



AFGHAN WOMEN'S ORGANIZATION

From Isolation to Full Participation

2016-2017 annual report



ABOUT AWO

vision

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

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.

values

- Access
- Equity
- Dignity
- Respect
- Social Inclusion
- Collaboration

board of directors

ASMA FAIZI
President

SHEBA SHERANZE
Secretary

LATIFA SARAWARI
Treasurer

NAJEEBA SHAIRZAY SHAHFIQA AKBARI
BEHESHTA JAGHORI ABEDA BALUCH
HAKEMA MASHAL MIDIQI ARZO NOORISTANI
ZOHRA SAFI KOBRA RASUL



A MESSAGE

from the president & executive director

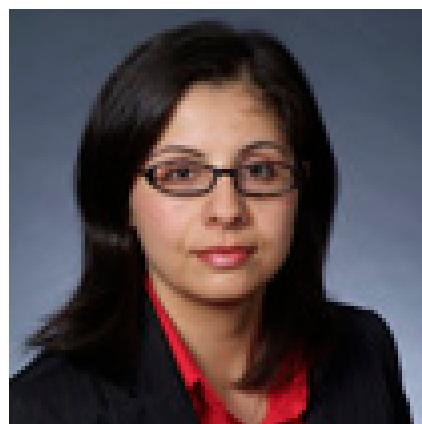
Working together throughout 2016-2017 we are pleased to have been an important part of the journey for so many refugees and newcomers to the Greater Toronto Area and Peel Region. Like many other settlement organizations and agencies around the world, the AWO has been greatly affected by the plight of the Syrian refugees. The Canadian Government's pledge to resettle more than 25,000 Syrian refugees during this past year has been a unique opportunity to expand our community, open our doors wide, and work as quickly and efficiently as possible to ensure the best settlement experience possible. Our organization had the privilege of sponsoring 300 Syrian refugees under our SAH contract as well as under the BVOR (Banded visa office referred) program. Of course, it has been both a time for celebration and a steep learning curve for us. To honour all our experiences, we held a gathering of Syrian families, sponsoring groups, and service providers on November 12, 2016 and have released a report, *How Are We Doing? Syrian Refugees, Sponsoring Groups, and Service Providers*, available for download on our website: afghanwomen.org. We were delighted that 300 people could join us for the celebration and that we are able to share our findings about what has worked and what needs improvement in terms of serving refugee families and supporting the profoundly connecting work of the Canadians who have sponsored families. These Syrian families have become an important part of our lives and continue to inform our work with refugees and newcomers from many other countries.

Within the organization, we have made great strides in working towards sustainability with the establishment of our hard-working Capacity Enhancement Committee (February 2017). We were inspired by the beautifully-produced public service announcements that highlight the needs of refugee families (especially women). The PSAs were created (pro bono) by the talented team of Send + Receive and produced by Someplace Nice and inspired by the strength, resilience, and goodwill demonstrated by the women, men, and children we serve.

We look forward to a healthy and prosperous 2017-2018 for all our newcomer and refugee clients.



Adeena Niazi, Executive Director



Asma Faizi, President

SETTLEMENT SERVICES

This year, we had the privilege to expand our programs and services to 4,010 Syrian newcomers, offering them counselling in one-on-one and group settings along a series of information sessions for Arabic-speaking clients, aiming to raise awareness about various aspects of life in Canada. These sessions were delivered by AWO Arabic-speaking staff as well as by professional guest speakers.

AWO was able to meet the needs of our clients and reduce the service gaps through enabling factors such as new Arabic-speaking staff, an expansion of LINC classes and childcare services (through CNC – Care for Newcomer Children), additional summer programming including group sessions, and receiving new office equipment (much needed computers). The Newcomer Settlement Program (NSP) assisted in the settlement and integration of specifically Arabic-speaking newcomers by providing them with information, tools, resources, and community supports to aid them in integrating successfully and becoming engaged in the community. Our work successfully settling new refugees was greatly assisted by AWO's new partnerships with a variety of organizations, including the Arab Community Centre, Lifeline Syria, Madison Community Centre, and many private group sponsors.

With support from Immigration, Citizenship, and Refugee Canada (IRCC) and Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration (MCI), AWO has provided settlement services to all newcomers, with a special focus on women, their families, refugees and people who have experienced war and persecution. Over the year, we have provided settlement services for resettled refugees, with a focus on women and youth. Women-centred activities include support groups, cooking clubs with a language development component, parenting sessions, and domestic violence prevention/support. Youth activities include homework support, peer mentoring, and media arts. Project partners have supported access to specialized services, including domestic violence counselling services, health and mental health education, legal education, and youth mentorship.

