



2015-2016 ANNUAL REPORT

AFGHAN WOMEN'S ORGANIZATION

From isolation to full participation

AWO

About AWO

OUR VISION

Refugees and immigrants, especially those who have experienced wars and persecution, leading self-sufficient and dignified lives in a socially inclusive society.

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

Access

Equity

Dignity

Respect

Social Inclusion

Collaboration.

OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Asma Faizi, President

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A Message

FROM OUR PRESIDENT AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

This year we celebrated 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 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. In the late fall of 2016, our work changed dramatically with the Federal Government's promise to welcome and settle 25,000 Syrian refugees. Canadians clearly demonstrated their support for refugees, invigorating the settlement sector with their roll-up their sleeves and contribute attitude. Sponsorship groups, other service providers, and, at the centre of it all, 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 affected the lives of over 19,900 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 700 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, Samanak, and various other social and cultural events throughout the year. We look forward to a healthy and prosperous 2017 for all our newcomer and refugee clients.

Sincerely,

Asma Faizi
President

Adeena Niazi
Executive Director

Settlement Services

The 2015-2016 year brought some new faces to the AWO. We had the honour of serving 19,993 newcomers, many who are refugees, from Afghanistan, Syria, Iran, Iraq, Turkey, China, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Central Asia, the Middle East, as well as Eastern European and North and West African countries during 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 frontline staff are continually upgrading their skills and knowledge 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: Advanced Crisis Management Skills - Death Notification Training; Anger Management training; Board Governance Training; CAMH's Stress Management workshop; Canada Learning Bond training; CIBC's workshop for Newcomers; Community Integration Network -

Networking as a Tool for Integration; City of Mississauga Crime Integration Network; CLEO – Legal information; Community Legal Services training; Community Volunteer Income Tax Program - CRA Training; CPR training; Customer Service; Differences Between Trauma-Informed and Trauma-Specific Practice; Employment Ontario Programs and Eligibility; Employment Services Training; Financial Literacy; Global Experience Ontario Training; iCARE Training; Law and Regulation - recent changes; Ins and Outs of Housing Law; Labour Market Information in Region of Peel; Mental Health First Aid Canada; Mother Risk Commission; Ontario Human Rights Commission Training; Ontario Occupational Health & Safety Training; Refugee Immigration Policy RSTP e-training; Safety Service Ontario Training; Scarborough Community Safety Week 2015 - information sessions; Service Canada workshops; Trauma Informed Practice and Support; Information and Referral Training; WHMIS Training; and Women's Empowerment Training.

2015-2016 Group Sessions in All AWO Locations		
Type of Session	# of Sessions	# of Participants
Orientation	143	779
Women's Orientation	73	537
Citizenship Classes	64	479
English Conversation Circle	104	795
Homework Club	131	836
Youth Orientation	110	707
Senior Orientation	56	370
Employment Support	18	133
Total	699	4636



LINC picnic

LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION FOR NEWCOMERS

For over 20 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.

We've had a busy year in AWO's LINC program. During 2015-2016, a total of 382 students participated in the Toronto and Scarborough LINC programs and 321 students in the Peel LINC program. In Toronto / Scarborough the main first languages spoken were Dari / Farsi, Pashtu, and Tamil and in Peel over half the learners spoke Arabic. There were over twenty-six first languages represented among our learners. In Peel, Syrian refugees made up a large ratio of the new learners, increasing childminding needs. Many arrived needing to learn a new alphabet as a first step in their acquisition of English. They have found the AWO to be safe and, in many ways, familiar to them. We also had a lot of fun inside and outside our classrooms. There was a huge turnout for our box lunch Women's Day party and apple picking experience. Guest speakers spoke about everything from the environment to financial literacy. Care For Newcomer Children offered a lending library and parenting sessions to learners, and settlement workshops offered additional opportunities for learners to interact and network with other women.

