



Fostering Dialogues

An arts-based action research project imagining futures of
community-based care with homecare personal support workers
and LGBTQ older adults

March 2023

Egale

Land Acknowledgement

We would like to begin by acknowledging that Egale is based on the traditional shared territories of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples.

The territory is protected by the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement between the Haudenosaunee, Anishinaabe and allied nations to peaceably share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes. The concepts of gender, sexuality, and oppression that we often rely on in 2SLGBTQI advocacy work are largely based in White, Western, colonial systems of thought and do not represent the multitude of understandings of identity that exist outside of this viewpoint. Colonial violence created the foundations for the landscape of gender-based violence that we understand today. Indigenous communities and Two Spirit activists, scholars, writers, and artists have gifted us with ample tools to work with as we move toward the collective liberation of gender and sexuality minority people. We are grateful to carry these with us here and in our work beyond. The violence of colonialism is ongoing. So too are movements toward resisting this violence.

About Egale

Egale is Canada's leading organization for 2SLGBTQI people and issues. We improve and save lives through research, education, awareness, and by advocating for human rights and equality in Canada and around the world. Our work helps create societies and systems that reflect the universal truth that all persons are equal and none is other.

Authors and Contributors

Authors

Dr. Celeste Pang, Egale Canada

Dr. Brittany A. E. Jakubiec, Egale Canada

Melanie Schambach, Social Artist

Contributors

We would like to thank our Egale colleagues for their work through various stages of this project. Thank you to VHA Home HealthCare for their support, and to Dr. Andrea Charise the FLOURISH Collective.

Most of all, thank you to each of the participants who took part, and so generously shared their time, insights, and creativity with us.

This project was funded by a CIHR Catalyst Grant.

ISBN: 978-1-7389331-0-5

© Egale Canada



“The image is asking, ‘how do we do this?’”

This is what one of the project participants said when we showed them the image that you see on the first page of this document. This is a collective digital mural that was created by LGBTQ older adult and homecare personal support workers through the fall of 2022, as part of a virtual arts-based action research project conducted at Egale Canada and co-facilitated by social artist Melanie Schambach.

Reflecting on this process of dialogue and participatory arts-creation over the 12 weeks that we spent together, this question persists: how do we do this? How can we continue to build bridges and unite to address the systemic issues that we face in homecare work and care provision? How can LGBTQ+ people needing homecare access care that adequate and affirming, and how can care workers be better supported and respected in our society and care systems? What futures of community-based care can we imagine?

The process of coming together to share experiences, stories, concerns, and hopes, of exploring ideas and commonalities through metaphor, images, and blunt conversation, and of holding space and lifting one another up through our respective Zoom-squares shows that this imagining is possible. And so, the question can be repeated: how do we do this, and what futures can we imagine? We hope that this document, the messages and images it shares, can be one more spark.



Process

Agreements

Listen mindfully and empathetically

Step away from judgment and invite kindness and curiosity

Listen to our thoughts, emotions, and body, listen to the stories of others with an open heart

Lift yourself and others up

Avoid any kind of put-down, notice your critical mind when it underestimates you and replace it with a positive affirmation

Avoid making assumptions about others, try not to take personally what others are facing

Know when to step back and witness, or step in and share

From September to December 2022, we engaged a group of 14 LGBTQ older adults and homecare personal support workers (PSWs) in a 12-week online program of dialogues and arts-creation. All participants lived in southern Ontario and were able to commit to attending the eight group sessions, for which we provided honorarium and art supplies. Over these eight sessions, in which we alternated between dialogue-focused and arts-focused modalities, together we explored themes of home, care, and futures of community-based care. Ultimately, the goal of this project was to learn how arts-based action research can help to create connections among LGBTQ older adults and homecare PSWs (as multiply marginalized groups in society and within care

systems) and to creatively reckon with present situations and imagine what could be otherwise.

Participants came to the project with different experiences of Canadian care systems, different identities and life trajectories, different experiences making art, and unique perspectives on how homecare could be improved for LGBTQ people and for PSWs alike. Among the LGBTQ older adult participants, while none were currently receiving homecare, two people had in the past and others had witnessed homecare situations of significant others. These participants were between 66–76 years old, some living alone and some with others, and all were currently providing care and support to others, including emotional, financial, and day-to-day care to partners, adult children, friends, and acquaintances. All were born in Canada, with backgrounds including Scottish, Irish, British, Polish, and Ukrainian descent. The PSW participants were 29–56 years old, and all lived with others, including children and partners, and provided emotional and financial support to friends, parents, and family members in Canada and in home countries. All were women, born in Canada, Grenada, Thailand, Croatia, and the Philippines, and had worked as PSWs for between two to over 25 years, and currently worked with clients in Scarborough, North York, and Etobicoke. Through conversation and the process of co-creation participants shared experiences and ideas, explored commonalities, differences, and connections, and worked together to co-conceptualize an image that could represent the complexities of working in homecare and prospects of receiving such care as an LGBTQ person.

The final digital mural reflects these conversations and is one culmination of this process of collective exploration and co-creation. The art-making and mural creation was facilitated by Melanie Schambach, a social artist who facilitates participatory painting with public groups to explore themes of identity, belonging, and possibilities for social change. The concept of the mural was designed through collective discussion and facilitated activities, and multiple

iterations of feedback and revision. The final image is made up of contributions from each participant, with the prompts to explore a present of care, and a possible future of care, within the mural shape they selected.

In this document we describe the process of engagement and share some key reflections on the themes of home, care, and futures of community-based care that we explored during the sessions. Where we include participants quotes, we have used pseudonyms and indicated whether the participant was a personal support worker (PSW) or LGBTQ older adult (OA). We have also reproduced select individual artworks from the overall mural; all individual images and quotes can be perused on the project website <https://egale.ca/fostering-dialogues/>



Why were you interested in participating?

