

THE POWER OF SURVIVOR LEADERSHIP



2025
IMPACT
REPORT





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Dearest community members,

Care has been a lifeline this year at Healing to Action (HTA). Whether it is a nourishing meal, a healing ritual, or an opportunity to connect, care is the sustenance that allows for survivors to come back into their bodies and reclaim a sense of belonging to their communities.

And yet, many of the places where survivors access such care have been under relentless attack by our own government—schoolyards where parents chat before pickup, cultural festivals that cultivate community joy, neighborhood restaurants where friends can unwind, and countless other sites of respite and connection. The impact of these attacks is felt in every layer of our being.

It is not enough to mourn these losses. HTA's leaders are channeling new pathways to care, because their work is impossible without it.

In the face of grave personal risks, HTA leaders are providing survivors with trusted resources and personal support, meeting virtually to deliver workshops about healthy relationships so families have the tools they need to stay safe, and tirelessly advocating to preserve critical services across the city—refusing to let budgets get balanced on the backs of survivors.

Each of these acts is one of care, but also of defiance. The moment in which we find ourselves is a testament to the power of survivor leadership—the care that HTA leaders bring to survivors in their communities cannot be defunded, raided, or shuttered. It is always there, finding a way.

Thank you for being part of this community of care and defiance.
We couldn't do it without you.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sheerine'.

Sheerine Alemzadeh, she/her(s)
Co-founder, Co-director



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Karla'.

Karla Altmayer, she/they
Co-founder, Co-director

OUR MISSION AND VISION

Our mission is to end gender-based violence by building the leadership and collective power of the communities most impacted—survivors from immigrant, low-income, disability, LGBTQ+, and communities of color.

Our vision is a future free from gender-based violence.

HTA defines **gender-based violence** (GBV) as actions against an individual or a community, intended to **punish them for failure to conform with oftentimes unrealistic gendered expectations or stereotypes**, interfering with a person's bodily autonomy and self-determination. This can include physical and psychological violence by intimate partners, sexual assault, rape, sexual harassment,

and stalking. It also includes physical and psychological violence against people who do not conform to traditional gender roles, such as gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans, intersex, and gender-questioning people. **GBV impacts an entire community surrounding a survivor**, and has generational repercussions for the survivor's family and community.

Our Community Values:

We are survivor-centered and survivor-led.

We are working towards liberation.

We see our struggles as interconnected.

We have the power to transform our lives.

We believe that unity makes us stronger.

We are rooted in healing.

We are committed to justice.



HTA'S SURVIVOR-LED MODEL

Combining leadership development, grassroots organizing, and capacity building, HTA's program model enables survivors to develop bold solutions that address the root causes of gender-based violence and eradicate the shame and stigma surrounding it in their communities.

Survivor Leadership Development

Building the leadership of survivors and their communities

Healing Generations

Leadership program open to communities across Chicago to promote the individual and collective transformation of survivors through healing, relationship-building, political education, and organizing training

Leader Circles

Healing Generations graduates continue their leadership development and advance our Grassroots Initiatives in leader circles

Grassroots Initiatives

Building the collective power of the communities most impacted by GBV

Sex Ed Works

Survivor-created campaign to prevent future violence by engaging parents, caregivers, and the community in dialogues around consent and healthy relationships

Peer-to-Peer Outreach

Survivor-leaders facilitate discussions on the root causes of GBV to promote community-based solutions and connect survivors to vital resources

Movement Capacity Building

Building the field of frontline workers and organizers

Survivor Power Institute

Capacity-building for advocates, organizers, and frontline workers across various issue areas to learn about HTA's model and apply it to their own work to engage in greater accountability and responsiveness to survivors, their needs, and their communities





EQUIPPING SURVIVORS TO LEAD

2025 was a year in which many conditions were not in our control—and yet, our commitment to survivor solidarity did not waver. As the federal government cut critical services for survivors and ICE agents deployed aggressive tactics against immigrants and people of color, addressing the **immediate threats to our leaders' safety and well-being became HTA's priority.**

With rigor and deep solidarity, our team supported the emerging needs of our leaders by:

- Supporting leaders who were fearful of leaving their homes with home visits and care packages
- Nurturing community-building among 23 leaders with different risk levels through *cafecitos*
- Providing leaders with two *Know Your Rights* and *Family Preparation* trainings and a bi-weekly resource list to provide critical information to our community;
- Temporarily moving in-person meetings and events to virtual
- Launching a mutual aid drive for our leaders to provide an additional \$500 in cash assistance to each leader.



