

SHE  
CO\_  
LAB



"Being a patient, rather than a participant in one's healing process, separates suffering people from their community and alienates them from an inner sense of self."

- BESSEL A. VAN DER KOLK

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# Introduction

When I began my research, I started by understanding trauma and stigma, two forces that are highly invisible but shaped the interactions and systems I was observing.

It started off being very difficult finding survivors willing to share their stories with me. Working in my community reduced some barriers. However, internalized and cultural stigma prevented survivors from speaking up. The stigma is deep-rooted and while we need to fill the world with messages of support, our inner support networks and institutions continue to victim-blame, making it even more difficult for survivors to access support.

We need to stop telling survivors that they are allowing violence and abuse to happen to them.

I have met and encountered some of the strongest, badass women I know throughout this process. Their resilience, confidence and power will always inspire me. They are now my role models, friends, and fellow allies in the fight against gender-based violence.

I have also witnessed tremendous kindness, compassion and support from all of the community advocates and allies. There is a whole community of support waiting to be unlocked.

I have witnessed intimate partner violence, and I do not want to see a future where the cycle of violence continues. Together, we need to disrupt and end all forms of oppression and work to heal both survivors and perpetrators.

Best,  
Umila

PROCESS\_  
OVERVIEW

RESEARCH

22

PRACTITIONERS

Trauma Therapists  
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87

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PARTICIPANTS

# SCOPING

UNDERSTANDING  
Intimate Partner Violence in the  
Indo-Caribbean Community



# Research Questions

## Understanding Trauma and Healing

What are the conditions that supports a survivor's healing

## Speaking to Survivors

What are barriers survivors to accessing support and services? When do survivors find support? How would they like to find support? What does support look like?

## Gaps in Existing Services

What services are available and how are they designed?

## Stigma

What role does stigma play?

"Traumatic events destroy the sustaining bonds between individual and community. Those who have survived learn that their sense of self, of worth, of humanity,

The solidarity of a group provides the strongest protection against terror and despair, and the strongest antidote to traumatic experience. Trauma isolates; the group re-creates a sense of belonging. Trauma shames and stigmatizes; the group bears witness and affirms. Trauma degrades the victim; the group exalts her. Trauma dehumanizes the victim; the group restores her humanity.

Repeatedly in the testimony of survivors there comes a moment when a sense of connection is restored by another person's unaffected display of generosity. Something in herself that the victim believes to be irretrievably destroyed---faith, decency, courage--- is reawakened by an example of common altruism. Mirrored in the actions of others, the survivor recognizes and reclaims a lost part of herself. At that moment, the survivor begins to rejoin the human commonality..."

- JUDITH LEWIS HERMAN

## 02 Understanding Trauma and Healing

Before engaging with survivors of trauma, I spoke to trauma experts and studied trauma-informed practices.

### Trauma-informed Principles<sup>1</sup>

1. SAFETY
2. TRUSTWORTHINESS & TRANSPARENCY
3. PEER SUPPORT
4. COLLABORATION & MUTUALITY
5. EMPOWERMENT VOICE & CHOICE
6. CULTURAL, HISTORICAL, & GENDER ISSUES

### Learnings:

#### **Social support is integral to healing.**

Therefore, this gave me research questions around existing support and potential gaps and barriers.

