



AFGHAN WOMEN'S ORGANIZATION
ANNUAL REPORT
2009

Joint Message from the President and Executive Director

2008 has been a truly rewarding year for us both. This is primarily because we work with a remarkable group of board members, managers, staff and volunteers. These individuals work hard every day touching and transforming the lives of refugees and newcomers who have made Canada their home.

We have developed an outstanding reputation for delivering culturally and linguistically appropriate services. Our services are focused but not limited to refugee women and their families who constitute a very unique segment of our society. Their need is unique and requires very special care, attention and experience. Since the majority of our staff and board members have personal experience of being refugees, they have first hand understanding of the needs of our clients. This is what makes our organization unique and special.

As a result of the tireless efforts of the board, management, staff and volunteers, we have some successes to celebrate! We had more clients interested in seeking our services. We had an increase in the number of volunteers, particularly seniors. We expanded our collaboration with other organizations. In addition, our organization received much needed resources in order to establish after school programs for children, parenting programs for women and a program to promote gender equality among newcomer families.

Our year was not without its challenges. Most of our clients were deeply affected by the difficult and unpredictable economic times. Our organization tried to help these clients through our job search program. However, there were limited opportunities for employment. Also, many of our clients from the Afghan community were impacted by the continuous instability and loss of innocent lives in Afghanistan since they had left loved ones back home or in refugee camps. This had a significant impact on their speedy settlement in Canada. Further, there was a great demand for our youth and seniors programs, however, we were unable to meet these needs due to lack of resources. We will seek to build resources in the upcoming year in order to meet these needs. We have weathered these tests with our resolve strengthened – to continue to deliver the best service we can. In the year ahead, that will mean ongoing efforts to expand our resources and focus on working as efficiently as possible to maximize the resources we have. It has been our privilege being involved with an organization so dedicated to improving the future of refugees and newcomers in our society and ultimately building a stronger community for all of us.

Asma Faizi, President
Adeena Niazi, Executive Director

Introduction

For almost two decades, the Afghan Women's Organization (AWO) has offered culturally competent, innovative programming and services to newcomer clients from many different countries and in many different languages. This year

we served over 5 000 clients. The vast majority of the clients we serve have had refugee experiences and often need comprehensive support and services. Over the years, we have expanded our services due to the continuing and rising needs of both the growing Afghan community and other new-

comer communities in the Greater Toronto Area. We provide services from four centres:

- Head Office
- Flemington Park
- Scarborough
- Mississauga

Throughout these locations, the AWO currently employs over 80 full-time and part-time employees.



Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC)



Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) is a language program offered to newcomers learning the English language. This program also introduces Canadian values to newcomers to support the integration process. The goal of LINC is to provide basic communication skills that are essential for individuals to become self-sufficient and active members in their new communities. Our LINC Program is very

unique in that it is one of few LINC Programs that offers women only classes. This allows many women to attend class and acquire necessary language skills that they may not have been able to otherwise. Our women only classes create a high level of comfort and an environment that is warm and friendly for newcomer women. We offer 15 classes across our 3 LINC sites, ranging from Literacy to Level 5, our students are from various countries around the world. The top seven languages of our students are Dari, Pashto, Arabic, Urdu, Vietnamese, Tamil, and Mandarin. The AWO has also served various other language groups that include Amharic, Bengali,

Korean, Kurdish, Punjabi, Somali, Russian, Spanish, Urdu, Hindi, Bulgarian, Romanian, French, Armenian, Turkish, Nepali, and Gujarati.

As a large focus of our English classes is to immerse our students into Canadian culture, we also take many trips and host guest speakers to give relevant and timely information. Last year, we took many trips, which included places such as the Royal Ontario Museum, the CN Tower, and the Ontario Science Centre. We also took our students to community centers, libraries, and banks to allow the students to become familiar with and integrate into their local surroundings.

Last year, we had a variety of guest speakers, which



included speakers from the local police and fire departments, speakers on health topics such as breast cancer and stress reduction, as well as speakers on Canadian life and culture.

Childminding is a key component of our LINC classes as it allows women with young children (between the ages of six months to six years) to study English while their children are being taken care of by qualified staff. The LINC program often collaborates with other programs to meet the varying

needs of its students. These collaborations include:

- LINC students often have an ISAP worker that helps them with all areas related to settlement;
- Some LINC students are also members of the HOST program and benefit from the mentorship and inclusiveness that HOST offers;
- The Family Education Centre provides parenting classes for our LINC students, teaching them about parent-

ing in the Canadian context;

- LINC students regularly attend JSW workshops; and
- LINC students benefit from Financial Literacy workshops offered in partnership with JVS.

In January 2009, the LINC program in Mississauga expanded and we opened two new classes, offering students more levels and options for their English studies.



