



# Afghan Women's Organization

Annual Report 2017–2018

*from*  
Isolation

*to*  
Full Participation

In 2017 we celebrated Canada's 150th birthday feeling gratified that Canada has taken a lead on opening its doors to vulnerable refugees. Sponsoring and resettling refugees, helping them find shelter and peace from the trauma and guiding them through their settlement process is the reason the Afghan Women's Organization (AWO) was founded 28 years ago. At the time, we were a group of Afghan women, all having arrived in Canada as refugees ourselves looking to extend a hand to other Afghan women. Today we sponsor and resettle refugees from all over the world: women, men, and children. AWO's doors continue to open wider and wider.

In 2017 over 44,000 refugees, protected persons and people admitted under humanitarian, compassionate, and public policy were resettled in Canada.<sup>1</sup> The AWO is proud to be part of a Canada-wide partnership that links government, not-for-profits, NGOs, institutions, and private individuals committed to providing a warm welcome and support to refugees. For

many families and individuals who arrived as refugees, this past year was their second year in Canada, a time when the elation of being in a safe place begins to wane and deeper concerns about family members who have been left behind, and employment start to take root. The resettlement process isn't over in one year, that's why AWO

**Globally,  
68.5  
million**

forcibly displaced  
persons by the end of 2017\*



AWO has served  
refugee and  
immigrant women  
and their families  
for 28 years



Since  
1990, AWO has  
sponsored **5537**  
refugees

<sup>1</sup>2018 Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration

\*UNHCR Global Trends Forced Displacement in 2017 A displaced person is someone forced to leave their home due to war, persecution, and/or natural disaster.

provides newcomers with ongoing support and programming with the assurance that someone continues to be there for them.

A focus on sustainability in 2017–2018 helped us develop new strategies for strengthening our capacity to serve refugees and newcomers in upcoming years. We gained valuable insights working and learning with peer organizations in the Ontario Trillium Foundation-funded Peel Fund Development Collaborative (PFDC). This initiative guided us through the process of creating and maintaining an organization-wide fund development strategy. On the heels of the PFDC our group began another collaborative learning initiative in July 2017, funded by the Region of Peel, focusing on the field of communications. The Board, staff, and volunteers all participated in the skill-building and peer networking workshops. AWO is grateful for the information, tools, and the invaluable network of peers that the projects have given us.

Working at the AWO has been a true privilege and an honour. We have been blessed to be able to work alongside a remarkable group of board members, staff and volunteers who work hard every day touching and transforming the lives of thousands and thousands of refugees and newcomers.

Wishing you all a peaceful and prosperous 2018–2019.

Asma Faizi,  
President

Adeena Niazi,  
Executive Director



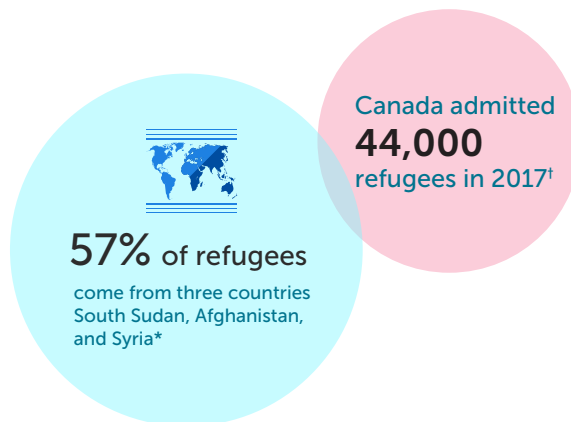
*President, Asma Faizi and Executive Director, Adeena Niazi.*



**In 2017 & 2018,  
AWO sponsored  
381 refugees**

*“...AWO provides newcomers with ongoing support and programming with the assurance that someone continues to be there for them..”*

The AWO initially began sponsoring Afghan refugees through an agreement with the United Church of Canada. Eventually AWO became an official Sponsorship Agreement Holder (SAH) with the Government of Canada. Since 1996, AWO has sponsored over four thousand refugees from all over the world from over 25 countries.



