

Immigration, Réfugiés  
et Citoyenneté Canada

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## Background

The Mental Health Promotion in Immigrant and Refugee Serving Organizations Project (MHP Project) is funded by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) through the Settlement Program Service Delivery Improvements (SDI) Funding Stream. As the lead organization on this project, the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI) partnered with community organizations across three sectors (immigrant settlement, primary care and mental health) to

carry out the project over three years (2018 – 2021). The project’s overall goal was to build the capacity of immigrant and refugee serving organizations (ISOs) to promote newcomer mental health (MH) and wellbeing and increase their capacity to respond to mental health issues. The project aimed to strengthen collaboration and partnerships between the three sectors through the development and implementation of the integrated mental health promotion (MHP) model.



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## Project Partners

Access Alliance Multicultural Health and Community Services  
Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture  
Canadian Mental health Association – Ontario Division  
COSTI Immigrant Services  
Crossroads Refugee Clinic Women’s College Hospital  
Hong Fook Mental Health Association  
Newcomer Centre of Peel  
The Neighbourhood Organization  
Mennonite New Life Centre of Toronto  
Parkdale Queen West Community Health Centre  
Polycultural Immigrant Community Services  
Rexdale Women’s Centre  
Toronto South Local Immigration Partnership Project  
Women’s Health in Women’s Hands Community Health Centre



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# Overview & Agenda

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## Overview

On March 2nd & 3rd, 2021, OCASI - Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants hosted a Knowledge Exchange Event on the topic of Mental Health Promotion in Immigrant and Refugee Serving Organizations. Over the three years, OCASI has been working closely with partners to develop, implement and evaluate an Integrated Mental Health Promotion Service Delivery Model in addition to delivering ongoing mental health capacity training and developing guidelines and courses on Trauma and Violence Informed approaches.

The focus of the event was to provide an overview of the project over the last three years, the accomplishments, challenges, issues, and what can be done to move forward beyond this project. The event also shared the lessons learned, recommendations and preliminary findings from the project evaluation.

The two-day exchange brought together key players and professionals across immigrant and refugee serving organizations, primary and mental health care, leaders, researchers, and funders.

The Key Objectives of the event were:

- Share lessons learned from the implementation of the Mental Health Integrated Service Delivery Model
- Share the experiences, challenges, and triumphs of organizations that have implemented the model
- Enhance cross-sectoral collaboration between settlement, primary care, and mental health sectors
- Implementation of OCASI Trauma and Violence Informed guidelines at Immigrant and Refugee Serving organizations
- Capacity building and knowledge sharing on Trauma-informed care and practice approach at work
- Interactive discussion, ideas and planning on the future for mental health care in the refugee and immigrant-serving sector

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## Agenda: Day 1, March 2<sup>ND</sup>

### Mental Health Promotion: Learnings from the Project

9:30-9:40	<b>Welcome and Overview of Agenda</b> <b>Overview of OCASI's Mental Health Promotion Project</b>	<b>Objectives:</b> Objectives of day 1 centered around sharing the experiences and lessons learned from the project. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The pilot sites involved in the project will share their experiences, challenges, and triumphs.</li><li>• The external evaluator will present recommendations and feedback.</li><li>• Discussion will focus on gathering feedback on the project, scaling up the project, and planning, for the future of mental health in the sector.</li></ul>
9:45-10:00	<b>Mental Health Promotion project Journey - Sajedah Zahraei</b>	
10:00-10:20	<b>Project Pilot Site 1: Mennonite New Life Centre (MNLCT)</b> <b>Speaker:</b> Leticia Esquivel	
10:20-10:40	<b>Project Pilot Site 2: The Neighbourhood Organization (TNO)</b> <b>Speaker:</b> Malini Singh & Yusra Baloch	
10:40-10:50	<b>Break</b>	
10:50-11:10	<b>MNLCT Pilot Site Youth Presentations</b> <b>Speakers:</b> Dena Badawi, Youth presenters: Yolanda Morell, Vivek Modi, Dylan D'Mello	
11:10-11:30	<b>Recommendations and Lessons Learned -Speaker:</b> Sonja Nerad (External evaluator)	
11:30-12:30	<b>Discussion and Q&amp;A:</b> Engaging the audience in cross sectoral discussion of lessons learned, recommendations for the future, and how to implement mental health initiatives in the sector.	