Between April 2016 to March 2017, AWO provided services to 27,485 clients.



Cashier training from the YWCA.

LINC

During the 2016-2017 session, a total of 456 learners participated in the Toronto and Scarborough LINC programs and 470 learners in the Peel LINC program. In Toronto / Scarborough an additional 20 Syrian learners attended summer classes. Two Syrian classes of 20 learners in total were added in September 2016, and 1 Syrian class of 10 learners was added in January 2017. 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 with regular information and guest speaker sessions happening on a monthly basis. There was a good turnout for our LINC Appreciation Day / Picnic June 2016 and for apple picking in September 2016. We also enjoyed a Christmas party and graduation in December 2016.

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.



A LINC group at the North York location.



A cake from Peel LINC's Canada 150 celebration.

PROGRAMS & PROJECTS

youth programming

AWO's dedication to serving the community's youth demographic has spanned over 18 years. Our popular in-house youth programs are refined through continuous process improvements to better serve the socioeconomically-challenged youth. We have ongoing programming with community partners such the YSN (Youth Services Network), OJEN (Ontario Justice and Education Network) and various high schools in the city, while seeking appropriate potential future partners.

AWO continues to leverage its in-depth understanding of the unique needs of the Afghan community to extend its service to be inclusive of other communities, (e.g., Iran, India, Pakistan, Iraq, Syria, Tajikistan, and Turkey). We aim to accelerate the process of their integration with the ultimate objective of empowering them to be successful and contributing members of society. Our welcoming program aims to develop the potential of the youth by equipping them with essential life skills, leadership skills, and assistance in various areas of settlement, academics, socialization and health.

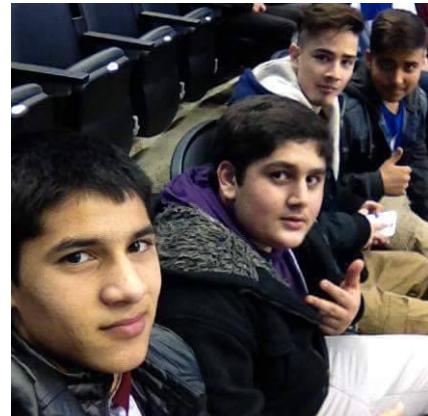
"Our homework club sessions, from April 2016 to today, served 924 youth participants and the number is growing."



Youth participate in a mock trial.

Our structured weekly homework club sessions provide youth with one-on-one academic assistance as well as mentorship, with the objective of encouraging higher academic pursuits; assisting students to navigate the complexities of academic and social institutions; and providing career orientation. In our homework club, youth receive academic assistance in various school subjects, resulting in higher grades, and improved language skills. Youth attend these sessions with high interest and enthusiasm. As youth are assisted with their homework they are mentored with other volunteer youth from various universities and colleges, providing youth with opportunities to build social connections and receive guidance for their social and academic journeys. Based on feedback and surveys, our homework club sessions have been successful and are meeting the needs of newcomer youth in the Thorncliffe Park Neighborhood. Our homework club sessions, from April 2016 to today, served 924 youth participants and the number is growing.

In addition to the homework club sessions, we provide youth drop-in sessions - group and one-on-one. Our weekly drop-in sessions are designed to assist youth with their settlement needs and to expand their community social network in order to accelerate their ability to be established in various aspects of life. An individualized needs assessment determines the appropriate and timely resources that can be allocated to each youth. Our one-on-one services provide youth assistance with services such as, employment opportunities, job search skills, leadership skills, public speaking, establishing social connections, cross-cultural and anti-racism training, and support counselling. In many instances, as a result of our services, youth return as active members of the community who are able to mentor newly-arrived and vulnerable youth. Moreover, youth who have successfully completed our job trainings have landed part-time and full-time jobs. Participant numbers for our drop-in sessions have continued to grow and from April 2016 to today we have 783 active participants and have held 49 sessions. Additionally, we provide educational field excursions to museums, and entertainment and sport venues with the objective of providing exposure and immersion into Canadian culture.



A trip to a sports game.

