

YWCA Hamilton Safety & Support Hub

*Program Evaluation
2025-2026*

1. ABOUT THE SAFETY AND SUPPORT HUB	3
• About YWCA Hamilton • Overview of the Safety and Support Hub • Gender-based violence in Hamilton • Hub service delivery model • Hub community partners	
2. EVALUATION APPROACH	9
• Program evaluation approach • Key service delivery indicators	
3. PROGRAM EVALUATION	12
• Section 1: Improving safety, independence and well-being • Section 2: Building a coordinated system of care • Section 3: Reaching diverse communities across Hamilton	
4. PARTICIPANT TESTIMONIALS	35
• Sawyer’s story • Helena’s story • Ama’s story	
5. KEY LESSONS LEARNED AND NEXT STEPS	38
6. REFERENCES	40

About YWCA Hamilton

Our Mission

To advance gender equity.

Our Vision

YWCA Hamilton envisions an equitable world where women (cis and trans), girls, Two-Spirit and gender diverse people have the rights and resources to share their own lives and lead their communities.

Our Approach

We co-create solutions with our community, responding to emerging needs through collaboration, innovation, and shared leadership.



Intersectional Feminism



People Centred



Belonging



Responsibility



Partnerships

Overview of the Safety and Support Hub

The Safety and Support Hub is a low-barrier space for women and gender-diverse people and their families who have been affected by gender-based and intimate partner violence. The Hub is operated by YWCA Hamilton in collaboration with community partner organizations.

Located in a central location in downtown Hamilton, the Safety and Support Hub offers coordinated support services including risk assessments and safety planning, assistance with navigating systems and services, mental health support (including free individual and group counselling), employment and training programs, and prevention and early intervention programs.



What makes the Safety and Support Hub different?

The Safety and Support Hub is an innovative coordinated service model that brings a range of services, community partner organizations and types of support together under one roof to provide accessible and trauma-informed system response to survivors of intimate partner and gender-based violence.

The goal is to eliminate the burden survivors of gender-based violence face when trying to navigate disconnected and fragmented services. The team and community partners take care to provide services in a way that is well coordinated and responsive to each individual's needs.



Evidence-Based Model

A hub model, co-locating a range of providers including police, social services, health, legal, and community partners under one roof, is considered best practice for gender-based violence response in Ontario. This model removes the systemic burden survivors otherwise carry of navigating multiple, disconnected agencies at the moment they are most vulnerable. This aligns with the broader evidence base on Coordinated Community Response (CCR) as well, a model with decades of documented use across North America showing that integrating advocacy, justice, and human services increases survivor safety, improves accountability, and closes the gaps that isolated single-agency responses leave open. Coordinated community response programs provide an integrated response to intimate partner violence by community providers and systems, designed to give survivors the resources needed to increase wellbeing and reduce their risk of repeat victimization. YWCA Hamilton has based its hub model on these existing services, tailoring the services to local needs with the goal of expanding partners to strengthen connection with police, legal, and health services to build off the success of the pilot.

Gender-based violence in Hamilton

Women, youth, and gender-diverse people are universally disproportionately affected by gender-based violence. In the city of Hamilton, feelings of safety and security are directly impacted by socio-economic status, ability, gender identity and expression, cultural and racial identity.

Women and gender-diverse individuals face threats to their safety in their everyday lives. However, they become more prone to such safety risks when they are Indigenous, racialized, disabled, elderly, unhoused, or identify as 2SLGBTQIA+. The persistent housing crisis in Hamilton makes the living conditions of women and gender-diverse people even more precarious. Many survivors have reported that their ability to leave abusive situations at home is contingent on housing affordability.

In 2023, the City of Hamilton declared domestic violence an epidemic.

In 2025, according to the Women Abuse Working Group (WAWG) Hamilton Snapshot, there were more than 32,813 women and gender-diverse people facing intersecting experiences of Intimate Partner Violence, Gender-based violence, and homelessness.

To further highlight the challenges survivors face in Hamilton, the WAWG Snapshot also finds:



Gender-based violence can be perpetrated by an intimate partner, but it also includes other kinds of violence that people experience in their homes and community because of their gender identity, sexual orientation, and other identities.

The Safety and Support Hub provides services and supports to women and gender-diverse individuals who are experiencing gender-based violence of any kind, and provides specialized supports to the following groups as they often face intersecting challenges:

- Newcomers, immigrants, and asylum seekers
- Indigenous and racialized individuals
- 2S LGBTQIA+ community
- Children and youth

In 2024, Hamilton Police recorded **297** hate/bias incidents and criminal offences, which is a **35%** increase from the previous year.



Hub service delivery model

The Safety and Support Hub service delivery model brings multiple essential services under one roof by providing a single point of entry, the Hub supports women and gender-diverse individuals to access the wraparound care they need.

Survivors can access services at the Safety and Support Hub all in one location:

Through YWCA Hamilton:

- Gender-based violence case managers
- Prevention and early intervention coordinator
- Economic empowerment workers
- 2S LGBTQIA+ service navigator

In partnership with:

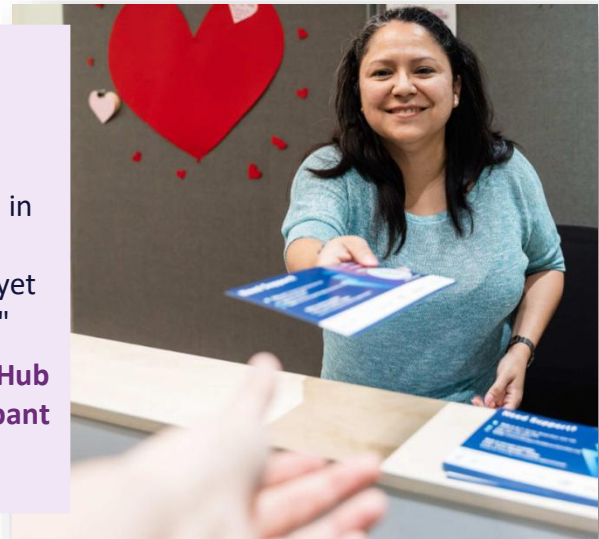
- **CMHA** - Mental health and addictions focused case manager
- **SACHA** - Sexual violence counsellor
- **Native Women's Centre** - Indigenous service navigator

In addition, other funded partners of the Hub (ABRAR, everwell, and Stardust) receive referrals from staff at the Hub to deliver services on and offsite depending on the survivor's needs. Partners are able to book space at the Hub to meet with survivors to help ensure support is provided in a safe and welcoming environment that is familiar to the survivor.

The Hub is also used after hours for community GBV programming, including youth programs, healthy relationship programming, and group counselling.

"I went through hell for two years, going one place after another, they are sending us in circles. I had to figure out everything on my own. And yet here, everything is included."