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## Agenda: Day 2, March 3<sup>RD</sup>

### Project Partnership and Approaches to Capacity Building

9:30-9:40	<b>Welcome and Overview of Agenda</b>	11:10-11:30	<b>Hong Fook: Discussing Cross Sectoral Partnership in Project and Implementing Mental Health Initiatives</b> Speaker: Maria Lo
9:45-10:00	<b>Approaches to Capacity Building in the Mental Health Promotion Project</b> Speaker: Aman Sallh & Dena Badawi	11:30-12:30	<b>Discussion and Q&amp;A:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Fostering discussion on cross-sectoral collaboration and capacity building</li><li>• Discussing recommendations for funders and emphasizing need for mental health support</li><li>• Gathering ideas on scaleup of the project and next steps</li></ul>
10:00-10:20	<b>Access Alliance: Discussing Cross-Sectoral Partnership in the Project and Implementing Mental Health Initiatives</b> Speaker: Serena Nudel, Alexandra Hanania Wellness Break		
10:20-10:40	<b>COSTI: Discussing Cross Sectoral Partnership in Project and Implementing Mental Health Initiatives</b> Speaker: Yasmine Dossal		<b>Objectives:</b> Day 2 of the event focused on and fostered discussion around capacity building and cross-sectoral collaboration in the sector.
10:40-10:50	<b>Break : Mindfulness Activity</b> facilitated by Facilitated by Rosalie Ricupati (COSTI)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Discussing strategies to build the capacity of organizations to respond to the mental health needs of clients, staff, and management.</li></ul>
10:50-11:10	<b>CCVT: Discussing Cross Sectoral Partnership in Project and Implementing Mental Health Initiatives</b> Speaker: Teresa Dremetsikas		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sharing recommendations for the future and planning for scale-up of the project.</li></ul>



Bios



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## **Sajedah Zahraei – OCASI**

Sajedah Zahraei is Senior Manager of Professional Development and Training at OCASI - Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants. She completed her MSW and Ph.D. at the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto. Her research interests include social determinants of immigrant and refugee mental health, women, war, structural violence, and trauma. Sajedah has 20 years of experience in the mental health field with a particular focus on equity, inclusion, community development, community-based research, partnerships, and collaborations addressing the needs of racialized communities with mental health and addiction issues.

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## **TNO-The Neighbourhood Organization - Malini Singh**

Malini Singh is a social development specialist who is both passionate about gender equality and committed to supporting social justice and community-building. Malini works as a professional at TNO- The Neighbourhood Organization, leading and strengthening projects in the areas of settlement, community and social service delivery. With a background in social work and counselling, Malini has worked as an advocate for ARAO inclusive change for women and girls, women's empowerment, prevention of violence, and work in anti-trafficking.

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## **TNO-The Neighbourhood Organization - Yusra Baloch**

Yusra Baloch is currently a Mental Health Worker at TNO-The Neighbourhood Organization where she provides mental health support to the newcomer and refugee youth. She conducts workshops on various mental health topics and does one on one sessions to support clients with their mental health and well-being. Yusra is also adept at providing services in multiple languages which include Balochi, English and Urdu. Yusra obtained her Bachelor of Social Work from Ryerson University and Master of Social Work from the University of Toronto.

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## **MNLCT - Mennonite New Life Centre of Toronto- Leticia Esquivel**

Leticia Esquivel is a member of the Colleges of Registered Psychotherapists in Ontario (CRPO) and the Ontario Association of Mental Health (OAMH). She manages the Community Mental Health program at the Mennonite New Life Centre of Toronto. In addition to her supervisory duties, Leticia provides counselling services to immigrants and refugees dealing with migration stress, depression, anxiety, family issues and interpersonal conflicts. She actively promotes psychoeducational workshops in the community. Most recently she manages two innovative initiatives that incorporate holistic mental health and settlement services: Helping Our Newcomers Prepare for Employment Success (HOPES) and Language Instruction Giving Hopes to Trauma Survivors (LIGHTS) programs.

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## **Access Alliance - Serena Nudel**

Serena Nudel's career has focused on the management of programs dedicated to promoting the individual and community well-being of vulnerable populations, specifically, utilizing an anti-oppressive lens to address social determinants of health. With a Master of Social Work Degree and a Post-Graduate Degree in Art Therapy, she has been able to apply innovative strategies to ensure responsiveness of programming and high engagement of the community. Her research has focused on supporting the wellbeing of racialized and newcomer youth and improving access to services for LGBTQ+ Newcomers.

