



COMMUNITY MURALS: A JOURNEY THROUGH COLLECTIVE GRIEF AND RESILIENCE



PROJECT

Our goal is to create murals as an expression of grief and resilience among children, youth and adults through collaborations with diverse agencies and to share murals with the community through art exhibition.

We recognize that people from different cultures and social positions express grief and resilience differently. We anticipate that murals will allow us to come together to develop a shared understanding of what grief and resilience means to us as a community.

Bringing different agency murals together and sharing them with the larger community within the region will enable us to communicate with one another about experiences of grief and resilience while negotiating our linguistic and cultural differences.



MEET OUR TEAM



Marny Williams

Grief Director

The Hummingbird Centre for Hope



Pamela Rojas

Art Director



Process

01

Grief & Art Director met to develop grief curriculum and creative activities

02

Meet with key agency staff to determine:

- their community's experience with grief and loss,
- cultural impact on ability to express grief,
- insight into how best we can serve their community

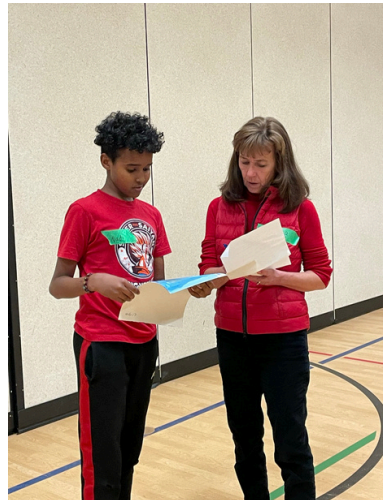
03

Grief & Art Director review master program and adapt to meet the needs of the agency and respect any cultural nuances



04

Facilitate program with youth in one or two sessions. Format toggles between grief education and creative components. Volunteers helped to capture the narrative behind each person's work



05

Art Director designs the mural by creating a collage that combines participants' drawings and symbols of what grief means to them

06

Meet back with youth for 2 sessions to begin painting of mural.

Engage volunteers to help with completion of mural



PROGRAM GOALS

Grief Education

Education will focus on three aspects

1. Understanding fundamentals of grief
2. Developing and exploring coping strategies
3. Explore growth that can come from grief



Art Expression Activity

Participants will be guided through a creative and inclusive conversation about grief

Art materials will be easily displayed and accessible to use for story sharing

Each participant will create their own visual representation of their grief



PROGRAM

01

Define Grief as what we think or feel after the loss of something special

Brainstorm with youth what things they have lost

03

Creative activities include:

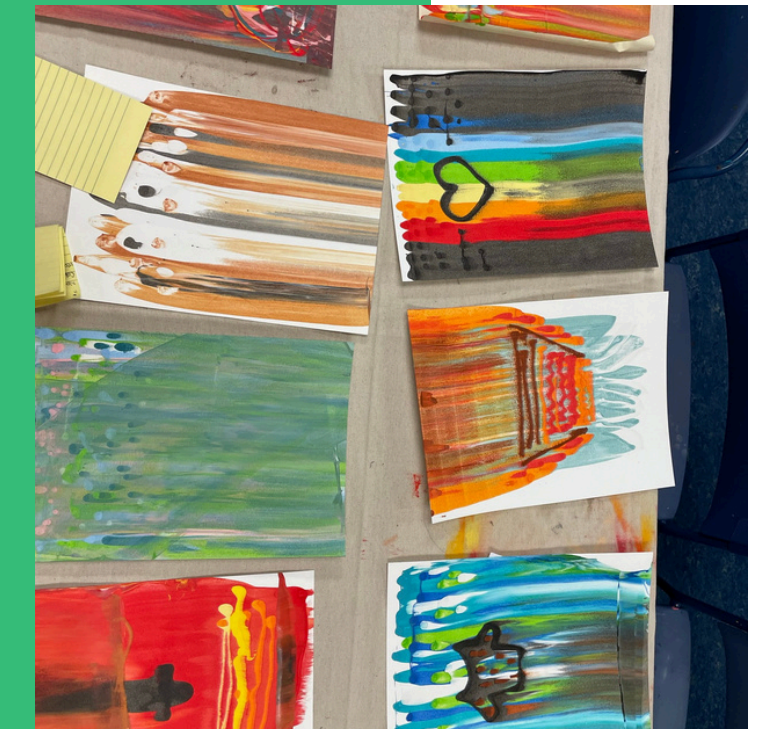
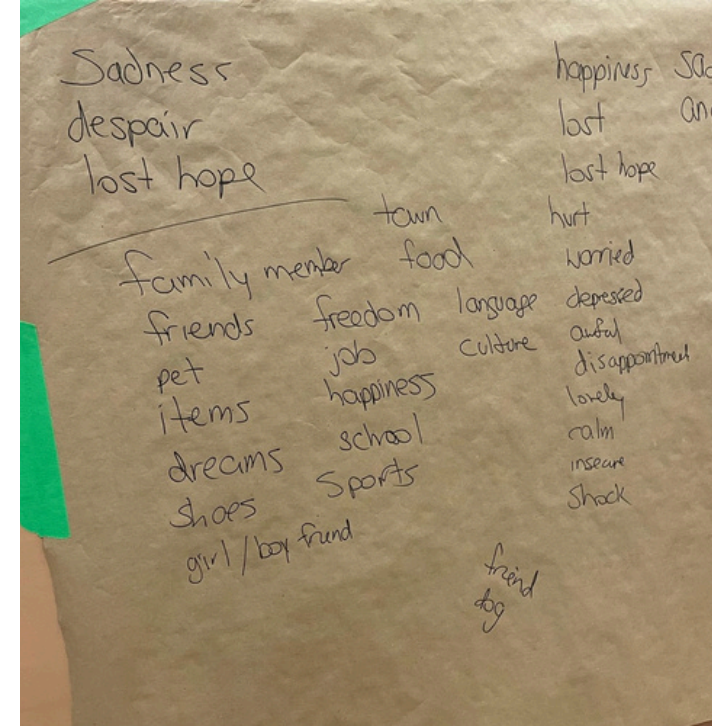
- writing their story through images
- squeegee art to blend grief colours
- using water colours to create more images that represent grief

02

Talk and validate the emotions that we can feel and share coping strategies

04

Art Director creates mural that combines all individual art pieces together. Youth help with initial painting of mural



GOALS

01

Educate about grief and develop coping strategies

03

Educate society about types of grief and show the uniqueness around how each individual and culture express it

05

Volunteer Goals

- give them opportunity to connect with community and learn about different types of grief
- some volunteers were students, so helped them to explore professional options
- brought awareness to benefits of creative expression to share emotions

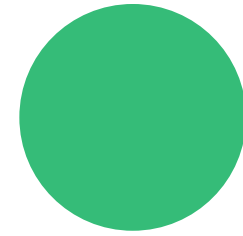
02

Provide creative outlets to express their feelings around a personal loss

04

Bring awareness to the many types of grief, the many things we can grieve over and the uniqueness of how everyone expresses and copes with it





THE AGENCIES 2023



AFRO

AFRO is a grassroots, mutual aid organization serving the Black and African communities in Waterloo Region that enables all members of our community to participate in Canadian society as active citizens.