— **Safety and Support Hub
Program Participant**



Hub community partners

The Safety and Support Hub has a broad network of community and referral partners, meeting quarterly through the YWCA led "Safety and Support Hub Collaboration Table". The aim through this connection is to ensure Hamilton's Safety and Support Hub is integrated, responsive, survivor-centered, and rooted in the realities facing the community.

The Table brings together key community partners to:

- Review and strengthen referral pathways
- Share updates, emerging trends and gaps identified
- Create opportunity for cross sectoral connection and coordination

YWCA Hamilton operates the Safety and Support Hub by offering core funded services alongside the following community partner organizations:

ABRAR Trauma and Mental Health Services

A federal non-profit organization in Hamilton that works to create human-centered, trauma-informed, and culturally safe brave spaces that foster healing, growth, and resilience for newcomers and immigrants by providing affordable mental health support.

Provides free individual and group counselling in an array of languages to survivors of gender-based violence.

Native Women's Centre

The Hamilton Native Women's Centre is a registered charitable organization serving Indigenous women, women-identifying individuals, children, and families in Hamilton since 1976. The Centre provides culturally grounded, trauma-informed support through emergency shelter, transitional housing, outreach, advocacy, violence prevention, trafficking supports, food and emergency assistance, and referrals. Through cultural programming, traditional teachings, ceremonies, and Elder support, it promotes healing, empowerment, cultural connection, and self-determination while collaborating with Indigenous and community partners across Ontario.

A part-time Indigenous Service Navigator works on-site at the Safety and Support Hub.

everwell in Partnership with NuVista Mental Health

everwell provides virtual and accessible counselling services focused on a range of concerns, with online therapy that is relationship-focused, client-driven, and trauma informed.

Individual counselling is available to Safety and Support Hub participants through this partnership.

Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA)

The CMHA Hamilton branch is a non-profit agency providing services to people with serious mental health issues, driven by ethics of collaborative excellence, truth and reconciliation, equity, diversity, inclusivity, social justice, and sustainability.

A full-time Mental Health and Addictions Worker works on-site at the Safety and Support Hub through CMHA Hamilton.

SACHA Sexual Assault Centre

A non-profit, feminist, community-based organization that has worked in Hamilton for over fifty years supporting survivors of sexual violence and working to eliminate sexual violence, guided by education, outreach, community partnerships, coalition building, advocacy, and activism.

A part-time Sexual Violence Counsellor provides on-site support at the Safety and Support Hub.

Stardust Community Cooperative

A community centre created by and for queer, neurodivergent people living in and around Hamilton, offering social and support groups, therapy, counselling, and peer support services.

Individual counselling is available to Safety and Support Hub participants through this partnership.



Program evaluation approach

The YWCA Hamilton and partner organizations began providing support through the Safety and Support Hub model on April 1, 2025 growing to include a physical hub location in the Fall of 2025.

This evaluation covers the first year of the project from April 1, 2025 to March 31, 2026.

The evaluation set out to answer the following questions:



Is the model producing real changes in survivors' safety, independence, and wellbeing?

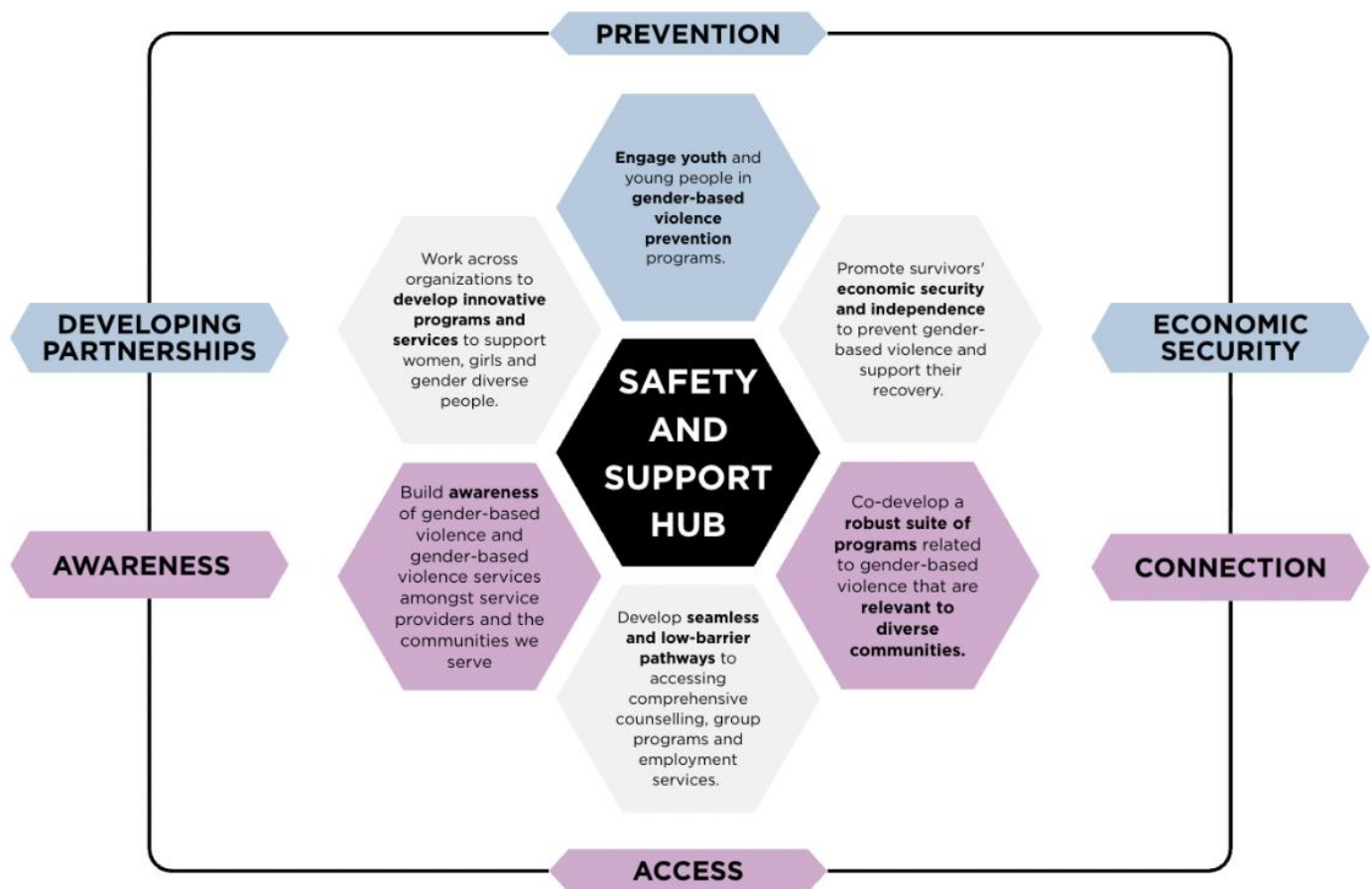
Does bringing services together under one roof actually solve the fragmentation problem experienced by survivors?

Is the Hub reaching the people and communities it was designed to serve?