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## **Access Alliance - Alexandra (Art Therapist)**

Alexandra Hanania is an art therapy thesis candidate at the Toronto Art Therapy Institute. She runs mindfulness and textile-based art therapy groups at Sheena's Place in addition to co-facilitating their BIPOC support group. Alexandra works with newcomers and refugees at non-profits around the Toronto area. She takes a person-centred, psychodynamic, and trauma-informed approach to her therapeutic work. She believes in practising cultural humility and tries to create a space that welcomes the unique experiences of all people.

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## **COSTI - Yasmine Dossal**

Yasmine has a Master's degree in Psychology, a Certificate in Professional Studies in Education from the U.K., and obtained accreditation as a Teacher Trainer from the U.K. Yasmine is the Director of Social Services at COSTI in Toronto. She oversees the administration of a large division that provides multiple services to refugees and newcomers to Canada, with a particular focus on resettlement of refugees, women, youth and seniors. She is also responsible for the Mental Health Services in her division as well as the Community Development programs offered across the province of Ontario, such as the Problem Gambling Program, Gender-Based Violence, Dementia and Neighbors Friends and Family program.

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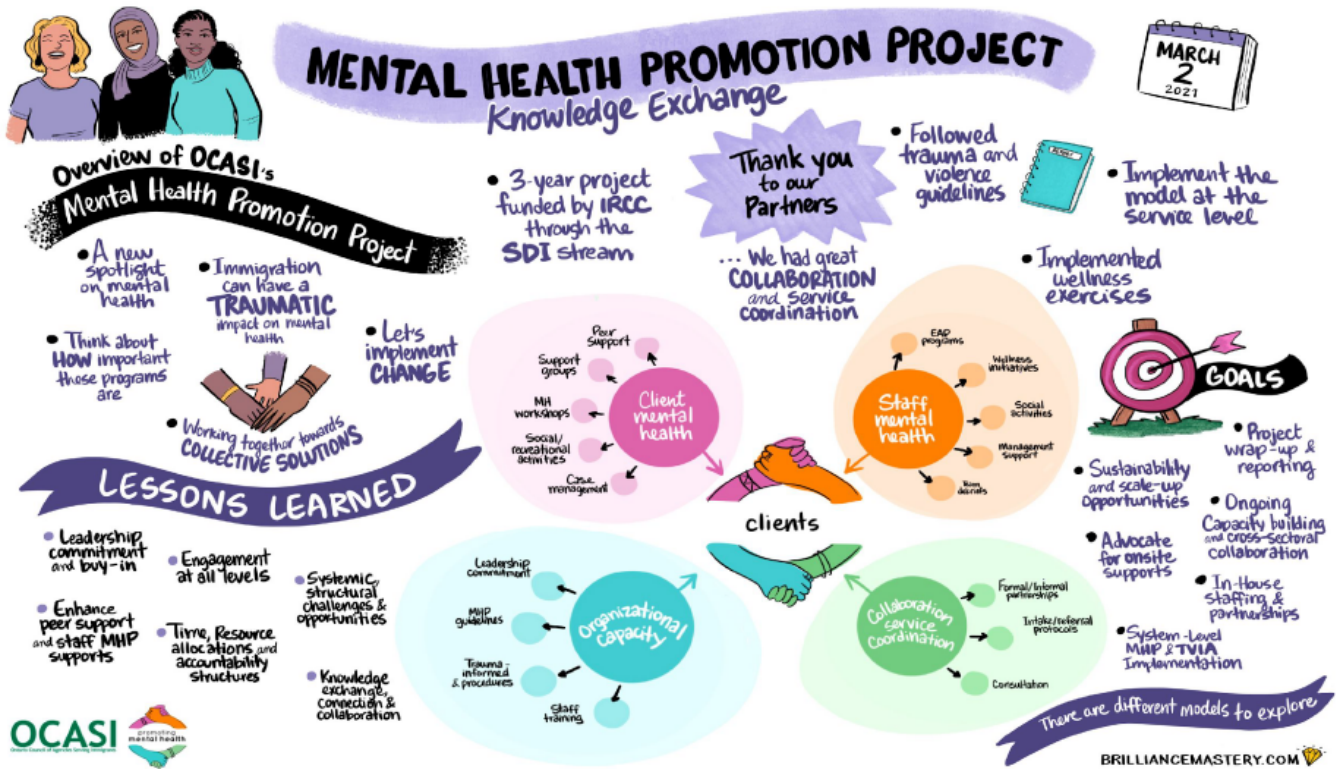
## **Teresa Dremetsikas: CCVT**