Hummingbird Centre for Hope

To build a community of hope for those who are widowed with children



What we witnessed – AFRO

01

Participants were all BIPOC boys between 10-16 yrs old
Total of 20 youth, 6 volunteers

02

We met the youth at their facility during their weekly program. This activity interrupted their basketball time

03

Youth were disappointed to not be participating in basketball, but did engage with our program. Facilitators were not sure of engagement during the program, but after reviewing their art it was evident they were engaged

04

Experienced some barriers in language and translation of terms. Older youth helped younger to interpret. Some youth did not want to share meaning behind their creations. This boundary was respected by all

05

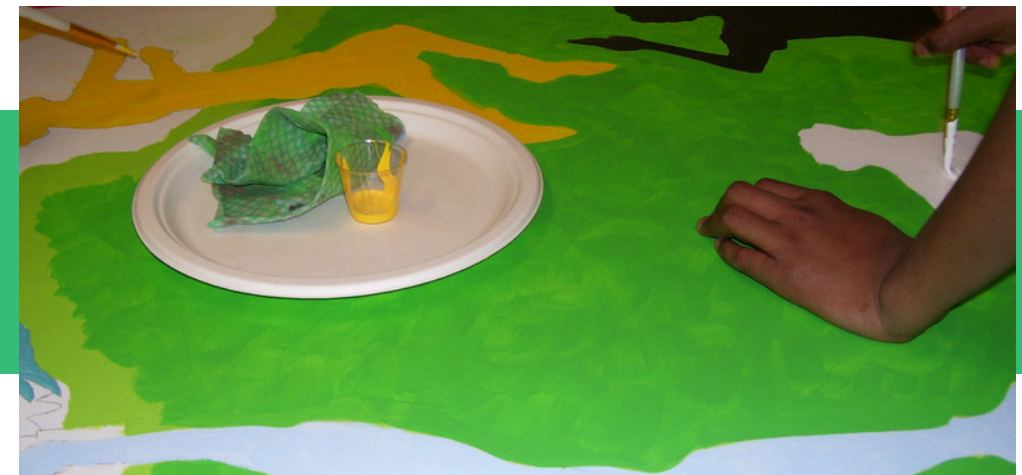
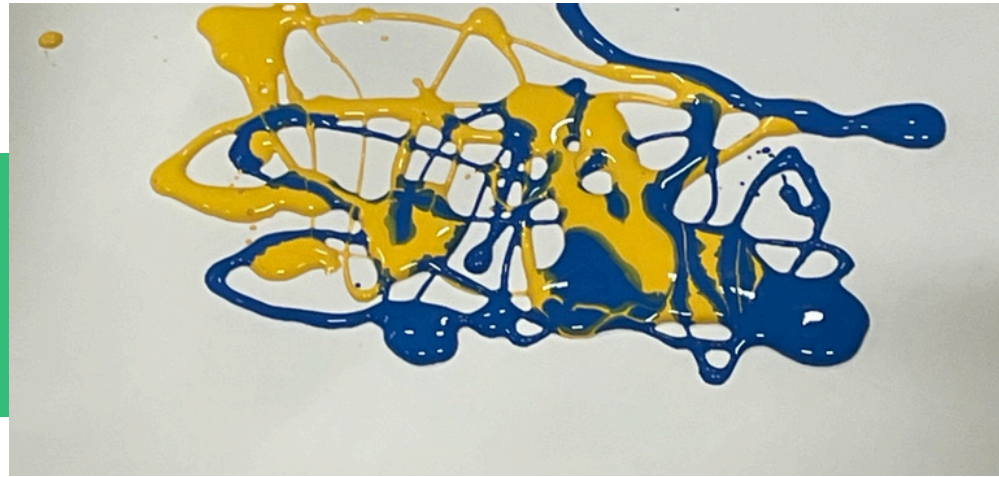
Tempo of workshop was fast paced, lots of energy in the room and we only held one session with the youth

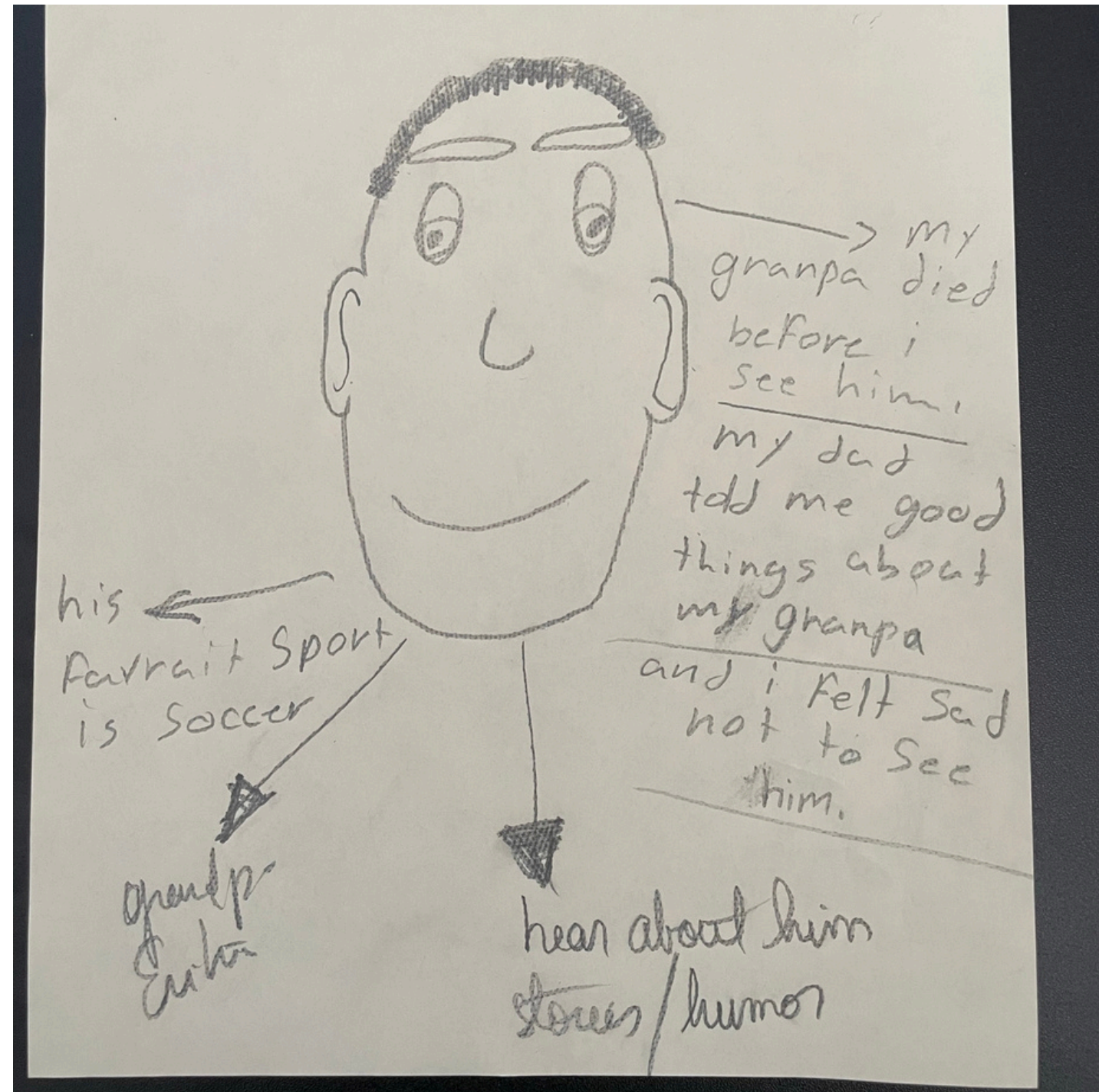
06

When we returned to have them start painting, youth were very excited to see their work included in the mural.. We hosted two painting sessions and youth could switch out and still enjoy basketball