We're incredibly grateful for the overwhelming generosity and solidarity of our supporters and sponsors. Because of your support, we were able to distribute an additional \$20,500 in cash assistance across our base of survivor-leaders.

These shifts in our strategy were more than just emergency measures; they're a continuation of our commitment to ensuring that no survivor has to choose between their safety and their leadership.

A key element of HTA's program model is **fostering the conditions for survivors to lead.** HTA invests in the leadership of survivors most impacted by ensuring active survivor-leaders have access to:

Monetary benefits

Ongoing leadership development

Free transportation, childcare, and meals at in-person meetings

Access to individual and collective healing opportunities

Multilingual interpretation at all program meetings

ALEX: ART AND ACTIVISM

An HTA survivor-leader story

After five years as a survivor-leader, Alex knows exactly what HTA is fighting for.

As a mother, a Mexican immigrant, and an artist, the breadth of identities and experiences within HTA is what first drew her to the organization: “When I first joined HTA in 2020 during the early pandemic, I was amazed at the diversity of the leaders. Especially listening to the stories of activist leaders with disabilities and LGBTQ+ facilitators. I thought, ‘these are very strong, very inspiring people that I can learn from’. **I realized I can help a broader group in my community**, in addition to fellow immigrants and Latinos. I’m educating myself to help more people. That was very impactful for me.”



“In these times, we need to be with our communities more than ever. That is why HTA is fighting for human rights. Immigrant rights. For us to be able to do the things that we love. They are fighting to preserve our community.”

In a year marked by attacks on already marginalized communities, Alex explains: “As an immigrant, right now I feel like I’m in another pandemic, unable to leave my home. In these times, we need to be with our communities more than ever. That is why HTA is fighting for human rights. Immigrant rights. For us to be able to do the things that we love. They are fighting to preserve our community. For me, that’s huge.”

Alex has remained dedicated to supporting her community of immigrant survivors through her artwork. “I cannot go out and protest ... but I can make art. I still have social media as my means of activism. **Creating art that sends a message of love and sends a message of hope is what I’m holding on to** right now.”

Alex’s art reflects her cultural experiences as an immigrant. She knows that all forms of activism go hand in hand in creating real change. In September, at the start of increased immigration enforcement activity in Chicago, **Alex guided survivor-leaders and community members in building their own altars** as a form of grounding, reminding everyone of the value of care and healing in times of uncertainty.

SURVIVORS SUPPORTING SURVIVORS

Despite a climate of immense fear, HTA survivor-leaders are **continuing to disrupt the shame and stigma that fuel GBV** through peer-to-peer outreach, community-based education, and initiating conversations with friends, family, coworkers, and neighbors to directly reach survivors in their communities.

To support their work in reaching new communities of survivors, HTA survivor-leaders **facilitated three community workshops** to provide practical tools to break stigma around GBV, discuss how to prevent GBV in families and communities, and explore principles of survivor-leadership.

What we're hearing from workshop participants:

"This was a great workshop ... it gave me motivation to learn more about domestic violence."

"We appreciate HTA for coming out and giving us the space to have more conversations about how to set boundaries for ourselves."

Partners for Peer-to-Peer Workshops



LoSAH
CENTER OF HOPE



Top 5 Referrals Provided by HTA Survivor Leaders:

1. Legal Assistance
2. Mental Health
3. Crisis Intervention
4. Public Benefits
5. Cash Assistance

HTA Survivor-Leaders' Impact in 2025

427

HTA survivor-leaders initiated 427 conversations about GBV in their communities

33%

33% of community members reached disclosed their experience of GBV to a HTA survivor-leader

183

HTA survivor-leaders referred 183 survivors to trustworthy, culturally competent services

SEX ED WORKS



CITY OF CHICAGO RECOGNIZES SEX ED WORKS INITIATIVES

In 2025, HTA and the Mayor’s Office of the City of Chicago led an event to promote the Gender-Based Violence Taskforce and Parent University Pilot Program, which expands HTA’s Sex Ed Works’ caregiver workshop series. **These workshops ensure parents have the resources to advocate for sexual health education implementation in their youth’s school**, as well as have the knowledge and confidence to talk to their child about concepts like consent and healthy relationships to prevent GBV for the next generation.



Last fall, HTA survivor-leaders provided caregiver workshops in partnership with Palenque LSNA.

