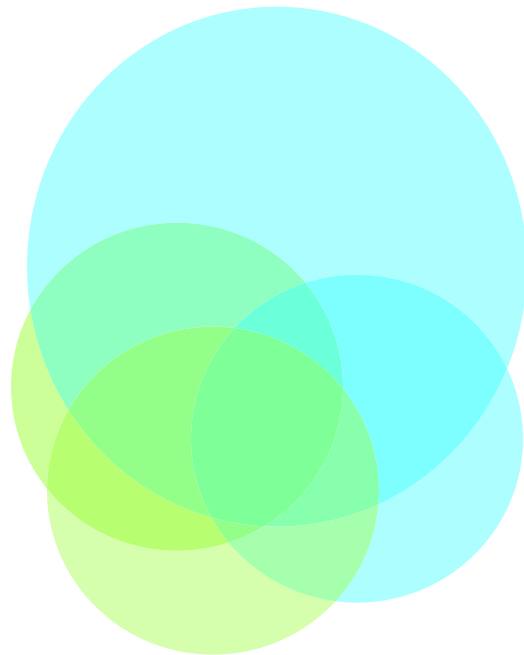


# 2014-2015 ANNUAL REPORT

*From isolation to full participation*



**AFGHAN WOMEN'S ORGANIZATION**



**AWO**

# About AWO

## OUR MISSION AND MANDATE

Our mission is to provide settlement services to all newcomers, with a special focus on women, their families, refugees and people who have experienced war and persecution. Our mandate is to improve newcomers' quality of life, to help them live in dignity and reach their full potential, and to prompt social and economic inclusion so that they may be contributing members of society. Our vision is refugees and immigrants, especially those who have experienced war and persecution, leading self sufficient and dignified lives in a socially inclusive society.

**Our values are: access and equity; dignity and respect; social inclusion; and collaboration.**

## OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**Asma Faizi, President**

**Beheshta Jaghori, Vice-President**

**Latifa Sarwari, Treasurer**

**Sheba Sheranze**

**Najeeba Shairzay**

**Hakema Mashal Sidiqi**

**Zohra Safi**

**Kobra Rasul**

**Shahfiqa Akbari**

**Abeda Baluch**

**Arzo Nooristani**

 **TO ALL OUR VOLUNTEERS,  
THANK YOU!!** 

# A Message

## FROM OUR PRESIDENT AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

This year we are celebrating our 25th anniversary of successful services. AWO has touched the lives of tens of thousands of refugee women, their families and people who have experienced war and violence. Our clients come from diverse communities and benefit from the provision of multiple services. Our success continues to be supported by our expertise in effectively understanding the cultural and gender specific needs of our clients and our experience in refugee resettlement. We nurture strong, collaborative relationships with partners, and benefit from the generosity of our funders and supporters. This year our organization was presented with many opportunities for growth and improvement. Regardless of the funding challenges and shifts in immigration policies and trends, our clients continued to provide us with the inspiration to move forward with renewed determination. Our role in helping refugees and immigrants feel at home in Canada is facilitated by the strength, resilience, and goodwill demonstrated by the women, men, and children we serve. We have sought to meet our commitment to providing equitable access to services, dignity and social inclusion by providing opportunities like the Women's Sewing Collective, which gives newcomer women an opportunity to learn valuable fashion design and business skills.

We affected the lives of over 20,000 clients, providing them with supports and a variety of services at four locations across the Greater Toronto Area and had the pleasure of teaching over 800 students in our Toronto, Scarborough and Mississauga LINC programs. Our clients have made new friends and enjoyed being part of their communities during picnics, Eid parties, and various other social and cultural events throughout the year. We look forward to a healthy and prosperous 2015-2016 for all our newcomer clients.

