

Project Story: “The ARK on Bowen Island”

Dr. Shahar Rabi

How many people participated?

We had an average for 15-18 people in each meeting. As time went by and due to the summer, our groups became smaller but we never went under 10. It was an interesting experience, because people kept saying they took a lot from the time together, but that it was also becoming harder to commit to meet via Zoom.

How did it impact your community?

Through our meetings, a group of women decided to start an online women’s group. We also gathered to celebrate one of our participants Birthday—she was feeling really sad that no one would come, so we held a COVID safe park party (with distance) and sang her some songs. We also had many moments of tears, grief and collective compassion to the challenges of Covid on the community. People said that they felt heard, seen, safe and welcomed. Others mentioned that they can be themselves in the space, and that we have created a non judgmental environment for difficult conversations. For me, what stood out was that people felt safe to share their mental health challenges and said that it made them feel like they belong on Bowen because of it.

Did you achieve what you set out to do?

I believe so! I was hoping to have a bigger audience for each zoom meeting, but I do believe it was very impactful for those who showed up. I love that people made new connections and friendships via our gatherings and that we have a range of age from 17 to 80+!!

What did you learn from the process?

That zoom can be, after a while, exhausting for intimacy and deep connection. That it is hard for people to commit to inner work online. I appreciate how the community took responsibility for the gatherings and for the leadership of the gatherings. I’ve learned that the more I provide the space and basic safety, people know what they need to talk about and how to be together as community.

What were your memorable moments (or surprises)?

I loved all the singing we did! How people told us that they felt really seen by others and safe. I appreciated the courage of people to speak their mind and to know that they won't be judged. I felt so hurt warmed when people brought their emotional struggles to the circle. One of the most significant moments for me was when one of the members brought the very unpopular opinion. Instead of the conversation going into an argument and divisiveness, we've managed to show him empathy and be curious. Because of that, that man said that he's never felt so seen by other people and he kept on coming to the groups. Which time he became much more soft in and open minded to other opinions.