

# TELLING OUR STORIES: Immigrant Women's Resilience

*A one-of-a-kind graphic novel written by immigrant women,  
to support immigrant women*



# TELLING OUR STORIES : A GRAPHIC NOVEL

**Telling Our Stories: Immigrant Women's Resilience** is a part of OCASI's Prevention of Sexual Violence and Harassment Project, funded by MCI: The Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration.

An integral part of the project is to provide education and training to community members and service providers on sexual violence. **Telling Our Stories: Immigrant Women's Resilience** was created through a series of creative writing workshops with immigrant and refugee women who came together to learn, share and compile the stories in this novel. We hope that you will share the stories with your families, friends and communities and continue the discussion on sexual violence and harassment. For more information or to order copies of the graphic novel, please send us an email to [vaw@ocasi.org](mailto:vaw@ocasi.org).

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# WELCOME MESSAGE

One in three women in Canada will experience sexual violence in their lifetime. Most survivors of sexual violence do not report their assault to anyone, including police, social services, friends, and family members. This is due to fear of stigma, lack of support, the very real possibility of being blamed for the assault, and a lack of knowledge about sexual violence and that support can be accessed. Racial, ethnic and religious discrimination and prejudice, as well as homophobia, biphobia and transphobia create particular barriers for women in dealing with sexual violence. Newcomer women are particularly vulnerable because of their immigration status and because they are new to Canada.

We have created the graphic novel “Telling Our Stories: Immigrant Women’s Resilience” to speak to one aspect of newcomer women’s experience, that of community support and engagement in situations of violence. We hope that these stories will start conversations in our communities on countering violence against women, and lead to people taking action and changing attitudes towards sexual violence, including their own.

Community workers have an important role to play in changing the conversation about sexual violence. We hope this new resource will support you as well as others in the critical work you do to address violence against women.

Debbie Douglas , Executive Director, OCASI



Fayza Abdallaoui, President, MOFIF



## ABOUT OCASI

OCASI was formed in 1978 to act as a collective voice for immigrant serving agencies and to coordinate responses to share needs and concerns.

OCASI is a registered charity governed by a volunteer board of directors. Its membership is comprised of more than 200 community-based organizations in the province of Ontario.

The Mission of OCASI is to achieve equality, access and full participation for immigrants and refugees in every aspect of Canadian life.

## ABOUT MOFIF

MOFIF, the Ontarian Movement of the Francophone Immigrant Women, is a provincial non-profit organization created in Ottawa in 2003. Its mission is to carry out research and projects focused on improving the lives of francophone women in Ontario through integration, advocacy, and public education. MOFIF develops tools, trainings and campaigns for the various organizations offering services to women.



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

OCASI would like to express sincere appreciation to the representatives of the participants of the creative writing workshops and advisory committee members for their input and assistance in developing the graphic novel.

We would like to send a heartfelt **thank you to all the participants of the creative writing workshops in Toronto, Ottawa and Windsor**, without whose support and input this graphic novel would not be possible. They include: **Alona Soschen, Annie-Olivia, Awa Ndiaye, Awa Dao, Blanca, Edith Igwe, Ghina, Helena Nynaoh, Hyam Dabbagh, Jia Li (Carrie) Hou, Jordanka Kanova, Maham Gull, Mariah, Mais, Marie-Françisca Ntabala, Mehroz Ahmed, Michelle Tomlinson, Mona Barkat, Nathalie Nadon, Necah, Nicole Williams, Pierette, Rebecca Miller, Safira Abu Di, Sala Al-Anisi, Sarah Al-Anisi, Shi Jia Hong, Stella and Xiu Lin.**

The members of our advisory committees:

- **Access Alliance Multicultural Health and Community Services**
- **Action ontarienne contre la violence faite aux femmes**
- **Argana, Association des femmes maroco-canadiennes**
- **Association des juristes d'expression française de l'Ontario**
- **CALACS francophone d'Ottawa**
- **Centre francophone de Toronto, service juridique**
- **Centre de santé communautaire Hamilton/Niagara**
- **TAIBU Community Health Centre**
- **Collège Boréal**
- **Conseil scolaire Viamonde**
- **Immigrant Women Services Ottawa**
- **Julie Lassonde, avocate et artiste**
- **Oasis Centre des femmes**
- **Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres**
- **Rexdale Women's Centre**
- **Springtide Resources**
- **The Redwood**
- **University of Toronto, Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work**
- **Windsor Women Working with Immigrant Women**
- **Women's Health in Women's Hands Community Health Centre**

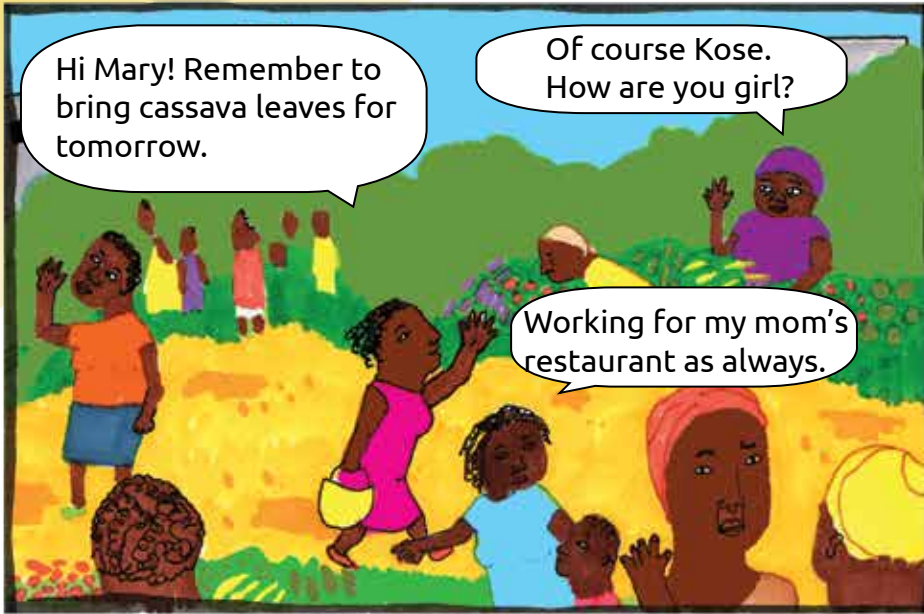
We would additionally like to thank **Newcomer Women's Services, Windsor Women Working with Immigrant Women, Immigrant Women Services Ottawa** and **Mouvement Ontarien des Femmes Immigrantes Francophones (MOFIF)** for their support in hosting the creative writing workshops.

