



2022 Annual Report

Land Acknowledgement, Appreciation and Solidarity

The Department of Imaginary Affairs is situated on the land of the Mississaugas of the Credit who are part of the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Wyandot, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy of Six Nations, and many other Nations, recorded or unrecorded.

Tkaranto is considered the original name of this land. Tkaranto is Mohawk meaning “where there are trees standing in the water.” You might know this land by its colonial name, Toronto.

The work we do is to understand the evolving definition of what it means to be Canadian. That work begins with each and every one of us learning to be in reciprocity with this land in the way this so-called country’s First Peoples intended.

Tkaranto is within the Dish with One Spoon territory and a treaty between Anishinabe, Haudenosaunee and Mississaugas. The treaty is a vision that every person and creature on this land shares this land as if it is one dish, with one spoon. We must work together to ensure the dish never goes empty. Importantly, there are also no knives at the table, representing that we must keep the peace between us.

As an organization, we carry with us the responsibility to be good ancestors and to be caretakers of this land.

We work to live in solidarity with every caretaker on this land—past, present and future.

The work we do is not possible without an ongoing journey of learning, unlearning, and relearning that history as we knew it has changed and continues to change.



Photo Description: Students visiting "What if Parks Were Safe for Everyone?" installation at 401 Richmond Gallery

Photo Credits: Laurence Butet-Roch

We see Canada as a place where everyone feels welcome, has a strong sense of wellbeing and belonging, and can live in reciprocity on this native land.

Vision

We see Canada as a place where everyone feels welcome, has a strong sense of wellbeing and belonging, and can live in reciprocity on this native land.

Mission

The Department of Imaginary Affairs is a national nonprofit organization. Our mission is to understand the evolving definition of what it means to be Canadian.

Our work is to seek, centre, elevate, and amplify the voices, stories, living experiences, perspectives, ideas, and ideally decision-making practices of Newcomers, Immigrants, Refugees, and Youth (especially those who identify as Black, Indigenous and/or People of Colour) in order to co-design more empathetic programs, policies, and services.

Newcomers, Immigrants, Refugees and Youth make up a majority population within Canada who are often underestimated or just missing when it comes to the design of empathetic programs, policies, and services.

When we care enough to imagine an alternative, we also have to grieve for how that alternative doesn't yet exist for us. We have and that we will need to release and hospice pieces of our reality to give way to our imagination.

It is our role to utilize our power and privilege to influence individuals, organizations, and systems to integrate equitable processes and practices.

To us, imagination is the work of grief and care.

We deserve to live in the equitable futures we are imagining.

Our work is not possible without the valuable contributions of many individuals, partners, and funders.

DIA People

We have so much gratitude to the people who work within the Department of Imaginary Affairs to bring equitable futures into reality:

Adrianna Chong
Ari Para
Ashley Gittens
Borrsha Kanapathipillai
Elvin Velasco
Janey Law
Jennifer Chan
Justine Abigail Yu
Mathura Mahendren

Board of Directors

To the people who have our backs in strategy, governance and finances.

President	Alexandra Tamiko Da Dalt
Vice-President	Andrew Chung
Secretary	Teresa Wiens
Treasurer	Darren Sutherland
Directors	Trevor Haldenby Ayomide Sami-Orungbe Rachel Phan Maggie Zhang

Volunteers

To all of the generous individuals who support us to do language translation on our projects so that we can be as inclusive as possible.

Partners

To our many partners who collaborate and work with us to imagine equitable futures.



Funders



Work of Imagination

We are so grateful for the work of our volunteers, storytellers, artists, partners, funders and every single person who dares to imagine equitable futures.

Message from the Board

Dear Reader,

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to the 2022 Department of Imaginary Affairs (DIA) Annual Report. In my final year as Board Chair, I'm reflecting on the ways this organization has grown, branching out into new areas of work and innovating in exciting directions.

I'm inspired by the programs that DIA has implemented this year, including the release of the gorgeous *The Stories of Us* magazine, exhibits asking the question, "*What If Parks Were Safe For Everyone?*", and reflections on feelings of grief.