- Share perspectives from being advocates

- Share experiences working with 2SLGBTQI clients

Share Experiences and Informed Perspectives

- Share perspectives from working in the care sector

Increase Understanding

- Bringing “curiosity” forward
- To discuss shared issues

- “Build bridges and break down walls”

- Knowledge is power; to increase knowledge and understanding in working with clients

- 2SLGBTQI clients deserve good care

- To make a difference
- Activism + art
- “Because one day I may belong to the demographic I am working with”

Make Change

- “I am about living in solutions”
- The project has potential to change conversations

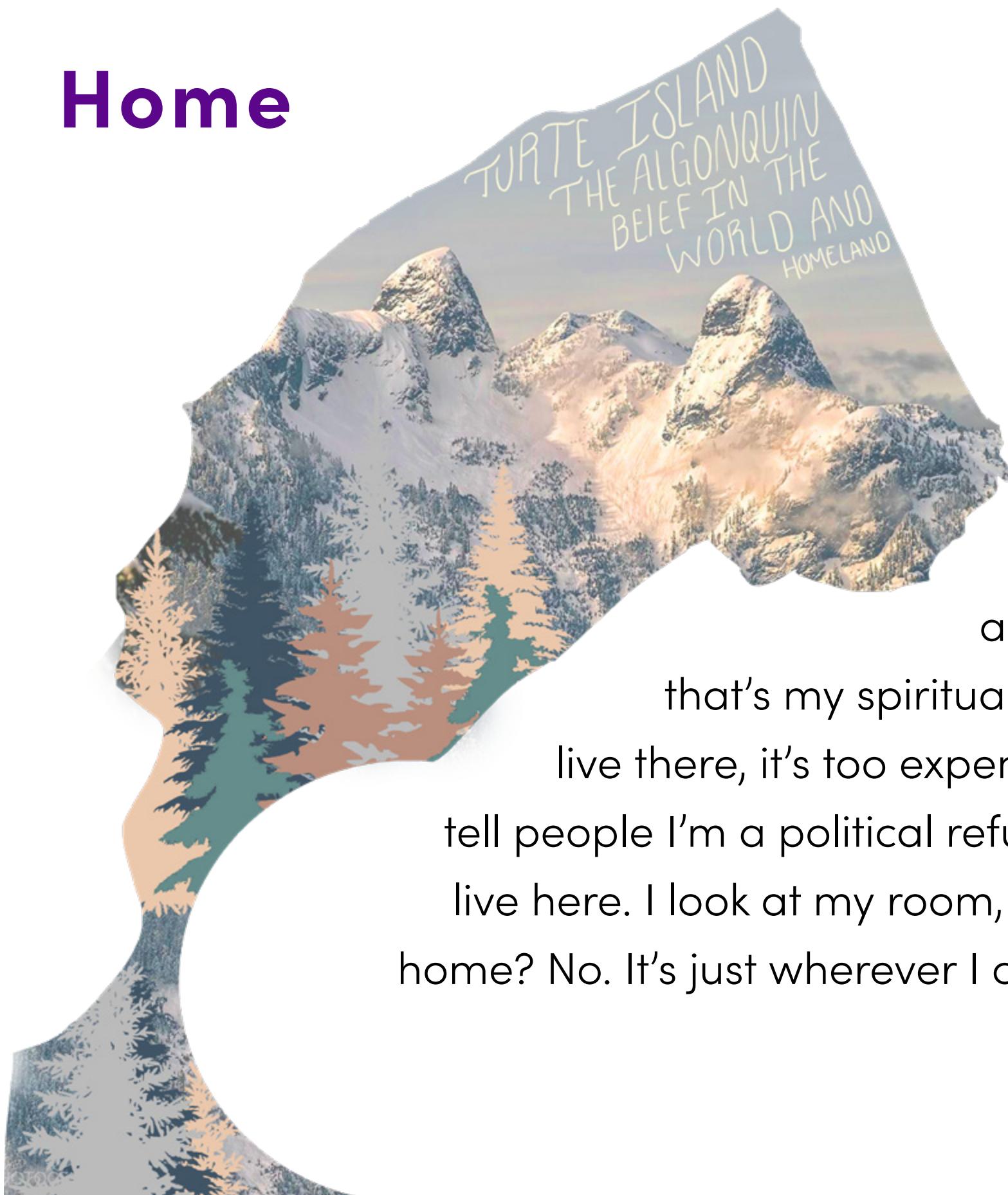
- Recognitions of issues in home care, and fears of receiving home care in 2SLGBTQI communities

- “It involves art. I am not an artist, but I like art.”

Make Art

- “Art was the icing on the cake!”

Home



"Home for me is a pejorative; I never really feel at home anywhere. Vancouver is my home, that's my spiritual, metaphysical, home. But I can't live there, it's too expensive. And my family lives there...I tell people I'm a political refugee from my family, that's why I live here. I look at my room, which is a mess, and I say, is this home? No. It's just wherever I can think for myself." - Bruce (OA)

"Home for me is not a physical place. Because we had to leave too many places in my life. So that's why I put Bakana, which is my mom. That's what everybody calls her. And when we're there, there's no topic off limit. You don't feel judged. There's always food, coming out of the tiniest kitchen. We talk about everything, we do everything together, when we're at my parent's house [...] But the house, it doesn't mean anything to me. No belongings, nothing really. Because we had to leave it twice behind, and we moved more than 15 times before I was 18, so." - Sofia (PSW)