Programs

YOUTH

The AWO provides a range of programs and services for newcomer youth across the GTA. Newcomer youth gained valuable skills, including public speaking, through various educational and recreational workshops and programs offered at our centre. Youth received supportive solution-focused counselling to reduce social isolation and were presented with opportunities to engage with their Canadian communities. We worked closely with the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), providing conflict resolution and skill development workshops for youth at schools and provide weekly services and a summer camp program. Youth-at-risk were supported with solution-focused counselling, referrals, and Aggression Replacement Training workshops. We continue our membership with the Youth Service Network planning programs for priority neighbourhoods. Our youth members took field trips to Toronto City Hall, the Ontario Science Centre, and participated in Mock Trial workshops with the Ontario Justice Education Network. Our youth mentorship program brought together established newcomer youth with newly arrived youth for guidance and support. The youth advisory group and volunteers coordinated cultural and social events, including an Iftaar Dinner and a youth trip to the Ontario Science Centre.

WOMEN'S CIRCLE

AWO runs a women's circle in partnership with 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.

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. 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.

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.

Projects

WELLNESS CAFÉS

The Wellness Café project aims to increase awareness about mental health issues, decrease stigma towards mental illness and increase help-seeking behaviour in newcomer communities. Through this project, we support newcomers to become community peer leaders and organize wellness cafes' around town in newcomers' natural hang outs. Peer leader engage the community in meaningful conversations about mental health issues and help them get connected to mental health organizations when and if needed.

Over the past year, 10 peer leaders were recruited and trained to run Wellness Cafés. Peer leaders held 29 Wellness Café sessions and engaged 130 community members (youth and adults) in conversations about mental health and well-being.

Wellness Cafés have created a support network and safe environment for newcomer participants to engage in discussions about mental health and wellness; and share their stories without fear of being judged or labelled. Each session focuses on different topics that include: 'defining good health', 'mindful listening', 'language and assumption', 'developing wellness tools' and 'compassion'. The continuous nature of the Cafés has allowed the participants to get to know each other, build trust, and share their stories and struggles without being judged.

This project is funded by Ontario Trillium Foundation.



Women at Wellness Café event.

MAKE THE FIRST MOVE!

Make the First Move! Program aims to enable newcomer women or women from refugee backgrounds and their children to get physically active through women-only fitness classes. In the past year, we have offered weekly yoga and Zumba classes for women taught by professional instructors in a safe and inclusive space. These programs focused on developing Fundamental Movement Skills (FMS), emphasized enjoyment on physical activity and raising awareness about the importance of physical activity on one's physical and mental well being through workshops. Additionally, we also partnered with Agincourt Community Services to offer workshops for women that focused on healthy eating and active living for a balanced life. These sessions allowed women to improve their mental well being by feeling happier, less stressed and isolated by socializing with other women. In the past year over 500 participants were able to benefit from such programs.



Make the First Move! yoga class.

MARKET UNLIMITED PROJECT

Market Unlimited aims to build and strengthen existing efforts to increase economic opportunities for women in Cooksville. The project involves expanding community bazaars and addressing barriers by providing more support for women, including advanced skills training. There is a strong focus on developing capacity among, and support to, those women interested in working together, as well as training on how to start a cooperative as an alternative business model. The AWO ran this project for the last three years with the generous funding support of the Community Foundation of Mississauga.



Card-making workshop and kitchen skills training.

Events

THE AWO'S 25TH ANNIVERSARY

On September 25, 2015, the AWO celebrated its 25th anniversary at the Montecassino Hotel and Event Venue. The AWO celebrated the many lives that have been touched since its humble beginnings in 1990 when it was a small, volunteer-based organization that served Ontario's new community of Afghan women newcomers and refugees. Community members, friends, AWO staff, and elected officials enjoyed a delicious meal and traditional music and dancing. The Gala honoured four women who have contributed outstanding work in service of human rights and dignity of women, especially women who are refugees and from war-affected countries. The honorees were Ratna Omidvar, from Global Diversity Exchange; Alia Hogben from the Canadian Council of Muslim Women; Marilou McPhedran, human rights lawyer; and Hanifa Frevar-Rostayee, a writer, teacher, and activist. The AWO is pleased to have worked with the many women and men, too many to list, who regularly give their time, resources, and their hearts to supporting newcomers and refugees.