AFRO WORK IN PROGRESS





INDIVIDUAL ART WORK

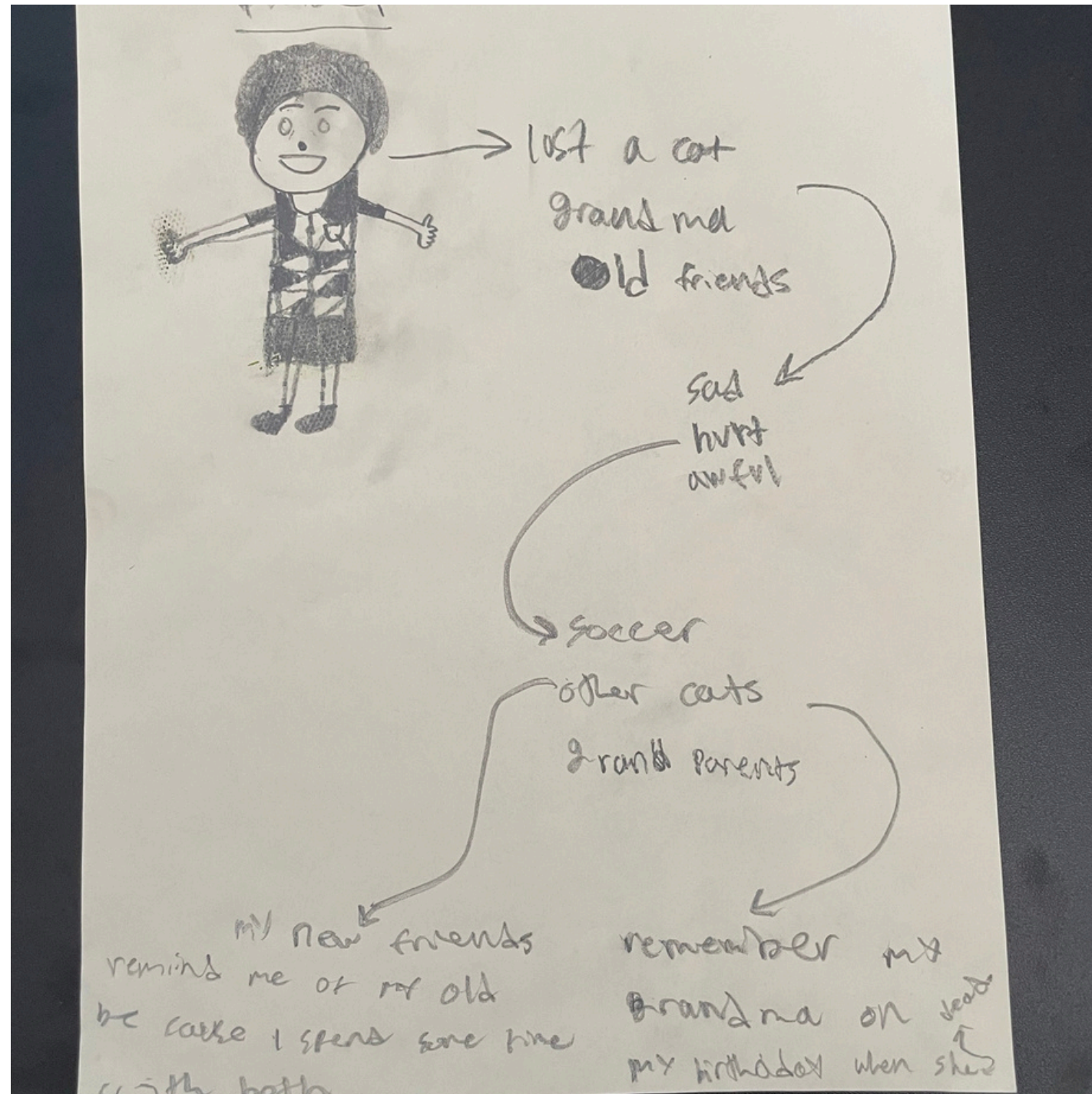
Male - 15 yrs

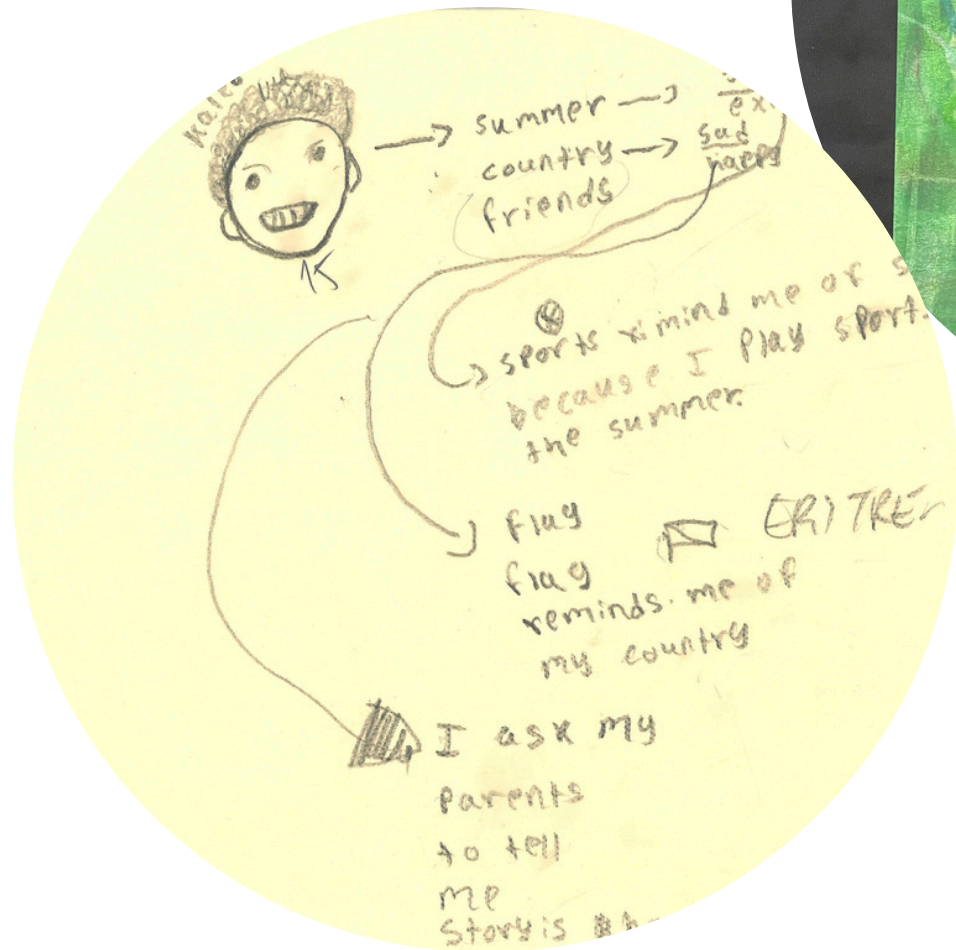
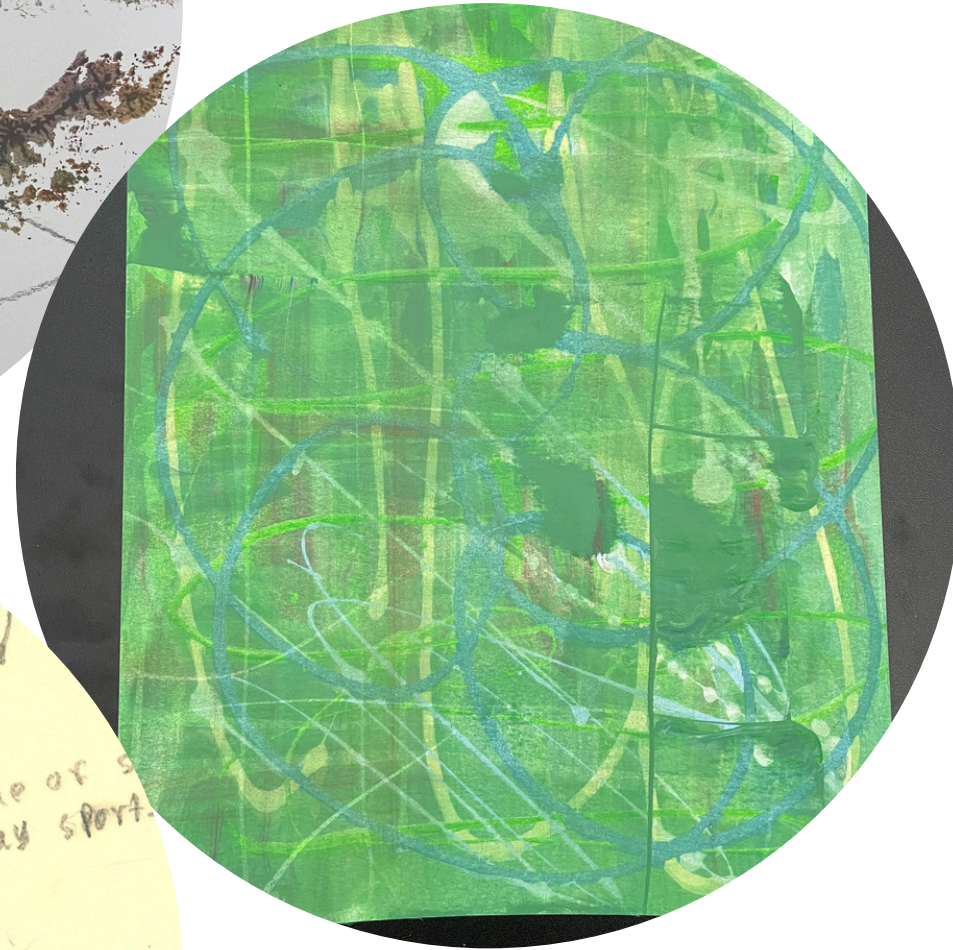
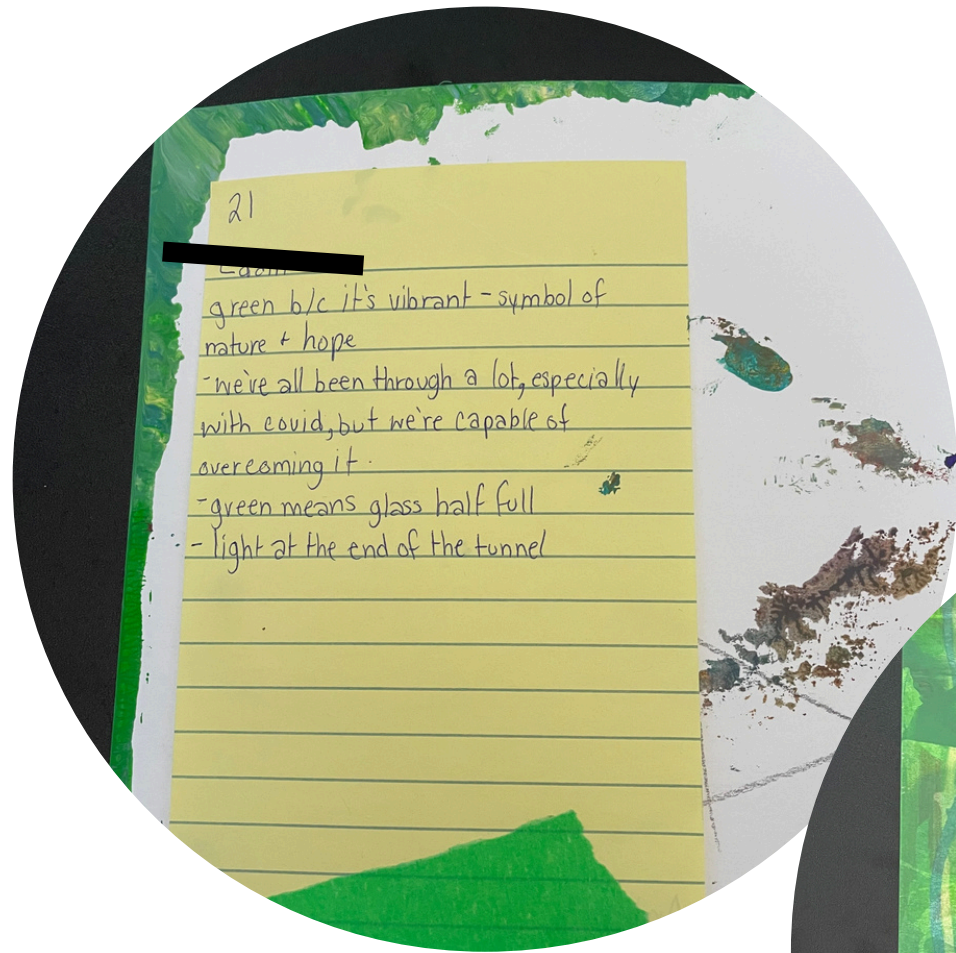
- my grandpa died before I see him
- my dad told me good things about my grandpa
- and I felt sad not to see him
- hear about him through stories and humour
- his favourite sport is soccer

INDIVIDUAL ART WORK

Male

- lost a cat, grandma, old friends
- sad, hurt, awful
- soccer
- other cats, grandparents
- my new friends remind me of my old because I spend time with both
- remember my grandma on my birthday when she died





INDIVIDUAL ART WORK

K - 15 yrs

- Green because it is vibrant - symbol of nature & hope
- We've all been through a lot especially with Covid, but we're capable of overcoming it
- green means glass half full
- light at the end of the tunnel



INDIVIDUAL ART WORK

N - 16 yrs

- red - friend died in old country
- dark
- yellow - best friend's favourite colour



INDIVIDUAL ART WORK

S - 15 yrs

- shirt he was wearing at school
- unite your country
- people united by red heart
- feel happy bringing people together
- people in background are my community



AFRO



Grief is not an experience solely associated to a death. Grief is a combination of what we think and feel after any type of loss.

Imagine arriving in a new country where everything that once brought you comfort and peace is now different and foreign. The grief that can be experienced by emigrants leaving their home land and settling in a new country can be immense.

Envision leaving your home, family, food, culture, language, climate and more, and moving across the continent where everything is unknown.

Grief is not a comfortable topic and adding a potential language and cultural barrier, this conversation becomes even more intimidating. Art is a language that joins us all and can ultimately be more powerful than words to express emotion.

We are all a product of our upbringing. Our values and beliefs are influenced by the teachings of our parents and grandparents. Elders bring invaluable lessons about life and the importance of staying connected to the land, community, and the animals we share it with. Stories that are often shared informally are important for remembering who we are and where we come from. Being separated by an ocean reduces the intimacy of being side by side, watching tv and uniting through togetherness.

The loss of a ring, a family heirloom, is more than a physical loss, it is a tangible and symbolic connection to ancestors.

When immigrating to a new country we bring all that we know and love with us and lean into that comfort. Canada looks very different due to its landscape, environment and community and therefore resides in the background as youth find ways to create a balance between differing cultures.