"I feel very privileged to be connected to a building. My partner and I have been married 13 years and this is our second house together [...] The house means so much for us. We talked and planned about this together-house for years, and we've tried to fill it with all the things that matter to both of us, separately, and as a couple. We've tried to create a place where everything feels welcome. People hang out on our front lawn, on our back lawn, on our driveway on New Year's Eve. And that matters so much to us, that we can create a space where folks feel like they want to be. So yes, the building matters. But clearly, it's about the feelings in the building. It's an important concept." - Ann (OA)



"To me Canada is the land of opportunity; my home will always be Saint Vincent. Nice warm island breeze. No alarm clock to wake you in the morning. The cock crowing, the dogs barking. Family and friends hanging out together. Going by the beach and spending the whole day frolicking in the water, playing on the sand. Having your fill of fruits and vegetables. Cooking, not so much, because you live off the land. It's just the atmosphere. Totally different from here, a more relaxed life. You go to work in the morning, you get home to spend time with the family, you have dinner together, go to bed early, and start all over again. That's my place of home." - Irie (PSW)

What is home?

The first two sessions centered around the idea of home. As “home” is a fundamental aspect of home-based care, we wanted to spark conversation about what “home” was for participants. What are its meanings and manifestations? Where is it, or what is it about? And how can better understanding of what home is for both care recipients and care workers lend to improving access to homecare for LGBTQ people, and to reimagining futures of community-based care and care work?

We explored the concept of home through facilitated dialogue and exercises using metaphor. As this was the first full-group session, we also used “home” as a jumping off point for participants to begin to get to know one another; to share stories about their lives and life trajectories, learn about different experiences, and to begin to identify points of commonality.

Participants discussed their relationship to home, both as an abstract concept and specific site. As exemplified in the quotes shared on the previous page, “home” was many different things for different participants, and it was also many different things at the same time. For some, home was a place of refuge, a place where they could breathe, be themselves without the noise, complexities, and navigations of the outside world, and a place that they could welcome others into. For several of the LGBTQ older adult participants, the physical place of home was especially important. The homes they had made in their houses or apartments had been made intentionally, on their own or with partners, to be places where they could feel comfortable and at ease and where they could also provide welcome and safe haven for friends and community.

For the LGBTQ older adult participants, these experiences of home as refuge



often lay alongside experiences of other places as unwelcoming, and previous homes, including family homes, as unsafe. In this light, the idea of what home is for LGBTQ older adults and what concerns people may have about receiving care in their homes can be understood at a deeper level. Participants in this study expressed concerns about having care workers in their homes, including concerns about facing bias and homophobia, of not being recognized as their spouses' partner, and about the intense vulnerability of such intimate care. Situated alongside meanings and experiences of home, these expressions of concerns were not about individual care workers per se, but about the general possibility of breach of safety, and of repeated experiences of unsafety both at home and among strangers.

Participants also described how "home" was a sense, sometimes connected to a physical place but more so to do with atmosphere,

feeling, self-becoming, and pace and texture of life. This emerged in a particularly pronounced way for participants who had moved multiple times in their lives. Among the participants who worked as PSWs, all but one had migrated to Canada as adults. This included moves and migration for work and economic opportunity and due to conflict, from more than thirty years ago to within the last two years. Home, for these participants, included the landscapes of their countries of origin, the sounds and slower pace of life, being in nature, and being among family. Among participants born in Canada (PSWs and older adults), many had also moved multiple times. For many of these participants, "home" was a feeling of finding a sense of self and ease, a feeling that could be connected with place but exceeded any physical boundary.

Homes, in the context of homecare, are sites of living and sites of work. They are places where personal

support workers must travel to and from throughout their workdays, often seeing multiple clients in different parts of the city in a single day, needing to find pitstops for unpaid time in between client visits. They are places where PSWs do their work of care: assisting others with bathing, dressing, tidying, and eating, doing the work for which they were trained, take pride in, and subsist upon. Homes are also clients' domains, these places of refuge, comfort, ease, and happenstance in which they dwell. They are places in which people have crafted a sense of safety and of self, and where the possibility of a stranger coming in to provide care is a possibility of intrusion, of unsafety, as well as a possibility for assistance and for being able to stay at home and to age in place.

To understand "home", therefore, as a place, a sense, a site where people have stopped, for now, is a way to grasp homes as sites of living and working both, as places where

care recipients and care workers dwell, in their various passages. The complexities of homecare encounters are many, as are the complexities of the lives of people who are brought together in circumstances of care. Learning about the meanings that "home" carries, and understanding what constitutes a *sense of home*, sense of safety, and feeling of respect will go a long way towards improving access to homecare for LGBTQ people and for efforts to reimagine homecare and improve conditions for care workers.



Poem on Home

Home,
expanse of water, moving almost imperceptibly, still, dust on top
home is the salt on my skin, the waves crashing on the shore, the sand
beneath my feet, and the smell of seaweed in the wind
with dragonflies and delicate bird sounds I don't know with a soft sun
illuminating all
Cabin in the sky

home is baka Ana who is our anchor
Beating wings, breathe, into blue sky
A cloud, always moving and meeting others, sometimes not in sight,
sometimes bright, sometimes dark

Home is a quiet valley of mountains full of trees, wildflowers, birds
singing harmoniously over the cool flowing waterfall overshadowing
hills and farms.

home is a tree house high up in a huge maple tree, with a rounded
door and windows
a retractable ladder leading to it from the ground
a willow, bent and drooping from the elements and environment
but, a beautifully grand and unbreaking shelter to the most vulnerable
of creatures

A Douglas Fir and the Lions of Vancouver
Turtle Island: the Algonquin belief in the World and homeland.
a pond where they can let their guards down to indulge in a cool drink
comfortably... a gathering place & life-giving force
there is safety among trees and soft spaces