Settlement Services (ISAP and NSP)

We provide a variety of settlement services to newcomers through our Immigration Settlement and Adaptation Program (ISAP) and Newcomer Support Program (NSP) at our four locations. Settlement services are an integral part of our services and one of the key components in helping newcomers settle in their new surroundings. The program goes beyond helping newcomers settle, as it also supports the newcomers adapt and integrate into Canadian society. Many of our staff have also had the experience of being a newcomer. They have been able to un-

derstand and overcome the many challenges that newcomers encounter.

Many newcomers face multiple challenges in their settlement. The vast majority of our clients have had refugee experiences prior to coming to Canada and some that are currently refugees. These clients often have complex needs and require not only services in their language but also services that are culturally competent. Moreover, our clients often have language barriers, lack of awareness about the process of accessing basic services such as health care, transportation, education,



employment and shelter – all essential to make the course of settlement easier for newcomers. Our clients with children often need support in understanding the school system and helping their children succeed in school. Unfortunately, many of our clients are also separated from family and require information on sponsorship. To help our clients, our services are provided one-on-one or through group sessions. Settlement services include orientation, counseling, interpretation, translation, referrals, advocacy, housing, health, escorting, employment counseling and employment support. These programs are offered by specialized youth, family and senior settlement staff, as well as general

settlement staff.

Our settlement services are delivered throughout the Greater Toronto Area. We have a strong outreach component that works to engage clients and match them with the particular service to meet their needs. Our most successful outreach method is word-of-mouth from our clients.

We have also been actively developing partnerships with other organizations in order to better meet the needs of clients. Our partnerships have been both within the settlement sector as well as other sectors that support our clients. These include health, legal, family support, and children and youth services.



Job Search Workshop (JSW)

The Job Search Workshops (JSW) Program helps newcomers find jobs in Ontario. Our workshops give clients the job search tools that help them succeed in the Canadian job market. It is often a challenge for newcomers to integrate into the Canadian labour market due to access barriers and systemic challenges. However, with the right support, many newcomers succeed in the labour market. Our aim is to be the support for newcomers who come to us for employment assistance. We also partner with other organizations to help meet the employment needs of clients. We offer the JSW program at all our Toronto locations. Our free programs are open

to all newcomers that are looking for work and may need extra support and resources. We offer three-to-four days workshops at two locations. To suit our client's schedules, these workshops are provided during day time, weekends, and evenings. These workshops cover resume and cover letter writing, labour market trends, strategies to tap the hidden job market, interview skills, cold calling and networking, worker's rights, and employment standards. Moreover, the workshops also assist our clients overcome the barrier of 'no Canadian work experience.' We also offer shorter one-day workshops that focus on computer skills and specific job

search techniques and topics.

Our clients also gain access to one-on-one counseling, assistance to develop an employment action plan, work experience placements, and referrals to job development. Furthermore, we provide access to the Internet, computers, telephones, and fax machines for job search purposes. We also offer child minding during workshops.

So far, we have offered more than 50 workshops and served over 400 newcomers. Some of our clients have found jobs, while others have preferred to upgrade their language skills. Many of the clients have also been admitted to educational institutions to obtain Canadian credentials.

Host Program

In January 2009, the Afghan Women's Organization received its very first funding to deliver the Host Program in the Mississauga (Peel) region. The Host Program has been very well received by our clients and the community we serve. Within a couple of months, we were running the program at full capacity and we hope to see the program grow even bigger in the future.

The Host Program has been successful in matching newcomers to Canada with volunteers, who have lived here longer. This unique program is mutually beneficial and enriches the knowledge of everyone involved in the program.

The program offers very useful and practical support to newcomers. We run English Conversation Circles, pot luck dinners, workshops, trips and social activities. These activities allow both newcomers and volunteers to share their skills and knowledge. There are also summer kids programs for newcomers, which include crafts, movie days, storytelling and talent sharing.



Youth Program

The Afghan Women's Organization's Youth Program has been very successful over the past year meeting the needs of immigrant and refugee youth. The AWO Youth Program empowers and supports youth in different areas of their life and provides youth with a number of different

services. Our Youth Program includes settlement services, as well as mentorship and civic engagement programs.

We provide supportive and solution-focused counseling to newcomer youth to reduce social isolation and to encourage them to participate in the wider

community. We have also served a number of at-risk youth. We have provided counseling, referrals to lawyers, assistance with court and school issues, and Aggression Replacement Training. Many of the youth we serve through the Aggression Replacement Training gain invaluable skills in conflict mediation. For many, this is a key skill in helping them inte-



grate into the broader community.

We also provide a number of skill development workshops to assist youth in developing leadership and public speaking skills, as well as empowering them with knowledge. Furthermore, we attempt to give these youth awareness about Canadian culture and society.