Teresa Dremetsikas is a program manager at the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture. Medical Doctor from Mexico has worked for CCVT for several years, carrying out different tasks including: settlement services, facilitation and coordination of support groups, design and evaluation of programs and services, facilitation of training sessions on different aspects of refugee mental Health, particularly torture and trauma. Training session's participants have included among other: Human Rights Defenders in different parts of the world, Locally Nationally and internationally as well as: Settlement Service Organizations, Social and Community Services, Immigration Department, Refugee Board, External Affairs and Visa officers.



# Session Summaries

Day 1: March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2021



## Session 1: Mental Health Promotion project journey – Sajedah Zahraei

The presentation focused on the goals and the objectives of the project, development of the integrated service model, lesson learned and challenges. OCASI acknowledged all the project partners involved in all aspects of the project for the last three years including proposal development, guideline development, design of the model, providing ongoing workshops and trainings, and participating in the monthly advisory meetings. Four of the partners formally piloted the project at their agency.

- The three-year project started with the establishment of the advisory committee, conducting the need assessment and environmental scan to look at the promising

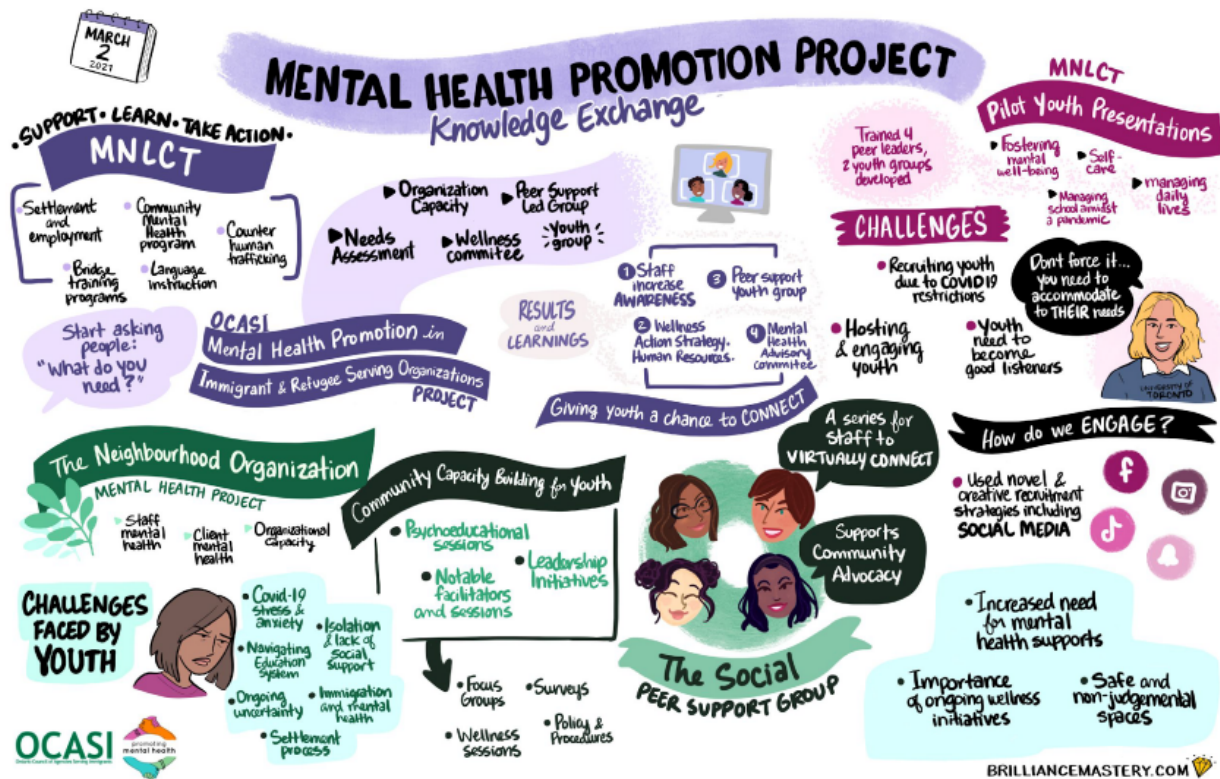
practice. Based on the findings the integrated service model was developed which is a client-centred model with four components: Client mental, staff mental health, organizational capacity, and collaboration.