A campfire in a clearing in the woods alongside a creek/river. No
human sound
a quiet, safe place, where I can be alone when I want/need to be,
where I can invite others to come
And also where my loved ones are, wherever i may be as long as i have
them (mentally, emotionally, spiritually), i am at home

A big pot of slow roasted stew

It is a bed with a never-ending feeling

that feel you get after a shower hopping into fresh clothing and
bedsheets

that sensation over and over and over again, I can live there forever

hug and warm

moments of soft hair, face, embracing, fingers entwined. a kiss

At first "Home is...lost"

But after drawing, I changed it to "Home is...a memory and something I
can create"

In Ella Fitzgerald's words, Airtight cabin in the sky, meditate, be away
from the busy city streets,

home is the warm embrace of a beating heart

Home is an oasis of peace and relaxation

warm breath, I release myself to the blue, and embrace the sky

I am home

Process Interlude

We asked participants, what is a powerful message or question this mural should explore regarding aging and home care? This is what they shared:

Message of EMPATHY, RESPECT, and RECOGNITION

- Understanding, listening, respect for significant others
- Consideration for cultural differences
- “What does it feel like to be in need of care? To be a caregiver?”
- “The importance of a positive, caring and respectful relationship between caregiver and patient”
- Equality and freedom of expression

Challenging discrimination and “AVOIDING THE ‘COOKIE-CUTTER’ APPROACH”

- Stop stigmatizing age; challenge age-based discrimination
- Respectful, caring, individualized care
- “Everyone deserves the right to good care”
- “Why is it becoming so sterile...do you work and get out?”

INTERDEPENDENCE and COLLECTIVE POWER

- “We are creating and taking up space”
- Hope
- Potential, open-mindedness, interdependency, connection
- “The value of those who share the journey”

We asked participants, what is the emotion or emotions you would like this digital mural to provoke in viewers? This is what they shared:

peacefulness inspiration
gratitude **trust**
relaxation sadness thoughtfulness
awe creativity possibility
compassion connection
loneliness togetherness **joy**
courage loss empathy human
dignity **hope** solidarity
critical thinking wonder

We asked participants, what image could we use to represent this message or question? This is what they shared:

- “A lush garden or field, maybe a light rain for nourishment, many interconnected growing organisms; plants, animals, water, sun, rain.”

A landscape

- “A puzzle, a bridge: Partial completion, pieces whirling, misplaced/uncertainty.”
- “The scene depicts a beautiful sunny day.”

- “A mosaic of those aging in place and those who support them through care.”

A carer and care recipient

- “A carer and care recipient looking out at the horizon at the ocean.”
- “Home, with door and windows with different points of view but the home is all encompassing.”
- “A group of people holding or extending caring hands: This will show solidarity, respect, compassion, and a caring nature.”

A portrait

- “A combination of portrait and landscape: An aging person portraying a role he always wanted to do.”
- “I’ve had too many times where individuals and their significant others were treated like another piece of inventory on an assembly line.”