Here’s what we’re hearing from CPS parents and caregivers:



About Sex Ed Works

Since 2019, HTA survivor-leaders have led Sex Ed Works, a campaign to advocate for Chicago Public Schools (CPS) to reduce GBV in Chicago by ensuring that all CPS youth have access to **high-quality, comprehensive sexual health education**. The key campaign demands include:

1. Adequate funding for the implementation of comprehensive sexual health education in the district
2. Accountability in sexual health reporting
3. Caregiver education

“To be able to make an impact for our younger generations is very empowering, and also very healing for my younger self—to continue advocating for myself and others. Sex ed should be a human right.”

“We are the people who can break these generational taboos and cycles. We have the responsibility to educate ourselves, our children, and continue supporting sex ed in schools.”

BUILDING A CHICAGO MODEL FOR SURVIVOR LEADERSHIP

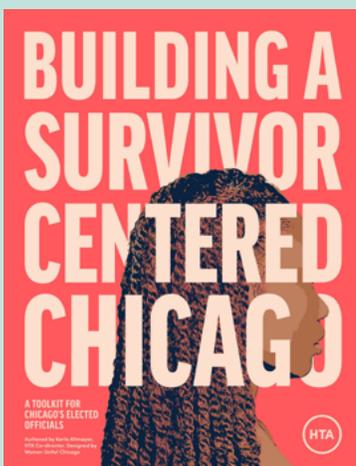
HTA's co-director, Karla Altmayer, published *Building a Survivor Centered Chicago*, a toolkit that aims to **increase civic engagement between elected officials and survivors most impacted by GBV** in order to develop policies and solutions rooted in survivors' lived experiences.

"Survivors of gender-based violence are the ultimate experts of their experience. Their voices are critical to addressing the root causes of community violence in our city."



Co-Director Karla Altmayer presented on the toolkit at the 2025 Chicago United for Equity fellowship showcase

In July 2025, HTA previewed the toolkit with 16 Chicago City Council members as part of an advocacy campaign alongside survivor-leaders to demand an increased budget of \$40.1 million for key initiatives to respond to and prevent GBV in our communities within Chicago's 2026 budget. With this toolkit, **HTA mobilized community members to push the city to not only maintain level funding, but also provide a critical investment to curb the rising levels of GBV** through a public teach-in for community members on using the *Building a Survivor Centered Chicago* toolkit to advocate with elected officials.



The *Building a Survivor Centered Chicago* toolkit features:

- 1. Nuanced data and stories on gender-based violence in Chicago**
- 2. An overview of key stakeholders**
- 3. Survivor-led recommendations for elected officials**

In September, **survivor-leaders from HTA and from Chicago’s Survivor Leader Working Group testified to members of City Council at a Subject Matter Hearing on Gender-Based Violence, voicing a need for prevention of and non-police interventions to GBV.** While the budget request was not met this time, advocacy efforts from survivors, community organizations, and elected officials prevented further proposed cuts of up to 50% of the budget and ensured funding of \$22.7 million towards vital survivor services for 2026.

Top 3 resources survivors advocated for:

1. Housing

2. Mental health services

3. Direct-cash assistance initiatives

Many survivors called for investment in peer-led interventions to gender-based violence over police-based responses.

“I know there is no magic wand that will eliminate gender-based violence from one day to the next. But if we obtain the right services, we will have healthy community members, not statistics”

Margarita, HTA Survivor Leader



SURVIVOR GOVERNANCE IN ACTION

HTA Co-Director Karla Altmayer completed her tenure as the first Chair of Chicago’s Gender-Based Violence Taskforce. Four HTA survivor-leaders also served on the Survivor Leader Working Group within the Taskforce, advising city policy and advocating for community-based solutions.

Under the leadership of HTA, survivor leadership became embedded in the city’s governing processes through:

A 2026 budget proposal informed by over 200 survivors across Chicago

Voting authority on the Taskforce by a representative of the Survivor-Led Working Group

A bill of rights by and for survivors

A woman with dark hair, wearing a red textured shirt and a necklace with a heart pendant, is smiling and looking towards the camera. She is holding a white notebook. In the background, another person wearing a bright pink shirt is partially visible, also smiling. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting an indoor setting.

**BUILDING
THE FIELD OF
SURVIVOR
LEADERSHIP**

SURVIVOR POWER INSTITUTE

In November 2025, HTA hosted **the third cohort of the Survivor Power Institute (SPI)**, our signature training for organizational leaders to learn HTA’s unique model of survivor leadership. The SPI brings together direct service and organizing groups from across movements and experiences to explore root causes of GBV, build concrete skills to support survivor leadership, and imagine new iterations of survivor power.