### DESIGN PRINCIPLE

**Restore survivors'  
connections to  
community.**

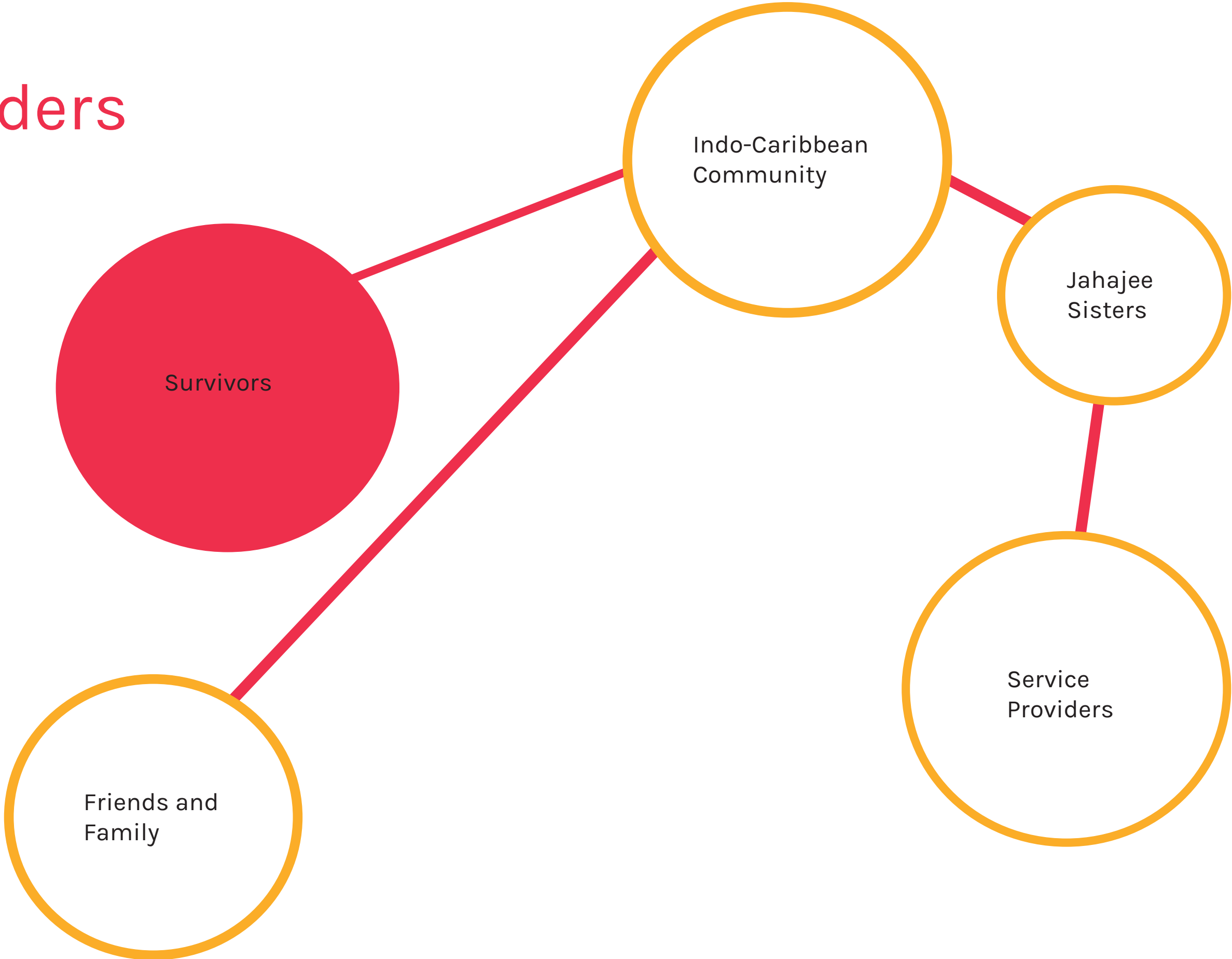
## INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

Also known as domestic violence, intimate partner violence is systematic violence used by an intimate partner to gain or maintain power and control over their partner and includes physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering, including threats and coercion. Domestic violence is a pattern of control and abuse that limits a survivor's choices. There are several forms of domestic violence, including emotional abuse, which systematically wears away at the victims of self confidence, sense of worth, trust in their perceptions of self and self concept.

### DESIGN PRINCIPLE

**Center survivors' power and control.**

# Stakeholders







SURVIVOR  
CENTERED

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11608



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116-523

116-06

116-04

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BY CARD



"We are taught to protect even those who hurt us."