Nada Albaradan arrived as a refugee in 2016 who didn't speak English. She now writes and publishes her work in English and even led a summer English program for Arabic youth.

## Profile Nada Albaradan

*Nada Albaradan and her family arrived in Canada in January 2016, as government assisted refugees. Nada left Syrian when she was 10 years old. She lived for a while in Jordan where she missed a lot of school at first, and then received a very poor education at the refugee camp. When she first arrived in Canada, Nada did not speak English and struggled with understanding the complexity of the language. She enrolled in AWO's homework club and youth drop in sessions and started improving her English by speaking to youth from other cultures, who also had trouble with the basics; which made it easier for her to improve. She improved so quickly and radically that she was comfortable delivering all her presentations in English, although she was given the option to deliver them in Arabic. As she started participating in AWO's various activities, including videos and writing contests; she discovered that she was talented at writing. With continuous one-on-one support and encouragement provided to her by AWO staff members, she decided to focus on her writing skills and become a writer. She started writing articles on a daily basis and asked AWO to help her with the translation of her written text into English, which allowed her to create her own blog with the help of our staff. Nada spread the word about her experience coming to Canada and how safe she feels being here compared to Syria and Jordan.*

*Her articles attracted both Arabic readers and English readers as well, including teachers and students from her school and friends of her family. With the support of AWO staff, Nada recently started writing articles in English instead of writing them in Arabic and translating them. Her first published writing came out recently in YMCA's magazine. Nada is now volunteering at various settlement agencies and social work initiatives. She established and ran an English language program for Arabic youth at one of the organizations and was named leader of volunteers at her school's summer camp.*

\*2018 Annual Report to Parliament on Immigration  
†UNHCR Global Trends Forced Displacement in 2017



## Welcoming Women and Their Families

AWO has expanded services this year to better meet the needs of a broader range of newcomer clients. Our four locations offered increased access to much-needed services in 2017–2018. Arabic, Kurdish, and Turkish speaking staff members, and increased LINC (Language Instruction for Newcomers) classes and child care options through CNC (Care for Newcomer Children) enabled greater participation of newcomers in our programming, especially refugee women.

Funding support from Immigration, Refugee, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) has allowed AWO to provide a range of culturally competent services and programming to newcomers in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and Mississauga. The Province of Ontario's Newcomer Settlement Program (NSP) and the Community Foundation of Mississauga along with in-kind support from our valued partners, including Arab Community Centre, Lifeline Syria, Madison Community Centre, many private group sponsors, and dedicated volunteers assisted in the settlement of our growing population of Arabic-speaking newcomers.



*Participants attending We Belong Gala Night. Over 280 Syrian refugees participated in the Community Foundation of Mississauga-funded We Belong program that offered food handling training, English conversation circles, culinary arts training, arts and information workshops, and outings. Participants run a quarterly bazaar to sell their wares.*

# 9099

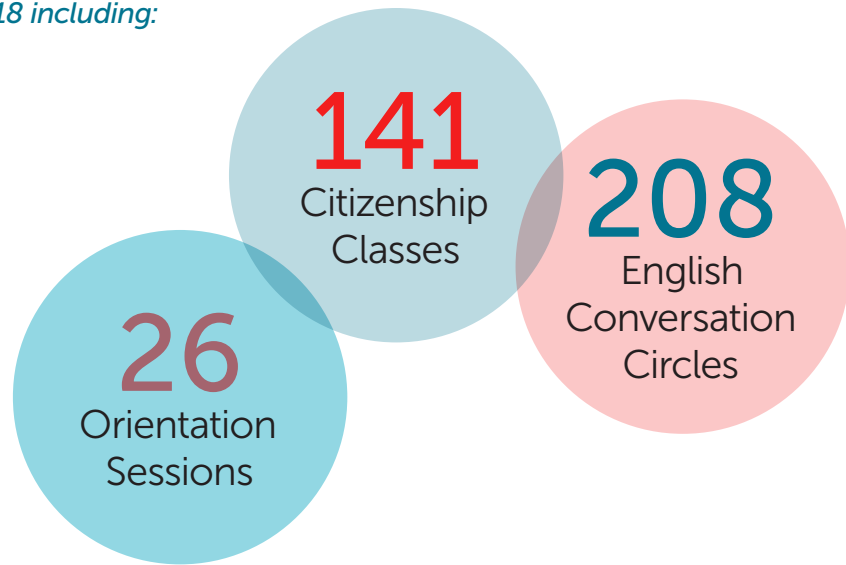
newcomers were served in 2017–2018  
across all AWO locations