Youth need a community of peers and basketball is one way they are building this. Victoria Hills Community Centre is a safe place for youth to be together, have fun and learn. The colour of each player was used by our youth to represent their grief. All players hold a basketball demonstrating not only their passion, but that each individual can move the ball in their own way; they can make their own path to the goal.

What we witnessed – Hummingbird

01

Participants were grieving families where the spouse has died; parent to the children. Children between the ages of 5 - 15 yrs old.

6 parents, 15 children
5 volunteers, 3 young adults who experienced death of parent

03

Children were engaged from the start. Grief has been a topic in their homes so they are more comfortable with discussions.

Education around grief was short which gave more time to be creative

05

Everyone was engaged through all 3 activities. Youth were open to talking to facilitators about their deceased parent and sharing stories about what they miss.

02

Met the families at The Family Centre Creative Space room

Event was approx 3 hrs which included dinner

04

Families sat together with each member working on their own creation. Part of Hummingbird's mandate is to provide families opportunity to grieve together and this was met during the activities.

06

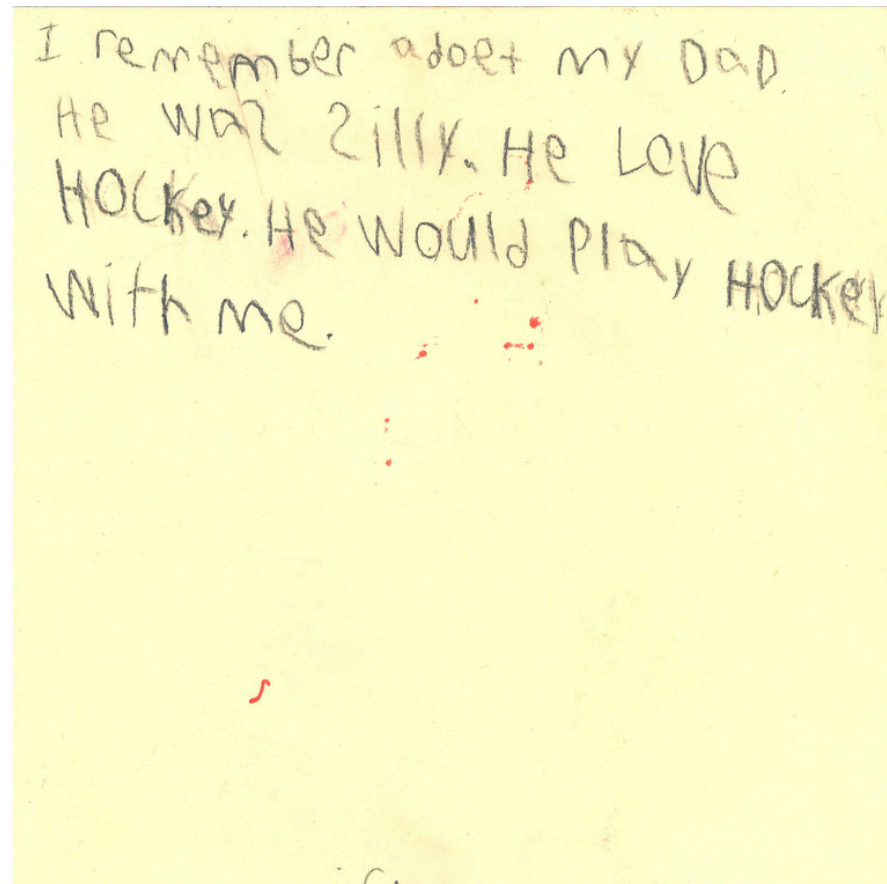
Not all families were able to help with painting the mural. One barrier HCH often experiences with programming is the conflict with extra curricular activities. Volunteers were needed to help complete the painting

HCH WORK IN PROGRESS



ART WORK

male: 6 yrs



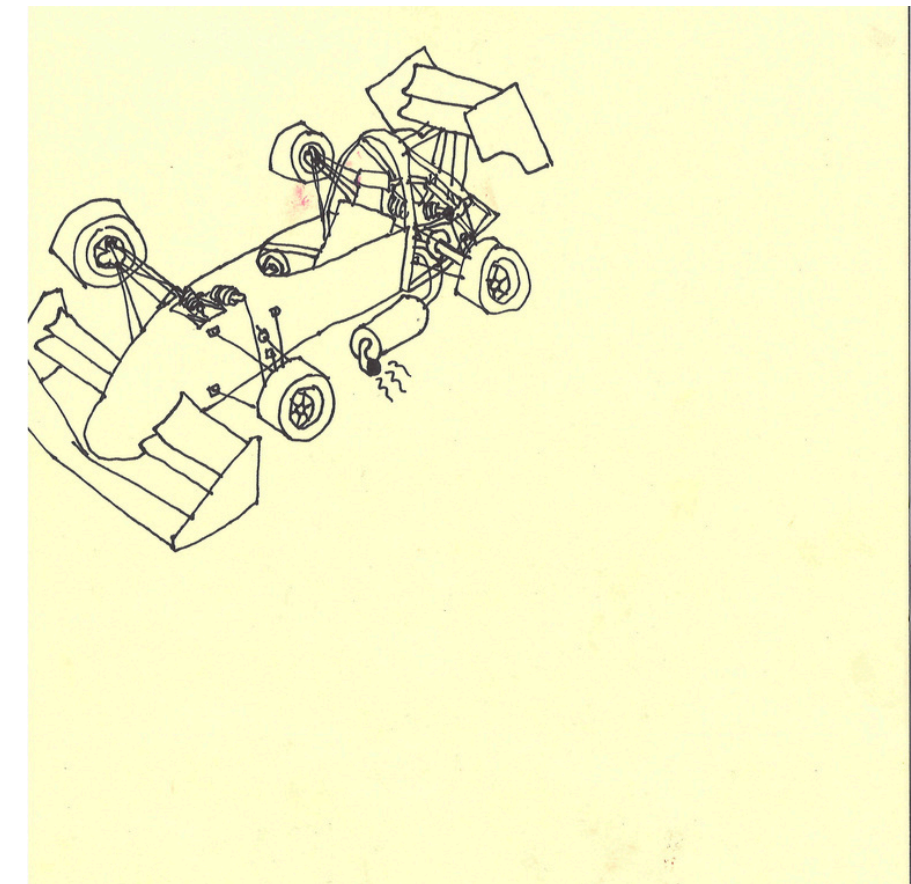
I remember about my Dad
He was silly. He love
Hockey. He would play hockey
with me