-SURVIVOR

# Speaking to Survivors:

## POWER AND CONTROL

"There was the time I was preparing for a family vacation to Disney world and ex-boyfriend took me shopping for every piece of clothing I'd pack so he could vet that they were appropriate; there was a the time he forced me to leave my cell phone on the desk so he could listen to make sure I was not participating in class."

"I had to give him my paycheck. I wasn't allowed to do anything. Once when I was pregnant, he pushed me down the stairs because he thought my shirt was too short."

"I wasn't allowed to go out with my friends, I couldn't talk to anyone on the phone. I had fallen into a depression. I had no freedom."

## LACK OF SUPPORT

"The first person I confided in about my experience was my friend (also Indo-Caribbean) from college. We had gone out for dinner one afternoon after class. I decided to explain to her why it was that going out to dinner with her had taken so long to happen. I explained to her some of the details of the abuse. She responded by questioning me and reacted with a sense of doubt and incredulousness. I shut the conversation down shortly after it began because I didn't feel comfortable sharing anything further with her."

"I wanted someone to talk to. I wanted to talk my mom but my mom didn't talk about her story. I didn't how and so I said nothing."

## STIGMA AND SHAME

"I don't think I have ever shared in detail with anyone. I know it is not my fault but there is still some stigma and shame attached. I don't know. I guess the why did you stay that long question annoys me. And I feel like that is what everyone keeps asking. It's such a stupid question I think. Especially for people who have never experienced domestic violence"

"I felt embarrassed. I thought I would become a source of gossip in the family. I thought everyone would look at me and my family differently."

## EXISTING SERVICES

"There are programs but I didn't qualify. I also wouldn't disclose my history of domestic violence and didn't have any police reports or proof for some subsidies and programs."

"I heard shelters were dirty, and I was scared. I was so scared and intimidated by courts and the cops. I didn't know what to do."

## SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND GENDER NORMS

"They tell you go to the priest and pray but no one is addressing the real issue, without any sort of guidance. Religious places can't help you."

"He was raised in Guyana with traditional values. I had more modified values, I had to learn to cook. His mom and sisters used to take care of him. He pretty much didn't do anything. For him that's what a wife meant. I was taking care of the house, our son, and job. My paycheck went to him and he managed all the money."

"Being a girl, raised in those times, you don't get that sense of self, you are not a priority, you don't think about yourself. You are raised to think about your parents, other people."

## BLAME AND JUDGEMENT

"I turned to a few other friends and to my sisters. However, more often than not I felt judged than supported, but this was only because every time each loved one told me to leave the relationship, I would say 'You don't understand. It's not that simple.'"

"I blamed myself. I turned it to the attention of my family. They didn't think it was a big deal."

"What I see the most is people feel really ashamed, and shamed by their families especially since they can't really talk about the things they're experiencing. Because they're afraid they're going to blame them for it. 'You must have done something to have him do this to you.' *That's what they're grappling with the most.*

- DV Advocate

### Gaps in Existing Services

1. Service providers center survivor's choices but there are not many opportunities for survivors to inform what resources look like.
2. Community engagement is often transient and used to promote existing services. Community members often remain uninformed.

# DESIGN PRINCIPLES

## 1. Center survivors' power and control

Provide survivors with decision-making powers throughout the process. Survivors input, ideas and thoughts should be centered and considered throughout.

## 2. Restore connections to community

Connections to community and a strong support network is integral to healing. However, the relationships with service providers do not create this or facilitate community relationships. Community is often overlooked by service providers. Facilitate relationship building between survivors and community members.

## 3. Provide community with agency and information

Community members often are not equipped with the right tools and information to support survivors. Individuals, generally default to victim-blaming without realizing. It is important for community members to learn how to support survivors as they are often the first touch-point. Community members also need to agency to make decisions, ask questions and participate in a way that makes most sense for them.

