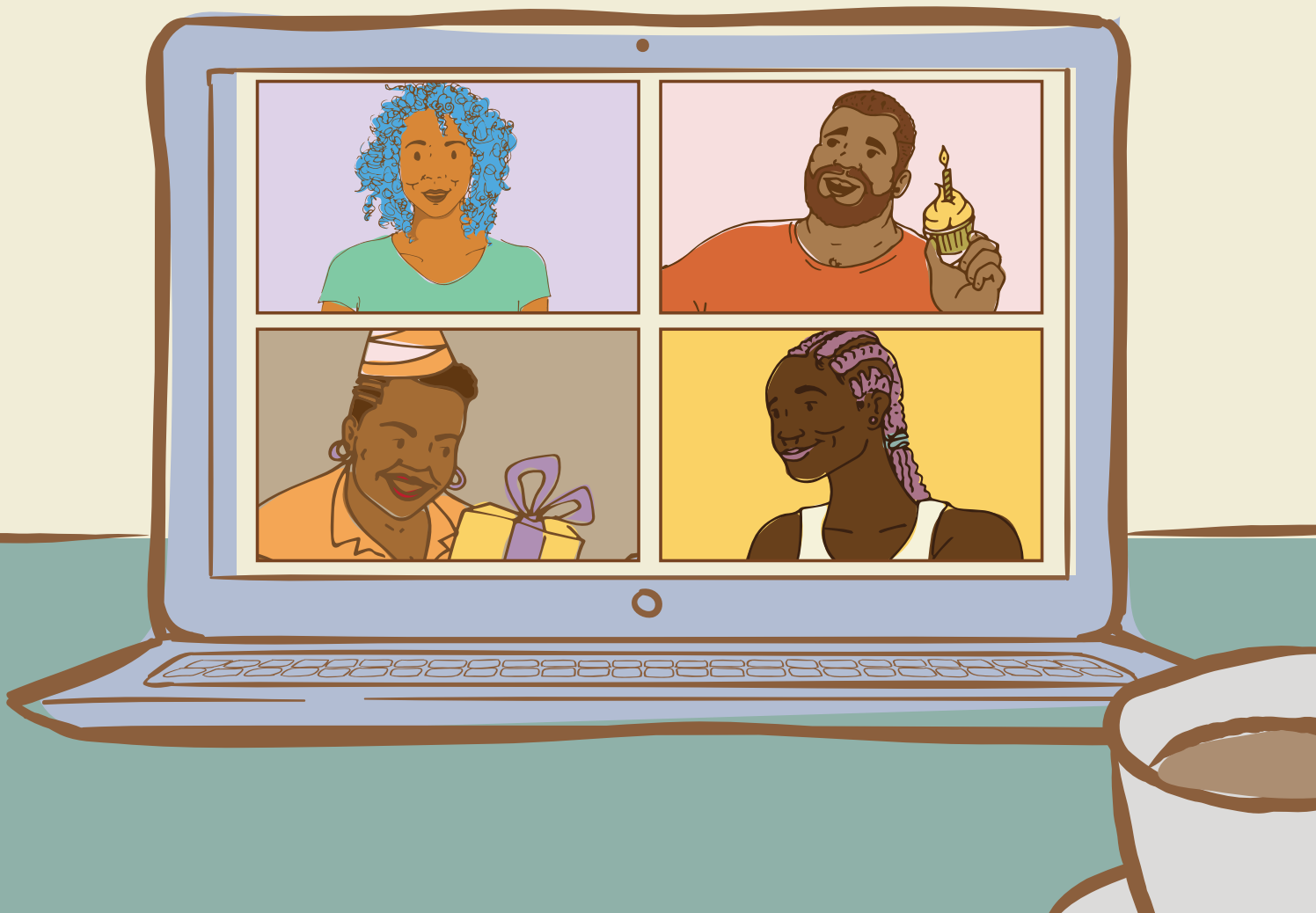


The Importance of Community

During COVID 19

Snapshots sharing the experiences of
some Black queer folks during COVID.



PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

This Black and queer led project centered the lived experiences, community, and research expertise of Black queer community members and researchers. Knowledge users, community collaborators, and independent researchers came together to conduct focus groups and interviews with Black queer people living in Ontario during COVID. This visual captures the shared experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting social isolation, barriers to accessing essential services, and the importance of joy through community.

RESEARCH TEAM:

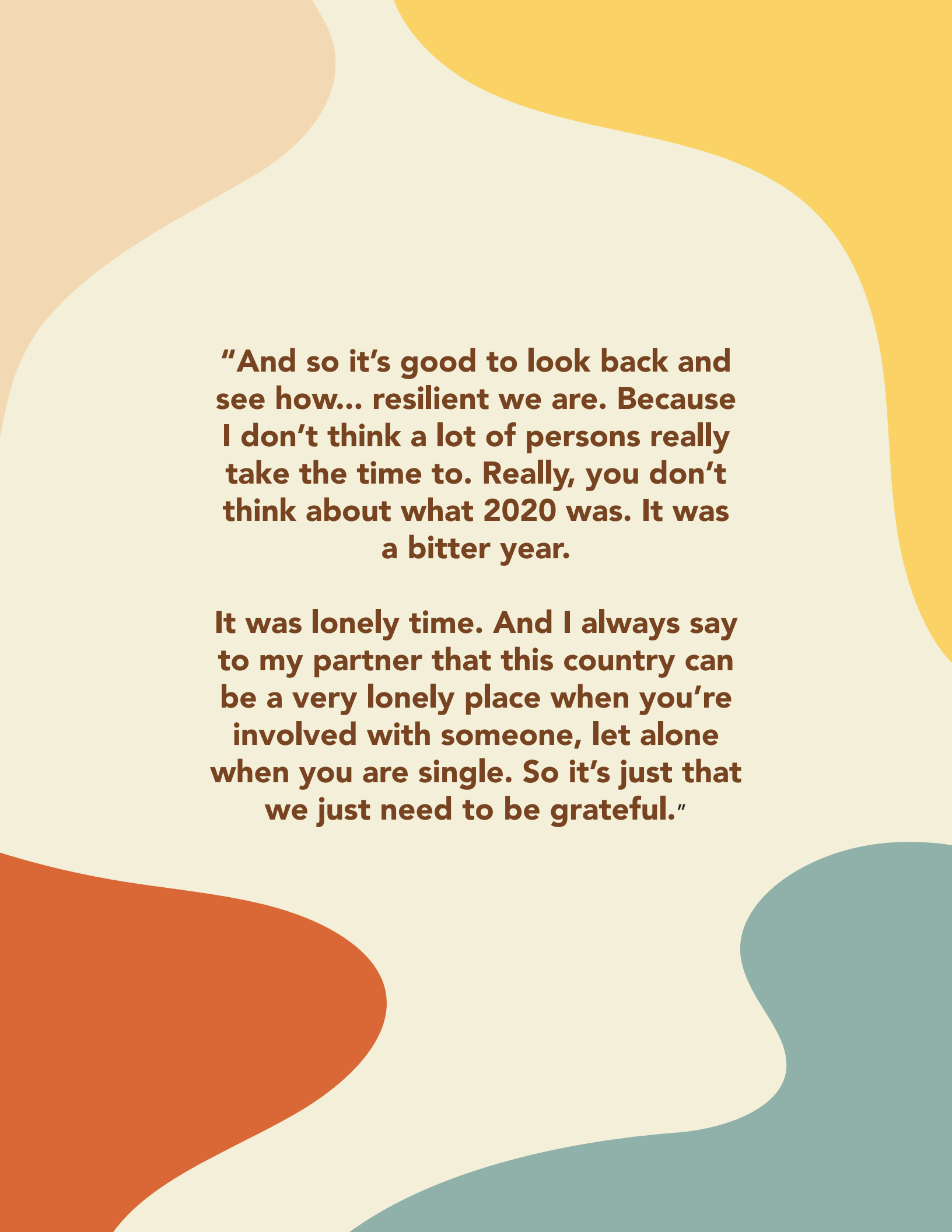
- **Dr. J Garrett-Walker**, Associate Professor at University of Toronto and Director of I AM Research Lab
- **Tatiana Ferguson**, Co-founder & Managing Director of Black Queer Youth Collective
- **Garfield Durran**, Men's Prevention Specialist at the Black Coalition for AIDS Prevention
- **Amira-Deka Dirie**, M.Ed Project Coordinator
- **Rawan Hedefa**, MSW, MA, Graduate Research Assistant
- **Keke Chambers**, Community Focus Group Facilitator