Employment support services are an increasingly important area of settlement for newcomers. The importance of having paid work and independence is paramount for most clients. AWO clients increased their capacity to find jobs, built their employment-related skills, and created personal plans for achieving their employment and career goals through our one-on-one and group employment counselling sessions and with the support of our partners: Employment Ontario, YWCA, Canada Goose, Labour Education Centre, and COSTI.

*Newcomers attended over 250 sessions at AWO during 2017-2018 including:*



## 280

Syrian refugees participated in the Community Foundation of Mississauga-funded *We Belong* program



*Giving the old ways a try during a Mississauga LINC trip to the Pioneer Village.*

*“I am extremely overjoyed that I am going to be able to support my family financially, since all my children are students and want to study hard in order to give back to the Canadian society and prosper in this country.”*

*– Atefa Salik*

## Expanded LINC Programming

AWO's LINC program offers women-only classes that allow vulnerable women from other cultures to improve their English language in a welcoming, safe and inclusive environment. Students improve their English, while gaining important information about settling in Canada. Classroom learning is reinforced with weekly computer lab lessons, visits out into the community, and guest speakers who have spoken to our classes about a range of local programs and concepts including recycling and energy conservation.

AWO's LINC program had an active and enjoyable 2017 - 2018. Students were engaged in school-wide extra curricular activities and events. The staff and volunteers offered skill development support that went well beyond language needs helping to further the newcomer students' journeys towards full participation in Canadian society.

### *Combined Care Opens Up Opportunities for Newcomer Moms and Their Children*

Thanks to the combined care program, our clients with young children are able to not only access settlement services but also to attend workshops and other activities at AWO such as sewing classes, knitting

club, conversation circles, resume writing workshops, citizenship classes, driving classes, mental health workshops etc. It's also a great opportunity for the students from levels 6-7 to get volunteer experience helping students from literacy and level 1 classes.

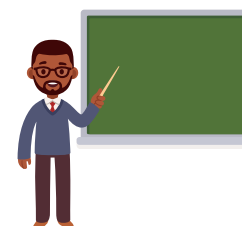
Children in care at our AWO Mississauga location have been engaged in some special programming. For Canada 150, the children and staff made 150 cards with Canadian symbols that were donated to Trillium Health Partners Foundation and distributed to children, families and doctors in the Pediatric Clinic and Kid'z Klinik. Our staff has been working with 39 children since February, as part of the Squiggle Park Readiness Program pilot project funded by IRCC. Moms received orientation and training from our staff on how to work on early childhood learning with their children at home. Our CNC program continues to provide the Parent-Child Mother Goose program introducing adults and children to the pleasure and power of using rhymes, songs, and stories together, as well as a Lending Library for students and their children that helps build familiarity and comfort with the library system.



*LINC Level 4 Toronto/Scarborough students receiving Attendance Recognition Awards.*

# 857

LINC students attended classes at Mississauga, Scarborough, and Toronto AWO locations



# 167

LINC students graduated, **140** women and **27** men



## Be Active, Be Involved

Newcomer and refugee women at AWO's Mississauga location took part in a Shoppers Drugmart-funded program of weekly information sessions on health-related topics and fitness activities. Our women-centred activities are at the heart of our organization. Yoga instructor Sarah Yeung brought trauma-informed yoga practices to female newcomers and refugees at AWO's Don Mills location through the Ontario Trillium Foundation sponsored Make the First Move

program. Many of the women taking the class had never exercised before, but they felt safe in the inclusive space, allowing them to relax and enjoy learning about techniques to help them manage stress and regulate their nervous systems. AWO offers support groups, cooking clubs with a language development component, parenting sessions, and domestic violence prevention/support.