To answer these questions, the evaluation highlights the key impacts the Safety and Support Hub has had during its first year of operations. To capture a comprehensive view of the first-year outcomes, this impact report draws on diverse perspectives, utilizing data from:

- Qualitative interviews with program participants
- A survey distributed to front-line staff working directly within the Hub
- A survey distributed to survivors accessing services at the Hub
- A survey distributed to community partner organizations
- Data on service utilization from the Safety and Support Hub and community partners

The Safety and Support Hub is focused on:



Key service delivery indicators

Over the past year, YWCA Hamilton and its community partners have made a significant impact in supporting survivors of gender-based violence and their families. The main outcomes expected in the first 1-3 years for this project include:

- Increase awareness and access to gender-based violence services in Hamilton for women, gender-diverse individuals and children, including among immigrant, refugee, and 2S LGBTQIA+ communities.
- Increase knowledge and coping skills for survivors and children who have experienced or witnessed gender-based or family violence.
- Increase connection to resources for survivors to build economic independence.
- Address service gaps to reduce risk for those turned away from shelters by offering centralized safe spaces for connection, support, and safety planning.
- Enhance accessibility by providing seamless referral pathways that link survivors to wraparound supports.

The following results have contributed to reaching those outcomes:



A SERVICE SPOTLIGHT ON NEEDS, BARRIERS AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS WHEN LEAVING IS THE GOAL:

In a review of survivors connected to case management services who identified leaving their relationship and / or current unsafe living situation as a primary goal of service:

- 43 participants out of 159 who engaged in case management support identified leaving as a primary goal – this represents approx. 1/3 of active participants
- Of these individuals:
 - 16% were connected with safe shelter/transitional housing
 - 33% were supported into safe housing (subsidized and private market rentals)
 - 51% neither accessed housing nor shelter at time of evaluation, of these:
 - 11% found an alternate place of safety (family or friends)
 - 40% continue to reside with the individual using violence

- Of individuals who have not accessed shelter and remain living with the individual using violence:
 - 78% declined shelter option due to concerns related to accessing shelter system with children / pets (suitability/stigma/space/accessibility)
 - 12% unable to access due to capacity
 - 10% have identified not being ready at this time.

Top barriers to readiness to leave reported, include:

- Child custody and access concerns
- Financial concerns / loss of assets
- Lethality (fear their partner will kill them/children if they leave)
- Complex trauma impacting mental health and wellness
- Post separation abuse/stalking concerns
- Private market landlords unwilling to rent due to income / family size

100% of survivors wishing to leave their unsafe situation identify that the wrap around supports and services have increased their safety and readiness to take next steps.

As compared to prior to working with the Safety and Support Hub, 100% of survivors indicate that they have improved connections and knowledge of existing community services to support them

3

Program Evaluation

In the following three sections we will be responding to each of the evaluation questions outlined in the evaluation approach. The three sections are:

1. Improving safety, independence and well-being
2. Building a coordinated system of care
3. Reaching diverse communities across Hamilton

SECTION 1: Improving safety, independence and well-being

Environment at the Safety and Support Hub

The Safety and Support Hub provides survivors with a safe and comforting environment in order to support them in accessing services. The Safety and Support Hub is designed to allow survivors to participate in services in a way that feels comfortable and accessible.



The Safety & Support Hub offers a warm welcome to those accessing services.

"I talked to the Safety and Support Hub after the police recommended me to get in reach them, and talk to them because of my case. The first day I came here, I was crying. My husband kept telling me, you have no one, you have no family. He kept telling me this [redacted to maintain privacy], until he physically abused me. He financially abused me, he emotionally abused me. He broke me. After the police arrested him, he cut the lease, he cut the WiFi. When I got here, they told me, you won't be alone."

— **Safety and Support Hub Participant**

"I found the environment welcoming, which made it much easier for me to reach out and get the support I needed"

— **Participant survey response**

"Accessing the hub services was very easy. I learned about the Hub from the YWCA website. The office is at a location that is easily accessible by HSR. The staff are very warm, caring and approachable. I am very happy to have found the hub and I am extremely happy with my caseworker [name]. She has eliminated the overwhelm involved in this whole process. Thank you!"

— **Participant survey response**

Case management supports

Case managers at the Safety and Support Hub connect women and gender-diverse individuals who have experienced violence to a range of comprehensive supports to improve their safety, independence and well-being.

When the Hub receives a referral, the survivor is connected with a case manager as their first point of contact. The case manager meets with the survivor to hear more about their story and what support they are looking to receive. From there, case managers will conduct a risk assessment, provide safety planning and together with the survivor they will make a plan for how they can provide support.

159

women and gender-diverse people supported through case management support services

293

referrals to external organizations to support survivors

The Safety and Support Hub can support with providing resources such as bus tickets, childminding, and interpretation services to ensure survivors can access the supports and services they need.

The case managers have some areas of specialization based on the needs of the community. There are two case managers focused on supporting the newcomer community, and a case manager focused on supporting the 2S LGBTQIA+ community. Through partnerships with Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) of Hamilton and Native Women's Centre, the Hub also has a mental health and addictions focused case manager and a case manager focused on working with Indigenous survivors.

"They started with creating a chequing account, then applying for Ontario Works, then applying for Housing, then applying for child care for me - working with subsidies - all of that stuff. It was so helpful. I did not know where to start."

— Safety and Support Hub Program Participant

Program participants at the Safety and Support Hub have received systems navigation support across the following services:

Housing 32.4%



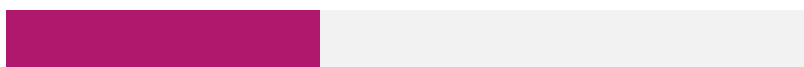
Legal Support 25.8%



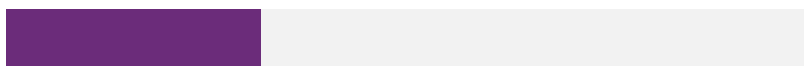
Social Assistance Programs 18.8%



Police 12.7%



Healthcare 10.3%



Counselling services

Accessing trauma-informed, timely, and culturally responsive counselling services is often very difficult for survivors of gender-based violence and their families — services are often costly or have long waiting lists. Through the funding for the Safety and Support Hub, survivors are able to access counselling through everwell counselling, Stardust Community Cooperative and ABRAR Trauma and Mental Health. Trends over time at the Hub have shown that counselling continues to be a critical part of the model, and specifically important for survivors after the initial crisis has stabilized and survivors are looking to find support in healing and recovery. Counselling services have been provided in Somali, Arabic and Spanish, and interpretation can be provided for other languages.



125

survivors have accessed
free individual counselling
support at the Safety and
Support Hub

135

survivors have accessed
free group counselling
support at the Safety and
Support Hub

"The fact that they have free counselling is amazing, because I wouldn't have been able to afford it. I talk about my trauma and everything. I never actually realized how much I needed this until I started it. I have been doing counseling for about 3 months. I feel much calmer about myself. The therapist uses some art as well and has a lot of fidgets there, so that is helpful."