Care

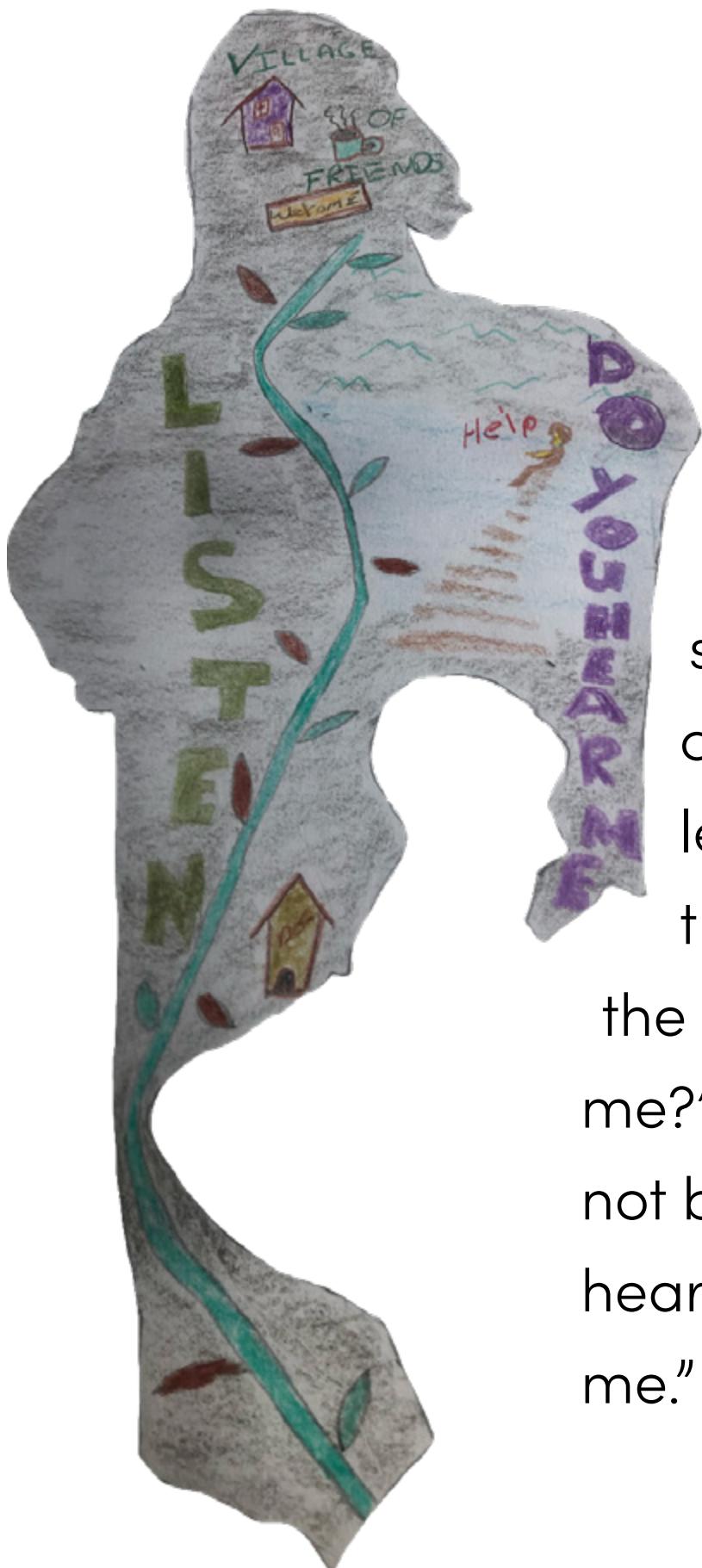
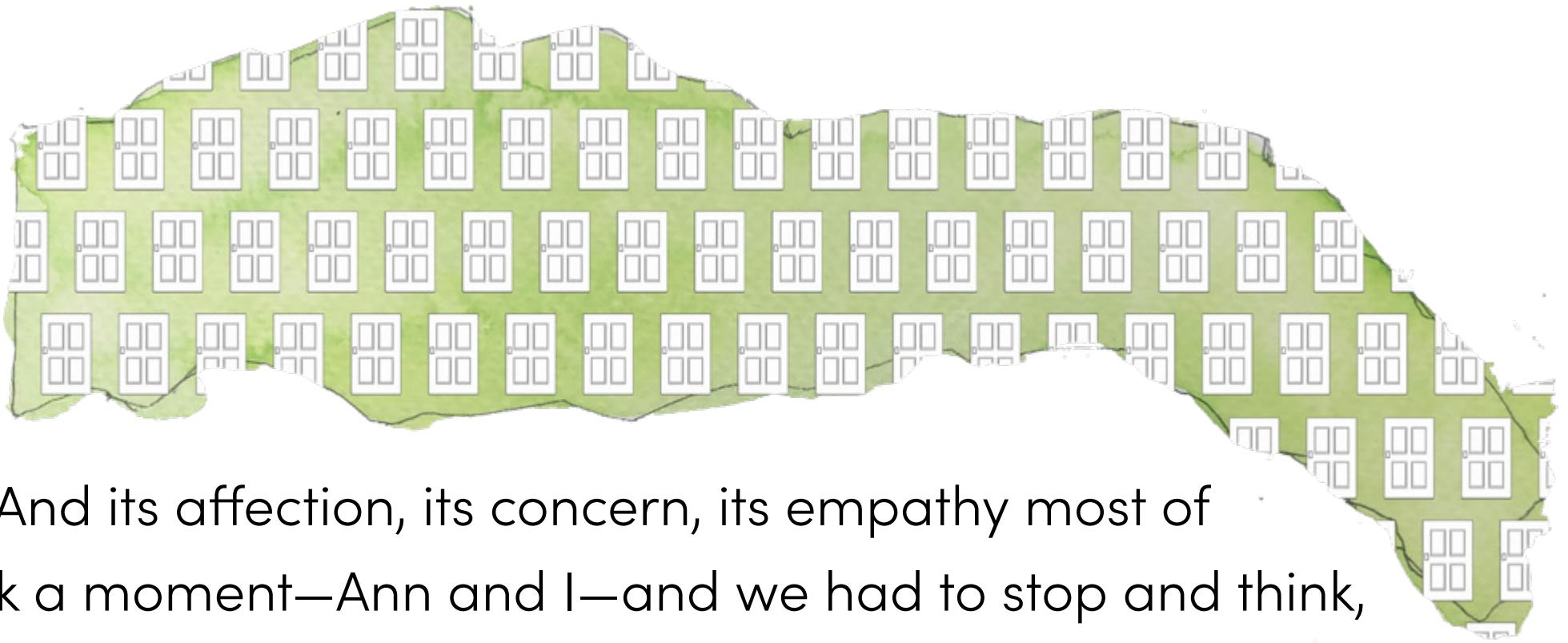


"I've had care workers who've made me feel like a problem when I've been vulnerable and at my weakest." - James (OA)



"It was interesting because all of us talked about ourselves as caregivers, and less about being recipients of care. That seemed to stand out for all of us. And being raised, whether we were forced to be this way or because we admired seeing the caregiving traits in [our parents], especially our mothers, we moved toward that. In my case as a hospice volunteer, and for Sofia as a job, one she does magnificently. So it was a good discussion. There was a lot of common ground." - Sharon (OA)

"One thing we did talk about was care and stepping outside of yourself. And its affection, its concern, its empathy most of all, but we both took a moment—Ann and I—and we had to stop and think, 'what is the difference between love and care?'. The little things that make them different, or maybe the big things that make them different. Ann had also mentioned, and it resonated with me, [how] PSWs do not receive special training when it comes to dealing with the 2SLGBTQ+ community, and so there is sometimes a lack of awareness, a lack of sensitivity, a lack of communication sometimes, and even I have experienced it." - Marci (PSW)



"I felt alone so many times over the years, and especially the last three years, and there was nothing, absolutely nothing [...] I'm talking about nothing from community support and the frustration again, I always have to be careful [...] Last February I had to ask a support worker to leave the house definitely because of homophobia and the way they were treating [my husband]. If you look to the far side, you'll see, "listen," and on this side, "do you hear me?" and I just felt so often we're not being listened to and not being... I often feel they may be listening but they're not hearing what you're saying, and that's been a frustration to me." - Richard (OA)

Circles of Care

A pink warming sun with soft edges
Sunlit tree, positive energy
Being held
A warm cup of tea

Circles connecting
Feeling the care and love from a warm hug
Showing up for others, reaching out
Two people walking together

Circles of care never stops and it is infinite
Letting someone know you care
Care is connectedness
Listening to my heart, I create a circle of hope

What is care?