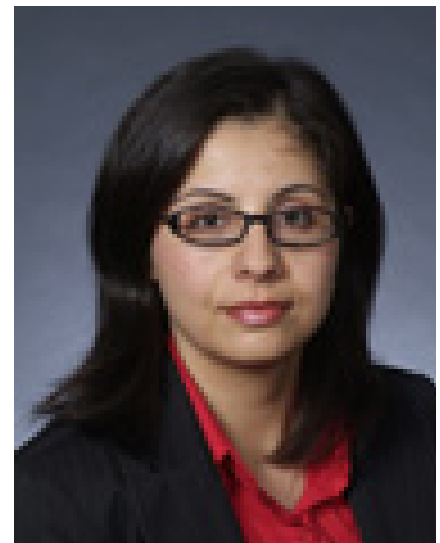
*Sincerely,*

Asma Faizi  
President

Adeena Niazi  
Executive Director



Adeena Niazi, Executive Director



Asma Faizi, President

# Settlement Services

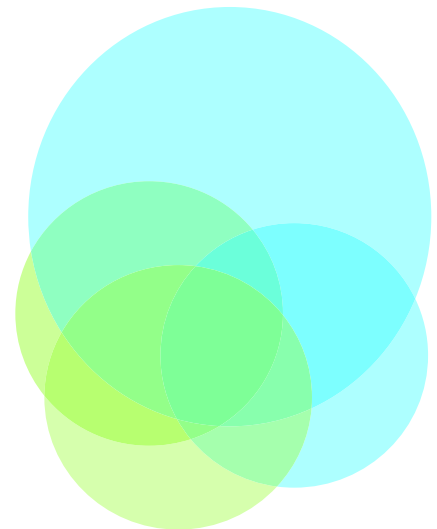


Apple-picking with LINC staff and students.

During the 2014-2015 period, the AWO welcomed newcomers from Afghanistan, Iran, Uzbekistan, the Middle East, Tajikistan, Turkey, China, Pakistan, Bangladesh, as well as Eastern European and African countries. We had the honour of serving over 19,430 clients in the first stages of their settlement process. These first steps taken by newcomers, finding a home, work, learning English, and finding out about Canada's legal system and health care are all crucial to ensuring that each newcomer has a foundation for building a healthy life in Canada. The first few months in a new country can be intimidating; to mitigate feelings of unease, our settlement workers provide each client with linguistically and culturally appropriate services.

At the AWO we offer programming and events that help newcomers feel included and supported by their new communities. This year we provided guest speakers from various organizations who outlined the similarities between newcomers' values and Canadian law and offered a whole host of workshops, counselling circles and many opportunities to gather with new friends and family members while enjoying refreshments and learning about their new community. To make services accessible to our clients across the Greater Toronto Area we connected with our partners at East Scarborough Storefront; Jenner Jean Marie C. Centre; Jane Alliance Neighbourhood Services; the Ajax Library; Uma Nabawi Mosque; Wood Green School; the Newcomer Information Centre; the Peel Career Assessment Centre; COSTI Employment Mississauga; Peel Chinese Community HUB; and Micro Skills Brampton. Our clients also received excellent orientation and information sessions from the COSTI Reception Centre.

Our front line staff are continually upgrading their skills and knowledge in order to offer the best services to AWO's clients. This past year, staff went to many workshops, trainings, conferences and other professional development sessions including: the Annual TESL conference; Access, Vulnerability and Rights: A Frontline Networking; Anger Management training; CAMH's Stress Management workshop; a Canada Learning Bond training; CIBC's workshop for Newcomers; CLEO – Legal information; Community Legal Services training; CPR training; Crisis Intervention; Employment Services Training; Financial Literacy Workshop; Healthy Communities; Heart and Stroke Foundation; iCARE Training; Mental Health Promotion; Job Search Workshop (COSTI) training; Law and Regulation training; NCON Conference; Parenting Workshop; Peel Police Diversity; Refugee Immigration Policy RSTP e-training; an online CMAS; and Service Canada Newcomer Youth training.







LINC staff

## LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION FOR NEWCOMERS

We've had a busy year in AWO's LINC program. During 2014-2015, a total of 346 students participated in the Toronto LINC program and 242 students in the Mississauga LINC program from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds. For over twenty years, the AWO has offered Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) at different levels of proficiency in part-time and full-time classes. The program goals are to provide basic communication and life skills that are crucial for individuals to develop into productive, independent and active members in their new communities. Our all-women classes play a significant role in encouraging the attendance of the many women who have not been able to attend programs due to cultural, religious and personal preferences.