— Safety and Support Hub Participant

Supports for parents and caregivers

The Safety and Support Hub aims to dismantle barriers to accessing support and services for parents and caregivers, and offers dedicated programming for parents and caregivers impacted by violence.

"My child can be very active and loud and he is so welcome here. Everyone is always ready to help with him so I can do what I need to do when I am here. Everyone has been so patient and kind to him."

— Safety and Support Hub Program Participant

- Case Managers at the Safety and Support Hub provide systems navigation for parents and caregivers interacting with the child welfare system.
- The Circle of Security Program — a relationship-focused parenting program designed to help caregivers understand and respond to their children's emotional needs — has **engaged 19 parents and caregivers impacted by gender-based violence.**
- The Safety and Support Hub has **provided child-minding services over 60 times** to ensure parents and caregivers can access the support they require.

>50%

Over half of the women and gender-diverse people who have accessed the Safety and Support Hub have been parents and/or caregivers.

"My case manager has found a child care place for my child. She helped me to get a subsidy. I can actually see that she is trying. The way she talks to me, she is hopeful for me, me hopeful for the future - and I leave feeling hopeful too."

— **Safety and Support Hub Program Participant**

"It (Circle of Security Program) has helped me to understand my child more, I didn't know what I was doing. I learn how to teach my child how to organize her feelings, it was amazing."

— **Circle of Security Participant**

Economic empowerment

The Safety and Support Hub promotes survivors' economic security and independence. Hub Economic Empowerment workers increase connection for survivors to the resources, skills, and trainings that survivors need to build their own economic independence. Through workshops and individualized support and coaching, the Economic Empowerment workers spend time understanding the goals of each individual and develops a custom plan to support them. Their work at the Hub has focused on:

- Financial stability and literacy supports
- Asset-building education (savings plans and financial management resources)
- Individualized resumes and interview preparation
- Job search support (digital literacy and setting up LinkedIn)
- Career exploration, including non-traditional pathways
- Workplace soft skills development
- Problem-solving barriers impacting employment success



"This place has helped me with my confidence. At first, I was so scared even to go for an interview and I was so scared of the computers. She would give me practice tests, interview questions, set up the Zooms set up the Teams, all things I wouldn't have known."

— **Economic Advancement Program Participant**



SECTION 2: Building a coordinated system of care

Hub community partnerships

Survivors are often experiencing complex and multi-faceted challenges, which often necessitates a system-wide response. The Safety and Support Hub staff work collaboratively with partners across community organizations to connect survivors to the resources and supports that are more relevant to their needs. To do this successfully the Hub has focused on building strong relationships with community partners to share information and resources, build clear referral pathways and broaden awareness of the impacts of gender-based violence.



The Safety and Support Hub engaged partners that are funded through the Hub to deliver services and a much larger group of community organizations the Hub refers survivors to, receives referrals from, or connects with to deliver programming. Supporting survivors requires a system response and community organizations have been integral to the success and reach of the Hub model.

What community partners shared

During this evaluation, a survey was distributed to community partner organizations to better understand how the Safety and Support Hub was improving access to services for survivors. Fourteen community partner organizations responded to the survey — and this is what was learned:

Referral Pathways for Survivors



An important aspect of the work has been working to **improve referral pathways** so that survivors of gender-based violence can easily access the support they need.

Co-located Support Services



The Safety and Support Hub is operated out of a centralized location designed to intentionally **co-locate a range of support services** that survivors of gender-based violence access.

Serves Underserved Communities



Frontline staff and community partners shared that the Safety and Support Hub was **filling an important gap for underserved communities** - including newcomers, 2S LGBTQIA+ folks and youth.

Strengthening the hub model



Community partner organizations suggested the following to **further strengthen the Safety and Support Hub model**: enhanced partnership building, focus on engaging rural and other hard- to-reach communities and offering more programs through the Safety and Support Hub.

Access to Services



An important aspect of the work has **been increasing access to a range of services and supports** for survivors of gender-based violence and their children.

93%

of community partners indicated the Hub had improved referral pathways for survivors of intimate partner violence.

93%

of community partners indicated the Hub had improved access to services for traditionally underserved communities.

86%

of community partners believe the Hub has led to increased access to GBV support services.

86%

of community partners believe co-locating services through a centralized location is a benefit to survivors.

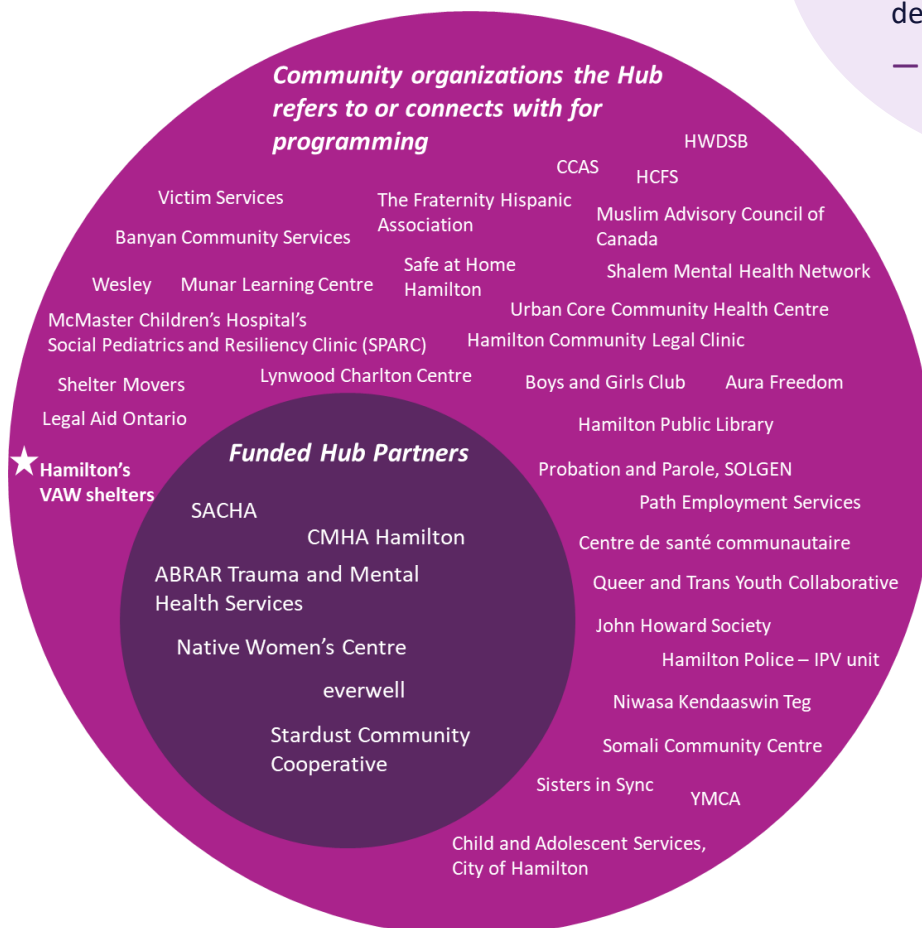
"I believe once survivors can see that the Hub is a staple of the community, the word will spread and it will only continue to grow. I think increasing partnerships, advertising, etc. so survivors know this is a safe space to access a wealth of knowledge and supports!"