I was proud to read *The Stories of Us* magazine with my grandparents, second-generation Japanese-Canadians, and to have them wonder over the honest stories and beautiful artwork about what it's like to be a Newcomer to Canada today.

They went on to share the magazines with their friends and community—creating bridges between different generations of Canadians of all ages. I light up when I think about the connections that DIA has sparked across the country.

The DIA Board is immensely proud of the creativity, passion, and expertise that the DIA team, especially our CEO Jenn, brings to the work.

Over the course of my period as Board Chair, I've witnessed thrilling growth in the organization and its leadership and am eager to see where things are headed next.

As we look towards the future, I am excited about the opportunities that lie ahead and the connections that will be made in this next chapter. Thank you for being a part of the Department of Imaginary Affairs community, and all the best for the year ahead.

Sincerely,
Alexandra Tamiko Da Dalt

Wayfinding through our work

We describe our work as designing artifacts of the future.

Making programs, policies, services, solutions that we imagine existing and then working to unpack why they didn't already exist, and at each of those artifacts needs in order to thrive and survive.

We aim to create tangible versions of the futures we imagine so that we may provoke and spark change.

We have come to see as projects as multi-pronged versions of bringing our imagined futures into reality.

Here is a legend for understanding the ways we categorize our work:



Project

A time-bound container that we put around our work, which includes roles, tasks, timelines, deliverables, partnerships, and ideally budget



Product

What is created through our work



Process

How we approach our work through principles of care and reciprocity



Vision

The systemic change we imagine being created and catalyzed based on the work we have invested in



The Stories of Us

What Happened

In 2022, we worked with Justine Abigail Yu, founder and editor-in-chief of Living Hyphen, to produce a multilingual magazine for *The Stories of Us*.

When we started *The Stories of Us* project in 2017, we had always imagined that our books would end up in public libraries. This vision came from early conversations with ESL teachers who were doing their programming primarily from public libraries and an assumption that many Newcomers access libraries to get their learning materials.

While trying to get *The Stories of Us* books into public libraries we learned that many libraries actually don't often carry self-published books in their circulation. While this discovery was disappointing at first, it ultimately led us to the solution of designing a magazine.

In partnership with Living Hyphen, we were able to create a beautiful, multilingual 151-page magazine with 60 stories in 15 languages.

The entire team for *The Stories of Us* magazine are women of colour and each have a very personal relationship to immigration.

In September 2022, we were able to celebrate the launch of the magazine with an intimate outdoor part under The Bentway in Toronto. It was so magical to be joined by so many of the people who have made The Stories of Us project what it is today.

What's Next

In 2023, we are excited to be imagining the next chapter for *The Stories of Us* project and conducting a learning journey on investment options.

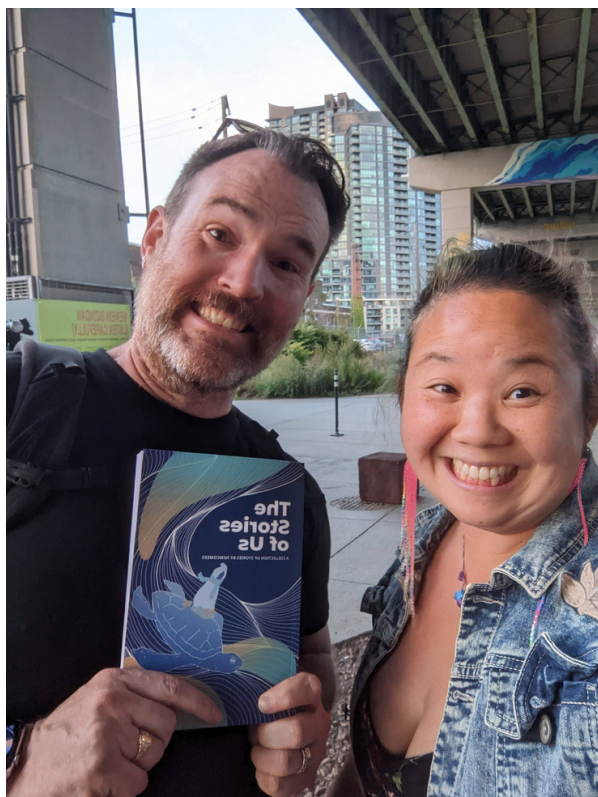


Photo Descriptions: *The Stories of Us* magazine launch party, Justine (top left), the Annes (top right), Blair & Jenn (bottom left) and Rana, an SOU author (bottom right).