This year we've had a lot of fun inside and outside our classrooms. Our LINC Toronto and Scarborough classes spent a gorgeous day in the sun enjoying delicious food during their annual LINC picnic and in the fall had loads of fun picking apples in one of Ontario's orchards. Our classes also enjoyed learning about financial literacy, health, the environment, bullying, parenting and fire hazards from speakers who joined us from different agencies and organizations including the Canada Revenue Agency, Toronto Police Services and Toronto Public Health.

# Programs

## YOUTH

The AWO provides a range of programs and services for youth across the GTA. Our programming focuses on engaging newcomer youth with activities that will help them develop social support networks, increase their well-being and maximize their potential for enjoying a healthy, enjoyable and productive life. This past year, in collaboration with the Toronto District School Board, we provided Afghan youth with conflict resolution and skill development workshops and as members of the “EE/KP Youth Service Network”, “Neighbourhood Action Plan” and the “Youth Service Network” we collaborated on initiatives for youth in priority neighbourhoods.

Our newcomer youth enjoyed field trips to the Science Centre, the courthouse, and Toronto City Hall; participating in a “Mock Trial”; and developing valuable new skills sets through our mentorship program with the Afghan Association of York University and The Afghan Canadian Sports Association.

Throughout the year, AWO youth participated in many cultural, social, religious and recreational events including, the always well-attended, Taste of Asia in Markham.

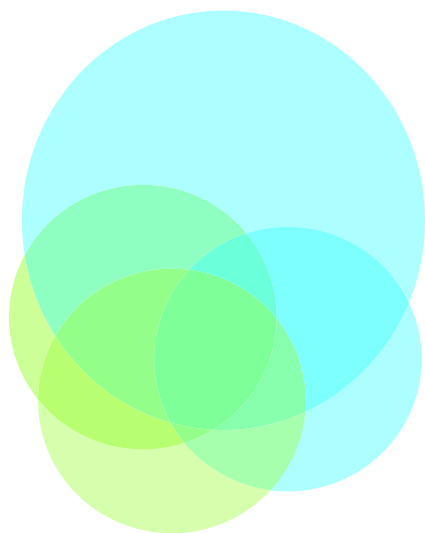
**Weekly skill-development drop-in sessions build leadership and public speaking skills and greater awareness of Canadian culture and Canadian society.**

Youth at Taste of Asia



## WOMEN'S CIRCLE

AWO runs a women's circle in partnership with Toronto Public Health twice a week in Mississauga and twice a month in Toronto. Women get together to support one another within the group while learning different skills, and building their confidence in order to start a successful life in Canada. We provide classes on different subjects, including building self-esteem, increasing leadership skills, stress and time management, yoga, healthy relationships, how to hold open family discussions, and loving and caring for your children. This last course helps parents to nurture trust, respect and emotional security through positive parenting, the provision of good nutrition, and through the demonstration of loving support for their children.



## JOB SEARCH WORKSHOP

Our popular Job Search Workshops (JSW) assist newcomers in determining the next steps on their career paths. During 2014-2015, 195 clients participated in the JSW program. The program encourages newcomers to think through their long- and short-term career goals and supports them through the initial job preparation process into a life-long process of skill-building and career development. We offer computer training classes and access to the computer lab while receiving ongoing support. Clients were referred to schools and language services, Employment Ontario programs, career fairs, employment agencies, apprenticeship programs to obtain their licenses in various trades and skills training. Foreign professionals were referred to credential evaluation services. Clients created resumes and received follow up services to assess their progress and benefitted from ongoing access to Internet services, photocopying and the use of a fax machine. We wish all our JSW participants great success in 2015!





Senior's Eid Party.

## SENIORS

Our AWO Senior Connection program reaches out to Afghan senior women to assist them in becoming more active and healthy members of Canadian society. We offer a variety of services to our clients including friendly home visits and telephone support, support group meetings and outdoor activities. This year, seniors learned about health conditions (heart problems, medication safety, Alzheimer's disease); financial and senior abuse; life in Canada; and joined in on many social events including educational trips, senior-youth idea exchange sessions and many celebrations.