Learning how to strengthen and relax in Sarah Yeung's yoga class at AWO Don Mills.

# 130

Syrians, mainly women, attended the **Law Foundation** sessions on **rights and responsibilities**



# 200

women benefited from the Shoppers Drugmart sponsored **Be Active, Be Involved** Program



# 1022

women participated in women-focused programming at AWO's Toronto location



*"I'm so relaxed now knowing that if there is anything I need to do, AWO will be there to help me."*

– Naikbakht Ael



## Seniors Moving from Social Isolation to Social Connection

Newcomer seniors are actively engaged at all of AWO's locations. Language circles, outings to local sites and parks, and cooking classes are all regular offerings.

During 2017–2018, seniors were also invited to take part in senior-led programming funded by New Horizons for Seniors (NHSP). In our Don Mills location, Arabic-speaking seniors led what were supposed to be monthly seasonal walks, but the group soon decided that it should be a weekly activity. They enjoyed getting to know their Toronto neighbourhood and the gentle physical fitness that walking affords. The seniors in Mississauga were treated to senior-led sewing and knitting sessions, which both the teachers and participants enjoyed in equal measure.

Through Ontario's Senior Community grant, seniors in Scarborough and Mississauga got to experience dance movement therapy. In the sessions at both locations, the senior participants took turns leading discussions, introducing and/or leading dance phrases

and movements to the group, and introducing songs and music to the group. The program demonstrated to us that the senior refugee participants respond well to activities that allow them to express themselves in a medium that is more than descriptions and words, but instead a reflection of their inner worlds.

**15%**

of AWO's clients are **seniors**



**100**

**senior newcomer women** participated in **arts-based** and **dance-related** activities



*Senior newcomer women from AWO Don Mills go cherry picking.*

## Adapting and Thriving in Transition

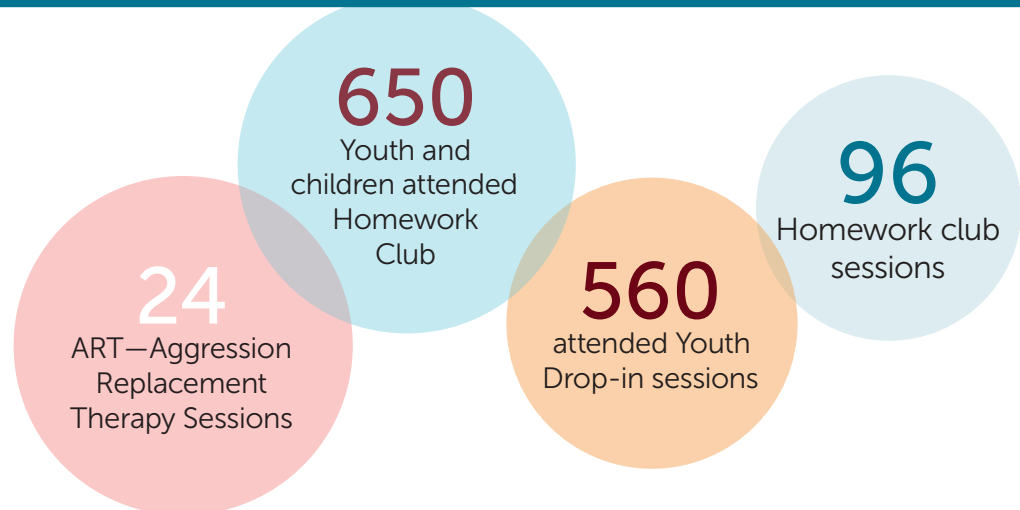
Youth and children’s activities were held at the AWO Head Office, Don Mills, and Mississauga locations. School-age children and youth took part in homework clubs and peer mentoring programs. Along with receiving help with their homework, there were field trips to museums, the Science Centre, City Hall and sports events. They enjoyed movie nights, a summer BBQ, an Iftaar Dinner, learning how to Dabke dance, yoga, and playing outdoors. Some youth took part in theatre activities with InForma Theatre company. Older youth found a place to relax, socialize, and benefit from peer mentoring while playing pool at AWO’s Don Mills location. Workshops and information sessions throughout the year focused on key areas of the newcomer youth’s transition into Canadian society and the information and supports they need as young adults.