— Community Partner



"The Hub approach could be strengthened by expanding and formalizing stronger cross-sector pathways that go beyond immediate crisis response, particularly into employment, healing, and leadership development."

— Community Partner



Connection to wraparound supports

The Safety and Support Hub connects survivors of gender-based violence to comprehensive wraparound supports for themselves and their children. The service delivery model provides case management support and system navigation to assist survivors in making connections to a range of community resources.

100%

of survivors interviewed had been connected to wraparound support services through the Hub.

100%

of survivors surveyed had enhanced connections to support services available in the community.

92%

of survivors interviewed had been connected to housing, income, and mental health supports.



"I came to (Case Manager), she helped a lot. I was lost, I am new to Canada, I have no family here. After what I have been through, I am still in shock. He kept telling me you are going to be homeless, but I came to (Case Manager) she said 'don't worry, we will try to help you as much as we can'. She helped me today for the housing and for the shelter. She helped me also to get information on how to apply for a Master Degree. She helped me to get Ontario Works because I did not have any income - I did not know how to do this. I received some money for groceries from Ontario Works right away. She is helping a lot. The next appointment, she will apply for housing in other areas for me. She said I will help you with the resume, how to apply for a job, she helped me get into an English course."

— Safety and Support Hub Participant

SECTION 3: Reaching diverse communities across Hamilton

Access to gender-based violence services in Hamilton

The need for gender-based violence services in Hamilton is significant and outpaces the services that exist in the city due to ongoing underfunding. The needs that survivors have are varied, based on their own personal experience and where they are in their experience of violence.

Some survivors may be looking for urgent support to access housing or shelter, while others may be contemplating how to improve their safety while staying in the relationship, and survivors may also be understanding historical abuse they faced and want support to break the cycle of violence for their children.

Over the past year, the Hub has aimed to increase awareness and access to gender-based violence services in Hamilton with a particular focus on serving newcomers, immigrants, and asylum seekers; Indigenous and racialized individuals; the 2S LGBTQIA+ community; and children and youth.



Over the past year, the Hub has aimed to increase awareness and access to gender-based violence services in Hamilton



Culturally and linguistically responsive services

The Safety and Support Hub has aimed to develop **culturally and linguistically responsive services** to support survivors of gender-based violence.

- Interpretation services are critical to the support provided by the Hub. All survivors are asked if they would like to use interpretation services at intake, and if so, they are provided for every appointment.
- Through a partnership with ABRAR Mental Health and Trauma Services, gender-based violence group workshops (known as Brave Spaces) were facilitated in Spanish, Arabic, and Somali.



Weekly in-person groups were hosted at the Safety and Support Hub. Participants were able to receive services in their first language, which helped build trust, safety, and meaningful connection.

Complementing the group sessions with optional one-on-one counselling strengthened participant outcomes.

"Este grupo fue un abrazo a mi alma.
("This group was a hug to my soul.")"

— Program Participant, Unidas

"When I got here, they sat with me and tried to understand me, they got an interpreter for me - the same interpreter has been with me for all my appointments here."

— Safety and Support Hub Program Participant

3

culturally and linguistic specific groups were offered by ABRAR Trauma and Mental Health Services, each with ten sessions.

128

newcomer and refugee women accessed culturally responsive and linguistic specific support groups across the three groups.

100%

of participants across all groups reported increased knowledge or skills, especially in emotional regulation, problem-solving, self-awareness, and empowerment.

Akhawat: Arabic Speaking Support Group

A trauma-informed support group fostering emotional healing, skill-building, and practical tools for personal and relational challenges.

Unidas: Spanish Speaking Support Group

A trauma-informed support group focused on fostering emotional healing, skill-building, and practical tools for personal and relational challenges.

Walaalo: Somali Speaking Support Group

Trauma-informed support for Somali-speaking women, addressing gender-based violence, migration stress, and caregiving challenges.

من خلال مشاركتي اتقدم بخالص شكري
لكامل فريق الدعم وانصح كل أخت الإنضمام
لهذه المجموعة لما حظينا به

"Through my participation, I extend my sincere thanks to the entire support team. I advise every sister to join this group because of the care we received. The group was like a complete family."

— Program Participant, Akhawat
(translated from Arabic)

Co-located sexual violence support

Through a partnership with the Sexual Assault Centre - Hamilton & Area (SACHA), the Safety and Support Hub has an on-site part-time Outreach and Support Worker who can provide sexual violence counselling services and support. In this role the support worker is able to provide individual counselling sessions, accompaniment to appointments, and provide group programming to survivors of sexual violence. Being able to provide timely support to survivors of sexual violence is a significant benefit and allows survivors to get the support they need when they need it. Having sexual violence support at the Hub supports newcomers in connecting with someone who speaks their language and can warmly welcome them. Interpretation services are available.

A significant part of this role is also outreach to diverse communities across Hamilton, including through planning and running key community events like International Women’s Day, SACHA’s 4th Annual Sexual Violence Prevention Month Community Conference and Dia Internationale de la Mujer, and participation in many other community events:

- HIPC Newcomers Day
- Open Streets Hamilton
- HWDSB Student Summit
- Refugee Rights Day at Hamilton Public Library
- Women’s Perennial Circle

Outreach and visibility at these events is critical to connect with communities across Hamilton who may not otherwise know about the services that are available to them.

The part-time Outreach and Support Worker has provided:



2SLGBTQIA+ supports

2SLGBTQIA+ Systems Navigation within the YWCA Hamilton’s Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Safety & Support Hub recognizes the unique relationship dynamics surrounding instances of GBV within the 2SLGBTQIA+ population. This work seeks to decenter heteronormative understandings of GBV through conceptualizing homophobia, transphobia, and biphobia as instances of GBV. Additionally, this role recognizes and helps address harmful relationship dynamics unique to the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, such as isolation from one’s 2SLGBTQIA+ community, threats of outing, withholding access to gender affirming care, and internalized stigma.

I was looking for more support around trans-health, but also community support. Help with housing, help with counseling, more specifically for trans people. I was referred by CMHA. When I came here I felt comfortable, it was quiet. Immediately the day I came in I was able to meet with somebody - and I felt relieved after the conversation.

— **Safety and Support Hub Program Participant**

The 2SLGBTQ+ Systems Navigator is also responsible for direct 1-on-1 peer support. Often partnered with a Hub case manager, the systems navigator facilitates deeper connection to the 2SLGBTQ+ community for participants through:

- Knowledge sharing
- Warm referrals
- Addressing financial, language, or other barriers to participation in community events.

