



2021
**ANNUAL
REPORT**

MISSION

To provide a safe and supportive network for Arab women by connecting them with resources, providing supporting programs and empowering them to be active, successful community citizens. CAWA strives to enable Arab women, as well as younger girls, to make a positive impact in their own lives, in the lives of their families and in their community at large.

VISION

For every Arab woman to feel empowered, confident, supported, and encouraged to achieve her hopes, goals, and dreams.

LEADERSHIP

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Asma Alwahsh

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A MESSAGE FROM OUR FOUNDER & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

2021 has come to an end, and what a year it has been. Entering 2021, I was hopeful that we'd be able to return to our regular in-person programming at some point that year. While that never happened, the Canadian Arab Women's Association (CAWA) was able to organize a variety of in-person events, despite restrictions, and further expand its virtual programs and services.

A highlight for me this year was the Volunteer Appreciation Event CAWA organized in September. It was wonderful celebrating the many volunteers, who have supported CAWA over the last five years. Most of CAWA's work has depended on the hard work and dedication of our volunteers. Without them, CAWA wouldn't be the responsive organization it is today. Though CAWA has paid staff now, a great team of dynamic women with a variety of backgrounds and talents, our volunteers will always have a place with CAWA!

In 2021, CAWA was also able to finally expand in-person events into Guelph and Cambridge; two cities that had

been on CAWA's radar for a long time. During the pandemic, more participants from the two cities were able to join CAWA's virtual programming, and they specifically expressed the need for Arabic language programs and services in both Cambridge and Guelph. CAWA has responded to this need by exploring (and establishing) partnerships in both cities to serve Arab women better, and sending our committed team to do outreach work there.

CAWA was also able to finally expand in-person events into Guelph and Cambridge

I was able to accompany CAWA staff on several occasions during their outreach work, and these visits have given me tremendous insight in the needs and expectations of Arab women in both cities. I experienced the warm welcomes we received firsthand, and this has made me even more committed to CAWA's goal of truly supporting, empowering and inspiring every Arab woman in Waterloo Region and Guelph.

In 2022, CAWA will hopefully be able to continue this course of establishing itself

as a community organization that all Arab women can look upon for support and services that are relevant to their lives. Also, I hope to be able to announce many more partnerships with other community partners and organizations, especially in Cambridge and Guelph. While it is still unsure how regulations and restrictions will affect activities and events, I know one thing for sure: CAWA is a resourceful, responsive organization that can overcome all these struggles and come back stronger!

CAWA will hopefully be able to continue this course of establishing itself as a community organization that all Arab women can look upon for support and services that are relevant to their lives.

We don't know what 2022 will bring, but I remain hopeful that this year will truly be giving us more opportunities to connect, get together and celebrate the amazing community we have in Waterloo Region and Guelph!



Asma Alwahsh
Executive Director & Founder
Canadian Arab Women's Foundation



2021 HIGHLIGHTS

2021 was an interesting year for everyone; with so many disappointments came an equal number of opportunities. The Canadian Arab Women's Association had to constantly adapt and shift approaches to meet new needs and conquer new challenges along the way. With CAWA, the Arab community in Waterloo Region and Guelph continues to grow, and more women have connected with us this year than ever before.



2021 HIGHLIGHTS

CAWA IS GROWING: STAFF & PARTNERSHIPS

A NEW TEAM

Thanks to funding received in 2021, CAWA was able to form a team of 10 paid employees. CAWA now has paid staff in the positions of Outreach Workers, Social Media and Content Creators, a Community Services Worker, a Grants & Operations Officer, and a Program Director. Many of CAWA's current staff were once volunteers, which speaks to the commitment and dedication of CAWA's community to the organization. Giving Arab women the opportunity to gain valuable Canadian work experience and provide their families with extra income is perfectly in line with CAWA's goal to empower Canadian Arab women.



WE HIRED 10 FULL-TIME & PART-TIME EMPLOYEES.



OUR COMMUNITY SERVICES WORKER SERVED OVER 20 WOMEN WITH URGENT NEEDS.



VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION

In 2021, CAWA worked with over thirty volunteers who helped us facilitate a variety of programs and events. In September, CAWA celebrated its volunteers with an appreciation event, which was attended by the honourable Bardish Chagger, MP of Waterloo and later the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth.



OVER 30 VOLUNTEERS DEDICATED 2000 HOURS TO HELPING CAWA SERVE THE COMMUNITY.