**33%**

of AWO’s clients are **children and youth**



The North York Youth Drop-in group had a discussion about women from around the world and the women that inspire them on International Women’s Day.



## Meeting the Community Where They Are

The Wellness Café program officially wrapped up in the spring of 2018. The Cafés were funded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation to raise awareness about mental health in newcomer communities, to reduce stigma surrounding mental health, and to encourage people to seek help. This dynamic program is being driven by a dedicated and skilled team of newcomer Peer Leaders who continue to seek out opportunities to build awareness around mental health and wellbeing in newcomer communities.

You can link to our Wellness Cafés Youtube videos [here](#).



Wellness Café member participating in a peer leader training.

**229**

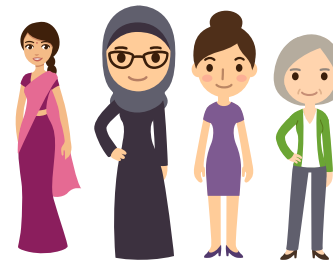
Wellness Café Sessions

**12**

Wellness Café Peer Leaders

**1750**

total Wellness Café participants by Jan 2017





## Canada 150: Reimagining Life on the Canadian Canvas

In celebration of Canada 150, AWO created a series of digital stories that highlight identity, diversity, and multiculturalism in Canada by showcasing the contributions of people who came to Canada as refugees. The storytellers, from Iraq, Afghanistan, Zimbabwe, Iran, Nicaragua, Jordan, and Syria, were asked what they felt Canada has given to them and what they have given to Canada. The resulting stories illuminate the diversity of experiences and challenges this group of Canadians have faced and the possibilities for love, growth, and happiness in a new country. Digital storytelling events were held in libraries in Ontario and at the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21 in Halifax. The project was developed with funding from the Government of Canada. To view the the digital stories, visit the [AWO website](#)



AWO's Canada 150 storytellers at the Simcoe County Museum in Minesing, Ontario. From left to right: Mona Awaad, Zakia Rezai, Evis Chirowamhangu, Najia Zewari, Kelley Swift-Jones (Simcoe County Museum Curator), and Michael Reyes.



## Humanitarian of the Year Award

Adeena Niazi is awarded the Humanitarian of the Year Award from IDRF in November 2017.



*Adeena Niazi receiving a Humanitarian Award*

## Samanak

In celebration of the spring and new year, AWO held its Samanak event on March 23, 2018. The lively, women-only party featured delicious food and the musical talents of Taher Shabab and Alia Ansari. Over 500 women celebrated together at the popular event.

## Cooksville Street Party

The first annual Cooksville Community Street Party was held on Saturday, September 23, 2017. This fun-filled family event showcasing local arts and entertainment was jointly organized by Dixie Bloor Neighbourhood Services, Mississauga Cooksville Library, Indus Community Services, Afghan Women's Organization, Volunteer MBC, Newcomer Services of Peel, The Dam, City of Mississauga, Mississauga Arts Council, Centre for Education and Training. The live music and fun family activities including, face painting, storytelling, and puppet shows, drew more than 700 visitors.