**Project Lead:** Krittika Ghosh & Siham Chakrouni  
**Francophone Project Coordinator:** Djia Mambu

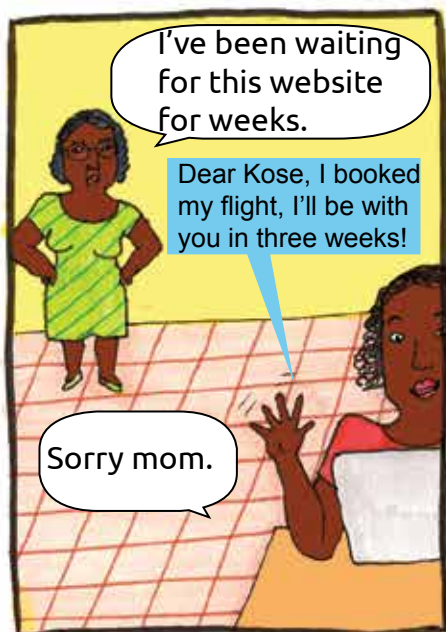
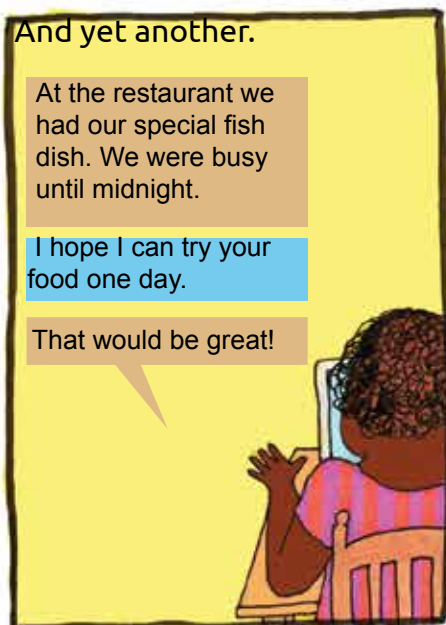
**Illustrations and Design** by Coco Guzman

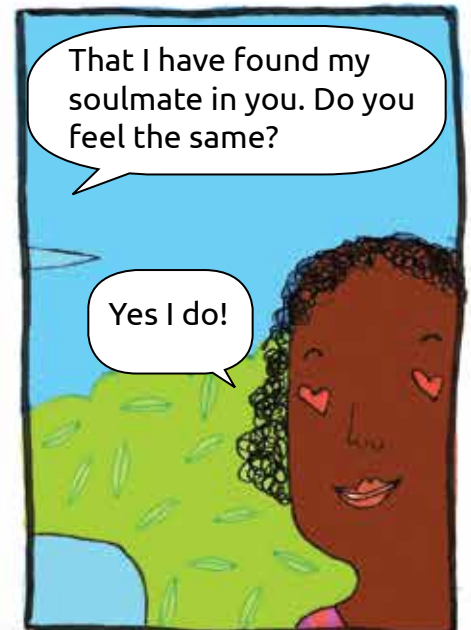


# KOSE'S STORY





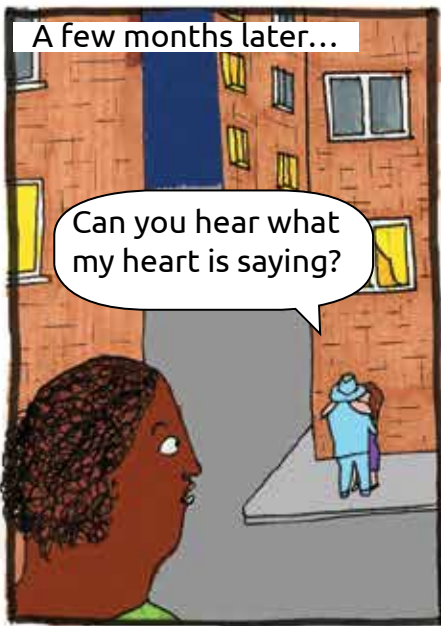


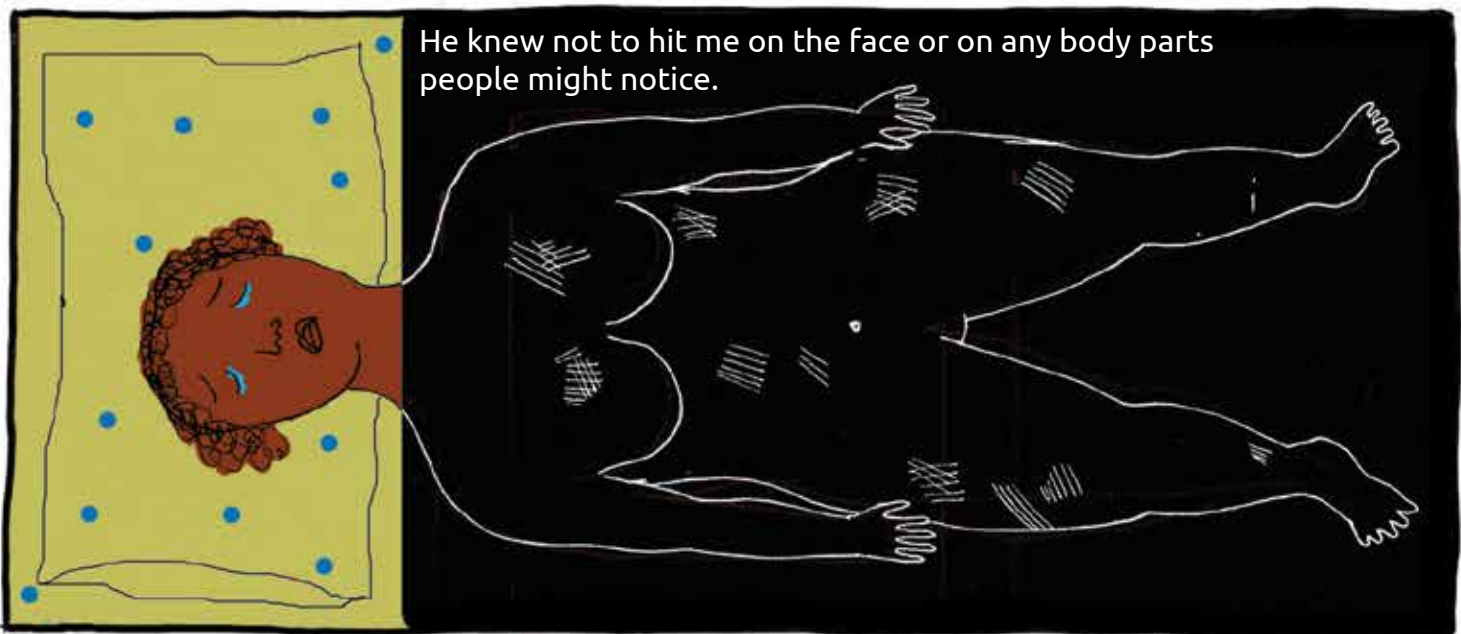


We spent the rest of his holidays getting to know each other. He met my parents. I showed him my childhood house. We went out with my friends. He proposed. I said yes. I told him I wanted to have three children and open a famous restaurant. He said we would work together to make my dreams come true. He said he would sponsor me to become a permanent resident. When his holidays ended, he went back to Canada. On his next holiday, he came back and we got married. I moved to Canada.