In the past, we have taken our youth clients on field trips to the Ontario Science Centre and City Hall to promote civic participation. We have also hosted sessions on Ontario Colleges to assist youth in learning about different colleges and eligibility criteria.

With the help of our Youth Advisory Group, which is composed of a broad group of Afghan youth, we are able to plan cultural,

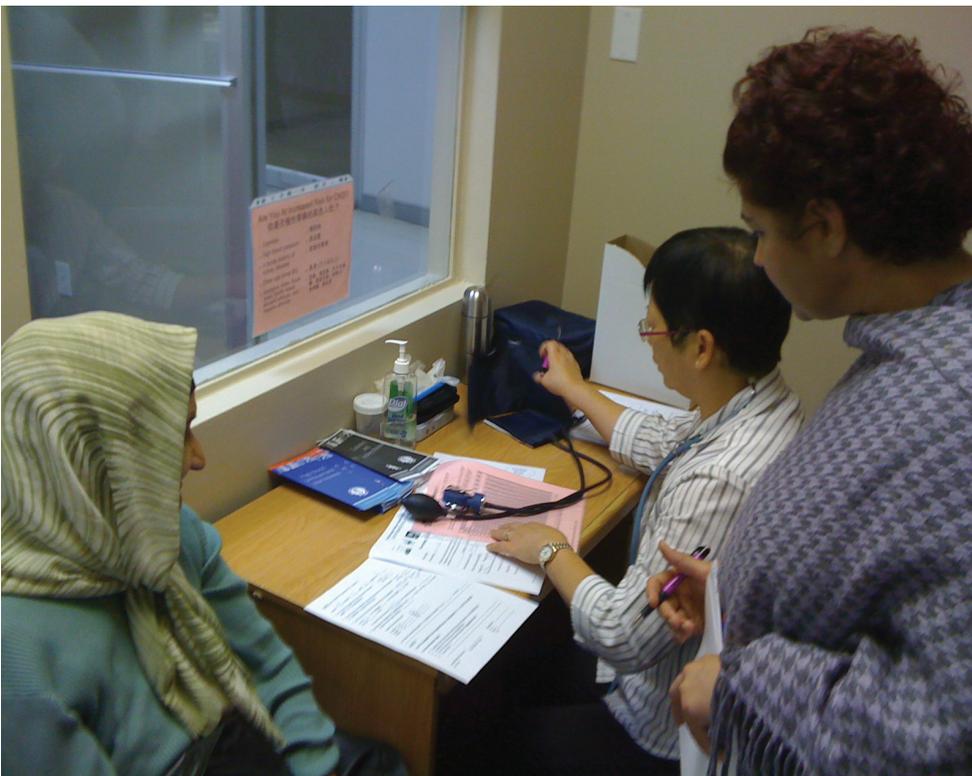


social and recreational events for youth. Through these events, youth learn about their culture, increase awareness among the broader community regarding Afghan culture and about Afghanistan, and of course, encourage everyone to have fun.

As part of our outreach program, we visit many Ontario secondary schools to bring awareness about our services and programs, and to assist schools

with their multicultural weeks. We also conduct some workshops. We have also established a number of partnerships with other service providers such as the Access Alliance Multicultural Health and Community Services, the Canadian Council of Muslim Women, the Eglinton East/ Kennedy Park Youth Network, the Youth Service Network for Victoria Village, and the East Metro Youth Services.

Seniors' Program



Our Seniors' Program focuses on the physical, emotional, and social needs of newcomer seniors. Many newcomer seniors experience multiple challenges and as a result are often isolated and their needs often go unmet. Our program aims to reach out to these seniors and help engage them into life in Canada by providing them with the appropriate services and support.

Group workshops are a highlight for the seniors as they join other seniors in a warm and welcoming atmosphere to learn valuable information from staff and guest speakers on topics such as health and nutrition, Canadian culture, housing, social security, and other relevant issues. Workshops are held across our sites and at partner agency sites as requested. We also provide one-on-one support.

Afghan Sewing Circle

The Afghan Women's Organization, in partnership with the Flemington Health Centre, has been offering newcomers free sewing classes. This project emerged as there was a recognition that many Afghan women are in need of skill-building activities. It was also found that many Afghan women are often isolated as they tend to be away from family and friends once they get here. Moreover, many newcomer and immigrant women become employed in the garment industry and too often are not aware of their employment rights.

Thus, the project was created with the following three goals in mind:

- **Engaging women into a skill-based group to de-**

crease social isolation;

- **Raising awareness around employment rights; and**

- **Increasing knowledge of health issues, particularly on issues that affect women.**

Flemington Health Centre has provided a wonderful community room for the sessions, and their health professionals have provided workshops on various topics. So far, over fifty women have been served through this project.

We are also providing child-care to ensure that women with children can access this project. Demand for this project is very high and we have a continuous waiting list.