KNOWLEDGE USERS:

- **Dr. Wangari Tharao**, Director of Research and Programs at Women's Health in Women's Hands
- **Molly Bannerman**, Provincial Director of the Women and HIV / AIDS Initiative of Ontario

CO-INVESTIGATORS:

- **Dr. Lance T. McCready**, Associate Professor of Leadership, Higher, and Adult Education and Director of Making Spaces Lab
- **Dr. Mona Loutfy**, Senior Scientist and Director of Women and HIV Research Program at the Women's College Research Institute
- **Dr. Trevor Hart**, Professor at Toronto Metropolitan University and Director of the HIV Prevention Lab



"And so it's good to look back and see how... resilient we are. Because I don't think a lot of persons really take the time to. Really, you don't think about what 2020 was. It was a bitter year.

It was lonely time. And I always say to my partner that this country can be a very lonely place when you're involved with someone, let alone when you are single. So it's just that we just need to be grateful."

March 14th 2020

The start of the lock down.



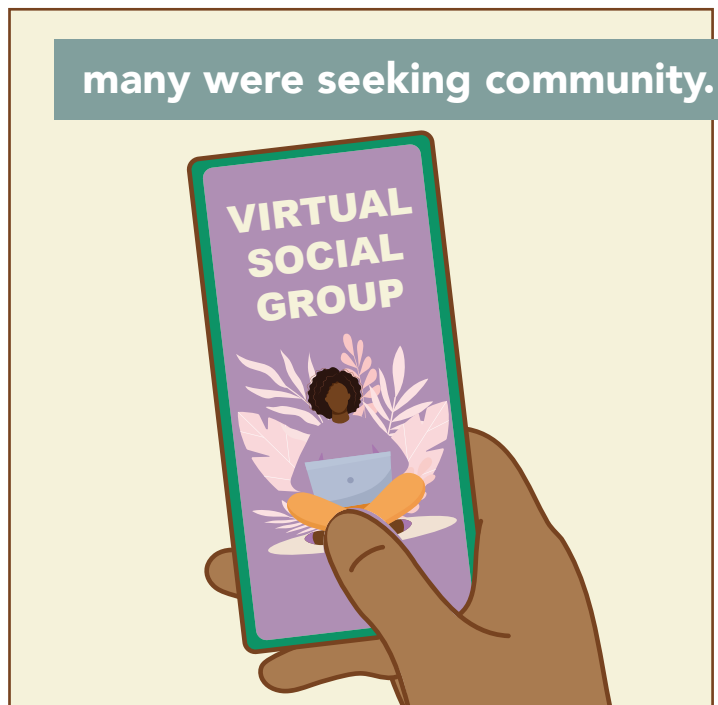
Uncertain of the future with a world ridden by pandemic ...



STAY HOME!



many were seeking community.



... but it was hard to navigate this new reality and for many it became quite isolating and lonely.

I feel like I'm doing the same things everyday...

I need to see people.

Me too!



Connections

"... initially we started, we tried to do different things, maybe like, work out, have a wine night, movie night, you know, we tried to do stuff to cope."

Virtual communities became lifelines.



People came together to connect and to celebrate.