The English Circle Social Group meets twice weekly to help seniors learn how to use English in their communities, for example, at the doctor's office or the grocery store. Seniors from the program understand how to fill out forms and the pricing of items, giving them more confidence and independence to shop and attend appointments. The seniors also meet for outdoor and exercise activities, including walks through the local parks in the warmer months, and yoga and other indoor activities. Starting in March 2014 and continuing until March 2015, the AWO received funding under the New Horizons for Seniors Program (NHSP) Grant to support social participation and inclusion of seniors. Our Pathway to Social Inclusion program will focus on activities such as, yoga, nature walks, raising awareness through storytelling and plays and provide engagement for more isolated seniors with less developed social skills.

## MULTICULTURAL WOMEN'S WELLNESS

AWO provided a multicultural women's wellness program, supported by the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), which raised the awareness of mental health among our clients and educated them on mental health issues and resources in the community. Workshops were provided bi-weekly on different topics on mental health issues. Guest speakers were invited. The sessions were well received and many participants benefited from them.

## HOMEWORK CLUB

The Homework Club provides different kinds of volunteer-based, outside the classroom homework support for students. The AWO runs homework clubs for children and youth in Toronto and Mississauga. The goal of the program is to assist newcomer children and youth with their homework so they are able to achieve higher marks for related subjects and gain more school credits. We ensure that every child receives individual assistance based on their needs in order to complete homework and assignments in a timely manner. We also provide opportunities for children and youth to work together to encourage and support each other. Parents have been pleased to report that the Homework Club has improved their children's performance in school and helped them to establish a love of learning.

Homework Club at the Science Centre.



# Projects

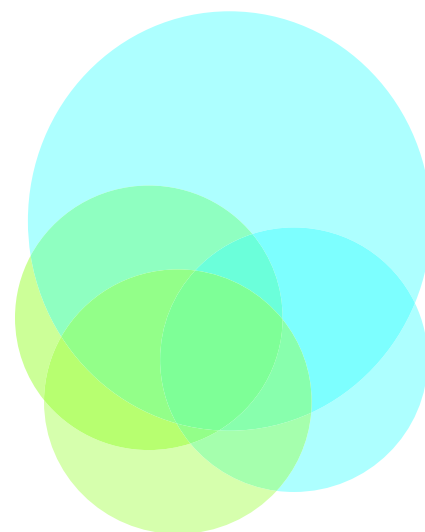
## WOMEN'S SEWING COLLECTIVE

The AWO's Women's Sewing Collective is a dynamic program that has been making a positive impact on the lives of its members since January 2013. It is a multifaceted approach to addressing the economic and social needs of newcomer women. The collective brings together a group of isolated women who have been unable to fully participate in Canadian society due to a complex web of barriers. Having to learn a new language; facing a lack of Canadian work experience and employment supports; and living with the day-to-day after effects of having experienced war and trauma in their homelands are a few of the barriers these newcomer women have worked to overcome.

The sewing collective is a welcoming space that provides members with training in sewing, business and the English language. The members have met several times a week since last year, nurturing a supportive network of friends, developing new skills, and most importantly, increasing their confidence in their own abilities. With these new skills members have been able to generate an income through an alteration service and the sales of handcrafted clothing. A sense of pride and accomplishment has emerged among the members, opening doors to new possibilities and a bright future. The AWO's Women's Sewing Collective is generously sponsored by International Development and Relief Foundation, IDRF.

## BE SET BE SAFE

The AWO community in Peel is sad to be wrapping up the very popular, Neighbourhood Development Project, Be Set, Be Safe, which ran successfully for two years. The more than 350 people from newcomer families that participated in this program got to know one another and their neighbours through the various community-building activities. The forty-five youth participating in the program received leadership training while making presentations in different sessions and by doing outreach for the programs. Stay tuned for more community-based programming coming to Mississauga.



## FINANCIAL LITERACY

**“Since the start of this workshop, I have cut down on my Tim Horton’s coffee. It is only \$1 a day, but it is \$365 a year.”**

**- Mary, 25 year-old participant.**



Financial literacy is for the whole family.