Photo Credits: Jenn Chan



Photo Description: DIA Team playing *"What if Parks were Designed by Us?"*

Photo Credits: Jenn Chan



A Tale of Two Parks

What Happened

In 2022, we continued exploring what it means to feel safe in public parks. This exploration led us to designing an interactive public installation following a storytelling program, a mini zine, a game about participatory park design, and speaking at the Park People Conference.

In April 2022, Ari and Elvin hosted a storytelling program called re:Parks to create art-based stories with a cohort of participants. The program included collaging, poetry, drawing, and facilitated writing exercises.

Having this program within our organization invited all of us to do a lot more art-based check-ins, and to integrate art and creative writing into our regular processes.

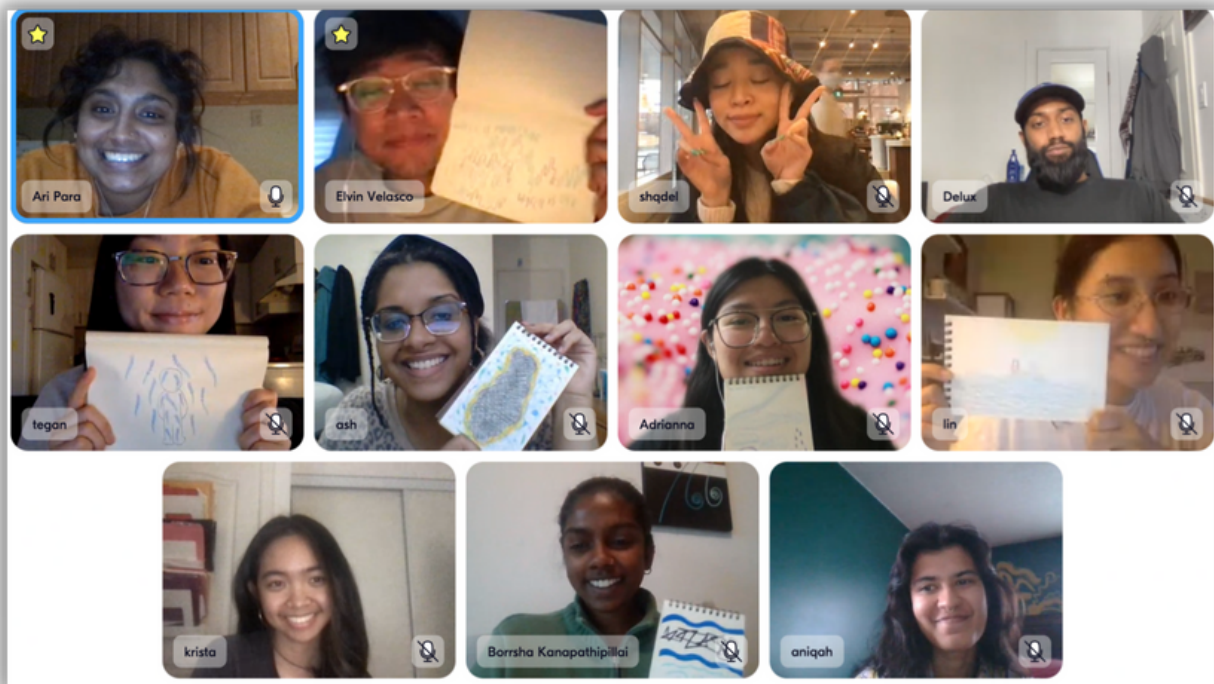


Photo Description: re: Park participant screenshot

Photo Credits: Ari Para



A Tale of Two Parks

What Happened

In May 2022, we launched an installation called “What if Parks were safe for Everyone?” as a culmination of artifacts co-created by the participants of re:Parks and our team.