"Participant numbers for our drop-in sessions have continued to grow and from April 2016 to today we have 783 active participants and have held 49 sessions."

wellness cafe

Wellness Cafés have created a support network and safe environment for newcomer participants to share their stories without fear of being judged and being labelled. The Cafés have created an outlet for newcomer communities to get engaged in informal discussions about mental health and wellness more broadly. Each session focused on different topics, ranging from 'definition of health', 'mindful listening', 'language and assumption', 'developing wellness tools', to 'compassion' and other topics. The continuous nature of the Cafés has allowed the participants to get to know each other, to build trust, and to share their stories and struggles without being judged.

We organized three community events that were led by the peer leaders and the Wellness Café youth committee. The Wellness Fair event in April 2016, held in Jenner Jean-Marie community center, focused on promoting wellness as a whole - combining physical, mental and spiritual aspects of wellness. Over 150 people attended the fair. In August, peer leaders and volunteers organized an awareness-raising walk in Thorncliffe Neighbourhood called "Wellness for All". As a lead up, our volunteers worked with the community to create posters with inspiring messages for the walk. We walked around Thorncliffe Neighbourhood with the motto: "We all live with mental health. Break the silence, break the stigma". Over 50 people including about fifteen newly-arrived Syrians attended the event.

In May, the Wellness Café youth committee organized a discussion night with diaspora community at Hart House, University of Toronto. The discussions were focused on intergenerational challenges, the effect of gender identity on wellness, and cultural assimilation versus cultural integration. The event was attended by about 25 diaspora youth. During 2016-2017, peer leaders held 57 Wellness Cafés with the participation of 458 people.



A woman participates in a Wellness Cafe exercise.



make the first move!

Through the generous support of the Ontario Sport and Recreation Communities Fund, the AWO was able to provide a variety of accessible and culturally appropriate weekly women-only physical activity sessions led by certified and qualified instructors in yoga, Zumba, and pole walking between September 2015 to March 2017 through the Make the First Move! Project. Women only classes created opportunities and removed barriers for women, girls, and children from marginalized and low-income families from Afghan, Iranian, South Asian and Arab communities in Toronto and Mississauga, who otherwise would not be allowed to participate in fitness classes due to cultural restrictions, financial constraints, or language barriers. Additionally, they were able to achieve and maintain physical wellness. Even though over 90% of participants were sedentary and expressed that it was their first time taking part in yoga, Zumba, or pole walking, they felt comfortable participating and expressed enjoyment. Volunteer Steering Committee members were also trained as part of this project to increase their capacity, engage the target population in leading a more physically active life, and sustain the project beyond the funding period. Furthermore, summer camps, exercise awareness workshops, and health and wellness fairs were held for women and their children to build their fundamental movement skills, educate them about physical literacy, the importance of exercise, getting enough sleep, and healthy eating – as they are all correlated – in order to live an overall healthy lifestyle.



A yoga session.



markets unlimited

The summer of 2016 was a remarkable one for Syrian newcomers at the AWO Peel. We have organized a number of initiatives to educate, empower, and facilitate integration for newcomers.

Every Friday, a group of women gather together at the AWO office to learn and teach one another crochet, knitting and sewing skills. As they get to know one another, these women begin to feel a sense of community through building friendships with one another. Their passion and dedication to crochet helps them bring a structure to their week. It also allows them to feel productive as they finish a crochet item. Their creations include baby outfits, scarves, flags, household covers, and more. While they enjoy conversing and exchange tips to improve their crochet skills, the women's children also have the opportunity to engage in recreational activities. This weekly workshop resulted in a summer bazaar at AWO Peel office on August 23rd, where these same women interacted with other women of different backgrounds and skills. The objective of the summer bazaar is to network and empower women to become strong and financially independent entrepreneurs.



Crochet items on display at the summer bazaar.



The crochet, knitting and sewing group.

annual summer picnic

On August 20th, AWO invited all their clients and families to the annual summer community picnic, which took place at Erindale Park in Mississauga. A day full of children's activities, socializing and networking allowed newcomers to meet new community members from various backgrounds and walks of life. This occasion welcomes every newcomer to experience Canada's proudest values of diversity and multiculturalism. A day out in the park sharing food, and helping one another clean up afterward encourages newcomers to bond with nature, people, and the community. Civic engagement activities help to educate about the responsibilities and duties of each Canadian citizen. Events like this slowly but surely make newcomers a vital part of the Canadian social fabric.



Families gather in Erindale Park for the picnic.

women's circle

AWO is running a women's circle in partnership with Toronto Public Health twice a week in Mississauga and twice a month in Toronto. Women get together and support each other within the group while learning different skills, building their confidence and starting 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 and respect and emotional security through positive parenting and through the provision of good nutrition, and loving support and encouragement for their children. The programs are very successful and we have a great feedback from participants.