Having limited financial resources is a big stress factor for many newcomers and can delay the process of settlement. In our financial literacy project, the AWO’s settlement workers and facilitators help individuals and groups with limited resources to understand Canadian financial services and better manage their budget. In the life cycle of the project (2013-2015), we organized one-on-one counselling and group sessions for 620 newcomer adults on different topics such as saving and budgeting, banking, credit card and wise consumerism. Engaging in financial literacy workshops and counselling encouraged the participants to interact with their financial institutions more confidently and make wiser decisions when it came to their financial needs. We also partnered with Access Alliance and organized a forum of learning and networking with 29 individuals from 17 service providers and community leaders to have a solution- focused discussion about the long-term financial well-being of Newcomers in Toronto.

We found out that our adult financial literacy project may not be best suited for less skilled seniors. To fill this service gap, and with funding from Ontario Seniors’ Secretariat, we organized group sessions for seniors with a focus on elder financial abuse and fraud, as well as basic banking. Fifty female seniors attended the sessions.

We partnered with organizations and agencies such as Prosper Canada, Credit Canada Debt Solution, Frontier College, Flemington Health Center, Canadian Bankers Association and Access Alliance.

The Financial Literacy Project is generously funded by the TD Financial Literacy Grant Fund.



# An AWO Profile

## SAMRA'S STORY

Samra came to the AWO, after enduring years of physical, emotional and financial abuse from her husband. Because she was a woman contemplating leaving her marriage, she was shunned by her community and its religious leaders. Alone and facing a difficult future raising her two small children on her own, Samra turned to the AWO's Women's Support Group. The friendship and mentoring she experienced at AWO increased her confidence and eventually Samra began to actively pursue the dreams she had for herself and her children.

Samra worked multiple jobs while attending university full-time and raising her two girls as a single mother, a concept that was not widely supported in her community. She went on to complete her Bachelor's and Masters degrees from the University of Toronto earning the highest distinction and winning over a dozen awards and scholarships throughout her academic career. Samra was the first mature student and woman of colour to win the John Moss Scholarship, which is awarded to only one student annually across all three U of T campuses. Today, Samra works at RBC Capital Markets and is looking forward to an exciting career in finance.

Samra credits her AWO counsellor, Fauzia Khan, with giving her the hope, courage and motivation to go on. After all her hard-earned successes, Samra provides support to other newcomer women at the AWO by volunteering to teach computer literacy skills and assisting them to overcome cultural and language barriers.

At the AWO we see the great potential in all our newcomer clients.



**Samra's Newcomer Experience:  
Hope, Courage and Motivation**

# Events

Throughout 2014 -2015, the AWO's staff, volunteers, clients and wider community members participated in a variety of cultural and social events. We participated in the Race Against Racism. Our youth group performed at the Taste of Asia and for the Afghan Business Association in Ajax. We held picnics, went for community walks, and to welcome the spring held a delightful Samanak party!

## SAMANAK

Every year, the AWO hosts a Samanak party for women to celebrate the ancient and cultural traditions of Nowruz. Nowruz is a cultural festival that commemorates the start of the Afghan New Year and marks the first day of spring. The main dish of celebration is Samanak; which is a sweet pudding made of wheat germ that takes two weeks to prepare.

In March 2015, the AWO celebrated the 11th anniversary of their first Samanak event at the Pearson Convention Centre with approximately 1800 women. Women enjoyed delicious Afghan food, dancing and live music. Different vendors set up tables outside the Banquet Hall to advertise their business and products. At the party, we held a raffle to raise money for an orphanage for girls in Afghanistan. At the end of the evening, certificates of appreciation were given to the talented group of women who prepared the Samanak dish. A wonderful time was had by all!