The installation was hosted at Artscape Weston Commons and was open for 3 weeks. During that time, we also offered public programming and shared The Giant Storybook during the Farmers’ Market on the weekends.

One of our public programming offerings was the game we designed in 2021 called “What if Parks Were Designed For Us?” which invites participants to co-design a participatory planning process for parks in the place where it is happening.

The game and installation caught the attention of the Park People team and they came to play and visit. This led to an invitation to adapt the game digitally for their conference in September 2022. We had 60 participants play.

In December 2022, we opened the installation again at the 401 Richmond Gallery. This space received many visitors and we were able to truly see what it was like for our installation to come alive.



Photo Description: DIA Team getting familiar with the Humber River
Photo Credits: Elvin Velasco



A Tale of Two Parks

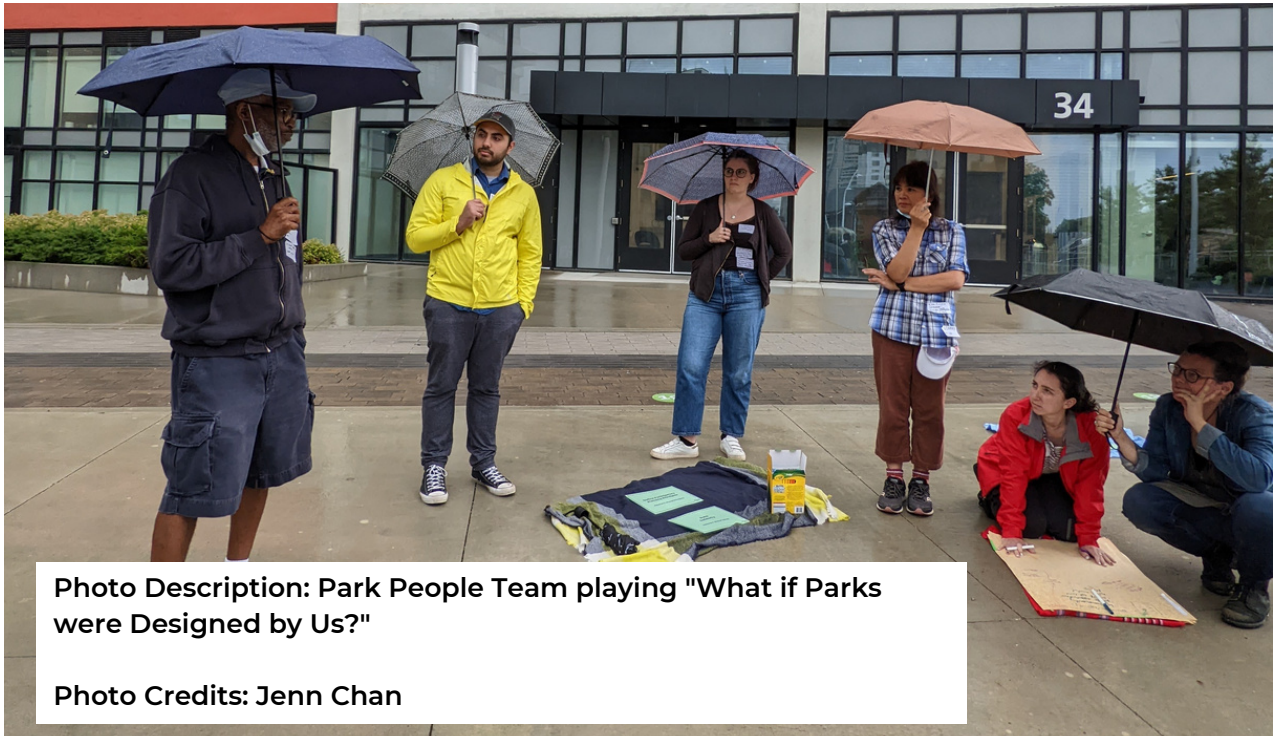


Photo Description: Park People Team playing "What if Parks were Designed by Us?"