## 4. Shift burden off of survivors

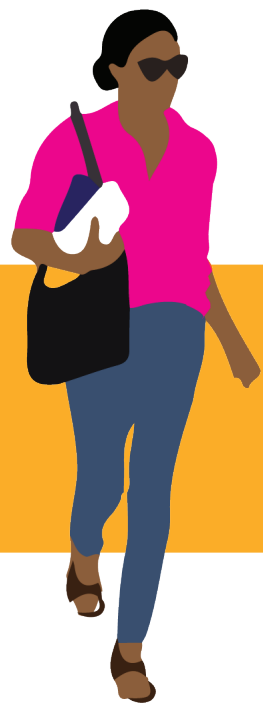
Most of the individuals working in this space are survivors themselves. Survivors are already doing the work. We need to shift the burden off of survivors in order to create better systems of accountability and disrupt cycles of violence. Invite community and male allies to participate.

## 5. Safety and confidentiality

We need to protect the identities of survivors, and advocates and allies and need to design for this.



**Beyond support groups, relationships between community members and survivors are not being facilitated in the current support network.**



**Survivors and  
community members  
are disconnected.**

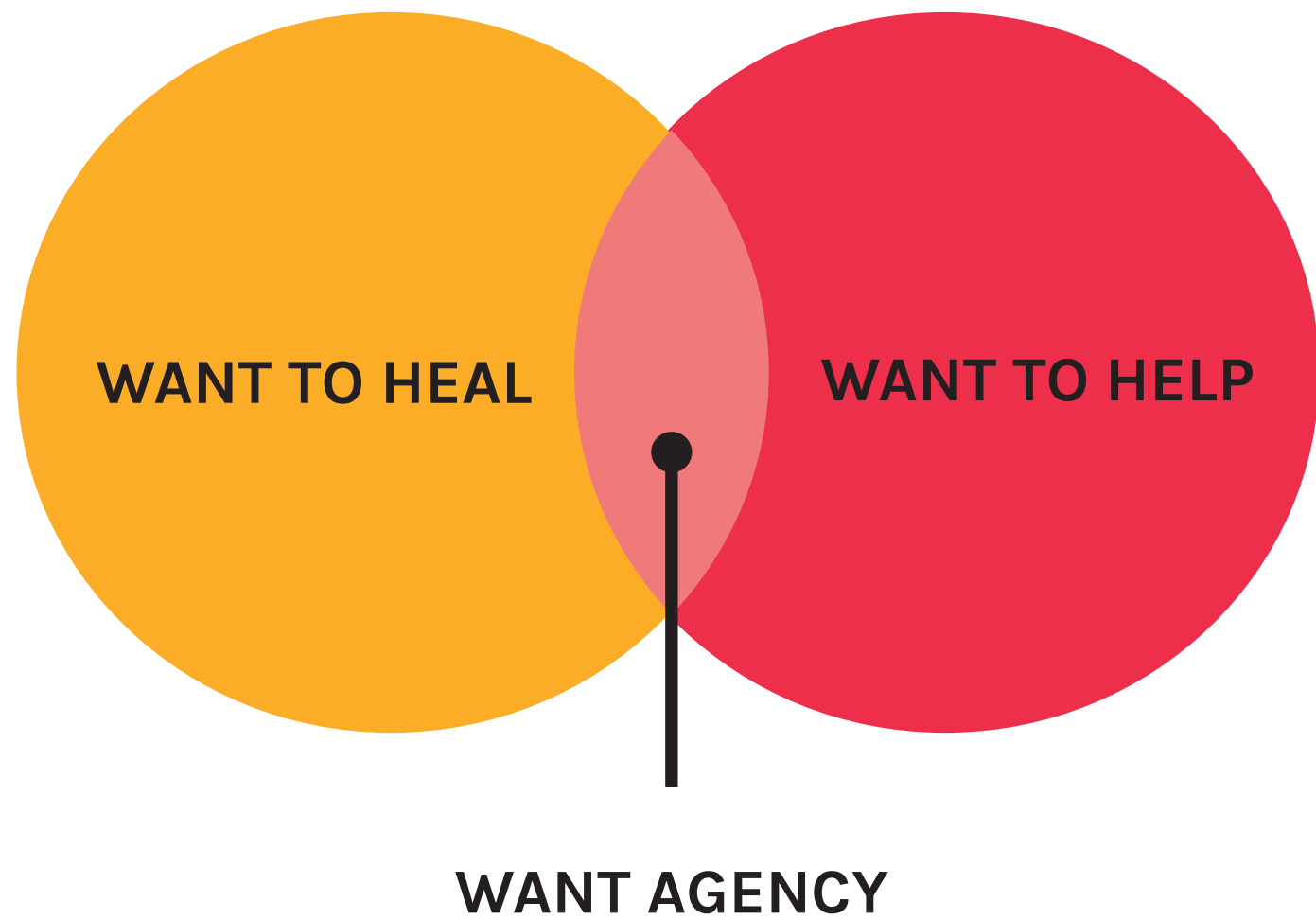
## **Problem**

**Trauma isolates and stigmatizes, and connections to community are vital to a survivor's recovery.**

Trauma isolates and stigmatizes, and connections to community are vital to a survivor's recovery. However, with the current service landscape, service providers often overlook community as a potential resource for survivors. Community engagement is often limited to outreach on promoting services. There are several barriers for community members to be involved. Not feeling supported by her community can be detrimental to survivor as well as her healing journey. The current lack of community support fuels traditions that encourage silence and perpetuates cultural and internalized stigma around DV.

There is a lack of survivor and community member participation and inclusion in the domestic violence field. How might we design opportunities for survivors find support in their own community?






**= COLLABORATION?**





**How might I foster  
collaboration between  
survivors and community  
members?**



# SHE CO\_ LAB

**SURVIVOR LED.  
COMMUNITY BUILT.**

A co-design program  
for survivors of IPV and  
community members to  
generate new sources of  
support.