AWO staff at the 2015 Samanak



# Finances

<b>Revenues</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2014</b>
Grants – Govt Can (Toronto – CIC)	2,086,700	2,110,169
Govt of Canada Peel	1,349,478	1,373,510
SAH Secretariat	200,787	165,558
Newcomer Settlement Program	76,990	76,990
Trillium Foundation		75,000
Invest in Neighbourhood – Ontario	72,684	84,348
Community Service Partnerships	71,690	70,140
SEDI/TD Financial Literacy	48,354	36,576
HRSD Canada	23,263	20,144
United Way Peel - Neighbourhood	31,941	20,453
International Development & Relief	19,730	25,325
Others	25,982	11,712
Donations	9,354	17,803
Fundraising	13,625	28,287
Miscellaneous Income	33,574	16,283
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,064,152</b>	<b>4,132,298</b>

<b>Expenses</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2014</b>
Personnel Costs	\$2,938,441	2,938,302
Consulting	195,333	159,870
Fundraising	15,454	33,044
Insurance	7,245	7,769
Office and General	76,803	81,907
Professional Fees	61,402	106,420
Program Delivery Cost	206,953	220,229
Rent & Maintenance	556,363	547,517
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,057,994</b>	<b>4,080,058</b>
<i>Excess of Revenue over Expenses</i>	<i>6,158</i>	<i>52,240</i>

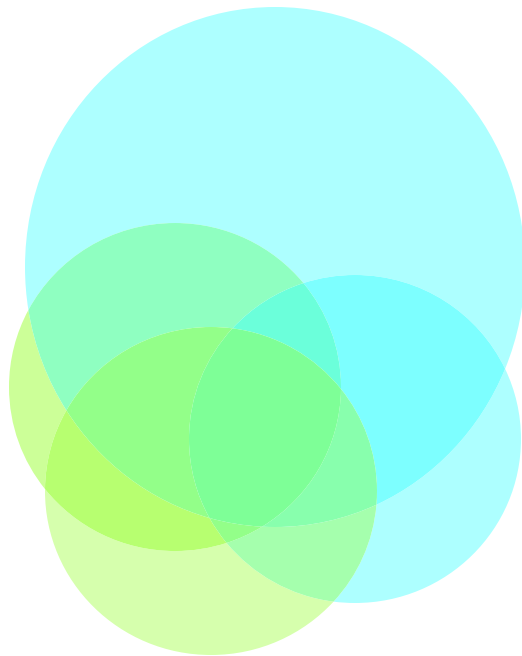
# Our Partners

Absolute Health Centre	George Brown College	Safe City Mississauga
Access Alliance	Greenwood Secondary School	SAFE Program Coordinator
Across Boundaries - An Ethnoracial Mental Health Centre	Green Standards	Seneca College of Applied Arts & Technology
Afghan Canadian Islamic Centre	Heart House Hospice	Service Collaboration and Supports for Muslim Families
Ajax Public Library	Jane Alliance Neighbourhood Services	Sheridan College
Agincourt Community Services Association	Kennedy Employment & Social Services	Skills International
Canada Revenue Agency	Labour Education Centre	Studio 89 Youth Centre
Canadian Mental Health Association - Toronto Branch	MIAG Centre for Diverse Women and Families	Sussex Centre
Catholic Crosscultural Services	Micro Skills West Brampton	Toronto East Quadrant Local Immigration Partnership
Centennial College	Mississauga Community Legal Services	Toronto North Local Immigration Partnership
Centre for Education and Training	Mobil Health Clinic Coordinator	Toronto Police
Children's Aid Society of Toronto	Muslim Families Outreach & Awareness Committee	Toronto Public Health
Community Engagement Worker	Muslim Welfare Centre	Toronto Social Service
COSTI Immigration Services	Newcomer Centre of Peel	Trios College
Credit Valley Conservation	Newcomer Information Centre	Tropicana Community Services
Dorset Park Community Hub	Peel Career Assessment Centre	Uma Nabawi Mosque
East Mississauga Community Health Centre	Peel Family Shelter	University of Guelph-Humber
East Scarborough Storefront	Peel Regional Police	Victoria Village Action for Neighbourhood Change
First Book Canada	Polycultural Immigrant & Community Services	YWCA
Fraser Mustard Early Learning Academy	REH'MA Foundation	



# Our Funders





## **Afghan Women's Organization Locations**

**North York (Head Office)**  
789 Don Mills Rd., #700  
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**Scarborough**  
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Toronto, ON M1K 5J1  
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