The question of “what is care” permeated all sessions and was the specific focus of session four and five. In session four, we gave participants the following prompts to discuss in smaller and then larger groups: *What does “care” mean to you? How did you get into homecare work? What concerns you about accessing care as an older LGBTQ person? What about homecare do you think could be changed?* Session five focused on artmaking. It began with a reading of the Circles of Care poem (on the previous page) followed by guided art exercises using colour, line, mixed-media, and metaphor to delve further into themes of home and care. After, participants paired up to reflect on this process and what their art pieces said or showed them about their relationship to home and care.

Participants had different reasons for becoming personal support workers, and for working in the homecare sector. These reasons included a desire to help others in need, to make deeper connections with clients (differently from care work in institutional settings), to the sense that being a carer was part of their nature, a skill and strength developed since childhood and inspired by others in their lives. Similar sentiments about caregiving were also shared by several LGBTQ older adult participants, who described past and ongoing care commitments. This included past professional work, volunteering experiences (e.g., as a hospice volunteer) and the current support they gave to friends, children, partners, and community members. Because of this shared experience and being able to connect with each other during the sessions, many participants felt as though there was a lot of common ground between the PSWs

and older adults' perceptions and experiences of care.

Participants explored, through dialogue, what the concept of "care" meant to them. In relation to "care," all participants expressed an openness to change, wanting to be heard and listened to, the desire for respect and authentic and caring connections, and commitment to learning more and better understanding one another's circumstances. For LGBTQ older adult participants, care was navigating co- and interdependency, having their needs met, and having personal boundaries respected. Being in a caring relationship was seen as a gift, a situation contrasted with experiences or feelings of isolation. LGBTQ older adults expressed that homecare services should be client-focused or person-centric, and that "good" homecare included sincerity, sensitivity, and thoughtfulness, and also consistency in the care worker

coming to provide care. LGBTQ older adult participants further shared serious concerns about facing discrimination in homecare (such as homophobia, and refusal of care), noting negative experiences of friends and community members, and the general marginalization and sidelining of LGBTQ people. PSW participants recognized these care needs and desires and positioned themselves as carers who ultimately wanted to meet the diverse needs of their clients and be there, present, and supportive in times of need. For them, care was about stepping outside of themselves and creating a genuine connection with their clients rooted in empathy and trust. They agreed that care should be client-focused, free from judgement, and sensitive to the needs of LGBTQ care-seekers and suggested that there should be greater focus on education and professional development in

their training programs and in their workplaces which could promote greater healthcare equity for LGBTQ care-seekers.

Through conversation, participants also reflected on the structural and systemic barriers that stood in the way of their “care” imaginings. PSW participants shared the struggle of wage inequity, staff shortages and precarious patient loads, and misdirected healthcare funding where “homecare is at the bottom of the [funding] tier.” These challenges were noted as being rooted in ineffective government funding for, or lack of priority given to, personal support work, and can be further understood to be part of a general undervaluing of care work in society. LGBTQ older adult participants were also keenly aware of these systemic challenges of the homecare sector. They noted that while PSWs are some of the most important care workers in the system

and do the front-line work of care, they are often overworked, overwhelmed, and prone to burn out.

These shared reflections from PSWs and LGBTQ older adult participants both invited and displayed empathy and care for one another. The dialogue and artmaking sessions prompted greater mutual understanding and allowed participants to recognize commonalities, and their own and each other’s situations within the same homecare system. Further, despite the challenges, there was a commitment to make it better, and there was a hope for change.



Process Interlude



We worked with participants through several iterations of the mural image, integrating their thoughts, suggested images, and priorities into each version. The intentions of the mural image were to capture three themes that were determined by the program participants in earlier sessions: (a) show empathy and recognition, (b) show the challenge of discrimination, and (c) show interdependence and collective power. In discussing the second iteration of the mural, participants had a lot of feedback regarding the two central figures of the PSW and older adult. A key tension here was around the visual signs of frustration and disconnect that these figures showed, signs emerging from the theme of showing the challenge of discrimination and intention to inspire recognition and empathy. Below is a lightly edited conversation between PSW and LGBTQ older adult participants about this tension.

PSW 1: Can we get a more confident looking caregiver? She looks flustered. It seems like she doesn't want to be there, or she doesn't know why she's there, or where to begin. She looks upset.

OA 1: I get the feeling that maybe she is overwhelmed.

PSW 2: Wasn't this a part of our theme though? Isn't this why in the first layer we have two people looking at each other, and then in the next layer we see that although they're there together, there is somewhat of a disconnect, a frustration on both ends, which may not necessarily be a reflection of the relationship, but maybe a reflection of the overall everything that we're interested in?

OA 2: I think it's an inappropriate image, even if it reveals some reality, I think for what we're trying to express which is home and caring. The fact that they're not looking at each other in that particular image shows a great deal of disconnect for the homecare person and the older adult. They really look like they're in distress, like they cannot come together.

PSW 2: The two people facing away from each other shows a little bit of a barrier between each other and their frustration, I like it. The reason why I like the frustration on the PSW's face is because our work is not secure. We lose clients, we get clients, we have days of not enough hours, that's where the frustration comes from.

PSW 1: But we don't bring that negativity at work, even if we're exhausted or tired, we still bring the smile on our faces.