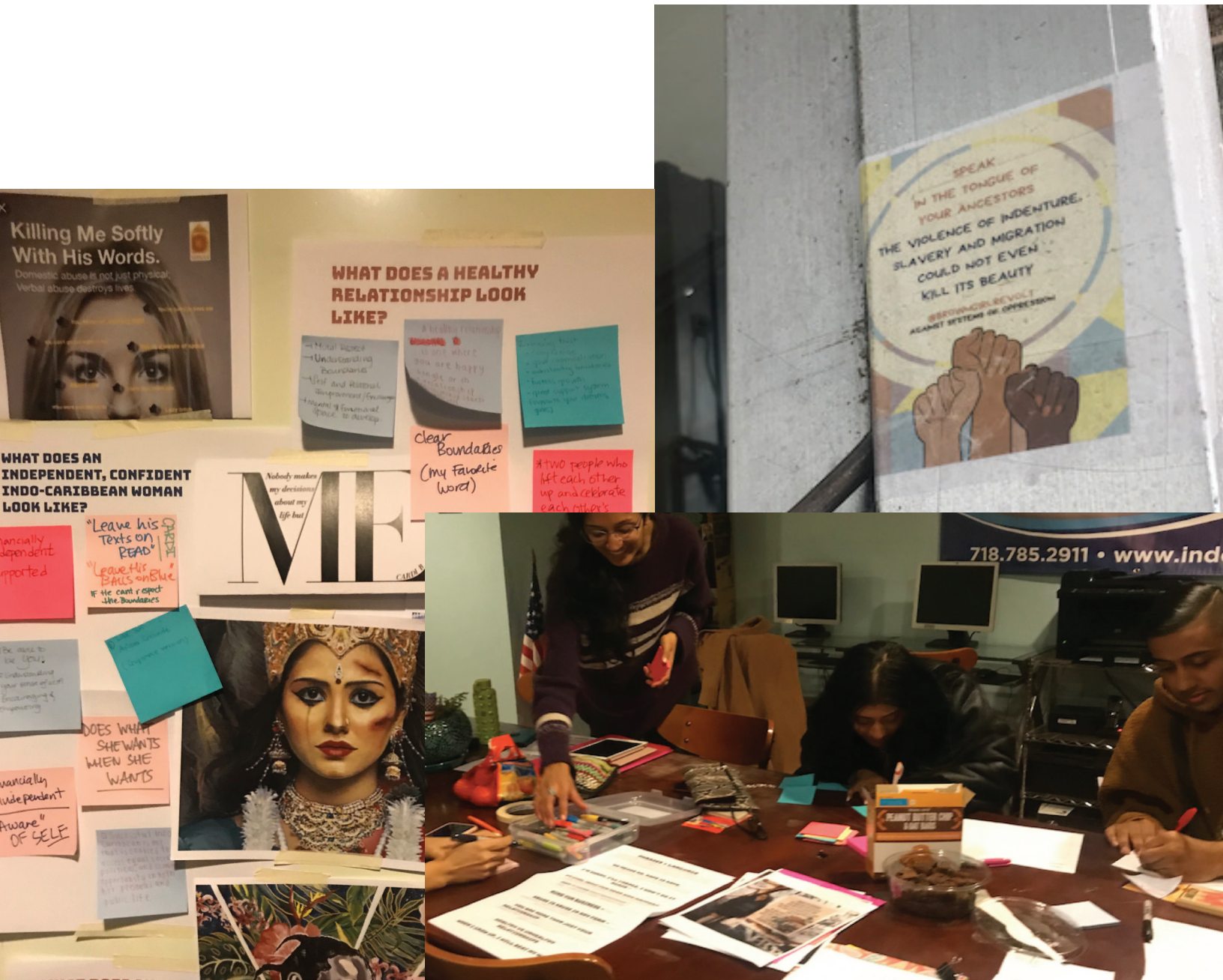


PROTOTYPE

# Survivor-led projects

I began by ideating and facilitating survivor-led projects. However, many of the survivors were busy rebuilding their lives. I realized many of the individuals in this field are survivors themselves and we need to shift the burden off survivors.

However, the first survivor-led project was a public art campaign, which is launching and has created excitement in the community.