female: 12 yrs



Sharing all the things that
youth remember about
their Dad

male: 19 yrs

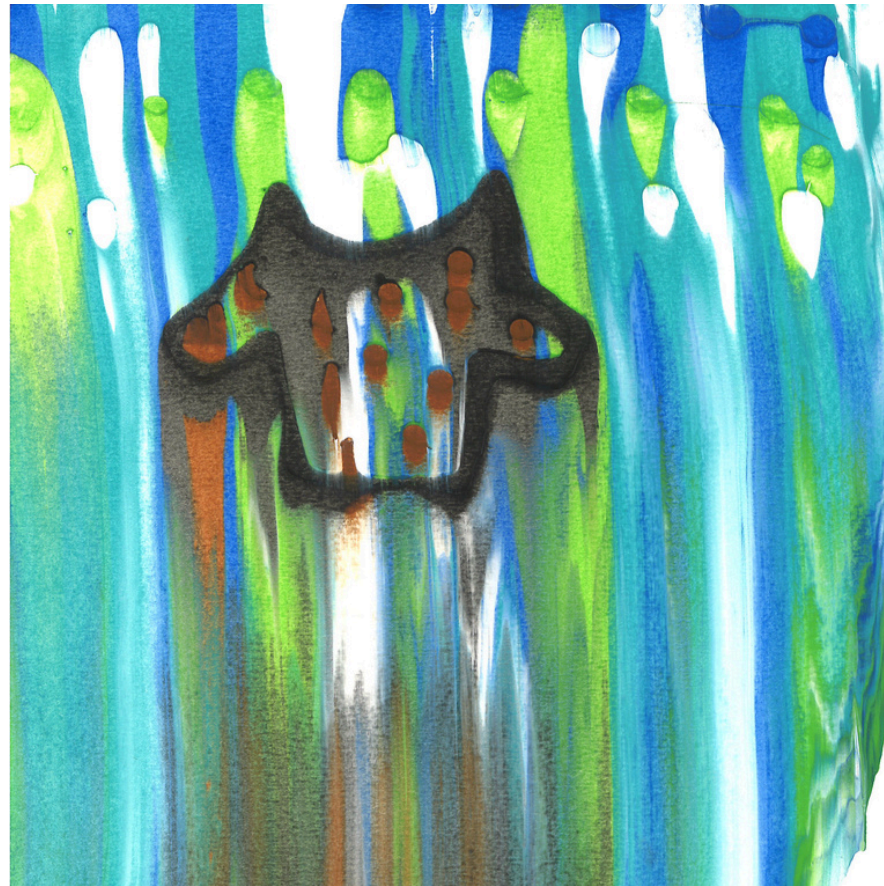


Youth and parent worked
on cars together



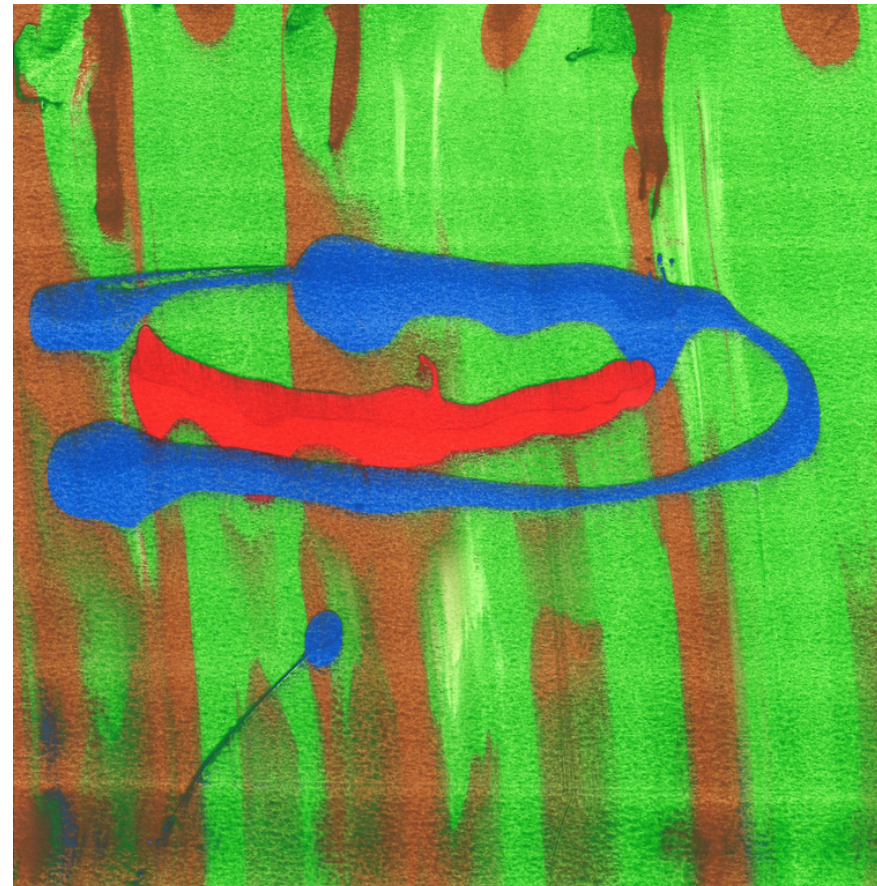
ART WORK

female: 12 yrs



Blue: fishing
Black shirt: any wore black shirts
Green: went a saw nature together

male: 15 yrs



Trees
Canoe in water
Dad liked to do this

female: 10 yrs



All colours: rainbow effect
Red & orange: dad's favourite colours
Black: represents loss
Yellow: represents being open and happy,
Dad was always like this
Green: shows Dad's happiness
Blue: represents sadness
Purple: feelings of grief & emotions

ART WORK

female: 10 yrs

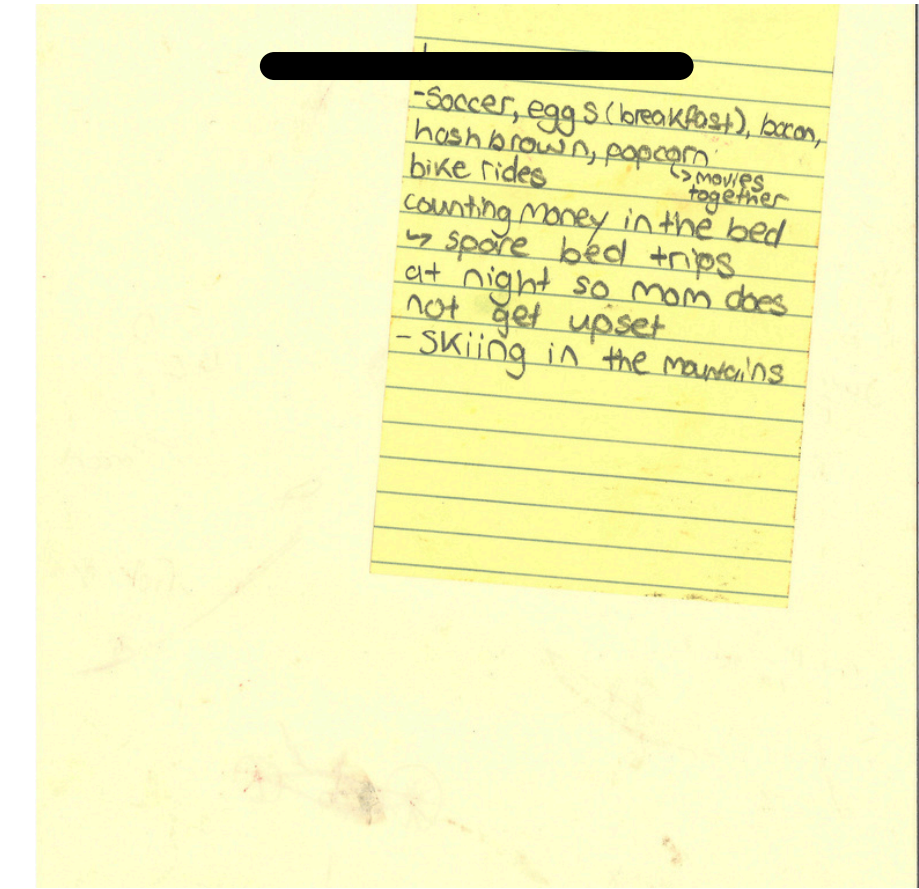


mainly blue & purple -
sadness from father dying

she said she was blocking
feelings

green: frustration

male: 14 yrs



soccer, eggs (breakfast) bacon, hash browns,
popcorn & movies together, bike rides
counting money in the bed
spare bed trips at night so mom does not get upset
skiing in the mountains

HUMMINGBIRD

“Grief is meant to be shared” – Harry Wales

This mural is a compelling collection of images of grief as told by our widowed parents and their children. Each adult is missing their life partner and each child is missing their parent. Each story shares the impact of grief on their lives.