Additionally, the **Check-In Program**, run by both the systems navigator and Spectrum employees, offers a low-barrier form of peer support.

- Participants will engage with peer-support workers over online messaging for two hours a week.
- During these sessions, staff can make referrals or provide support however the participant feels most comfortable.
- For example, support has been provided around housing, mental health, and relationship dynamics through the program.
- Individuals who have higher support needs may be invited to have in-person or video call meetings for a broader depth of support. Connection to community and peer support is crucial for preventing and addressing harmful relationship dynamics and GBV contexts.

26 youth
participated in **137**
check-in
appointments

Prevention of gender-based violence with youth

The Safety and Support Hub is focused on preventing gender-based violence through early intervention and programs and services designed to engage youth and young people. Prevention and Early Intervention within the gender-based violence scope highlights the importance of engaging youth, young adults, and families in meaningful conversations about healthy relationships, boundaries, consent, communication, and emotional well-being.

Engaging youth and families together creates valuable opportunities to reinforce shared messages around respect, consent, conflict resolution, and personal boundaries. By addressing risk factors early and strengthening protective factors within both youth and families, the Prevention and Early

Intervention team strives to reduce the likelihood of future experiences of gender-based violence while fostering safer, healthier communities.

During youth drop-ins, the Prevention and Early Intervention team intentionally incorporates games, crafts, and interactive activities into conversations about boundaries, consent, emotional regulation, and healthy relationships. By embedding these topics into fun and engaging experiences, youth are more likely to participate in discussions, reflect on their own experiences, and develop practical skills that can be applied in their daily lives.

- For example, during a science activity night, participants completed an experiment that created a dramatic reaction and, at times, a mess. The activity served as a natural opportunity to explore how strong emotions, when acted upon impulsively, can lead to unintended consequences.
- Staff facilitated discussions about recognizing emotions before they escalate, considering potential outcomes, and developing strategies to respond thoughtfully rather than react impulsively.



"If the Hub could continue services I would like to see continuous healthy relationship program for Black youth. We had such success and lots of interest delivering this [healthy relationships programming], and would love to see what it would look like for continuous support. It really allowed us to especially engage Black boys."

— Youth Serving Community Partner Organization

153

youth have been engaged in programming focused on preventing gender-based violence.

28

youth received individualized support from the Prevention and Early Intervention Worker focused on early intervention and preventing gender-based violence.

16

organizations serving youth and young people are now partners of the Safety and Support Hub.

"Over the next year, I would like to see more opportunities to engage men and boys in conversations about gender-based violence."

— Prevention and Early Intervention Worker at the Safety and Support Hub



PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT: ABRAR Trauma & Mental Health

In collaboration with the Safety and Support Hub, ABRAR Trauma & Mental Health (ABRAR TMH) launched a trauma-informed, culturally sensitive Gender-Based Violence (GBV) support program for newcomer women affected by violence. The initiative provided tailored one-on-one counselling sessions and culturally responsive language-based support groups (known as Brave Spaces).

- Individual Counselling Sessions provided each participant with up to 8 weekly sessions with a culturally and linguistically aligned counsellor.
- These sessions focused on gender-based violence education, emotional support, coping strategies, skill-building, self-esteem, empowerment, connection to community support, and support navigating available resources, services, and systems.

84

newcomer women experiencing gender-based violence accessed free, trauma-informed counselling services in their own language.

100%

of participants reporting increased knowledge or skills in emotional regulation, problem-solving, self-awareness and empowerment.

100%

of participants indicated they would consider continuing care with ABRAR Trauma & Mental Health Services.

"You created a safe and comfortable space that allowed me to be completely vulnerable and share things I have never shared with anyone."

— **Safety & Support Hub Program Participant**



"My counsellor helped me identify my goals and needs. She gave me guidance and assisted me towards healing and acceptance."

— **Safety & Support Hub Program Participant**

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT: Sisters in Sync

Sisters in Sync partnered with the YWCA Hamilton's Safety and Support Hub to deliver a multi-week Healthy Teen Relationships Program, culminating in the Teen Dating Summit. The initiative aimed to equip youth with tools, language, and confidence to navigate healthy relationships, boundaries, safety, and emotional well-being — delivered by their peers.

- 27 youth participated in the Healthy Teen Relationships program.
- 100% of the participants identified as Black and/or of Caribbean descent.
- Participants were either connected to Sisters in Sync or learned about the program through school and other youth-serving health and social service organizations.



As part of the program, youth co-designed three GBV media tools:

- Podcast — Love, Lust and Lessons: focused on teen relationships, red flags, and personal experiences, with youth-led scriptwriting and recording.
- Short Documentary — It's Just Not Worth It: captures peer interviews, discussion circles, and real reflections from program sessions.

- Live Game Show — Masked Crush: an interactive educational activity created and facilitated by youth that reinforced learning through scenarios and role-play.

65 youth attended
the Teen Dating
Summit.

91% of youth
reported being satisfied
or very satisfied with
the program format,
instructors, and safety

88% of youth
reported improved
understanding of how to
access supportive
services, school supports,



PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT: Front-line and sector capacity building

Aura Freedom – ‘GBV PREVENTION AND RESPONSE’

YWCA Hamilton engaged Aura Freedom, leaders in GBV prevention and capacity building to provide frontline capacity building to enhance frontline knowledge to recognize, respond to, and prevent gender-based violence, as well as support survivors in transformative and trauma-informed ways to improve service provision.

Sessions are being offered through 3 learning modules, integrating ongoing feedback and service evolution into focused presentation and scenario-based learning sessions. Staff survey responses indicate that workers had increased capacity in the following areas:

Trauma-informed Care / Understanding and Defining Forms/Types / GBV Trends/Rates

Barriers to Seeking Support / Risk Factors and Warning Signs / Cycle of Violence

Reframing Language with Survivors / Myths and Misconceptions / Coercive Control

Reframing Best Practices / Impacts on Survivors / Potential Harms by Service Providers

How Trauma Manifests



everwell In Partnership with NuVista Mental Health – 'ANTI-VIOLENCE WORKER WELLNESS'