Photo Credits: Jenn Chan



Photo Description: Visitor at mapping activity of "What if Parks were Safe for Everyone?"

Photo Credits: Jenn Chan

What's Next

In 2023, we will be documenting the artifacts that we collected.



Photo Description: The Giant Storybook at Deeply Rooted Farmer's Market

Photo Credits: Ari Para



The Giant Storybook Project

What Happened

In 2022, we were excited to bring *The Giant Storybook* out of storage! This year *The Giant Storybook* traveled all summer between multiple Farmers' Markets. *The Giant Storybook* is an invitation for visitors' to share their stories and engage with the stories others have left behind. The pages are 10 feet by 12 feet and take at least 2 people to turn a page!

As always, *The Giant Storybook* is an amazing conversation starter and brings about all sorts of interesting stories and interactions.

We spent the most time at the Deeply Rooted Farmer's Market in Dieppe Park in East York. Deeply Rooted is the first and only Farmer's Market in Toronto that hosts exclusively Indigenous and Black vendors. For most Sundays of the summer, our team set up a table under a tent with *The Giant Storybook* out to invite visitors to share their stories.

We asked visitors to reflect on the following questions:

- My relationship to Canada began when...
- I feel most at home when...
- My family is from...
- I think future generations will have a Canada that is...
- I am worried future generations of Canada won't have...

What's Next

In 2023, we will be documenting the artifacts that we collected and maybe getting to take *The Giant Storybook* on new adventures!



Photo Descriptions: The Giant Storybook out at Farmer's Markets

Photo Credits: Ari Para and Jenn Chan



Photo Description: *"We are Lost and Found"* installation at Corner Commons in Jane and Finch

Photo Credits: Jenn Chan



Hosting & Holding Grief

What Happened

In 2022, we continued our exploration into individual and collective grief spaces and conversations. These conversations led us to designing two public installations.

In January 2022, as a part of the DesignTO Festival, we installed an interactive installation called *"Artifacts of Grief"* to invite visitors to contribute their individual narratives of what grief is in 5-word sentences and build collective poems. The installation was held at Made Design, a custom furniture store.

In June 2022, we partnered with the Corner Commons team out of the Jane Finch Center to create a community-based art installation called *"We are Lost and Found."* This installation was an opportunity to showcase the stories of business owners with relationships to the Jane and Finch neighbourhood.

We collected stories of 17 business owners about what they had lost and found during the pandemic. The stories ranged from grief, joy, inspiration, perseverance, and endurance.

We worked with 5 Artists of Colour to illustrate each business owner. The illustrations and a quote from the business owners were displayed at Corner Commons in late September 2022.

What's Next

In 2023, the theme of grief continues to weave its way through our work but at this time, we don't have specific plans for these installations.



Photo Descriptions: Youth writing about grief, Artists and business owners beside their installation posters
Photo Credits: Jenn Chan



Photo Description: DIA Team at PIF Retreat

Photo Credits: Jenn Chan



Public Imagination Fund

What Happened

In 2022, we initiated work on the Public Imagination Fund. This research has taken us down multiple paths of internal and external discovery and has led us to rethinking a lot of our own organizational practices and sustainability.

Through funding from the Suncor Energy Foundation, we started researching what it might look like to design the “best ever” fund. We spoke with funders and Youth to understand the existing landscape of philanthropy. We were humbled to discover that designing a “best ever” fund was going to require a great deal of dismantling of white supremacy.

In April and July 2022, we held retreats with our team to dig deeper into the project and discovered that we need to spend more time defining our organizational role in the work and where to invest our resources.

As an organization, we are not suited to become funders. We are better suited to be funding intermediaries. We discovered through our research that funding intermediaries are situated between wealth holders and recipients are typically the ones advocating and designing equitable practices.