At a time when many organizations across the country were facing threats from the federal government and attacks on the communities they serve, **the SPI provided a space for organizational leaders to reenergize and restrategize**. Reflecting on when they first recognized GBV as a political issue, participants considered how they could implement survivor-

led initiatives to facilitate that awakening in others. **Participants leaned into bold innovation together, discussing strategies of organizing and storytelling to engage communities** in the movement to end GBV.

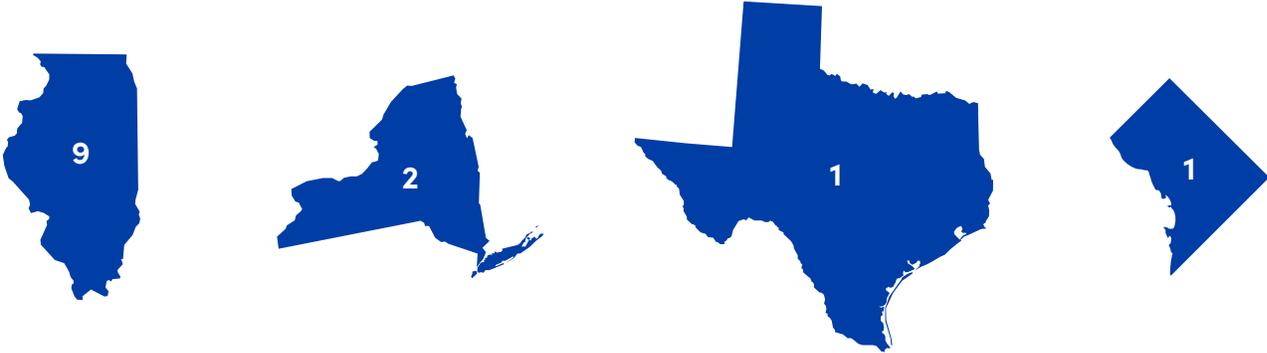
“[The Survivor Power Institute reminded me] that [ending] gender-based violence, power-based violence is my passion. I had almost forgotten what gender justice means to me.”

Fatema, SPI Participant



THE 2025 SPI COHORT

16 movement leaders across 3 states and Washington D.C.



Illinois



New York



Texas



Washington D.C.



Participants designed their own **survivor leadership initiatives that they will implement in the following months. Their experiments in building survivor power across the country include:**

Community education on domestic violence through theater, with stories written and directed by survivors

Building a peer education program for student survivors and allies to lead workshops on preventing GBV

Writing articles and policy positions in partnership with survivors on the issues they most want to center

Piloting a global storytelling lab for survivors to co-create digital campaigns that amplify survivor-led solutions

“Building survivor genius in your organizations takes time and effort and resources, but it is necessary to do this work well”

Angelina, SPI Participant

44%

of the cohort learned about SPI from a previous participant from their organization





INTRODUCING THE SURVIVOR POWER HUB

In 2025, HTA launched the Survivor Power Hub (The Hub), our new technical assistance platform for SPI graduates.

The platform was intentionally built from previous participant feedback asking for increased collaboration with cohort members and additional guidance from HTA between coaching and peer learning calls.

As we work to onboard past SPI alumni in the year ahead, **the Hub will continue to deepen and accelerate the impact of the SPI**—fostering greater collaboration across organizations, states, and movement areas.

The Hub provides participants with:

1. Tools to track progress and measure the impact of their survivor leadership initiatives
2. Opportunities to build relationships with fellow alumni and share learnings with each other
3. Access to tools and resources curated by HTA to deepen partners' impact in the field of GBV

“[The SPI] was refreshing and rewarding. The [Hub] is a valuable [resource] because it brings everything we’ve been working on to an organized fruition.”

Tracy, SPI Participant



YENSY: LEADING WITH COURAGE

An HTA survivor-leader story

Since moving to Chicago from Honduras in 2018, survivor-leader **Yensy Bonilla has quickly made her mark as a resource and guide for her community.** In 2024, Yensy joined HTA through the Healing Generations Survivor Leadership Program, having been referred to the program by two longtime HTA survivor-leaders she knew from organizing for immigrants' rights. Both at HTA and with local immigrant justice groups, Yensy works to ensure everyone has a chance of breaking free of the isolation many immigrant survivors face.



“I see a connection between immigrants and people experiencing gender-based violence at work, schools, or home. We are all people whose rights have been violated ... I have spoken many times with people who have suffered through domestic violence, and **I pass on what HTA has taught me—that I am not alone and that the community will support me.** I did not have the courage to do that before HTA. Through me, there are now other people who can come out of the shadows.”

Now, as part of the Sex Ed Works campaign, Yensy is working to end GBV through caregiver workshops in Chicago Public Schools, which ensure youth like her teenage son have access to vital education on consent and healthy relationships.