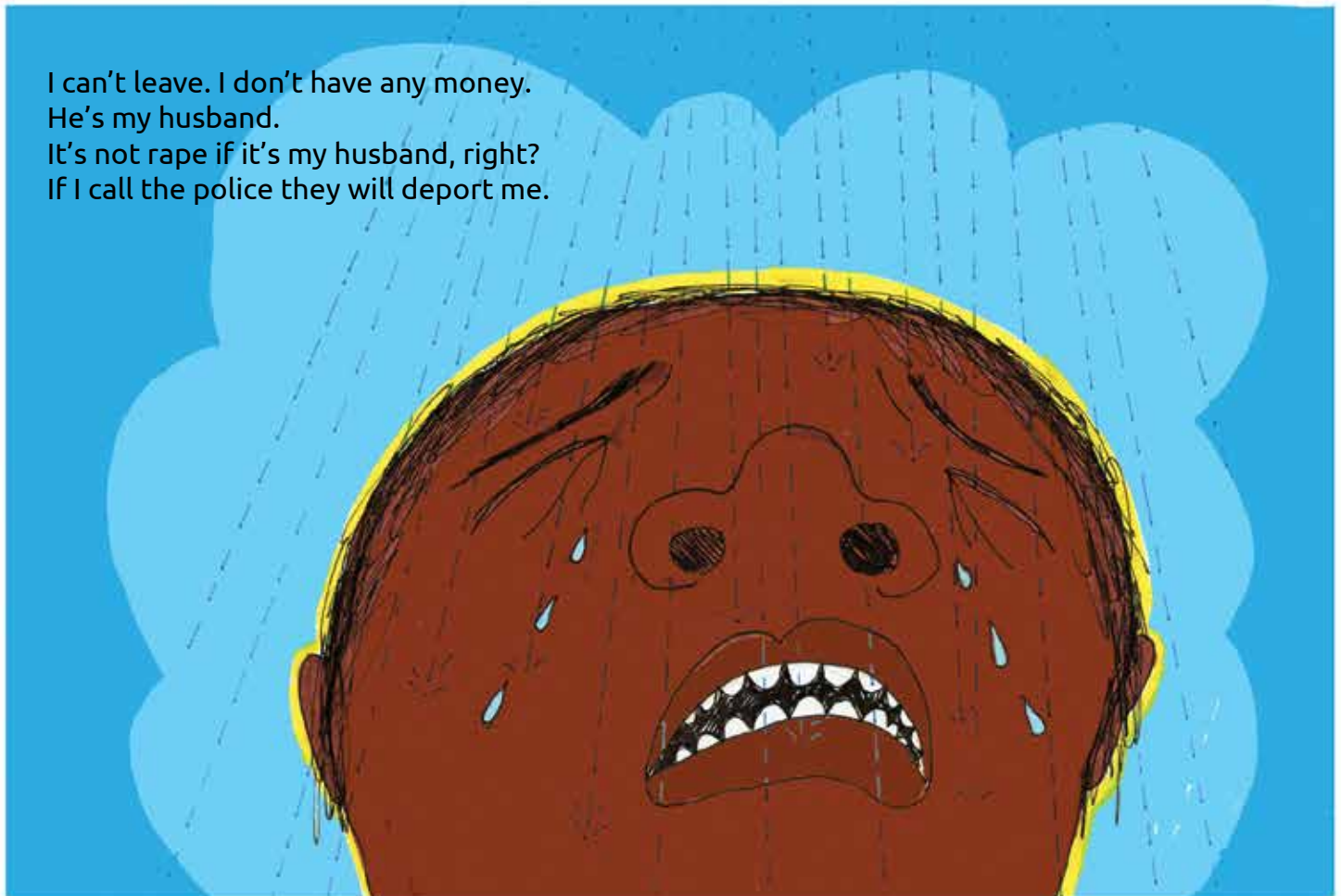




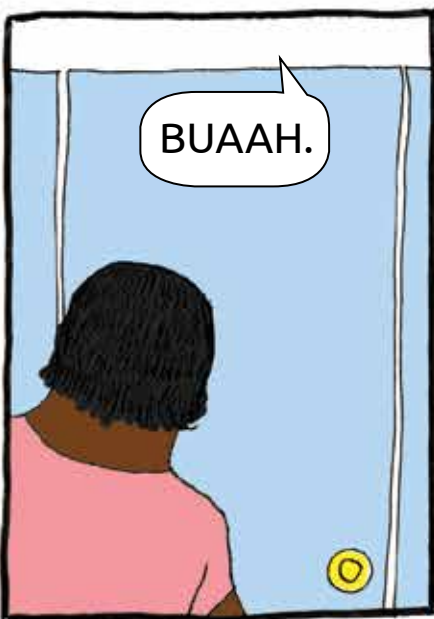












This is how I met Nisha, in the washroom of a restaurant. I told her my story and showed her the bruises all over my body. She was furious. We both cried. She said 'I'm going to help you Kose'

Here is my number. Tomorrow when he leaves for work, call me. I will come pick you up.

The next day.

Nisha?  
He's gone.



Here we go!!



I'm going to introduce you to Sarah. She helped me a lot.

You? Did your husband beat you?

My neighbor stalked me and sexually abused me. That's why I left India and came here.

That's terrible.





I started selling sweets to friends and to friends of friends. Every day when my husband left I started cooking right away.



Hi honey, you're home early!

It smells delicious.



Every evening I gave him two or three sweets out of the hundreds in the closet, so he couldn't be suspicious of the smell.



Soon all my friends were working for me, distributing sweets around town.

Anita you're taking 200 downtown. Carla you're taking 100.



And I was saving enough money to one day...

I think Monday is THE day.



BYE!



And after a little bit more time and a little bit more business skills...

**KOSE SWEETS**



Mom?

Kose! How are you?



I made it mom!

I'm so proud of you Kose.