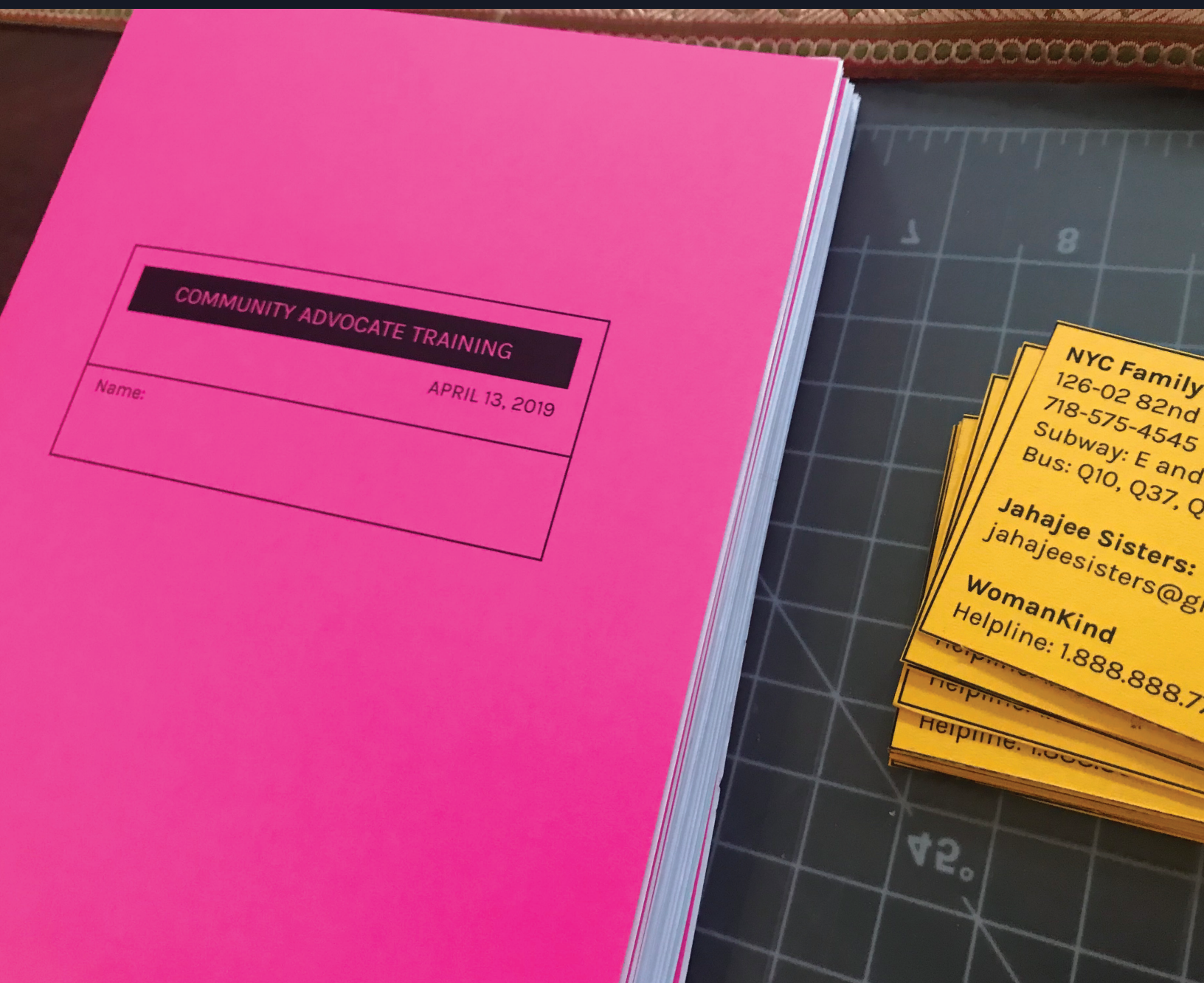
## The Process:

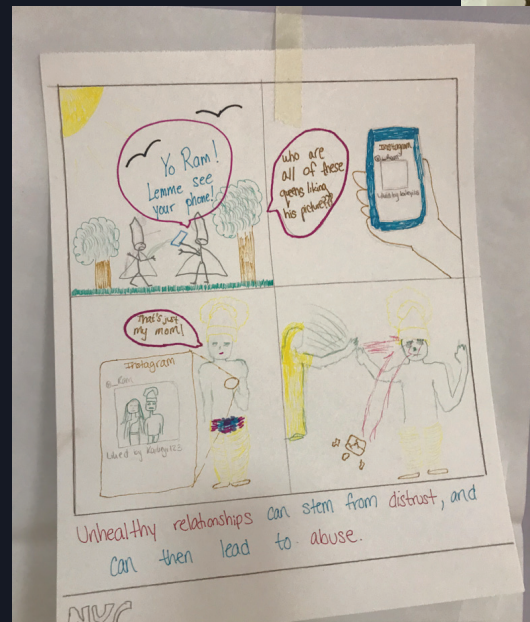
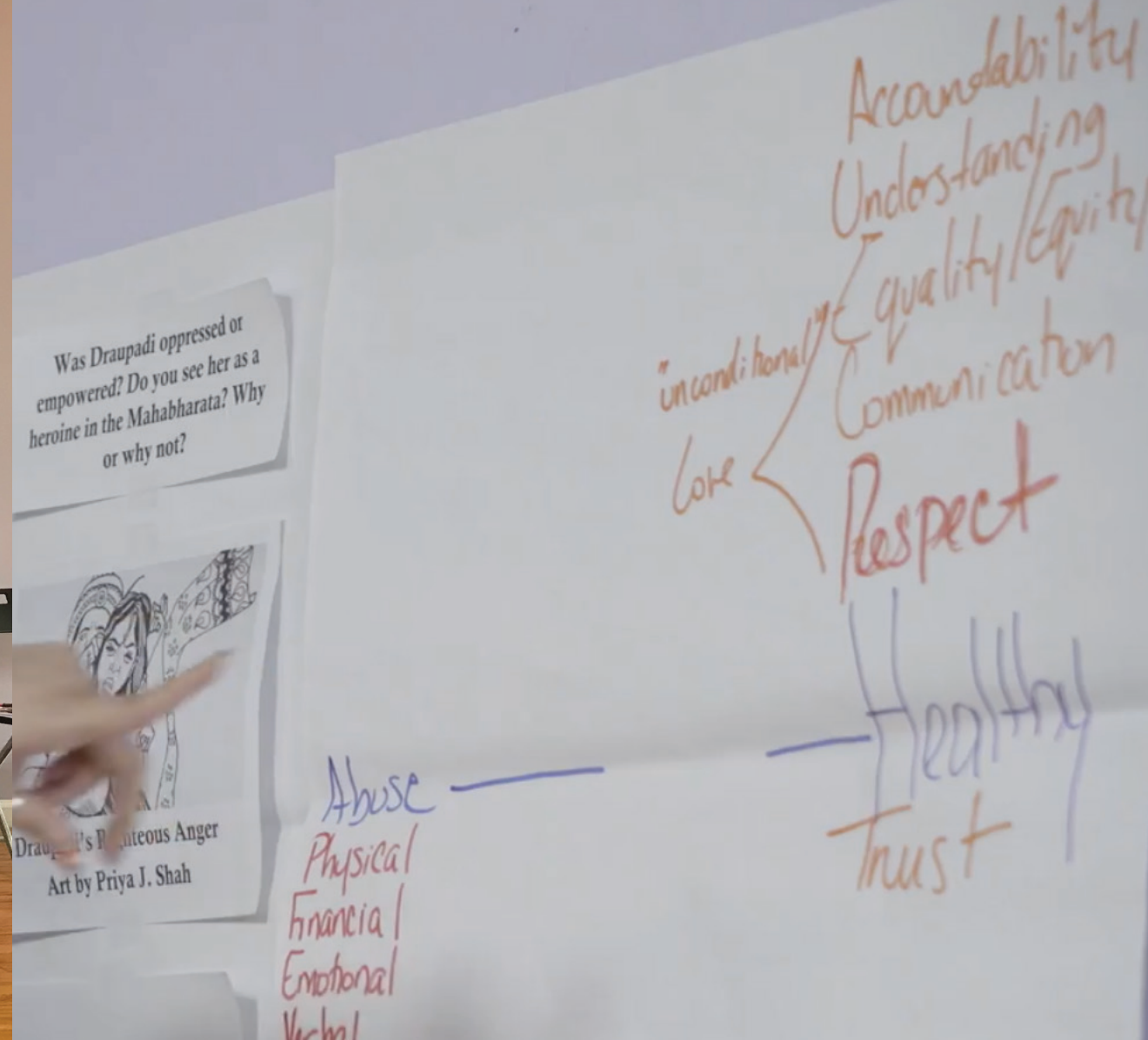
- 1 Survivors define their needs.
- 2 Invite community members.
- 3 Brainstorm and ideate support together.
- 4 Identify and train community advocates.
- 5 Prototype and Implement.

## Journey Map

# Aligning community resources with survivor needs.







**NEED FOR**  
Healthy Relationship Education

+

**COMMUNITY RESOURCE**  
Temple Youth Group

=

**CONCEPT**  
Posters and Workshop





Imagine a future where gender justice is embedded in the social fabric of communities.