- In 2019-2020 Rexdale Women Centre and Polyculture Immigration services were the first pilot site to implement the model. In 2020-21 OCASI piloted the model at The Neighborhood Organization and Mennonite New Life Center.
- TVIA guidelines and course were launched in 2020. These guidelines were not part of the initial project plan and evolved during the project. It was the integration of anti-racism and anti-oppressive, taking the cultural care approach, structural and historical issues into account. OCASI collaborated

with project partners and delivered capacity-building training for the sector.

The project is finalizing the evaluation report and developing the overall report. The feedback gathered from this event will be presented to the advisory committee to discuss the

sustainability and scaling up of the opportunities. OCASI is also looking at other opportunities for cross-sector collaboration and will continue to advocate for the need for onsite mental health support, holistic and wrap-around services for the newcomer population.



## Session 2&3: Pilot Project sites: Leticia Esquivel (MNLCT), Malini Singh (TNO)

The Neighborhood Organization and Mennonite New Life Center shared their experience implementing the model at their agencies, their success, and challenges.

The implementation of the project went through different phases: need assessment, focus groups, interviews with leadership, staff, and clients to better understand the needs in relation to mental health. Both agencies selected newcomer youth as their target population and had a positive experience from the peer support group.

The staff at the pilot sites participated in the TVIA training facilitated by OCASI and reported increased knowledge and understanding of the client's potential exposure to traumatic events and implications.

By involving in this project, both organizations started looking at the mental health and wellbeing of their staff, especially during the pandemic. A staff wellness committee was created, wellness activities were

formalized which had a positive impact on staff mental health and open conversation around staff mental health to end stigma.

Both project partners shared recommendations to increase programs for youth, create safer workplaces through policies, establish working groups with health experts and facilitate connections between mental health and primary care to have onsite support.

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## **Session 4: Pilot Site Youth Presentations – MNLCT Peer leaders**

- The target population for the pilot sites was based on the need assessment findings done at the beginning of the project. Some of the topics for the groups were fostering mental health wellbeing, self-care, managing daily lives, managing schools amidst a pandemic etc.
- The peer leaders were recruited from the community and were trained by the OCASI staff using CMHA's 'Peer group facilitator training program'. Peers carried out all aspects of the programs, recruited participants, promoting the program, decided topics, designing the material, and participated in the final evaluation. The peers had a lot of autonomy and decision-making power to host the program which

was the unique component of the model. Due to COVID restrictions, peer leaders used novel and creative strategies including, social media to help promote programs.

- The videos highlighted and shared the experience of the peers as there were both successes and challenges such as difficulty engaging them in the different activities and, the group had to figure out ways to engage all youth in the activities.
- The peers also suggested to accommodate youth needs, give them space and time to open up instead of enforcing anything upon them.

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## Session 5: Recommendations and Lessons Learned - Sonja Nerad

The presentation shared the finding and the lessons learned from the pilot sites.

Evaluation framework: included evaluating the different phases and components of the project, collected and reviewed project data.

The evaluation framework was based on the four areas of project activity:

- Foundation for Success: Established the Advisory Committee and conducted the Needs Assessment/Environmental Scan
- MHP Model: Designed and pilot tested the MHP Model with 4 sites
- Training and Capacity Building: Developed and delivered professional development programs
- Knowledge Exchange: Undertook evaluation, learning and knowledge exchange

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### Results:

- Client mental health: improved self-esteem and confidence and improved knowledge and skills to address loneliness, depression, anxiety, relationships, etc.
- Staff mental health: Provide leadership and management supports to sustain commitment, assess staff wellness needs on a regular basis, sustain wellness committees.
- Organization capacity: Leverage the cross-sector collaboration, implement a range of partnerships to address needs – shared care, referral pathways, advocate to prioritize and plan for newcomer mental health at local health planning tables, OHTs, LIPs.
- Capacity: ~ 1,949 people participated in training over 3 years.