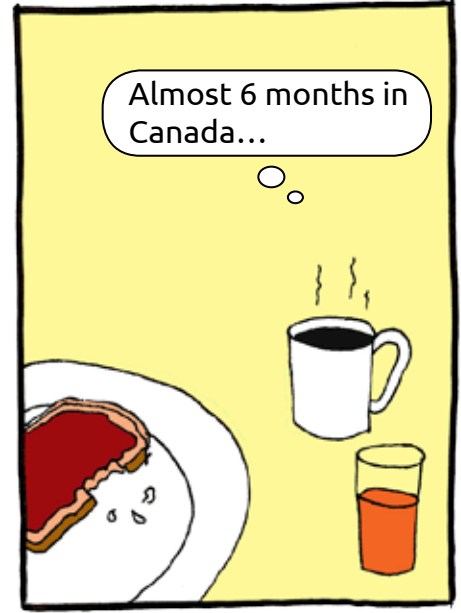
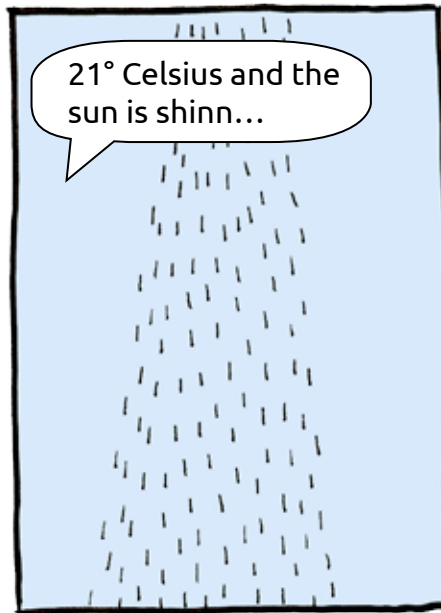
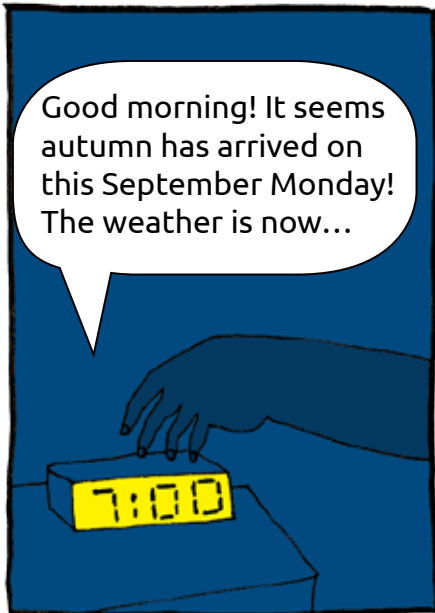
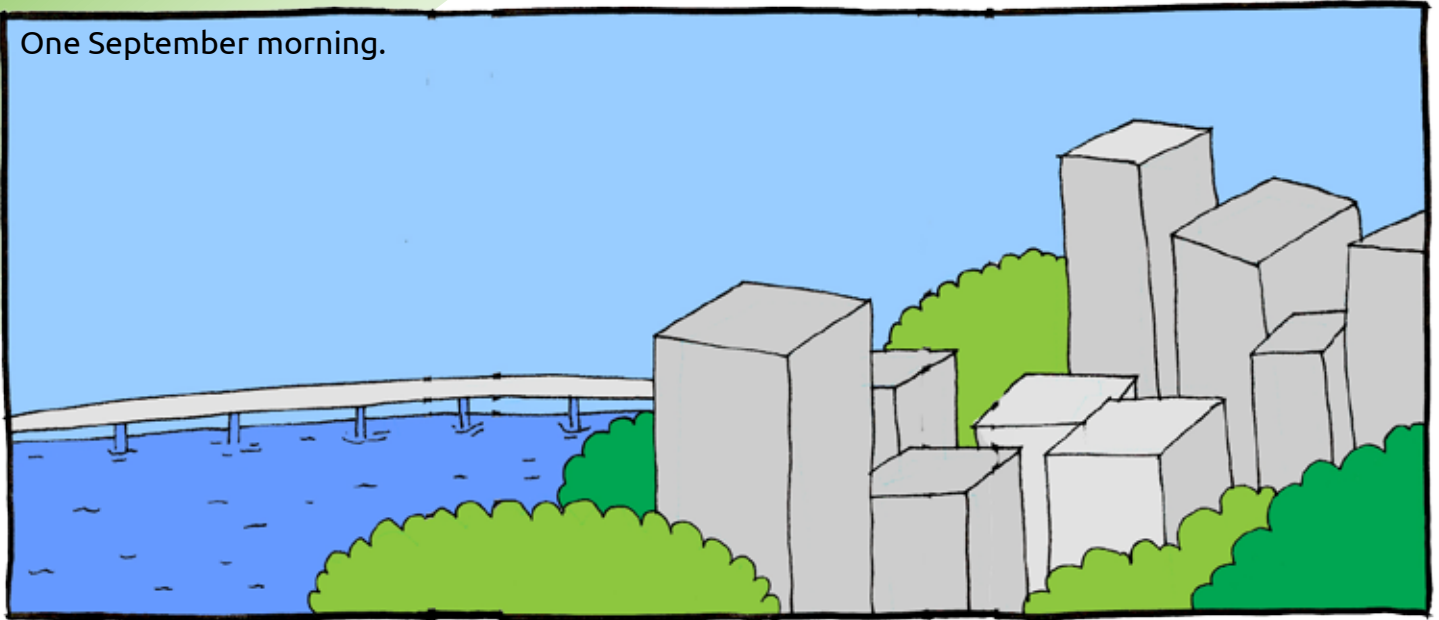
Thank you mom!





# MAGALI'S STORY

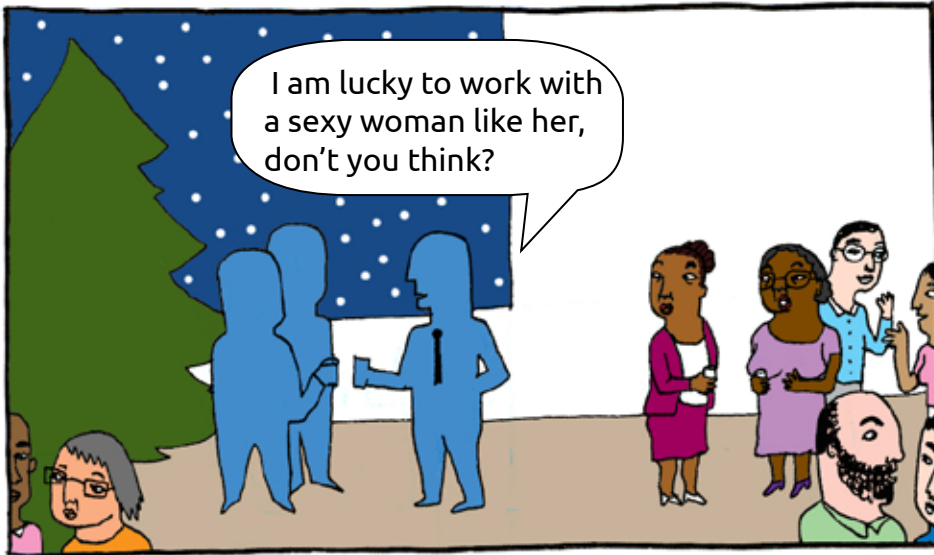
One September morning.