OA 2: The PSWs here are really sharing that they don't like the way the PSW is represented in the image, and how they want to be present, smiling, positive, and bringing positive energy into the room. I feel like I really learned a lot from everything that the PSWs said here, and I'm very moved by that. But



we—the old people—haven't really talked about how it hits us as potential clients or how it affects us as elderly gay people.

PSW 1: Because our focus here is on caregiving with the LGBTQ people, the two people turning away, there's just a disconnection; it seems the PSW is refusing to give care to the LGBTQ person.

PSW 2: I like that you brought that up because that's one of the elephants in the room, and not everyone is as fortunate as all of us here to be having these conversations in a safe space. PSWs go into people's safe spaces, and it doesn't always go well. Some days are great, some days aren't. I'd like to say the majority of PSWs take pride in what they do, but there are a few that are misinformed, uninformed, frustrated by all those different things that have been brought up. It comes down to what are the themes that we're trying to portray?

OA 2: I've really come around to wanting to represent the tension between the client and the caregiver, but maybe the PSW can be responding to the emotion of the client. I think the essence of the relationship is about caring, regardless of whether they are upset or disturbed.

PSW 2: I feel like we're all trying to find a piece of ourselves in the photo. I believe we should leave the frustration, because that exists every single day, we cannot ignore it. The PSWs here want a positive image of ourselves, but the reality isn't all positive.

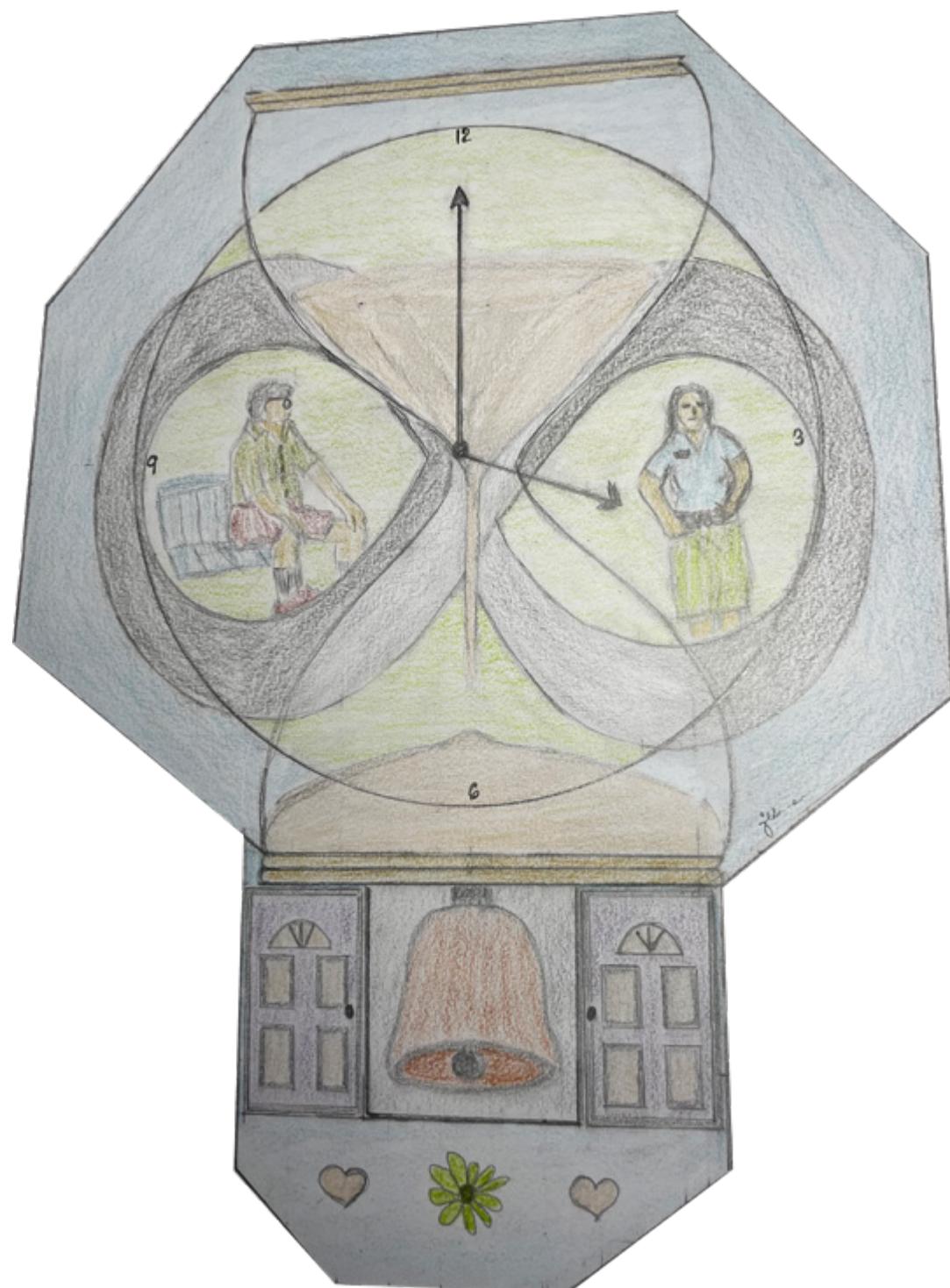
OA 1: Because it's one of our main themes—the one about discrimination and the struggles—I'd like to see the struggles not appear between the people but rather, it's a systemic struggle. We're working within a broken system and right now it looks like the struggle is between those two people. I would like to see the two of them on the same side of the struggle rather than on opposing sides of the struggle.

OA 2: I have struggled between metaphor and literal here. While I see the actual literal thing—of the tension between the client and the caregiver—I think we can see that, I can see that as a metaphor, about the system being broken. They represent the struggle that we all have to create to create a better support system and caregiving system.