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### Recommendation:

- Build management competency and provide supports for MH needs
- Commit financial resources Pursue strategic collaboration
- Undertake system-level strategy for formal inter-sectoral partnerships and agreements between immigrant settlement and health/mental health sectors
- Recognize that mental health enables newcomers to achieve immediate and intermediate settlement and integration outcomes
- Add mental health services to the list of core settlement programs
- Undertake cross-governmental collaboration to foster and promote sustainable models of MH
- Incentivize (financial) physicians and MH providers to serve newcomers
- Equitable allocation/reallocation of MH system resources



# Session Summaries

Day 2: March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2021





## Session 1: Approaches to Capacity Building in the MHP Project Aman Sallh - Dena Badawi

The presentation focused on framing capacity building as one of the components of the service model. A strength and unique feature of the project was utilizing partnerships in the sector to develop and deliver capacity-building initiatives. The main aim was to strengthen the response of the sector to mental health needs in newcomer populations through improving skills in client care, improving staff wellness, and building organizational capacity and mental health policy.

Approaches to Capacity Building in the MHP Project:

1. Developing and facilitating capacity building initiatives (i.e. webinars, workshops, training, online course)
2. Hosting evidence-based skills training and certification
3. Improving organizational capacity through policy development and guidelines

Due to the pandemic, OCASI shifted the model to an entirely virtual platform, and it allowed it to reach a larger and more diverse audience across the province.

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## Session 2 & 3: Discussing Cross-Sectoral Partnership in the Project and Implementing Mental Health Initiatives: Serena Nudel and Alexandra Hanania, Yasmin Dossal

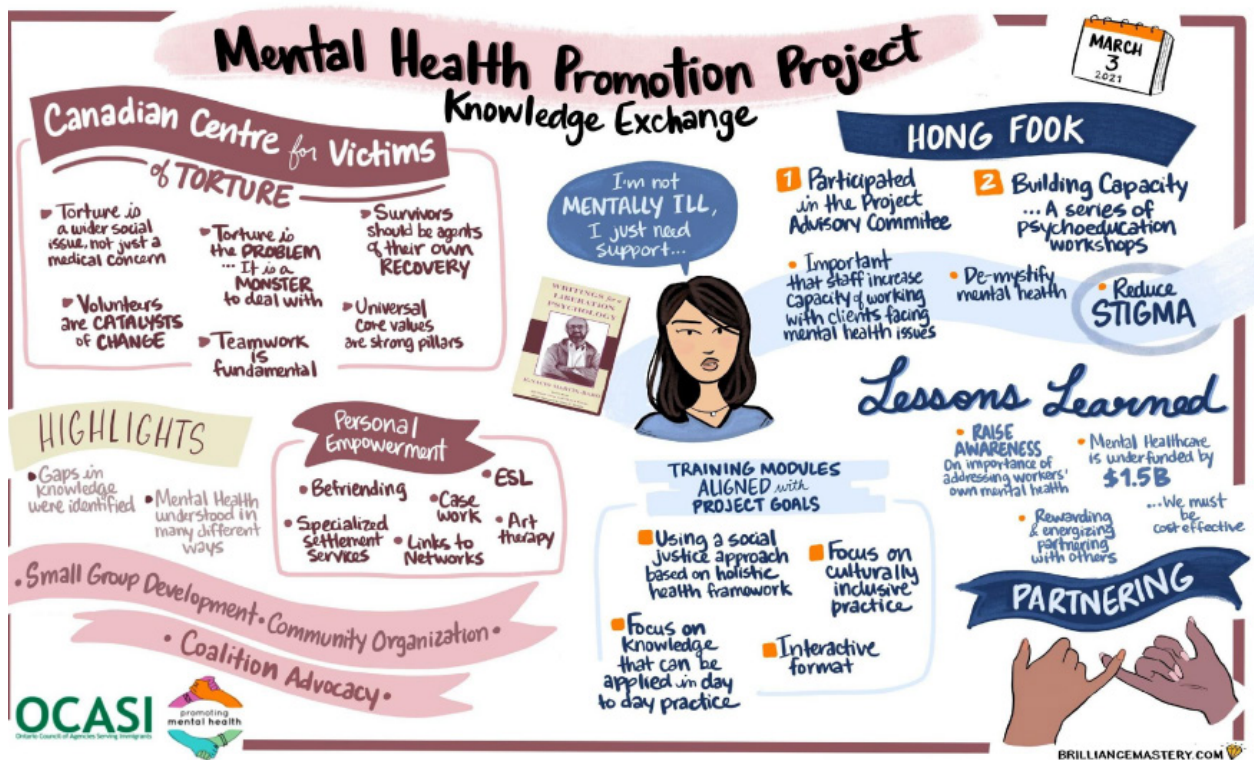
Serena Nudel and Alexandra Hanania from Access Alliance shared their art therapy embroidery program for Arabic women to address their mental health, domestic violence, and settlement concerns. The women reflected their experiences through symbolically embroidered stories. The program significantly reduced social and emotional isolation and forging a cross-cultural friendship. The program also used an interdisciplinary approach by involving professionals such as community engagement workers, counsellors, and therapists. The group was able to help participants to reduce and cope with stress, promote relaxation, express emotion through embroidery and feeling a sense of self.