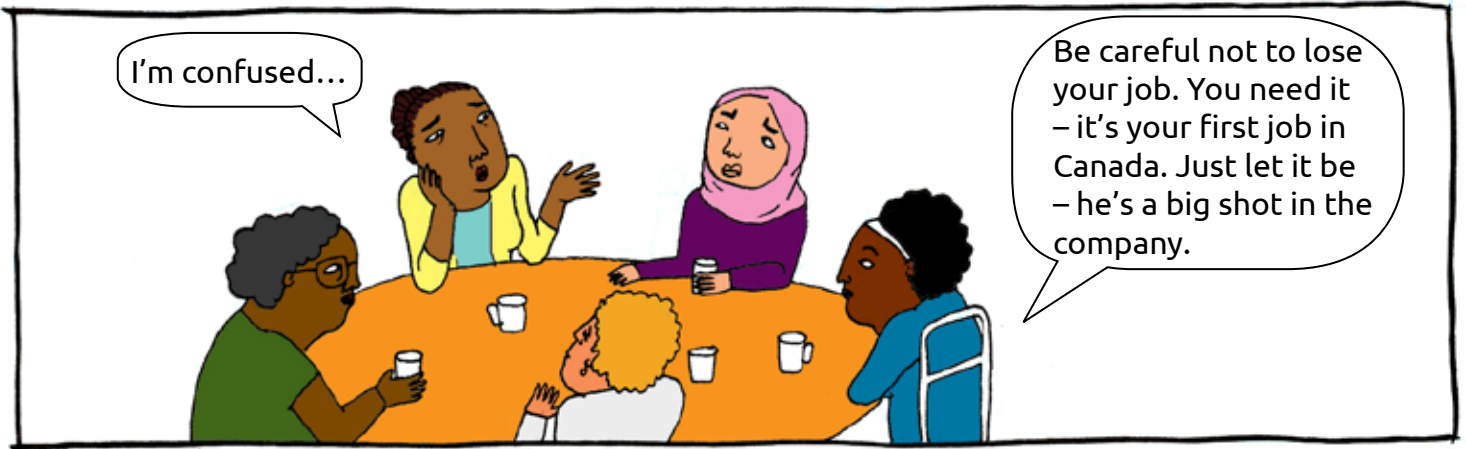
















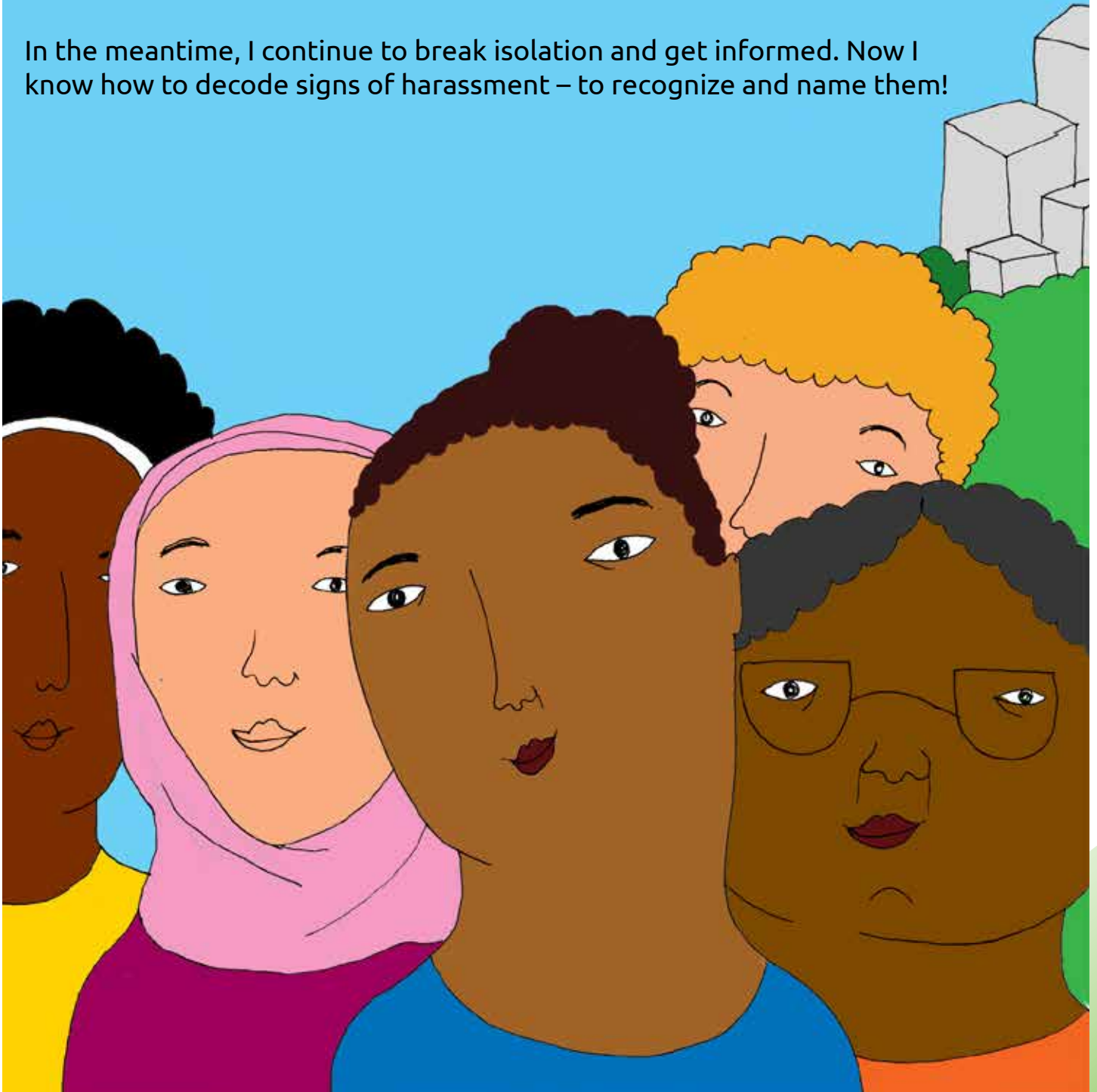


I requested information from Human Resources. An investigation was launched.

I learned that it's useful to keep evidence from telephone and written communications – and to have witnesses.

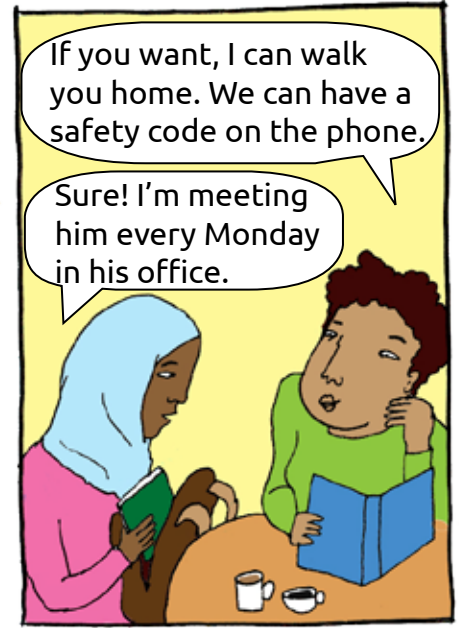
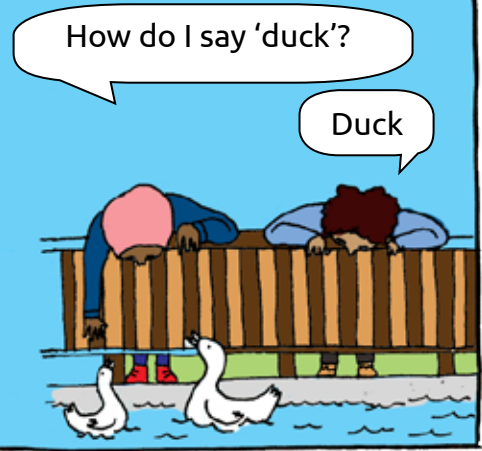
When I got informed, I was able to better understand the signs of sexual violence at work, the options available to me, and what I can do. I am hopeful!