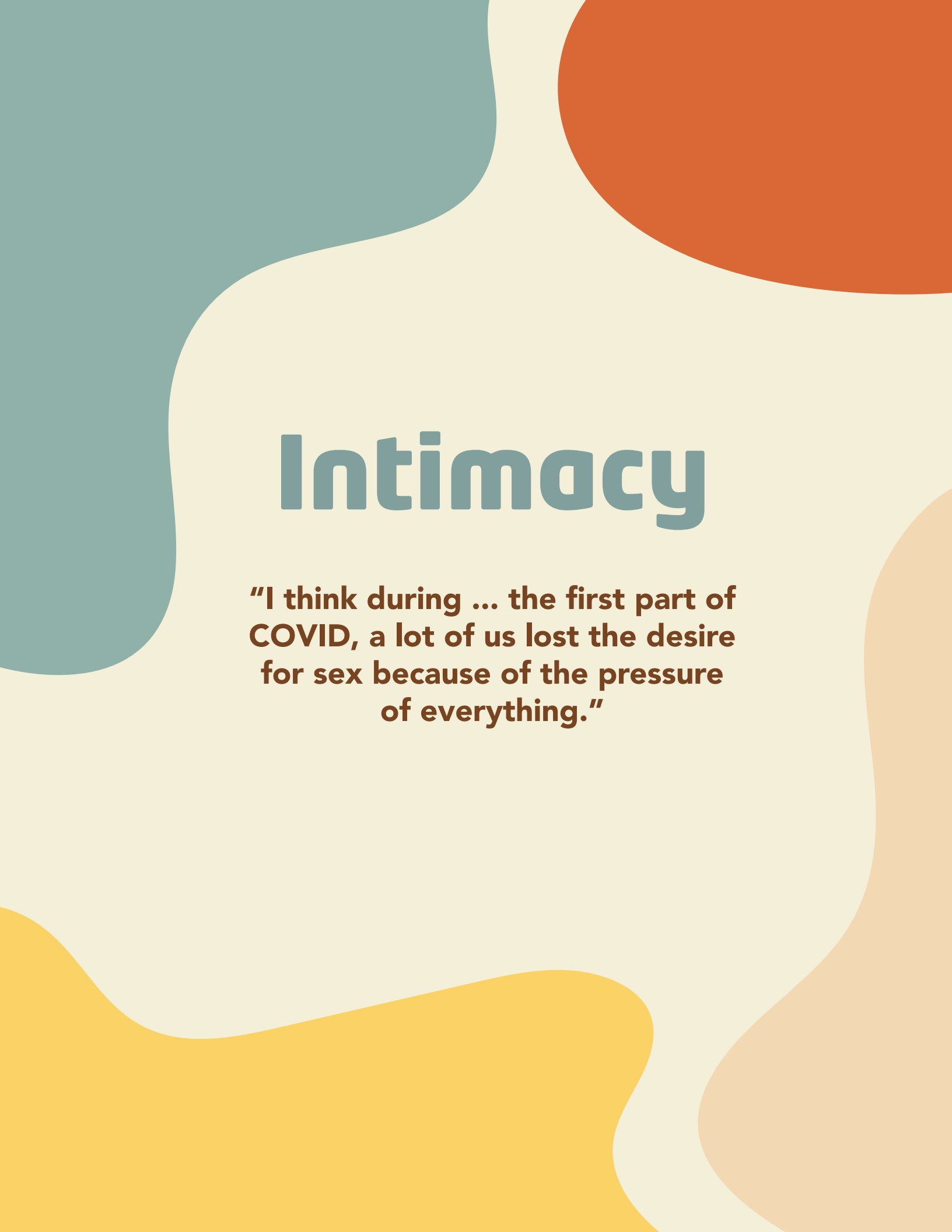


They shared struggles
and shared strengths.



For many it was the only way
to stay connected.