What's Next

In 2023, we are deepening our clarity around our organizations power and privilege to influence the philanthropy ecosystem.



Photo Descriptions: Borrsha and Adrianna in the canoe

Photo Credits: Jenn Chan



Photo Descriptions: DIA team dismantling characteristics of white supremacy in philanthropy

Photo Credits: Jenn Chan



Future Happens Here

What Happened

In 2022, we were invited to facilitate *Future Happens Here* at an Atlantic Gathering of Local Immigration Partnerships. This opportunity required a bit of redesigning of the Future Happens Here experience to be adapted to a larger group at a conference.

Typically, we play *Future Happens Here* with small groups of up to 8 players. However, this conference was expected to have 50 participants. To adapt, we created a game table in a fish-bowl style within the conference.

We opened up the 8 player spots to whoever wanted to join.

This invitation sparked a question about readiness to imagine equitable futures.

Future Happens Here is a simulation around what it would be like to co-design public policy with all the stakeholders at the table having equal power and opportunity to know and change the rules of the game.

With 8 spots open and power for the taking, the hesitation to participate was visible.

What's Next

In 2023, we are paying attention to what helps and hinders readiness.



Photo Descriptions: Jenn facilitating Future Happens Here

Photo Credits: Hannah Renglich



Language Translator Community

What Happened

In 2022, we launched a DIA Language Translator Community. During the Stories of Us project, we relied heavily on volunteer translators to support us in ensuring that as many of our books were in both English and the author's home (mother tongue) language as possible. We did this as a signal to Newcomers that multiple languages are welcome in English-learning spaces.

We didn't realize how powerful of an impact this would have on Newcomers, Immigrants and Refugees and their sense of belonging to this so-called country.

It is not enough to tell people in English that their languages matter. We need to show it.

In 2022, we had 17 people join our Language Translator Community offering translations in Tamil, Tagalog, Spanish, Turkish, Vietnamese, Urdu, Italian, Chinese, Serbian-Croatian, Arabic, Farsi, Bahasa Indonesian, German, French and Portuguese.

For our *"Artifacts of Grief"* installation, we had poems translated into Tamil, Chinese, French, Italian, Tagalog, Arabic, Urdu, Tagalog, Vietnamese and Spanish.

What's Next

In 2023, we are excited to grow our Language Translator Community and to continue to offer our story prompts at workshops and installations in multiple languages.