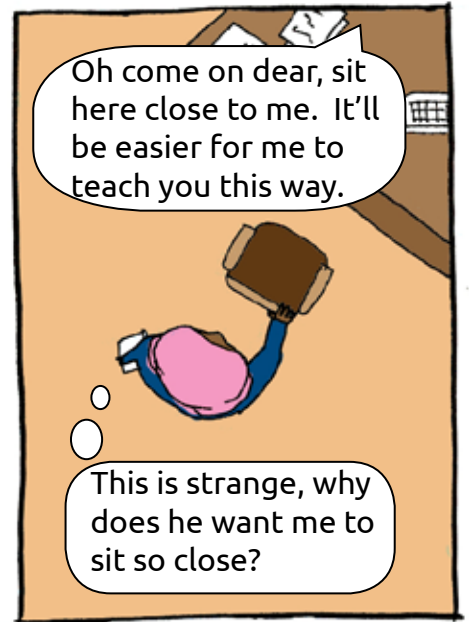
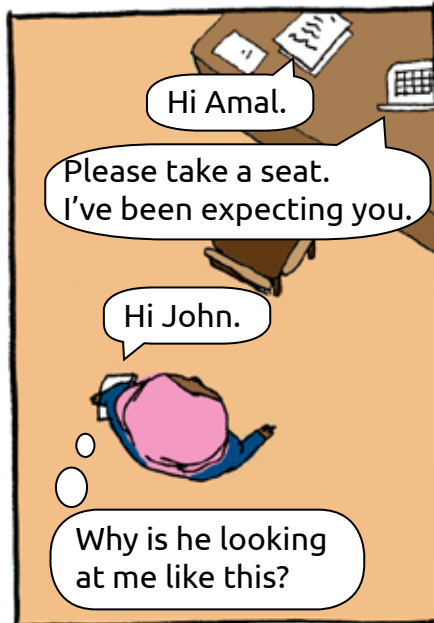
In the meantime, I continue to break isolation and get informed. Now I know how to decode signs of harassment – to recognize and name them!



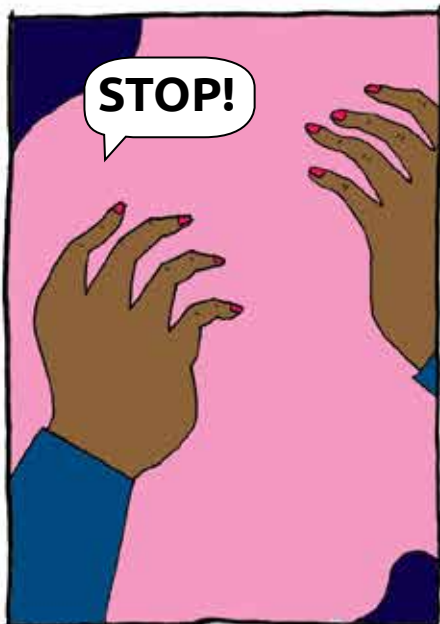
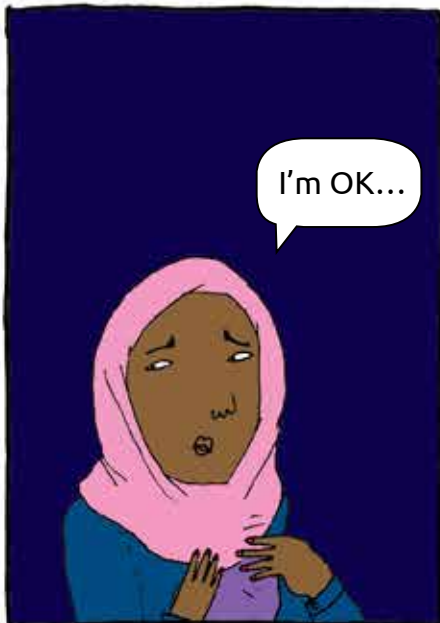
# AMAL'S STORY

My name is Reem and I have a friend named Amal. We are newcomers to Canada. Amal is a refugee and I came as an International Student to complete my Master's in architectural engineering. After spending a lot of time together, we became best friends, and trusted each other completely.



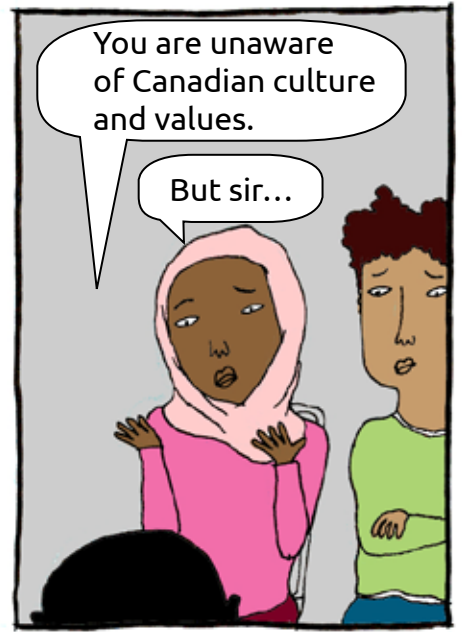




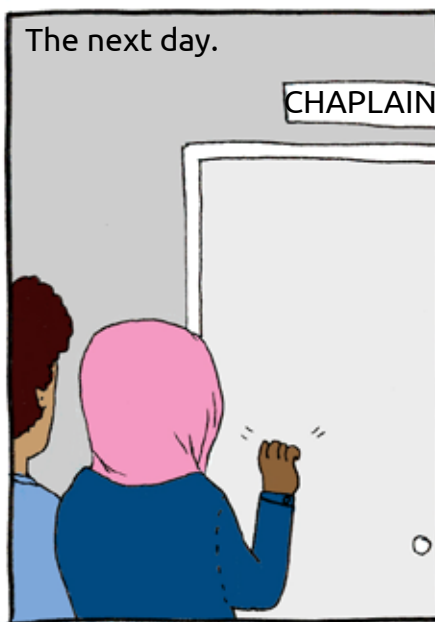
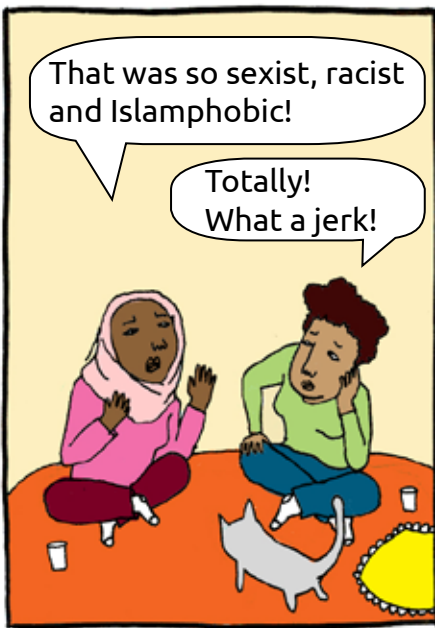






