

Uhuru 2.0 – April 2026 Cohort

Beyond Independence: Community, Identity, and the Making of Self

Opening Note: What We Set Out to Do

The April 2026 Uhuru 2.0 cohort was designed as a continuation of a growing learning arc, one that builds on rhythm, memory, and community as the foundations of assisted living.

Drawing from the intent we carried forward in earlier cohorts that autonomy grows in rhythm, learning grows in community, and independence is a practice we return to again. This cohort brought together a mixed group of 13 participants, where the presence of returning participants was not incidental, but intentional.

Returning participants carried what we have come to understand as memory in motion, the embodied recall of routines, relationships, and shared expectations. New participants entered not into an empty space, but into a living ecosystem already held by practice.

What we set out to explore, therefore, was not just whether assisted living skills can be taught, that question has been answered but whether they can be sustained, transferred, and deepened through community itself.

At the same time, this cohort introduced a new and necessary layer to the work: an intentional engagement with body awareness and sexuality education, recognising that independence without an understanding of the self remains incomplete.

Cohort Composition & Learning Design

- Total Participants: 13
- Returning Participants: 11
- New Participants: 2
- Buddies: 3

The cohort functioned as a living curriculum, where:

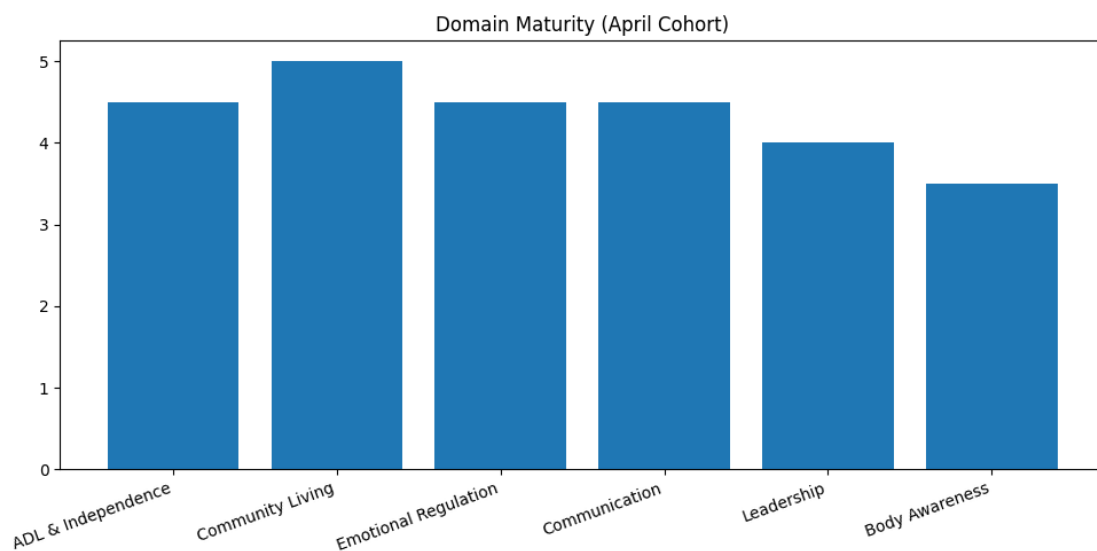
- Learning was not delivered but distributed
- Structure was not imposed but held collectively
- Participation was not forced but invited and sustained

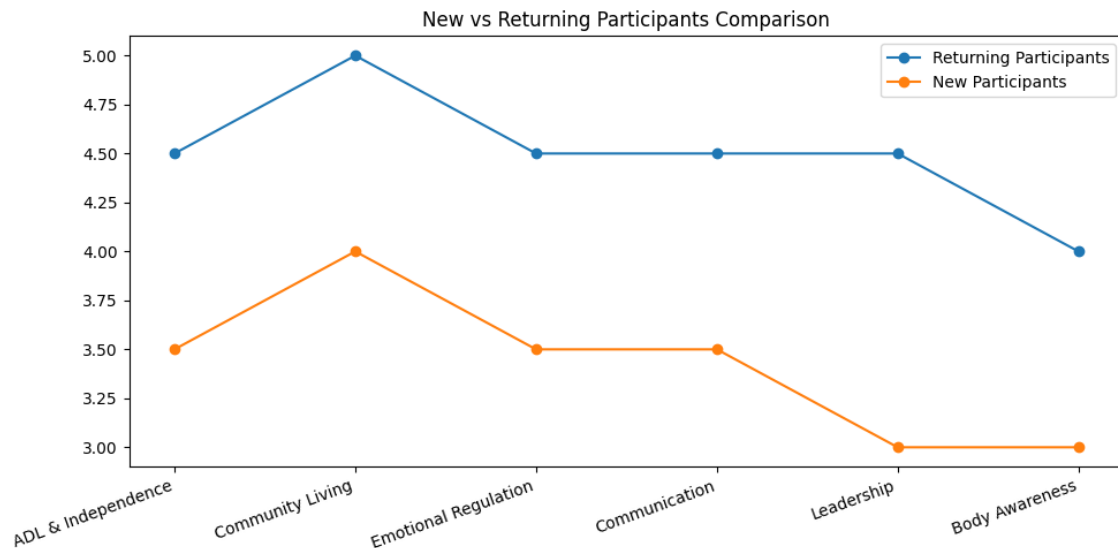
As seen in earlier cohorts, mixed groups enable:

- Faster onboarding for newcomers
- Consolidation of skills for returnees
- Peer-led learning ecosystems

Key Research Findings

- A significant shift observed in this cohort is the movement from facilitated learning to peer-held systems. Returning participants emerged as *rhythm holders*, carrying memory, structure, and internalised practices, while new participants learned primarily through observation and immersion. This allowed facilitators to move away from direct instruction toward relational anchoring, where the space was held rather than driven. What emerges from this is a clear transition toward community as pedagogy.
- In the domain of Activities of Daily Living (ADL), the shift from independence to ownership is evident. Returning participants demonstrated high levels of independence, marked by self-initiation and ownership of routines, time, and tasks. New participants, on the other hand, showed rapid adaptation, moving from initial hesitation to active participation within a short span. This reflects a clear progression from prompted action to self-directed engagement and ownership.
- Community living continues to stand out as the core learning system. Across participants, there was near-universal engagement in shared responsibilities, increasing self-initiation, and the emergence of reciprocity. Participation evolved along a clear arc from joining, to contributing, to organising, and eventually to holding space for others. Community, therefore, is no longer an activity within the programme; it has become the primary site of learning.
- Participation in this cohort was notably non-linear yet sustained. Participants moved fluidly between engagement, pause, and re-entry, while remaining connected to the group. Expression took multiple forms — verbal, non-verbal, and symbolic reinforcing the insight that participation is not constant activity, but rather a relationship with the space.
- A strong emergence of identity, agency, and voice was also observed. Participants demonstrated clearer preferences, articulated aspects of identity, and reflected on their own behaviours. Expressions such as “I don’t want help” or “I want to change this” indicate a shift from compliance toward choice and agency, marking an important developmental transition.





Emerging Domain: Body Awareness & Sexuality Education

- A key addition in this cohort was the introduction of body awareness and foundational sexuality education, marking a shift from independence toward selfhood.
- This domain was not introduced as a separate subject, but embedded within lived experience through movement, body mapping, shared spaces, and everyday interactions. Participants engaged with language around ownership (“my body”), explored boundaries in real-time, and experienced relational learning through proximity, touch, and choice.
- Participants began to show early signs of body ownership, engaging with their physical self through naming, movement, and awareness. Boundary awareness emerged behaviourally through choices of proximity, engagement, or withdrawal, highlighting that behaviour often precedes language. Regulation was increasingly understood as embodied, with movement and rhythm supporting emotional settling.
- At the same time, participants demonstrated growing self-advocacy, choosing when to participate, expressing comfort or discomfort, and asserting preferences. This contributed to the emergence of relational independence, an understanding of how to be with others, share space, and hold oneself within a community.

Social Immersion as Extension of Learning

- A significant dimension of this cohort was the role of social immersion as an extension of the learning environment beyond campus. Experiences such as visits to public and cultural spaces, including the Museum of Art and Photography, enabled participants to engage with unfamiliar environments while carrying the rhythm and structure of the Uhuru space with them.
- Social immersion created opportunities for participants to transfer learning from contained settings to real-world contexts. Participants demonstrated the ability to navigate public spaces, manage routines such as eating, toileting, and transitions, and remain connected to group processes even in new environments. Importantly, many participants showed increased awareness of social norms, personal space, and collective movement within these settings.

- The presence of returning participants played a critical role in anchoring these experiences, offering implicit cues for behaviour, pacing, and participation. New participants were able to observe, adapt, and engage more confidently, reinforcing the strength of peer-mediated learning.
- At a deeper level, social immersion expanded the understanding of assisted living from a protected environment to a transferable life skill. It enabled participants to experience themselves as part of a larger social world not as individuals being supported, but as individuals participating, navigating, and belonging within shared public spaces.

Challenges and Learnings

Introducing this domain also surfaced important challenges:

- The need for strong facilitator alignment in language and approach
- Navigating varying levels of readiness and comfort among participants
- Holding a balance between structure and sensitivity
- Ensuring that conversations remained grounded, safe, and non-intrusive

At the same time, these challenges reaffirmed the need for this work.

They highlighted that sexuality education in neurodiverse spaces cannot be delayed, avoided, or treated as an add-on, it must be held with the same care, intentionality, and practice-based design as all other domains.

Conclusion: What This Cohort Makes Possible

If earlier cohorts helped us establish that:

- Assisted living can be taught
- Independence can be built
- Community can be held

This cohort begins to show that: Assisted living can become a self-sustaining, relational ecosystem and with the inclusion of body awareness: Independence begins to move from skill to identity.

Closing Note

When individuals learn to manage their routines, care for their spaces, and participate in shared life, they become independent. But when they begin to understand their body, their boundaries, and their place in relation to others they begin to become themselves. And perhaps that is where this work is truly leading us: Not just toward answering “What after me?” But toward building a world where individuals are not only cared for but are able to live, choose, relate, and belong.