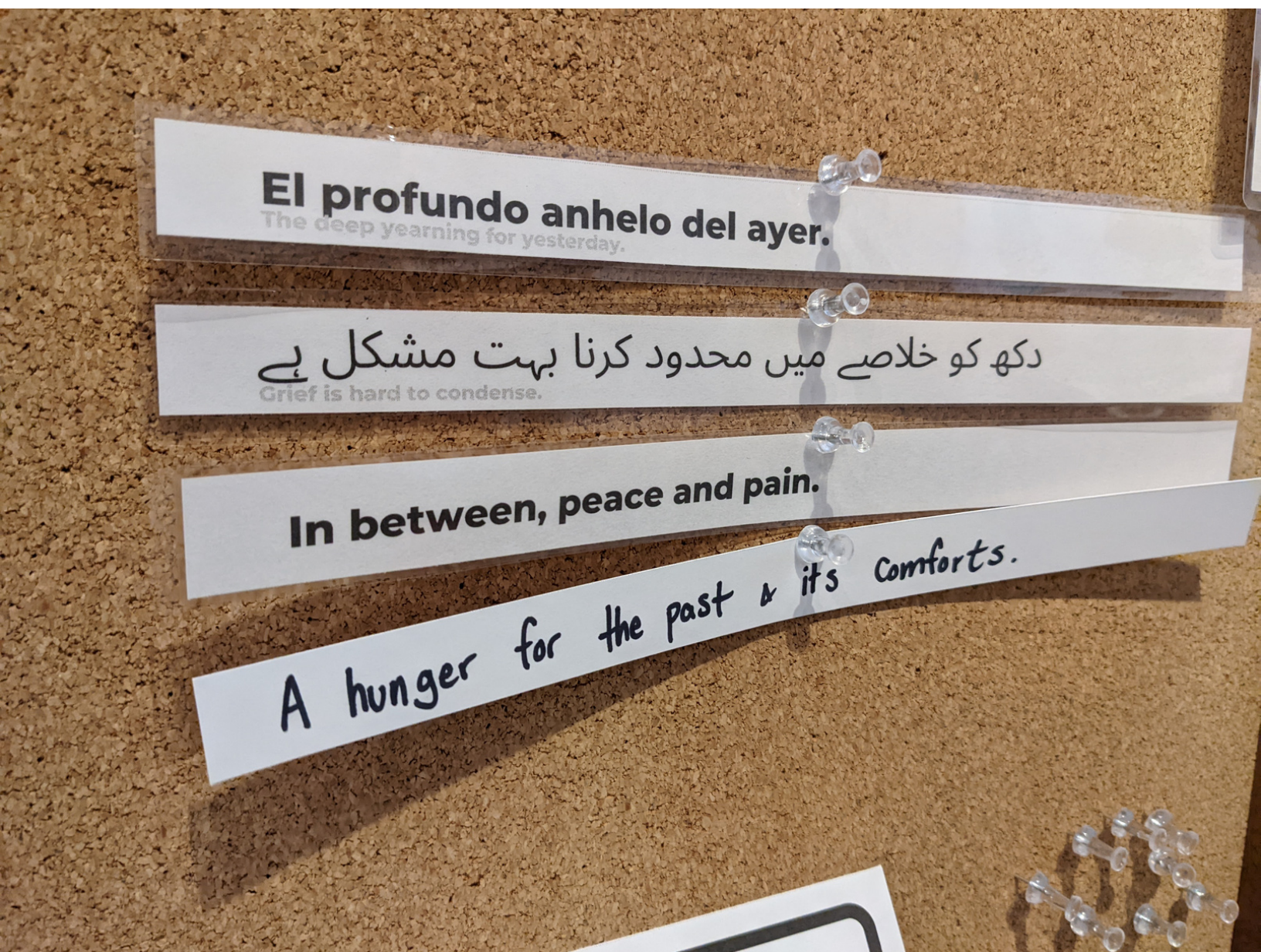


Photo Descriptions: "Artifacts of Grief" translated poems

Photo Credits: Jenn Chan



Co-Designing a Community-Based Funding Model

What Happened

In 2022, in partnership with the Toronto South Local Immigration Partnership (TSLIP) and Social Planning Toronto (SPT), we are working on an Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC)-funded research project to develop a community-based funding model.

We are a part of one of 16 research projects taking place at the same time across Canada to propose alternative funding models to the settlement sector and Newcomer/Immigrant-serving organizations.

Our approach to this research is to centre the voices of Newcomers and racialized organization leadership at the core of a co-designed funding model.

In 2022, we participated in co-facilitating focus groups to understand gaps in services, as well as funding constraints.

Through the focus groups, we spoke to 181 individuals, conducted focus groups in 7 different languages, both virtually and in-person.

Simultaneously, we have been working with a project Advisory Committee and a Co-Design Team within the Project Team.

In December 2022, we hosted 3 virtual sessions to introduce co-design principles to Newcomers, Immigrants, Refugees and Settlement Workers to build a foundation for co-designing a community-based funding model.

What's Next

In 2023, we will be working with Newcomers, Immigrants, Refugees, and Settlement Workers to articulate shared definitions and understandings of the co-design principles and roles in order to shape a community-based funding model.



Region of Waterloo Arts Fund

What Happened

In 2022, we supported the Region of Waterloo Arts Fund (RWAF) Board as they embarked on an equity, diversity and inclusion journey. This journey included internal and external stakeholder meetings, interviews with Board Members, past grant recipients and Artists of Colour in the RWAF network.

We conducted a needs assessment and shared a recommendations report in April 2022.