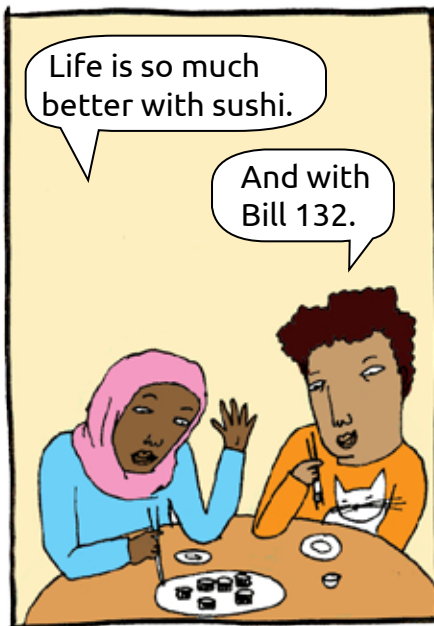






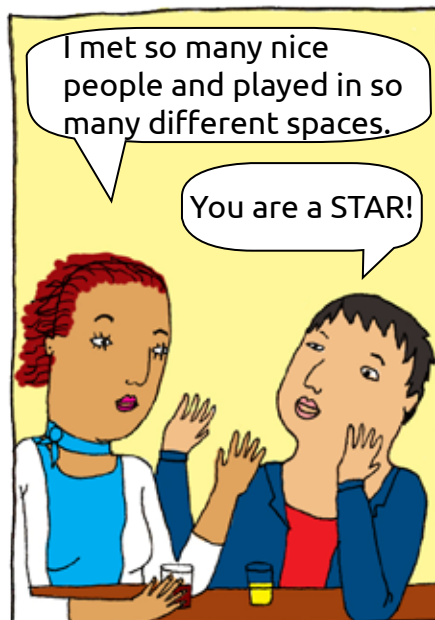


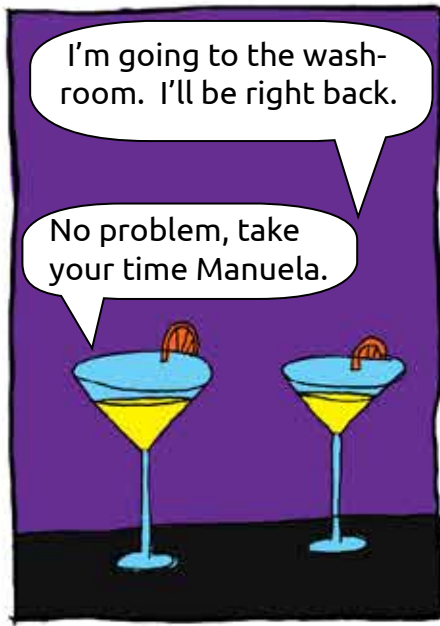
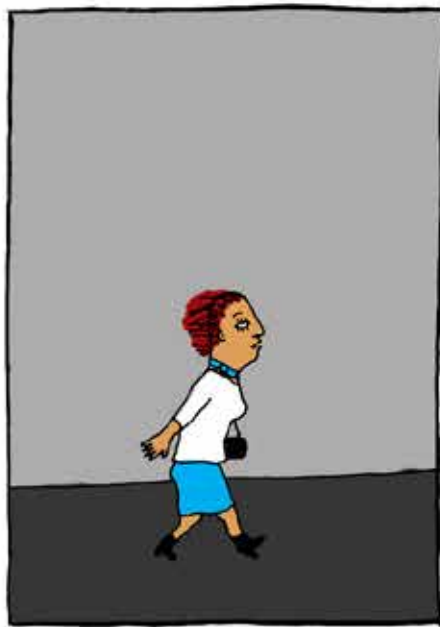