The “Equality Rocks!” project is a new project aimed at newcomer Afghan and Iranian girls and boys between the ages of 8 to 14 years, who live in the Greater Toronto Area. At the same time, parents, community members and leaders are invited to be a part of this very important project. This project addresses gender inequality through a specialized curriculum. Through workshops, outings, research, case studies, role play, open discussions, and materials, the participants receive information focusing on the importance of gender equality and



the direct correlation between gender inequality and violence in the home.

As a result of this project, many children begin to view their female counterparts in a different way – one of respect, trust, and support. Through discussion at home, these concepts are further reinforced.

Workshops have been held throughout the year at our various AWO locations, which are conveniently located throughout the GTA (North York, Scarborough, and Mississauga).

Reaching Out—Addressing the Mental Health Needs of the Afghan Community

This project served Afghan newcomers who were dealing with mental health issues. Many of the clients served through this project were dealing with settlement and acculturation stress, post-traumatic stress disorders and other mental health issues. These newcomers were often unable to access services elsewhere and this project was able to meet their mental health needs. The activities of this project were providing culturally and linguistically appropriate services, including referrals, support, counselling, workshops, and relevant materials.

Financial Literacy Education Project

Through a pilot project, JVS Toronto is working in partnership with the Afghan Women's Organization to develop and implement a financial literacy education program for newcomers residing in or around the Scarborough area. Topics of discussion include paying bills, balancing a household budget, understanding the benefits and risks associated with credit card use, banking, saving, investing and basic financial management. These issues are often unfamiliar tasks for new Canadians as many of the newcomers we serve come from countries where financial matters are handled dif-

ferently or where they have had limited exposure to banks and/or other financial institutions. So far, this project has benefited many women by assisting them in increasing their financial knowledge, awareness and well-being.

Workshops

We provide many different workshops through our various programs and projects. The topics we provide workshops on range from basic settlement issues such as housing, employment, education and accessing healthcare to other issues such as specific health issues, conflict resolution, family conflict, gender issues and civic engagement.

Fundraising & Cultural Events

The Afghan Women's Organization has been a host to many community events in the past; however, the most significant ones for 2008-2009, are:

Mela-E-Samanak: This event is celebrated each year in the month of April, to celebrate spring, and the Afghan New Year. Last year, over 2000 community members attended.

Mother's Day: Our annual Mother's Day event was attended by over 500 community members.

Father's Day: This significant event was held in the presence of over 250 guests.

Staff Development

It is important for our staff to receive up-to-date information and skills to help meet the needs of our clients. Our staff have received a wide variety of trainings both in-house and through different organizations. Staff have also participated in conferences and workshops on a variety of issues.

Sponsorship

As a Sponsorship Agreement Holder organization with Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), AWO sponsors refugees from Pakistan and other refugee camps to come to Canada. In 2008, 73 refugees arrived in Canada and received settlement services and other supports to help them upon their arrival.

Volunteers

Afghan Women's Organization operates largely on the generous contribution of our many volunteers from diverse multi-cultural backgrounds and age groups. Many of our events and some of our ongoing activities would not be offered without the support of these volunteers.

Omid-e-Mirmun Orphanage



The Omid-E-Mirmun Orphanage was established by the Afghan Women's Organization in 2004 in Kabul, Afghanistan. The orphanage currently has an administrative office in Kabul and runs its affairs internally. This orphanage provides shelter and basic needs for approximately 30 girls between the ages of three to twelve years. The girls have a safe and comfortable home, access to schooling and extra-curricular activities, as well as emotional support and care from the dedicated staff. We are thankful for the generous funding of Canadian Women for Women of Afghanistan, and other friends and supporters for making it possible for this project to persist and grow in its success.

Heritage Language and Literacy Programs

AWO provides Heritage Language Classes in Pashto and Dari for Afghan children as it is important for families to maintain elements of their culture and identity while living in Canada. In addition to our classes for children, our dedicated volunteers continue to provide a Dari and Pashto literacy program for Afghan women and seniors in Toronto.

AWO volunteers provide these programs to many children and women as a way to give back to the community.

Current and Previous Partners

- Access Alliance Multicultural Health and Community Services
- Canadian Council for Muslim Women
- Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture
- Canadian Mental Health Association
- Springtide Resources
- Family Education Centre
- Flemington Health Centre
- JVS
- Mother Craft Institution for Early Development
- Overland Learning Centre
- Seneca College
- South Asian Family Support Services
- Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office
- York University

Local Immigration Partnership (LIP)

AWO is involved in a number of collaborations and partnerships across Toronto and Peel. We are one of the partner agencies of the Thorncliffe Park Local Immigration Partnership, which is led by the Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office.



PREVIOUS AND CURRENT FUNDERS

The delivery of our services would not have been possible without the generosity of the following funders



Citizenship and
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