Yasmine from COSTI shared Partnerships and collaborations to reduce access barriers. As a project partner, COSTI assisted OCASI in the development of the different phases of the service model and reviewed the TVIA and MH policies guidelines. Additionally, they provided Capacity building and knowledge transfer workshops for front-line workers in the settlement sector.

Insights as a member of the Advisory Committee: Burnout in the sector is an invisible issue; self-care is important, well being of clients and should be given priority at all levels of government, demand for more Mental Health Promotion Pilot initiatives within the GTA.

The presentation also suggested:

- To bring together a pool of experts to find sustainable and replicable solutions, builds connections between service users, service providers, and institutions.
- Have Sustainable funding for mental health services, partnership building with primary care and mental health services, Implement trauma-informed care guidelines/policies within the agency Hire qualified staff with specific expertise and competitive salaries.

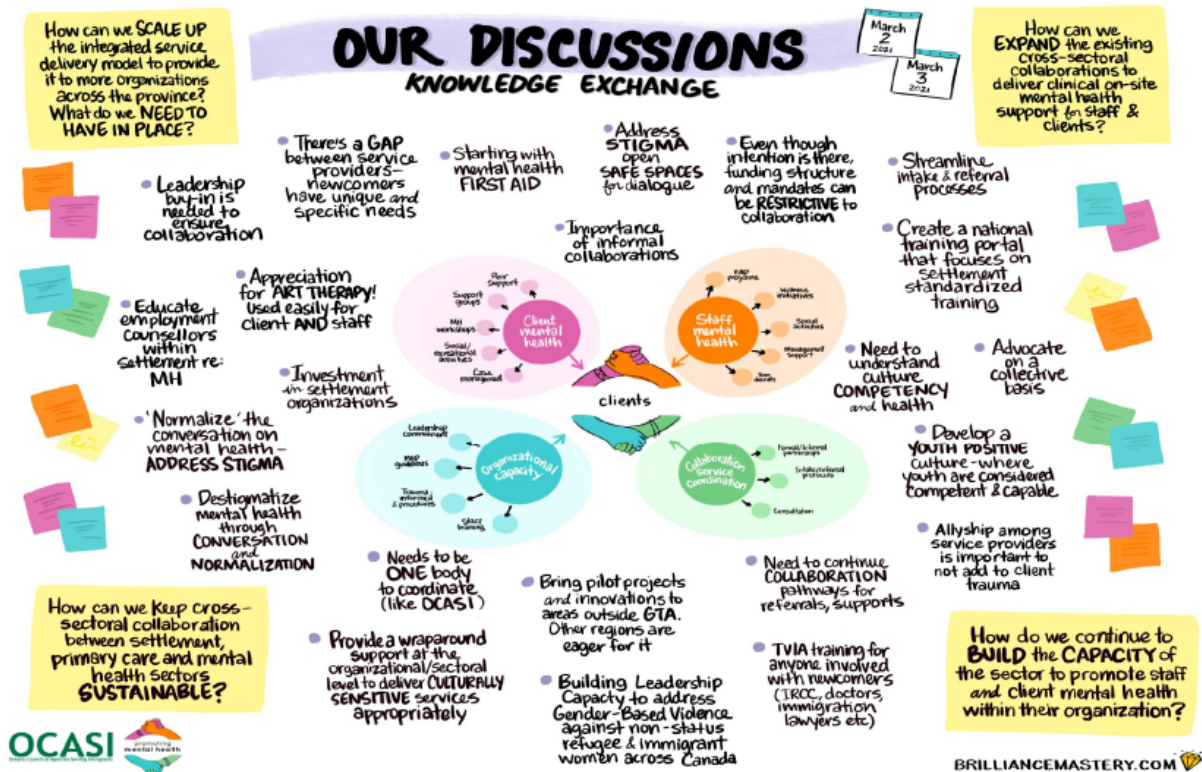


## Session 4: Discussing Cross Sectoral Partnership in Project and Implementing Mental Health Initiatives - Teresa Dremetsikas and Maria Lo

Both presenter Teresa Demetris (CCVT) and Maria Lo (Hong Fook) started with acknowledging OCASI work on supporting staff and leadership mental health at the workplace. The presentations highlighted the cross-sectoral collaboration and their contribution to the project life cycle through capacity building across the sector. Both presenters shared their participation in the advisory committee, opportunity to collaborate with other organizations and

strengthen the existing partnership. The project also gave space to the partners to exchange ideas and grow together. CCVT shared the essential concept of building a model of support to assist survivors of torture and the elements that have shaped their current model and approach. Some elements from CCVT's Trauma-Informed approach were used in developing OCASI TVIA guidelines.

Hong Fook shared their experience in delivering online training in collaboration with OCASI and great appreciation received from the sector.



## Recommendations from the participants:

- Increase funding for mental health services for newcomers.
- Help to identify MH needs in the settlement sector and room for both Standardization and Specialization.