Intimacy

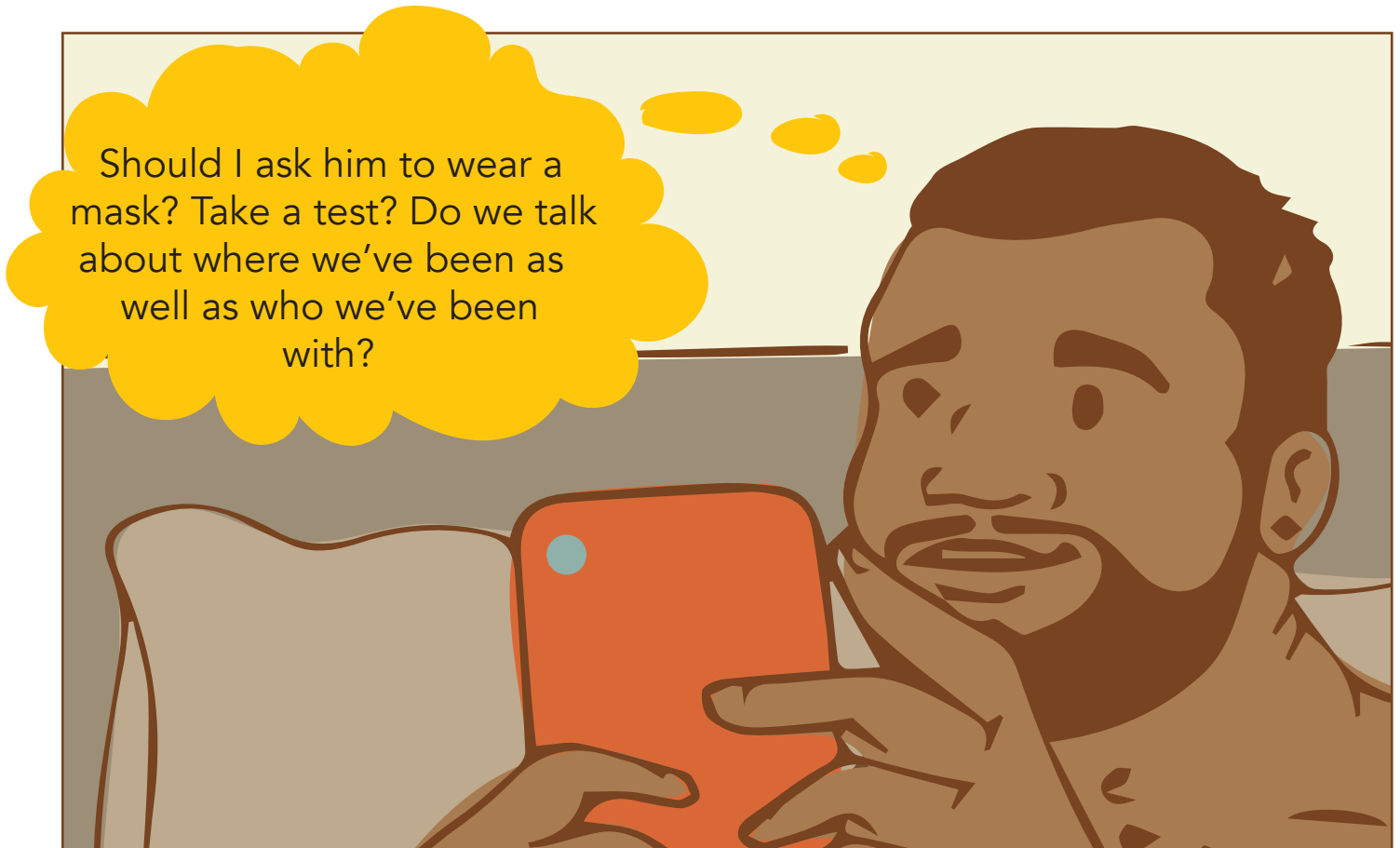
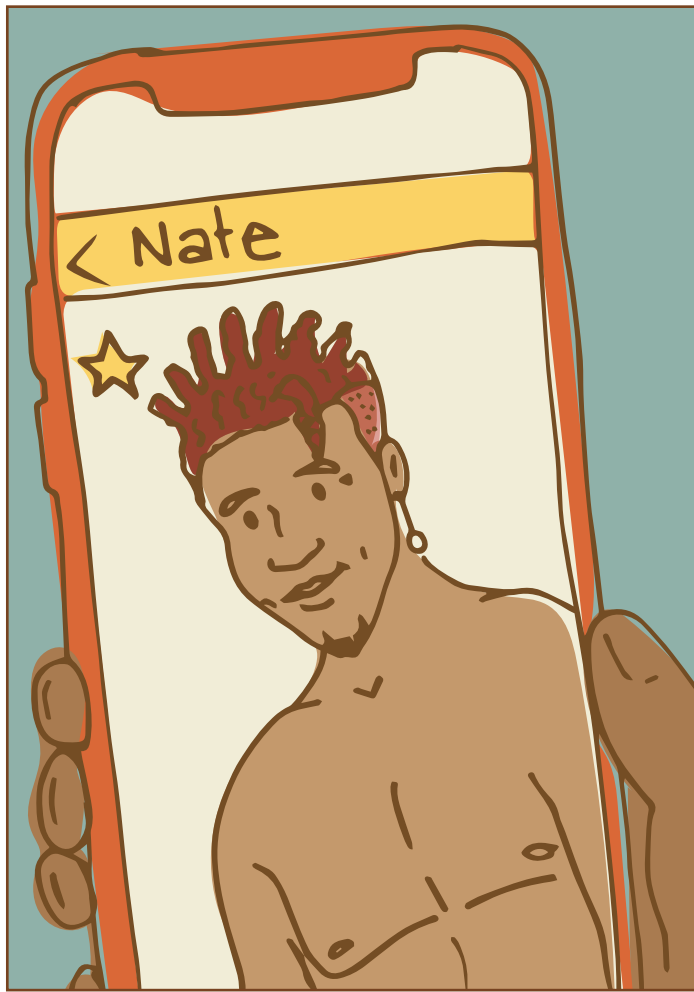
"I think during ... the first part of COVID, a lot of us lost the desire for sex because of the pressure of everything."