The foundation of this mural is built from our tears. The background has been washed with a variety of blue hues to represent the flood of shared tears. These streaks of blue peak through from the background. Layered on top are the collective images as told by our families.

Death and grief impact all areas of our life and the lens that we now look through has been muted or dulled. The colour palette is subtle and monochromatic to invoke the somber and mournful emotions of grief. In contrast, Hope is intertwined throughout with brighter hues and depths of colour.

Nature can provide a source of healing and reflection. Many of our kids miss the activities that they once shared with their parent. Canoeing, camping, sports and family play time have all changed.

The canoe's paddles are deliberately separated from each other to suggest the lost connection and reality that we are not all rowing in the same direction. The Hummingbird Centre for Hope was inscribed on one paddle to reflect the work that our agency strives to build in each family. We thank both the Waterloo Region Community Foundation and Resilience Project for supporting this hope in the second paddle and base of our canoe.

The flowers planted throughout bring pops of life that represent the necessary breaks we must take in our grief. Often, we can see beauty in the world, but it can be hard to connect with it.



HUMMINGBIRD



A keyboard runs along the edges and middle. Music surrounds us and can invoke memories, stirring both sadness and joy. Music has healing qualities through reflection and inspiration (melody). In the middle you see a guitar with a child playing it backwards or in the opposite direction – perhaps they are learning how to strum in a different way and work to turn the impact of music around. Behind this child is a parent offering support, while carrying two hearts in their chest.

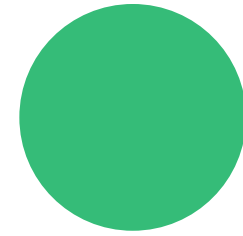
Positioned at the top of the mural is a fishing rod, rainbow and mountains reminding us of the power of nature to offer opportunities of reflection and connection to the person who died.

The solo activity of fishing can create a silent connection and conversation with our person. Memories can ebb and flow in not only the ripples and waves of the water but in the fish who are swimming beneath. The majestic presence of the mountain demonstrates the trek or journey grief creates. It is the transition and connection between the earth and the sky.

The muted rainbow that sits along side the water and mountain strive to remind us that there is colour in the world, but that again, grief has muted its vibrancy. With community support there is hope to see those bright colours once again.

The woman's face located in the center represents the founders of Hummingbird Centre for Hope. The many colours of their hair are the many families they have supported. The white outline between each colour are the many roads to be navigated not only in their personal grief, but within the creation of this organization. She sheds a tear for herself, her children and the many families who have come to Hummingbird for support.

Notice the white that is used to outline and surround the entire mural. The artist intentionally left space because the mural is not complete. There is still space for all our families to find their own way in grief and to share with our community. Grief never ends, we learn to grow and rebuild with it. We need space to continue this journey.



THE AGENCIES 2024



Resilient Rebels

Resilient Rebels are a youth group that strives to make positive changes in our world. We focus on volunteering and making a difference in KW



Kinbridge Community Assoc

Empowering community through positive relationship building, facilitation of programs and services to support a diverse and active community



What we witnessed – Resilient Rebels

01

Participants were a mix of youth between 12–18 yrs old
Total of 20 youth, 7 volunteers

03

Support and encouragement from facilitators helped to create a safer place for youth to partake in activities and share their experiences

05

Marny & Pamela were humbled to share space with the youth and their intimate experiences with grief. Youth have had difficult conversations with other adults which we believe made them more comfortable sharing their stories.

02

We met in the Youth Room at FACS during their bi-weekly program time. In-training therapy dogs were invited to be present as youth worked on activities. If needed, the youth could have a break.

04

Excitement in youth as they helped paint mural. A few came to help outside of their program time

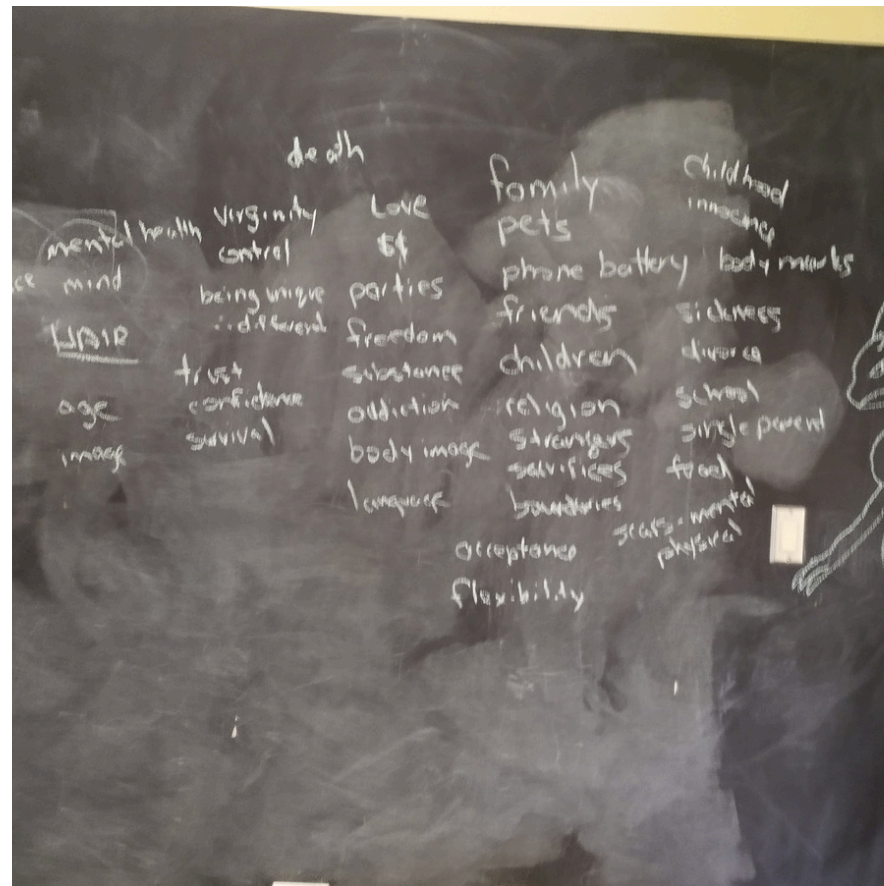
06

Marny & Pamela were invited back so that we could share completed piece with them. Amazing to witness their enthusiasm.



ART WORK

Brainstorming Grief Words



Working on activities



Beginning...