This feedback and conversation led to the updated mural image below.



Futures of Home & Community-Based Care



"Let's create a community that understands and hears each other, regardless of where we're coming from." - Gene (OA)



"...the commitment—I started to do even with the art part—is to be more rebellious. Which means to ask for what we need. Because we're very quiet, and the way it works is that we have to be in a group and then the group is allowed a voice, but it has to be that connection between PSWs and the community together. Because we work by ourselves, so there are months where you just see your 12 clients and you don't even need to talk to the office . So we are very isolated, so we need to work together and get some of our points across, to just become more vocal and more rebellious." - Sofia (PSW)

"The one commitment I'm willing to apply in 2023 is to be an advocate for all people, doesn't matter who they are, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, that everybody does deserve care and to reiterate that to people around me. Because I feel like some people they're still stuck in their ways and I feel like especially in healthcare it's important for us to be advocates." - Camille (PSW)



"I want to pick on something Sofia shared. She was talking about her goals for 2023 and it reminded me about a word that's been in my head this week, I want to be more disruptive. We make change when we disrupt the systems that aren't working. Change doesn't happen when we're quiet and gentle, it happens when we speak up and we're disruptive. Bring it on 2023!" - Ann (OA)



What futures of home and community-based care can we imagine?

A core aim of this project was to explore how dialogue and arts-based engagement could create space for collective, creative imagining about futures of home and community-based care. Building on conversations and relationships established throughout the first six sessions, in the final two sessions we moved to explicitly explore the speculative question of what homecare could look like. With the overall collective mural image finalized, Melanie had divided up the image into 40 sections. In the seventh session, participants were invited to select two or more sections that they would work on individually, identifying at least one section in which they would explore the present realities of homecare, and one section in which they would explore potential “futures” of homecare. We then prompted participants to reflect on what messages they would like to

share and guided them through an art-making exercise using the grid-method to explore how to develop story-images through metaphor, realism, abstractness, proportionality, and symbolism. In the final session, participants were invited to share one of their finalized pieces or a work in progress, to reflect on the process and how it felt be at the end of our group sessions, and to share a commitment they had towards improving care experiences and/or making real their vision of homecare.

For PSW participants, fixing the structural and systemic issues of homecare was critically important. They stressed how a future of homecare in which PSWs could fully and consistently connect, understand, listen, and care for their clients was only possible if they were better supported to do so and myriad, ongoing, and urgent challenges that they as frontline care workers faced were addressed. PSWs shared frustrations about bureaucracy, under-

funding, and time constraints, using imagery such as sharks, clocks, and baggage filled with stones to represent these barriers. They also shared their visions of the future of homecare, for example using imagery of hearts and eyes to represent a desire for authentic connections between PSWs and LGBTQ older adults, and working relationships that involve care, connection, openness, listening, and understanding.

For LGBTQ older adult participants, their hopes for the future of homecare involved the need to break down barriers, build diverse support networks, and create community and 'villages of friends.' These hopes were represented using imagery of hearts, sun, glitter and shine, music notes, and water. Participants reflected on the desire to speak out for change (as represented by powerful voices coming together in a choir) and to be the change (as represented by the ripple in the water). LGBTQ older adult and PSW participants alike argued

that regardless of where you come from, the future of care must be rooted in reciprocity: in hearing each other, seeing each other, and understanding each other.

In reflecting on the process of the project, many participants shared that the virtual environment established by the researchers and social artist was conducive to tapping into their creativity, to express and unpack emotions and experiences, and to share their fears and challenges. LGBTQ older adult participants shared that after the project, they saw their creativity in a different way, they felt inspired to be brave, open, and vulnerable, and to speak out for change. One participant said the project helped him feel hopeful again, while another expressed how it had helped him to see his creativity and art in a different way. LGBTQ older adult participants also expressed that hearing about the challenges faced by PSWs was informative, and one participant noted the project changed

their preconceptions about personal support workers. PSW participants, after taking part in the project, felt they had a greater understanding of the challenges that LGBTQ older adults face in homecare, and that they were committed to being more mindful about inclusive language and about speaking up for older adult clients.

They also described how the sessions opened new possibilities for them, with one person expressing how the safety and openness of the environment helped her to put her critical thinking and tenderness hand in hand.

Everyone agreed in wishing the project was longer—both in having more time to make art, to have conversations, and to be in shared company.

Both PSW and LGBTQ older adult participants also recognized that the pathway to change—to actualize the hopes and dreams rooted in the futures of care—was through collective action. PSW participants spoke about wanting to be rebellious, to stand up, speak louder, draw attention, and ask

for what they needed. Some shared concrete actions they planned to take in their work and workplaces. Older adult participants spoke about the need to be disruptive, to make trouble, to be brave, open, and vulnerable. Some expressed the increased empowerment they felt to advocate for themselves and their community, and to continue expressing themselves in creative ways. Both groups recognized that radical change and systems transformation would only be possible by standing together, and by fighting to address the broader structural, systemic, and social issues that people who work as PSWs and LGBTQ older adults who may be homecare clients face.



“The image is asking, ‘how do we do this?’”

Through our eight sessions and 12 weeks of engagement together, we witnessed a marked change in participants' ease in discussing their thoughts, feelings, and ideas about care and homecare, and in their confidence and pleasure in expressing themselves through art. While some participants came to the sessions with prior experience in the arts and identifying as writers and performers, others had not; similarly, while some came with prior activist or advocacy experiences, for others grappling with homecare issues with fellow frontline workers and LGBTQ people was new. All came with an appetite to learn, to listen, to explore, and ultimately, to engage in a process of transformation. It is our hope that the reflections we have shared and the collective mural that they made can inspire the same.

Égale



@egalecanada