A women's circle meeting.

seniors' programming

The AWO's Senior Connection program reaches out to Afghan senior women that are experiencing hardship, loneliness, obstacles, and possibly neglect and assists 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, breast cancer, hearing loss, and so on); financial and senior abuse; life in Canada; and joined in on many social events including educational trips, senior-youth idea exchange and many celebrations.

The English Circle Social Group meets twice weekly to help seniors learn how to use English in their communities, e.g., 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.

Newcomer seniors are often among the most vulnerable newcomer groups. Language barriers, culture shock, fear, and the loss of social network and strong family ties, mainly due to the busy schedule of their children or having no family, are only a few of the contributing factors to the seniors' social exclusion. The Afghan Women's Organization is committed to ensuring that seniors over 55+ live in dignity and are socially included.

EVENTS

how are we doing?

On Saturday, November 12, 2016, AWO brought together over 300 people to share their experiences of settling in Canada as refugees, of sponsoring Syrian families, and of supporting Syrians' settlement process. This was a unique occasion for individuals from the refugee community to share their knowledge and learn from each other's experiences in Greater Toronto Area and Mississauga.

Participants were delighted with the traditional Syrian welcome, [Arada](#), performed by Sooriana that opened the afternoon's events and a first viewing of the [video](#), *How Are We Doing?: A Snapshot of How Syrian Newcomers Feel in Their New Homes*. AWO's President, Asma Faizi and Executive Director, Adeena Niazi, welcomed the crowd. Remarks from Premier Kathleen Wynne were followed by greetings from local MPs, Yasmine Ratansi (Don Valley East), Rob Oliphant (Don Valley West), and Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre).

Prior to the event, AWO had collected information from sponsoring groups, settlement organizations, and refugees to understand the current opportunities and challenges within the settlement sector in Ontario. Highlights from the data collection were presented and further discussion on lessons learned, and the challenges and successes of Syrian newcomer settlement were fleshed out during a panel discussion which opened up to include participants in the audience. AWO would like to thank all who participated and helped make this event an enjoyable celebration.

The information collected has been compiled into the *How Are We Doing? Syrian Refugees, Sponsoring Groups, and Service Providers report* released in April 2017 and available for downloading on our [website](#).



black creek field trip

On July 17, 2017, AWO Mississauga invited 38 Syrian newcomers on a field trip to Black Creek Pioneer Village with Ahlan Passes (Cultural Access Passes) from the Institute for Canadian Citizenship.

The day was exceptionally fun and everyone enjoyed it! Lunch was served once they arrived, and then they split off into two groups. Each group toured around the site, appreciating the village's historic homes, built by pioneers in different areas within Ontario. Kids of all ages were playing and jumping around with excitement especially when they met the animals in the barn. Families also established new relations with other newcomers which helps them create a sense of community and a wider social network making them feel more at home. Many are inquiring about future field trips, and can't wait for more to come. This trip has also enabled AWO Mississauga to receive new clients.



Children consult the map of Black Creek Pioneer Village.



Syrian newcomers gather on the steps of a historic building in Black Creek Pioneer Village.

CLIENT PROFILE

hope, joy, and a cherry on top!

On April 21, 2016, a Syrian family of six arrived in Canada and came to AWO's Mississauga location a few months later to seek out support and services. As they were settling and trying to find their way around their new home in Mississauga, they were extremely preoccupied with their daughter Mariam, who has a severe nerve condition that causes her some limitations with her speech, behavior, and certain physical movements. Noura, one of AWO's Arabic-speaking staff recalled that she, "couldn't imagine how emotionally and physically exhausting and challenging it is to seek diagnosis and treatment" until she met up with the family at the Sick Kids Hospital multiple times.

As their daughter, Mariam continued her hopeful journey to treatment, she was extremely keen to go to school, especially seeing all her siblings get on the school bus every morning! The school had promised Mariam's parents that her enrollment was secured. Several times Mariam went to school, and within an hour, the teacher had sent her back home, claiming there was no space for her in class. The family met with another school and again, was promised Mariam's enrolment. Day after day, an eager Mariam waited for the school bus to pick her up, but it never arrived. Mariam, through tears of frustration, relayed the situation to AWO staff. The AWO counsellor was able to comfort Mariam and act on her behalf to negotiate and resolve this reoccurring problem. Now, the bus picks up Mariam every day to take her to school and with Mariam settled in school, Roukaya, Mariam's mother, was able to successfully enrol in AWO's LINC classes. Despite her daughter's frequent medical appointments causing her to miss classes, Roukaya is managing to keep up with and enjoy her English language learning. The cherry on top for this family is that Roukaya's son Chaaban has been selected from among his peers to receive an achievement award of excellence in school!