*Admiring henna designs at the first annual Cooksville Street Party 2017.*



*AWO staff and friends celebrating the new year, Nowroz, with a Samanak event on March 27, 2018. From right to left: Asma Faizi, Shinkai Tahiri, Adeena Niazi, Premier Kathleen Wynne, Fahima Fatah, Jane Rounthwaite, and Afie Mardukhi*

## Afghan Women's Organization Income Statement, Apr 2017 To Mar 2018

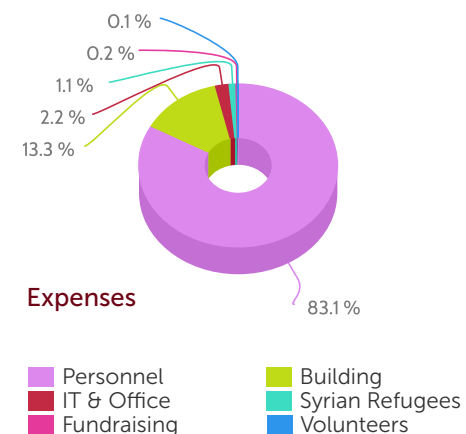
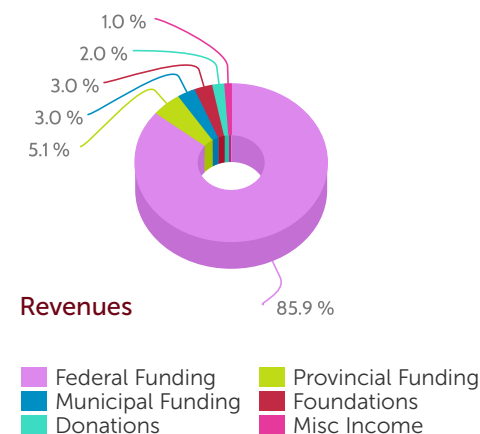
### Revenue

Federal	\$4,678,837
Municipalities	\$149,489
Province of Ontario	\$278,742
Foundations	\$190,451
Donations	\$75,958
Fundraising	\$21,001
Miscellaneous Income	\$53,646
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>\$5,448,124</b>

### Expenditures

Salary, MERCs & Benefits	\$3,694,056
Building Occupancy	\$609,848
Program Expenses	\$486,783
Purchase Of Services	\$274,374
Office And General	\$79,760
Staff Travel	\$13,915
Staff Training	\$5,200
Volunteer Expense	\$9,500
Fundraising	\$13,303
Syrian Refugee Settlement	\$67,688
<b>Total Expenditures</b>	<b>\$5,254,427</b>

**Excess of Revenue over Expenses before Reserve** **\$193,697**



## Our Funders

Immigrant, Refugee, and Citizenship Canada  
The Newcomer Settlement Program, Ontario  
The Newcomer Settlement Program,  
Toronto  
Ontario Trillium Foundation  
Government of Canada – Canada 150  
Employment and Social Development  
Canada  
Ministry of Seniors Affairs Ontario  
Community Foundation of Mississauga  
Shoppers Drugmart

## Our Partners and Volunteers

Thank you to our community and insitutional partners who provide referrals, share space, information, and so much more. Your support, generosity, and peer leadership help us get the work done in the company of kindred spirits.

Absolute Health Centre  
Access Alliance Multicultural Health and  
Community Services  
Across Boundaries - An Ethnoracial Mental  
Health Centre  
Afghan Canadian Islamic Community  
Agincourt Community Services Association

Ajax Public Library  
Arab Community Centre  
Bangkok Garden Restaurants  
Canada Revenue Agency – Tax Centre  
Canadian Mental Health Association -  
Toronto Branch  
Catholic Crosscultural Services  
Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture  
Cedarbrae Collegiate Institute  
Centennial College  
Centre for Education & Training  
Children’s Aid Society of Toronto  
Collège Boréal  
Community Engagement Worker  
COSTI Immigration Services  
Credit Valley Conservation  
Dorset Park Community Hub  
East Scarborough Storefront  
Eglinton-East Kennedy Park  
Employment & Social Services  
First Book Canada  
Flemingdon Legal Services and Flemingdon  
Community  
Support Services  
Flemington Health Centre