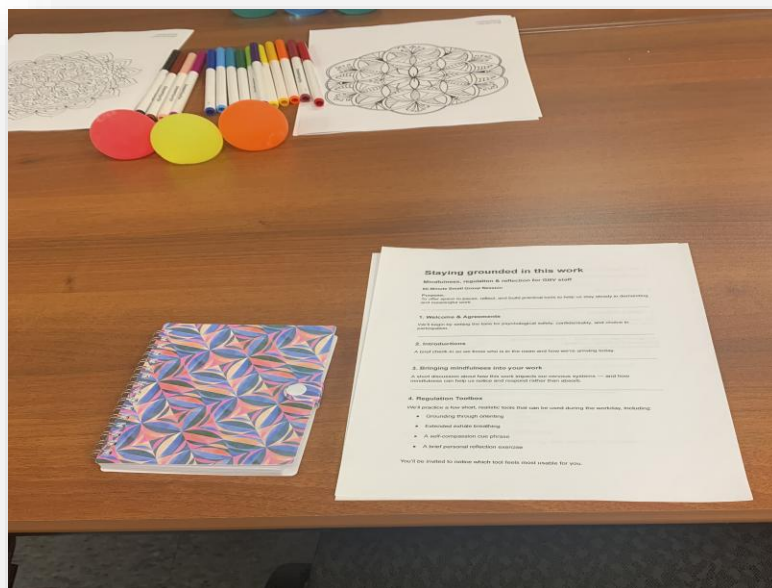
YWCA Hamilton engaged everwell counselling to build an 'Anti-Violence Worker Wellness' series to explore areas of support, challenge, coping and resilience in the work and the weight of carrying survivor stories. In a landscape of high need and parallel community crises face by families and individuals - tailored spaces and supports for frontline staff are one key piece to a well and thriving workforce

This small-group workshop offers staff a supportive space to pause, reflect, and simply exhale. Working in the Gender-Based Violence sector requires deep emotional presence, and this session is designed to acknowledge reality with care and compassion. Staff survey responses indicate that workers who attended, had this to share about the experience:

"Many staff emphasized the importance of learning practical mindfulness and grounding strategies that could be used in the moment, particularly during times of stress"

"Participants also reflected on the value of self-compassion and the importance of being kinder toward themselves in both personal and professional contexts."

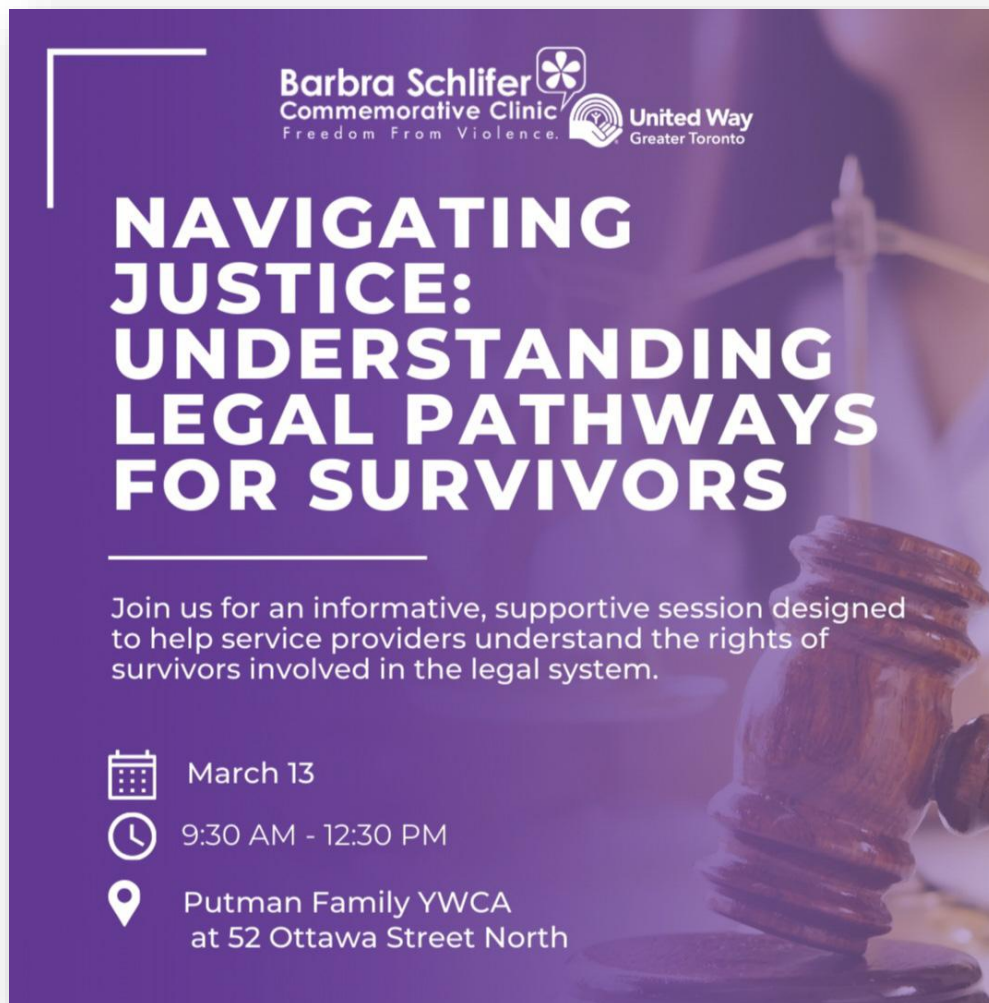
"Participants shared that opportunities to pause, connect with one another, and acknowledge both challenges and positive moments in their workday are deeply valued. There was a clear sense that these kinds of spaces contribute meaningfully to morale, resilience, and job satisfaction. Staff specifically noted the importance of being able to "celebrate the positive things in their days and jobs" and to have structured opportunities to connect outside of task-focused interactions".



Barbara Schlifer – ‘NAVIGATING JUSTICE: UNDERSTANDING LEGAL PATHWAYS FOR SURVIVORS’

YWCA Hamilton engaged Barbra Schlifer Clinic for a learning session highlighting the work of their Independent Legal Advice program for the Hamilton GBV sector.

Hosted at Putman Family YWCA, members of the justice, legal and GBV sector across Hamilton joined for an informative, supportive session designed for service providers to understand the rights of survivors involved in the legal system enhancing existing knowledge, resources and accessible pathways to legal support for survivors



Sawyer's Story

"I am trying to flee a trans-phobic abusive household and access gender-affirming care. The legal clinic connected me to the Safety and Support Hub. When I first got here, I was amazed. For the past two years, I have been trying to find support like this to navigate everything and I was amazed that it exists.

It is crucial to have a base understanding of the trans experience and the barriers we face trying to access care in the health and legal system. My worker has a great awareness of what is available - I do find that the services are kind of hidden. My worker has made me aware of not only what I deserve, but what I am entitled to.

Through the Safety and Support Hub I got connected to the trans ID clinic, helped with housing applications, and with an understanding gender-based violence. I am personally interested in restorative justice practices and they have connected me with resources relating to that. They are helping me with completing the gender-based violence special priority form. They have also connected me with individual counseling.

My worker has been safe, respectful and supportive. Giving me autonomy in the choices for my well-being to protect myself in that way. They go through everything they can offer you in length, what you should expect and then they give you the space to make those decisions for yourself.

Right now, I am exploring one-on-one counselling, but it is trans-informed therapy, with a focus on domestic abuse in queer relationships. That is not always easy to identify. Queer relationships and violence is not always considered, and that was recognized here.

As soon as I got here, it was like everything that I was looking for was handed to me. They are very trauma informed here - that helped me a lot with my anxiety. That helped me to feel safe enough to express my needs and to believe that they could be met. They were able to recognize my identity as a trans person - and most of the places I have gone have not been able to be myself."