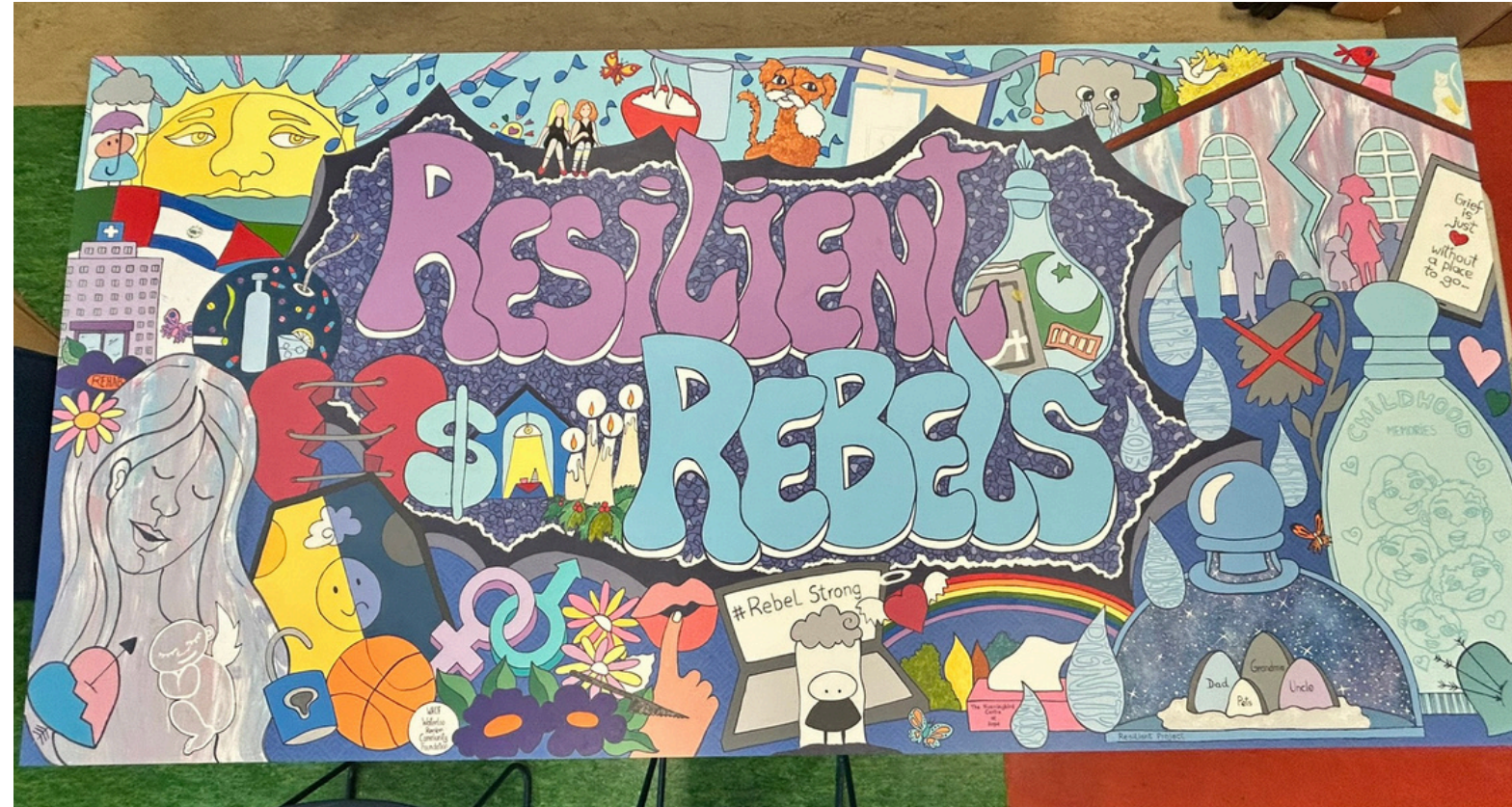
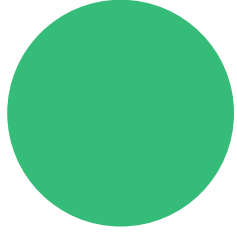


Virginity, trust, sickness, divorce,
language, confidence, image



REBEL WORK IN PROGRESS





Many of us assume that every child is surrounded with love, safety and nurturing adults. But sadly this isn't always true.

The innocence of childhood is a priceless gift that deserves to be cherished and protected. Every child has the right to a dependable caregiver who works to preserve the magic and joy of their early years for as long as possible.

For some, challenging family dynamics, neglect, substance abuse, and trauma are just some of the factors that have forced young individuals to shoulder responsibilities far beyond their years.

Resilient Rebels is a community for youth aged 14 to 20 whose innocence has been taken from them by circumstances beyond their control.

The group is led by two exceptional mentors who dedicate themselves to empowering, nurturing, and supporting these youth as they transition into adulthood. Rooted in three foundational pillars—food, spirit, and community—the program offers structured activities designed to help participants make healthier life choices and break cycles of abuse and hardship.

Growing up comes with inevitable grief and loss due to traditional developmental stages such as changes in friendships, schools, loss of belongings, and even heartbreak from first love. However, for these young individuals, the losses are often far more profound and inconceivable. They experience a harsh reality of disrupted innocence and unjust grief manifested through self-harm, suicidal ideation, sexual assault, teen pregnancy, addiction, and overdose. These are struggles no child should face, yet they are part of the reality that our community must confront and support.

The imagery of Resilient Rebels reflects the depth and complexity of their lived experiences. The rich and dark colors symbolize the profound effects of trauma and neglect. The name "Resilient Rebels" is placed over a serpentine path representing the unique, interconnected, and often messy struggles these youth face.

The imagery included in the mural are all representations created by the youth to depict their life experiences. We invite you to immerse yourself in the mural and feel the energy of the emotions that are being shared with you.



What we witnessed – Kinbridge Community Centre

01

Participants were a mix of youth between 12–18 yrs old
Total of 16 youth, 1 volunteer

02

We met the youth at their community centre during their weekly program. Youth were invited to join as they wished

03

Some disorganization in planning and having youth commit to the activity. Limited consistent participation through the 4 sessions.

04

Youth that did join enjoyed sharing and participating in the activity and painting.

05

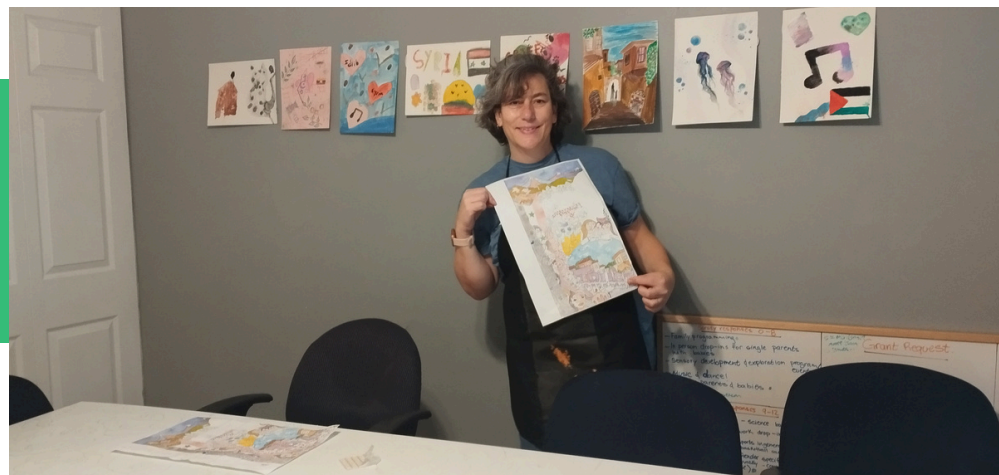
A few of the youth were consistent through all sessions and we enlisted them to help brainstorm a portion of the mural to help build personal ownership of the mural

06

Finishing of mural was delayed due to conflict of schedules and challenges of location/transportation. Volunteers from Kinbridge were unable to come help paint.



KINBRIDGE WORK IN PROGRESS



KINBRIDGE

The story is not yet completed.

When the mural is complete, Pamela shares her artistic design process to Marny.

Marny then strives to narrate the story!

As of January 2025, the painted mural is not complete, so the story is to come.



Pamela's design



Progress on mural

THANK YOU



WATERLOO REGION
Community
Foundation