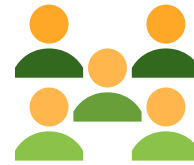
George Brown College  
Global Experience Ontario  
Green Standards  
Greenwood Secondary School  
Heart House Hospice  
Jane Alliance Neighbourhood Services  
Kids up front  
Labour Education Centre  
Le Centre Francophone de Toronto  
Lifeline Syria  
Madison Community Centre  
MCIS  
Micro Skills West Brampton  
Mobile health clinic coordinator  
Mothercraft College  
Muslim Families Outreach & Awareness  
Committee  
Nabawi Mosque  
New circle Clothing Donation  
Newcomer Information Centre (NIC)  
OCASI  
Ontario Justices Education Network (OJEN)  
Polycultural Immigrant & Community  
Services  
Refugee Sponsorship Training Program  
(RSTP)



## Our Partners and Volunteers (cont'd)

Reh'a Community Services  
 SAFE Program Coordinator  
 Seneca College of Applied Arts & Technology  
 Service collaboration and supports for Muslim Families  
 Sheridan College  
 Skills International  
 Social Planning Toronto  
 The Scarborough East Storefront  
 The Peer Project  
 Toronto East Quadrant Local Immigration Partnership  
 Toronto North Local Immigration Partnership  
 Toronto Police (Division 54 and 53)  
 Toronto Public Health (TPH)  
 Toronto Social Service  
 Tropicana community Services  
 Uma Nabawi Mosque  
 University of Guelph-Humber  
 University of Toronto School (UTS)  
 Unisphere Canada & Food Prep Inc  
 Victoria Village Action for Neighbourhood Change  
 Working Women Community Centre  
 YWCA

*The warmth, kindness, and hard work of our volunteers have made 2017–2018 an extra special year. A big thank you to each one of you who has contributed their time to AWO.*



**4596**  
volunteer hours in  
2017–2018



**\$64,344**  
Value of volunteer  
hours\*

\*Calculated at a value of \$14.00 per hour.



**\$53,237**  
Value of in-kind  
contributions

*“Hundreds of angels salute the person who assists people facing difficulties.”  
– Seyyed Ahmad Laghzaei*



## Our Vision

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

## Our Mission

AWO works with refugees and immigrants, particularly those who have experienced wars and persecution and those who are most marginalized, with a special focus on women and their families. Its mission is to improve their quality of life and to promote their social and economic inclusion in order to assist them to become contributing members of society and to live in dignity.

## Our Values

Gender equality; access and equity; dignity and respect; social inclusion; and economic empowerment

## Board of Directors: 2017-2018

Asma Faizi, President  
Beheshta Jaghori, Vice President  
Huria Jalalzai, Treasurer  
Sheba Sheranz  
Najeeba Shairzay  
Hakema Mashal Sidiqi  
Mina Saboor,  
Kobra Rasul  
Abeda Baluch  
Nasimeh Bayat

## AWO Locations

**AWO Head Office**  
150 Consumers Rd Unit 203  
North York, ON M2J 4G9  
416-588-3585

**AWO Don Mills**  
747 Don Mills Road, Unit 212  
Toronto, ON M3C 1T2  
416-422-2225

**AWO Scarborough**  
2555 Eglinton Ave. East, Unit 211  
Toronto, ON M1K 5J1  
416-266-1777

**AWO Mississauga**  
3050 Confederation PKWY  
Mississauga, ON L5B 3Z6  
905-279-3679

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 [www.afghanwomen.org](http://www.afghanwomen.org)

 [www.facebook.com/afghanwomengreatertoronto](https://www.facebook.com/afghanwomengreatertoronto)

 [www.youtube.com/channel/UCXRIFGMtvBh5z5OdvVRuCMQ](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCXRIFGMtvBh5z5OdvVRuCMQ)



*At the starting line in Flemingdon Park during AWO's summer camp activities.*