Amidst the pandemic's isolating grip, Black queer individuals faced profound challenges in maintaining connection. Struggling with loneliness and a sense of disconnection from physical communities, they turned to virtual platforms as a lifeline.

Through digital avenues, they sought to bridge the gap, finding solace in online gatherings, video calls, and shared spaces.

However, the yearning for intimacy, encompassing both emotional and physical connection, in real life remained a persistent ache, as they navigated the complexities of longing in a virtual landscape.





Navigating Risk

"Well, I got my stuff from Black Cap and 519. So like my condoms and my gel and I saw stuff I got from here and 519 it was easier, it was easier for me to get from here and instead of going to buy it in a store..."

Navigating the delicate dance of physical connection.



For many finding intimacy in
the time of COVID meant
negotiating risk and
overcoming obstacles.



Shared Experiences

"... I feel like people have moved on, and you know, back to their regular lives. And I'm here like, did you not just see what happened? Are you okay? So yeah, it's really nice to be around people with shared experiences to know that I'm not alone in my feelings. And yeah, just to know that there are other Black, queer people who share experiences.

So yeah, super grateful for the group."

I'm super grateful for
this group ... and I can't wait to
meet up with you all!



In the end many found ways to empower each other
through shared virtual experiences. And when the
restrictions started to lift, they found their way
to one another in person again.

Reminding us that in unity, resilience is unveiled.





The quotes used throughout this knowledge product come from participants who shared their stories with us. This Knowledge Product seeks to highlight the nuanced experiences of Black queer individuals navigating the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic in Ontario, highlighting the importance of virtual communities, the complexities of seeking intimacy, and the ultimate strength found in solidarity.