- Settlement agencies staff to increase their capacity in working with clients facing MH issues, especially during a pandemic.
- Invite people with lived experience and field experts to co-present to reduce stigma related to mental health.
- Continue to support a cross-sector knowledge exchange as an effective health promotion approach.
- Resource mobilization and funding is a priority
- Culture-specific training required for front-line workers.
- Tailor the mental health services to address the unique and specific needs of the newcomer population.
- Cross-pollination between settlement, mental health, and clinical support. More room for culturally specific agencies to help with shelters

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## Resources

Video: Youth peer leaders

[bit.ly/ke-youth-leaders](https://bit.ly/ke-youth-leaders) 

Link to the presentation from speakers:

[bit.ly/ke-presentation](https://bit.ly/ke-presentation) 

### Day 1:

OCASI- Mental health Promotion  
project Journey Sajedah Zaheri

[bit.ly/ke-mhp](https://bit.ly/ke-mhp) 

Mennonite New Life Centre (MNLCT)

Speaker: Leticia Esquivel

[bit.ly/ke-mnlct](https://bit.ly/ke-mnlct) 

The Neighbourhood Organization (TNO)

Speaker: Malini Singh & Yusra Baloch


[bit.ly/ke-tno](https://bit.ly/ke-tno) 

MNLCT Pilot Site Youth Presentations

Speakers: Dena Badawi

[bit.ly/ke-mnlct-youth](https://bit.ly/ke-mnlct-youth) 

SN management - Recommendations  
and Lessons Learned

[bit.ly/ke-sn-mgmt](https://bit.ly/ke-sn-mgmt) 

### Day 2

Approaches to Capacity Building in  
the Mental Health Promotion Project

Aman Sallh & Dena Badawi

[bit.ly/ke-capacity-mhi](https://bit.ly/ke-capacity-mhi) 

Access Alliance: Discussing Cross-Sectoral  
Partnership in the Project and Implementing  
Mental Health Initiatives Speaker:

Serena Nudel, Alexandra Hanania

[bit.ly/ke-aa-mhi](https://bit.ly/ke-aa-mhi) 

COSTI: Cross Sectoral Partnership in  
Project and Implementing Mental  
Health Initiatives: Yasmine Dossal

[bit.ly/ke-costi-mhi](https://bit.ly/ke-costi-mhi) 

CCVT: Discussing Cross Sectoral Partnership  
in Project and Implementing Mental  
Health Initiatives: Teresa Dremetsikas

[bit.ly/ke-ccvt-mhi](https://bit.ly/ke-ccvt-mhi) 

Hong Fook: Cross Sectoral Partnership  
in Project and Implementing Mental  
Health Initiatives: Maria Lo

[bit.ly/ke-hf-mhi](https://bit.ly/ke-hf-mhi) 

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