Helena's Story

“We came to Canada from (country redacted), only to end up having a difficult situation at home. My mom's husband was emotionally and financially abusing us. We learned more information about the relationship on the internet, and we were thinking to separate. We were really scared.

We found out about YWCA center online and decided to message. We receive an email with an invitation to come here.

Now we have a Case Manager, who helped us to strategize out our plans for separation. She connected us with counselling therapy, with housing, we applied to Access to Housing. We tried to apply for Ontario Works but they advocated for us and they help us to receive emergency assistance from OW.

They connected us with Housing Heals, with Shelter Movers, who helped us move our things to a new apartment. We had a consultation with an immigration [support] because we are from (country redacted) because we applied for a humanitarian and compassionate claim. We got advice on how to faster the process. She helped us to understand what needed to be done to move on.

We had such a great Case Manager, she was kind and supportive. She was checking in on us all the time. She told us about different opportunities, other things happening that we might like to attend.

We are really grateful to the services. It was an unimaginable help for us. It was a long process, we started in October 2025, but by April 1st we moved to a new apartment. They even got us a welcoming basket for our new apartment.

Everything was perfect. The Case Manager helped us to advocate with OW and Access to Housing. Now that we are in our new place, we are both receiving counseling for a few months already. They even help my little sister to get connected to therapy.”

Ama's Story

"I got to Canada because of a violent situation that happened (in another country). I am a refugee claimant. After I arrived, I later realized I was pregnant. That was when all that the chaos happened - I ended up in a shelter. I was lost, I was depressed.

I prayed to God, I don't want to give my birth in a shelter, and I ended up in YWCA Transitional Housing - it has been amazing place for me. My case manager there referred me to come to the Safety and Support Hub - because I want to do something with my life.

They helped me to get day care for my baby. I have accessed group counselling here for my emotions. It was amazing. It forced on getting me more confident with talking, how to deal with my emotions - I really liked it.

The moment I got to this place, my depression went down. Especially with (economic worker), my depression really went down. They just give you the right encouragement, they really help me out. I went to school for PSW - I was looking for a job and she has really helped me with the job search.

She didn't just job search for me, she went above and beyond for me. Even when I have interviews, she sets up prep up questions for me to practice, because in my country it is not that way. The motivation she gives me, and then I go back home. When you call her work phone, she is always willing to go above and beyond.

What this program has done for me, it has fulfilled me. Every newcomer needs this program. The supports I got from this place - I don't know what I would have done without them."

Through consultation with community partners, front-line staff, and program participants, YWCA Hamilton has identified the following recommendations and next steps for the Safety and Support Hub. Each recommendation is grounded in this year's evaluation findings and evidence-based best practice.

Co-locate the Safety and Support Hub in Affordable Housing for Women and Children

Housing was the single largest driver of system navigation support requested at the Hub (32.4% of all navigation support), and the WAWG Hamilton Snapshot found more than 9,273 requests for VAW/women's shelter were turned down due to a shortage of beds. Participant testimonials show case managers already brokering housing applications, emergency shelter placements, and moves on a person-by-person basis, and 86% of community partners believe co-locating services in a centralized location benefits survivors. Co-locating the Hub within affordable, transitional housing would let survivors move from crisis intervention directly into stable housing without a hand-off between agencies, extending the single-point-of-entry model that is already working.

- Explore capital and operating partnerships with YWCA Hamilton's existing housing portfolio (e.g., Oakwood Place).
- Prioritize on-site or co-located units for Hub participants moving out of the shelter system.
- Track housing outcomes, such as time to stable housing, as a core indicator in future evaluations.

Continue to Strengthen and Build Partnerships with Community Organizations

In its first year, the Hub built 44 partnerships with community-based organizations, and 93% of the fourteen community partners surveyed said the Hub had improved referral pathways for survivors of intimate partner violence. At the same time, partners were clear the model should reach beyond crisis response: one partner noted the approach “could be strengthened by expanding and formalizing stronger cross-sector pathways that go beyond immediate crisis response, particularly into employment, healing, and leadership development.”

- Formalize partnership agreements (MOUs) with the Hub's core and funded partners to sustain referral pathways beyond individual staff relationships.
- Expand partnerships to fill any gaps in programming and support based on identified needs.
- Formalize data-sharing agreements across partners to track wraparound outcomes for survivors consistently over time.

Additional Space to Offer On-site Programs and Services

Demand for in-person, on-site programming already exceeds what the current space can comfortably hold. A range of group and community programming is offered after-hours (evening and weekends), including youth programs, healthy relationship programming, and group counselling in the space. This concentration of programming in one location is a strength of the model, but it is also a growing constraint.

- Assess current space utilization — daytime case management and counselling versus after-hours group programming — to identify scheduling and capacity pinch points.
- Add group and workshop rooms so simultaneous programming (language-specific groups, youth prevention programming, economic empowerment workshops) does not compete for the same space.
- Explore satellite or partner-hosted space for lower-acuity programming, such as youth prevention or economic empowerment workshops, to free up the Hub for crisis and case management services.

Increase Outreach to Communities Historically Underserved by Gender-Based Violence Services to Build Awareness of the Hub and Trust

The Hub has made real progress here: 93% of community partners said the Hub had improved access for traditionally underserved communities, 84 newcomer women accessed ABRAR's culturally specific counselling, 100% of Sisters in Sync participants identified as Black and/or of Caribbean descent, and the Hub facilitated 171 interpretation instances. At the same time, gaps remain —partners specifically flagged a need to “focus on engaging rural and other hard-to-reach communities.” As one partner put it: “Once survivors can see that the Hub is a staple of the community, the word will spread and it will only continue to grow... so survivors know this is a safe space to access a wealth of knowledge and supports.”

- Extend targeted outreach and advertising into rural and hard-to-reach parts of Hamilton, building on the trust already established with newcomer, Indigenous, and Black youth communities.
- Continue and expand language-specific programming — currently offered in Arabic, Spanish, and Somali through ABRAR — based on the communities the Hub is seeing.

Additional Opportunities Identified

A small number of additional opportunities surfaced through interviews and surveys that do not fit neatly under the categories above but are worth carrying forward:

- Sustain one-off successes as ongoing programming — a youth-serving partner specifically asked for a “continuous healthy relationship program for Black youth” rather than a single cohort, noting the strong engagement it generated with Black boys in particular.
- Engage men and boys directly in prevention work, as recommended by the Hub's own Prevention and Early Intervention Worker.

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For More Information

Contact Amy Deschamps

Director of Gender Based Violence Support Services, YWCA Hamilton

Address: 75 MacNab St S, Hamilton, ON, L8P 3C1

Phone: 905-522-9922

Email: adeschamps@ywcahamilton.org

Website: www.ywcahamilton.org

Report Prepared By: Dr. Mary Vaccaro and Bhawya Wadhera