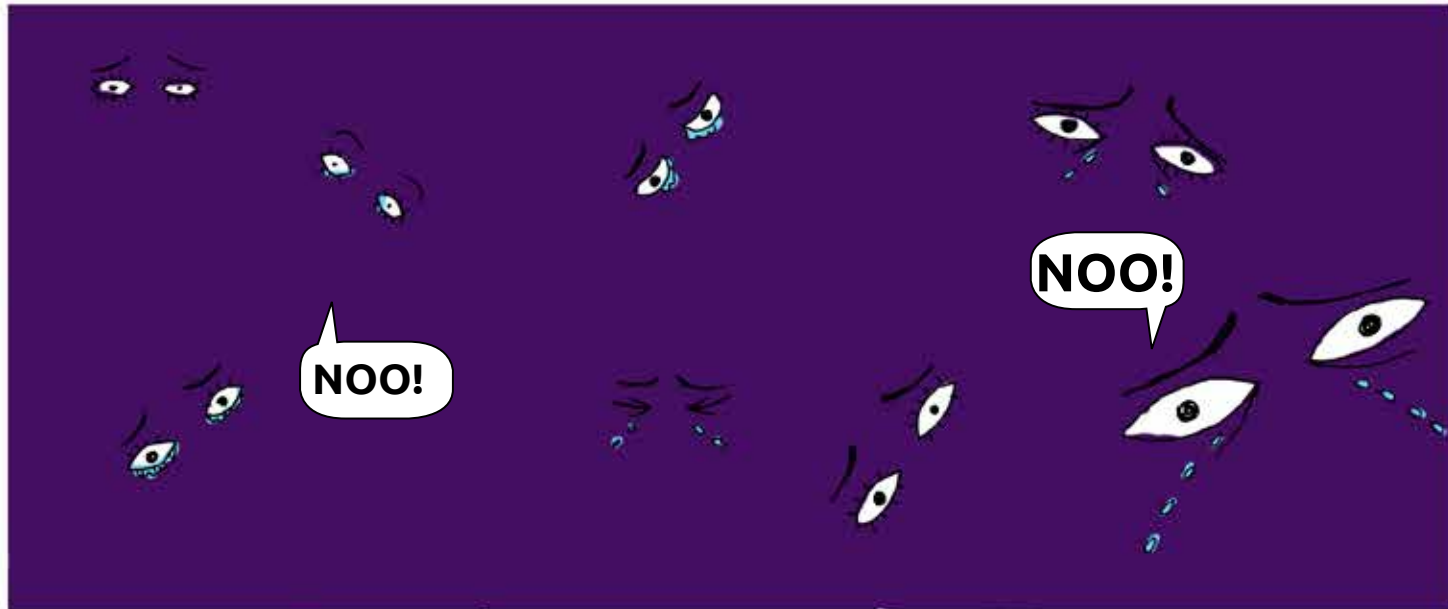


# MANUELA'S STORY

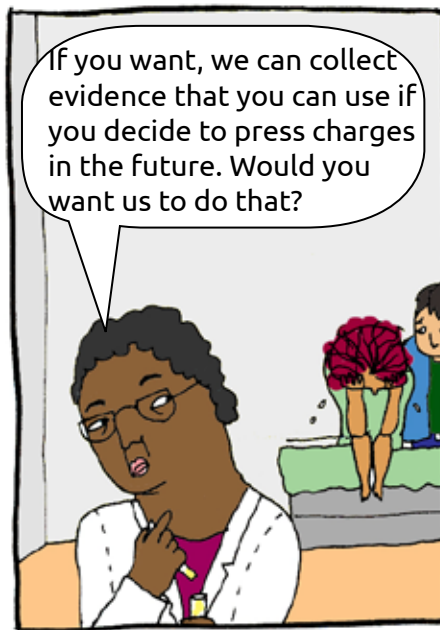
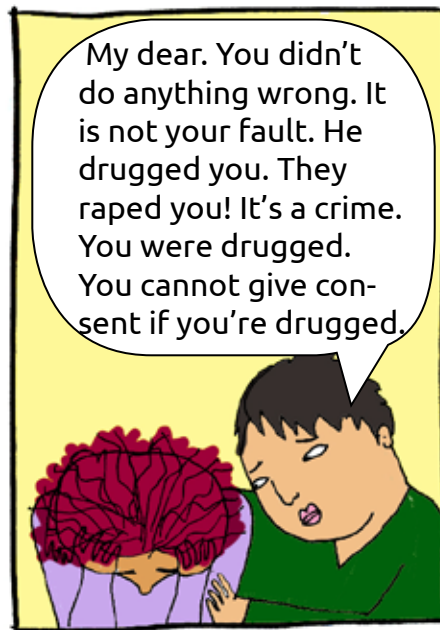
















After that night, Manuela wasn't able to complete her normal every day tasks. She was constantly reminded of the sexual assault.



I can't sing anymore.

That's terrible. I hope this Survivors Support group meeting is helpful.

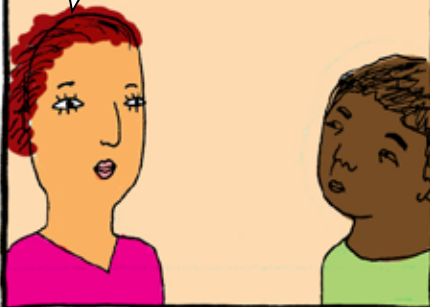


Yes. Thank you for coming with me.



At the survivors support group meeting Valeria and Manuela met many women, some of whom spoke about their experience with sexual harassment, sexual assault and rape. They also spoke of their healing journeys as they realized what happened to them was not their fault and that their stories, voices and lives mattered. Manuela began attending the meetings regularly.

After coming here for months, I feel ready to share my story with you today.



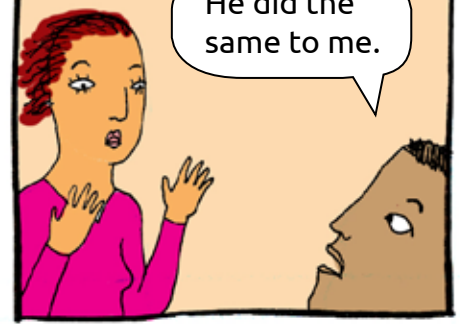
Manuela told them what happened to her.

Jack from the Zee lounge?



Yes, Jack the owner drugged me and then raped me.

He did the same to me.







They organized themselves.





Many in the community supported the women in their fight. This gave birth to a community group aimed at fighting sexual violence through education and collective action.

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

We are hoping that these stories will lead to conversations about the topics covered in the graphic novel, so that we can change attitudes towards sexual violence. Feel free to refer to these questions to start discussion with your friends, family and community.

## KOSE'S STORY (Pages 5-14)

1. At the beginning of the story we see Kose as a carefree, independent young woman. How does she change after she meets her husband?
2. How does life change for Kose after she moves to Canada?
3. Kose's husband takes away her keys to their house. How is that problematic?
4. Discuss the ways in which Kose's husband is manipulative and abusive towards her. How does his behavior impact Kose emotionally?
5. Kose's husband claims that it is his right to have sex with her even without her consent as they are married. What do you think about this? What would you tell Kose if you were her friend?
6. How does Kose meet Nisha? How does Nisha support Kose?
7. What kind of support does Kose get after she goes to Immigrant Women's Services? How does her life change?
8. In what way does starting her own business change Kose's life?

## MAGALI'S STORY (Pages 15 - 23)

1. What vulnerabilities and barriers does Magali face, when she experiences workplace sexual violence and harassment?
2. What led Magali to take action against Don?
3. What kind of information would have been helpful for Magali and when?
4. What do you think of the behaviour of Magali's colleagues (who she meets for coffee)?
5. What kinds of obstacles might Magali be confronted with in the future (after filing the complaint)?
6. Have you ever experienced workplace sexual violence and harassment, but had difficulty recognizing?
7. Do you know someone who is or has been through the same situation as Magali?
8. In your opinion, what is the best way to improve community awareness about workplace sexual violence and harassment?



## **AMAL'S STORY (Pages 24-31)**

1. How would you describe Reema and Amal's relationship?
2. What forms of violence does Amal experience?
3. In what ways does John violate Amal's boundaries?
4. How does Reema support Amal? How would you have supported her?
5. What do you think of the dean saying that Amal is unaware of Canadian "culture and values"? Would he have reacted the same way if Amal was not visibly Muslim? Why does the Dean defend John?
6. In what way does the Chaplain respond to Amal?
7. What is Bill 132? How will it impact survivors of sexual violence?
8. What do you think Reema and Amal do after they go to the student union?

## **MANUELA'S STORY (Pages 32-39)**

1. At first Manuela blames herself for the assault. What reasons does she provide for this way of thinking?
2. What messages exist in our society (from friends, family, media, school, work etc...) that blame survivors of sexual violence for their experience? What messages exist in our society that support them?
3. Valeria talks about consent with Manuela. How were you taught consent? What happens when consent is violated? When should we be taught about the meaning of consent and why?
4. How does Valeria support Manuela? If you were her friend, how would you have supported Manuela?
5. What factors make sexual violence different from other crimes? For example, if Manuela's car windows were smashed she most likely would not blame herself. What makes sexual violence more complicated to understand / deal with?
6. The story refers to Manuela being bisexual and her perpetrators trying to "fix". What do you understand from that?
7. Manuela gets support from a group of people who have experienced similar incidents of sexual violence. Why is this type of support important?
8. Can you think of examples from your community of how survivors of sexual violence have been supported? What actions are needed to ensure social / community support for survivors of sexual violence?







If you need support, please contact:



### Assaulted Women's Helpline

24 Hours | 7 Days a Week | 200 Languages |  
Confidential | Anonymous  
The Helpline provides free crisis counselling,  
emotional support, safety planning, information  
and referrals to all women in the province of  
Ontario. Call us today if you or someone you  
know is experiencing abuse.

**GTA: 416-863-0511**

**Toll Free: 1-866-863-0511**

**TTY: 1-866-863-7868**

**www.awhl.org**

Si vous avez besoin de soutien, contactez:



### Fem'aide

Ligne d'écoute et de soutien pour les  
femmes d'expression française dans la  
province de l'Ontario.  
Disponible 24 heures par jour, 7 jours par  
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ensemble pour un avenir meilleur