In September 2022, we continued coaching the RWAF Board Members and worked with a team of 7 EDI Advisors (Artists of Colour from the Waterloo Region) to localize and make movement on the recommendations report.

In December 2022, we shared an updated version of the recommendations report and concluded our coaching and strategy role with the RWAF Board.

What's Next

In 2023, the RWAF Board is making active changes based on our recommendations report. We are observing from the sidelines.

CEO's Message

Hello You!

As 2022 closed, I reflected a lot on how this was my second year as the solo leader of the DIA and there remain times where I still can't believe this is my job. I often struggle to see myself as a leader or a boss, but I have to acknowledge that I am, and with that comes great responsibility.

Each time I write our annual report, I am struck by 2 things:

1. How much I wish I had done a better job of documenting throughout the year; and
2. How much we have done and how much more work we have to do.

In our previous annual report, it made sense to share more numerical data. In this annual report, we are in a developmental year, and so numerical data seems less relevant. When I look at this report, I see a year of transition.

In the last year, I have spent a great deal of time thinking about the leader I want to be, the type of organization I want to lead, and working extremely hard to get there.

It has not been all smooth sailing.

In 2022, we reached our limits. We grew fast and we needed to take a step back to evaluate our next steps. We spent a lot of energy and resources on building stability within our organization.

Like many nonprofits, I hired staff for short-term programming roles but had trouble integrating their roles into the rest of our work. I hired a cohort thinking that it would serve the group well to support each other, but it meant I didn't have as much time for individual development and mentorship. I introduced and implemented care-based routines which revealed residual burnout from past work environments and interpersonal conflicts that ultimately resulted in relationships ending.

These limits led us to some extremely valuable lessons in organization growth.

I was humbled by the administrative tasks of developing new financial processes and practices, conducting our first organizational financial audit, and re-writing our agreements. These tasks are ongoing and require regular maintenance in order to be in alignment with our values.

I was excited to move into our first organizational office at the end of this year. It literally used to be an ice cream parlor and still has a pink exterior.

I am looking forward to a year of experimenting with having a physical space that is located in a rapidly changing neighbourhood with one of the only ridings in the city to have municipal, provincial and federal politicians who are people of colour and strong advocates for equity. I can finally clear the many organizational supplies that have been living in my home and my in-laws home for many years into proper storage to be shared amongst our partners.

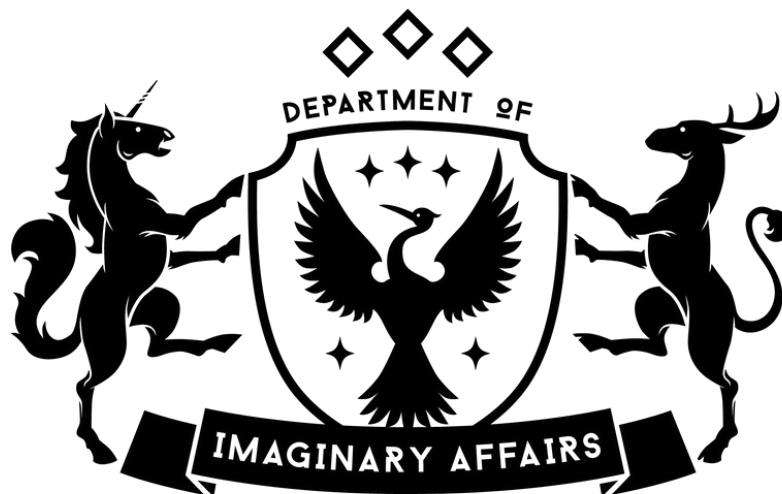
In the coming year, I will be slowly hosting in-person meetings and gatherings in this space, but for now, it is nice to have an office that feels like a home away from home.

A year of transitioning to more stability makes me incredibly grateful for the wisdom we gain from doing this work and I am proud of the way we are constantly adapting.

Every year with this organization has been such a learning journey and I am eagerly waiting to see how 2023 turns out.

Thank you for being on the journey with me.

Take (self) care,
Jenn



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