This family is ambitious and strives to make Canada proud of them and their achievements. It is a happy story of a Syrian newcomer family's first step towards integration, resilience, and achievement. We are so pleased and honoured to have been part of their journey.



Roukaya's son, Chaaban, proudly hold up his school achievement award.

FINANCES

financial statements 2016-2017

REVENUE	
Federal	\$4,141,447
Municipalities	\$ 155,481
Province of Ontario	\$ 213,891
Foundations	\$ 219,824
Donations	\$ 37,529
Fund Raising	\$ 15,780
Miscellaneous Income	\$ 54,731
Total Revenue	\$ 4,838,683

EXPENSES	
Salary, Mercs & Benefits	\$ 3,234,055
Staff Training	\$ 5,315
Staff Travel	\$ 13,429
Building Occupancy	\$ 574,640
Program Expenses	\$ 418,395
Volunteer Expenses	\$ 8,078
Membership Fees	\$ 2,855
Purchase of Services	\$ 255,034
Fundraising Expense	\$ 20,785
Syrian Refugee Settlement	\$ 125,887
Total Expenditures	\$ 4,658,473

Excess revenue over expenses before reserve transfers	\$ 180,210
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FUNDERS



Immigration, Refugees
and Citizenship Canada

Immigration, Réfugiés
et Citoyenneté Canada

New Horizon Healing and
Hope Coalition



An agency of the Government of Ontario.
Relève du gouvernement de l'Ontario.



PARTNERS

Absolute Health Centre	Credit Valley Conservation	MCIS
Access Alliance Multicultural Health & Community Services	Dorset Park Community Hub	MIAG – Centre for Diverse Women & Families
Across Boundaries - An Ethnoracial Mental Health Centre	East Mississauga Community Health Centre	Micro Skills West Brampton
Afghan Canadian Islamic Community	East Mississauga Midwives	Mississauga Community Legal Services
Agincourt Community Services Association	East Scarborough Storefront	Mobile Health Clinic Coordinator
Ajax Public Library	Eglinton-East Kennedy Park	Mothercraft College
Arab Community Centre	Employment & Social Services	MP – Peter Fonseca
Brampton Campus: University of Guelph-Humber	First Book Canada	Muslim Families Outreach & Awareness Committee
Canada Revenue Agency	Flemington Health Centre	Muslim Welfare Centre
Canadian Mental Health Association - Toronto Branch	George Brown College	Nabawi Mosque
Catholic Crosscultural Services	Global Experience Ontario	New Circle Clothing Donation
CCVT	Green Standards	Newcomer Information Centre (NIC)
Centennial College	Greenwood Secondary School	Newcomer Centre of Peel
Centre for Education & Training	Haroon Legal Services	OCASI
Children's Aid Society of Toronto	Hawks Management Group	Ontario College of Early Childhood Educators
Collège Boréal	Heart House Hospice	Ontario Justices Education Network (OJEN)
Costi Employment Mississauga	Humber College – School of Social and Community Services	Peel Children's Aid Society
Community Engagement Worker	Immigrant Women's Health Centre	Peel Regional Police
Cooksville Branch Library	Jane Alliance Neighbourhood Services	Peel Career Assessment Centre
COSTI Immigration Services	Labour Education Centre	Peel Family Shelter
	Le Centre Francophone de Toronto	Polycultural Immigrant & Community Services
	Lifeline Syria	
	Madison Community Centre	

Refugee Sponsorship
Training Program (RSTP)

Region of Peel

Reh'ma Community Services

Safe City Mississauga

SAFE Program Coordinator

Seneca College of Applied
Arts & Technology

Service collaboration and
Supports for Muslim Families

Sheridan College

Skills International

Studio 89

Tejwant Atwal – Yoga
Instructor

The Dam Youth Drop-In
Centre

The Scarborough East
Storefront

Toronto East Quadrant Local
Immigration Partnership

Toronto North Local
Immigration Partnership

Toronto Police

Toronto Public Health

Toronto Social Services

Trios College

Tropicana community
Services

Uma Nabawi Mosque

University of Guelph-Humber

Victim Services of Peel

Victoria Village Action for
Neighbourhood Change

Working Women Community
Centre

YWCA

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