AWO ANNUAL PICNIC

On August 8th, the AWO invited all their clients and their families to our annual summer community picnic in Erindale Park, Mississauga. A day full of children's activities, socializing, and networking welcomed newcomers who enjoyed meeting new community members from various backgrounds and different walks of life. This occasion allows every newcomer to experience Canada's proudest values of diversity and multiculturalism. Experiencing a day out in the park, sharing food, and helping one another clean up after the event encourages newcomers to participate and engage in important activities of bonding with nature, people, and community. The event provided many warm and happy memories for everyone. See you next summer!

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. On April 22, 2016, the AWO celebrated the 12th anniversary of their first Samanak event at the Pearson Convention Centre with approximately 1800 women. Women enjoyed delicious Afghan food, dancing and live music.



AWO community members making Samanak dessert for Nowruz.

Profile

OUT OF THE DARKNESS

Wedad is a Syrian refugee who came to Canada in December 2015. After arriving in Canada, Wedad felt home sick. All day, every day, all she could think about was her home country where thousands of people continue to suffer because of the war. Wedad was heading into a deep depression when one of her friends, a client of the Afghan Women's Organization's (AWO) Mississauga office, accompanied her to AWO where they spoke to an Arabic-speaking counsellor. She started to feel happy again after her first counselling session. Within a few sessions, Wedad decided to leave the dark days behind and begin a new life in Canada.

AWO encouraged Wedad to put her skills to use. She volunteered to lead crochet classes for other newcomer women. Within a short time, Wedad became a professional trainer of crochet arts. Receiving appropriate counselling from AWO's expert staff increased Wedad's confidence. She's now back on her feet and committed to helping other women who have suffered through similar experiences. The AWO has helped Wedad facilitate her weekly sessions that have taught over 20 women crochet arts.

In January 2016, AWO in Mississauga office organized a Market Bazaar, during which the AWO helped Wedad showcase her crochet arts. In that one day she attracted so many customers for her crochet products she was inspired to start her own crochet products business at home. Wedad is currently accepting orders from customers in her neighborhood, opening the door to expand her home-based Canadian business.



Examples of crocheted and knitted products made by Wedad.

Finances

Revenues	2015	2016
Grants – Government of Canada (Toronto)	2,086,700	2,027,389
Government of Canada Peel	1,349,478	1,300,846
SAH Secretariat	200,787	205,762
Newcomer Settlement Program	76,990	82,240
Trillium Foundation		66,200
Invest in Neighborhood – Ontario	72,684	41,499
Community Service Partnerships	71,690	73,200
SEDI/TD Financial Literacy	48,354	2,853
HRSD Canada	23,263	27,274
United Way Peel - Neighborhood	31,941	20,783
International Development & Relief	19,730	32,495
The community foundation of missis		22,500
Ontario Sport & Recreation Fund		16,500
Others	25,982	9,715
Donations	9,354	26,038
Fundraising	13,625	34,573
Miscellaneous Income	33,574	62,365
Total	4,064,152	4,052,232

Expenses	2015	2016
Personnel Costs	2,938,441	2,811,940
Consulting	195,333	171,653
Fundraising	15,454	28,004
Insurance	7,245	7,537
Office and General	76,803	84,036
Professional Fees	61,402	65,055
Program Delivery Cost	206,953	203,743
Rent & Maintenance	556,363	558,248
Syrian refugee settlement		22,575
Transfer programs		85,000
Total	4,057,994	4,037,791
Excess of Revenue over Expenses	6,158	14,441

Our Partners

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

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

Our Funders



Immigration, Refugees
and Citizenship Canada

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Human Resources and
Skills Development Canada

Ressources humaines et
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