Our children in some schools are not taught sex education, and sometimes, as parents, we are scared to talk to our children about it. But if we normalize talking about sex ed in schools, we can prevent children from committing or experiencing sexual violence ... As survivors, we might have experienced harm, but we want to see the world differently.

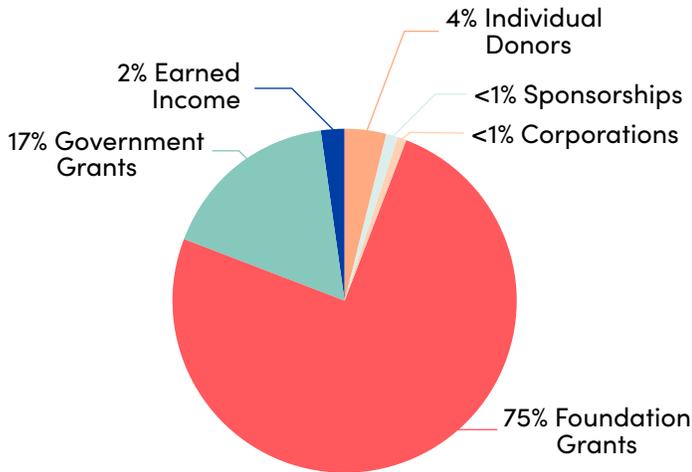
“Being in community makes us more courageous. Before, I felt I couldn’t do this work. Now I know I can. So why wouldn’t I?”

HTA'S ORGANIZATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY

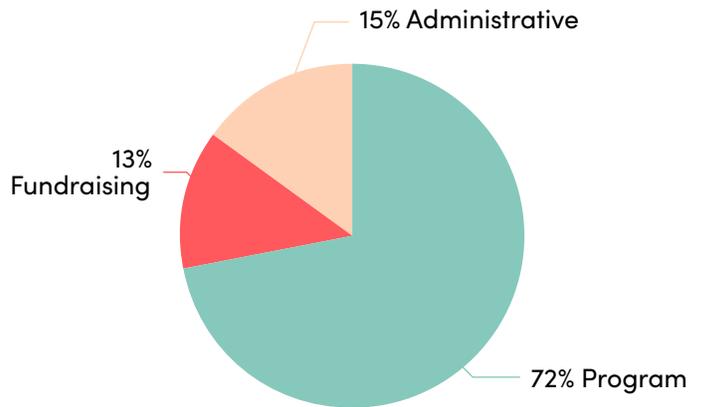
Thanks to our growing community of supporters, HTA's budget exceeded **\$1 million** in 2025 for the first time—a **24% increase** from the prior year. With greater stability and funding, we were able to grow our full-time staff size to 8 people, while retaining and promoting three staff members who have each been with

HTA for over three years. From increasing our investments in survivor-leader support, to launching a new platform for SPI alumni, our work is growing because of the generous individuals and funders who support us each year.

2025 Revenue



2025 Expenses



A big squeeze of gratitude to the:

183

individuals who collectively donated over \$70k to HTA in 2025

70

new donors who joined the HTA community in 2025

30

monthly donors who sustain our ongoing work

24

organizations that funded HTA in 2025

THANK YOU TO OUR 2025 FUNDERS AND SPONSORS!

Funders

Albert Pick Jr. Fund
Anonymous Foundation
Chicago Community Trust, Nuestro Futuro
Chicago Foundation for Women
Collective Futures Fund
Cook County Health,
Stronger Together Initiative
Cook County, Justice Advisory Council
Crown Family Philanthropies
Evans Family Foundation
Field Foundation of Illinois
Healthy Communities Foundation
John D. and Catherine T.
MacArthur Foundation
Julian Grace Foundation
Kolibri Foundation
Michael Reese Health Trust
Paul M. Angell Family Foundation
Reva and David Logan Foundation
Seabury Foundation
VNA Foundation
Woods Fund



Sponsors



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THANK YOU TO OUR LEADERFUL TEAM!

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HOW TO SUPPORT OUR WORK

Thank you for reading about HTA's 2025 impact! To further engage with our work and uplift the power and leadership of survivors, here's how you can support us:

Follow us on social media



@HEALINGTOACTION

Become a monthly donor

Subscribe to our newsletter

Sponsor our next fundraiser or event

Share our work and distribute this report

Ask your company to match your donations to HTA

Hold a peer-to-peer, in-person, or Facebook birthday fundraiser

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Contact us with any questions or opportunities at admin@healingtoaction.org