FORGING PARTNERSHIPS

In 2021, CAWA forged a partnership with the Greenway-Chaplin Community Centre. The Community Centre is located in Cambridge, and provides recreational, educational and supportive programs and volunteer opportunities in their community. Greenway-Chaplin hosted one of CAWA's few indoor, in-person gatherings in 2021, and the organization hopes to continue to visit the Community Centre come 2022.



WE FORGED RELATIONSHIPS WITH 2 NEW PARTNERS.

The Canadian Clay and Glass Gallery was also added to CAWA's list of wonderful partners. In partnership, CAWA is confident that its two new partner organizations can aid in delivering creative programs to Arab women and their families, and encourage exploration of art in the Arab community as a whole.

Some bricks were laid for future partnerships in 2022, which CAWA hopes to report on this coming year.

2021 HIGHLIGHTS

INCREASING OUR REACH: EXPANSION OF PROGRAMS & SERVICES

FOSTERING NEW COMMUNITIES

While CAWA's focus has always been Waterloo Region and Guelph, much of the organization's programming and services were previously based in the Kitchener-Waterloo area. With virtual programming taking over during the pandemic, CAWA's reach into Cambridge and Guelph increased significantly. In 2021, CAWA also hosted in-person events, when allowed by public health guidelines, for Arab women in Guelph and Cambridge and received warm welcomes from both communities.

In both Guelph and Cambridge, there is a lack of consistent Arabic-language programming aimed at Canadian Arab women, and CAWA hopes to be able to continue to fill that gap through increasing its presence in the community. As long as restrictions are in place, most of these efforts will continue online, but through budding partnerships and with volunteers on the ground in both communities, CAWA is confident in its ability to provide high-quality programs, services and support for Arab women and their families in these two communities.



The group has been helping Arab women in the tricity area for five years. Now they're looking for an office in Guelph



GUELPH TODAY.COM
After seeing local need, Canadian Arab Women Association expands to Guelph



WE EXPANDED OUR REACH
INTO 2 NEW CITIES.



Towards the end of 2021, in-person gatherings with capacity limits were permitted, and CAWA celebrated that by hosting indoor events in Cambridge, Guelph and Waterloo. These moments of connection are important to CAWA, as they give an opportunity to connect and reconnect with Arab women, listen to their stories, and provide a space for them to form relationships with one another.

The issue of isolation runs rampant in the Arab community, particularly for newcomers and refugees, and has only been exacerbated during the pandemic. This is why most of CAWA's efforts are aimed at forming and maintaining social connections amongst women.

CAWA is hopeful that 2022 will bring us more opportunities to host in-person events and gatherings for the women in its growing community.

SOCIAL ACTIVITY

2021 presented CAWA with the challenge of needing to be inventive while remaining responsive, as restrictions were constantly changing throughout the year. Since its establishment, Arabic Mother's Day has been celebrated big within CAWA with lavish in-person events. During early 2021, CAWA had to turn to an alternative celebration. On Arabic Mother's Day, March 21, 2021, CAWA hosted a live celebration broadcast on its Facebook page, and hand-delivered Mother's Day gifts to dozens of Arab women in the community. While this is definitely not how CAWA would ideally have chosen to celebrate Mother's Day, the organization was successful in spreading joy and surprises in difficult times.



WE CONNECTED WITH 1800
WOMEN THROUGH OUR
PRIVATE FACEBOOK AND
WHATSAPP GROUPS.





PROGRAMS

One way the Canadian Arab Women's Association responds to the needs of the Arab women is through developing programs and events that are requested specifically, and repeatedly, by our community. This year, CAWA was able to deliver 3 unique programs to Arab women in Guelph and Waterloo Region.



TOGETHER, STRONGER

Together, Stronger: Supporting Arab Women during the COVID-19 Pandemic was a program that ran from March to June 2021. This program was designed to fight isolation and continue supporting the Arab women in the community in a variety of ways. Initially this program was intended for about 60 participants, but due to high demand and lack of other programming and supports in the community accessible to Arab women, CAWA ended up serving around 150 women through this program. This program was volunteer-led, and consisted of a variety of programs and activities, covering weekly educational sessions, weekly virtual English conversation classes, weekly virtual computer classes and social events in the park, when Covid-regulations allowed this.

In addition, volunteers would have small groups of participants assigned to them, for whom they were the main contact person, but also was a way to connect on a smaller scale, virtually and later on, in-person as well. The volunteer would check in with individual participants on a bi-weekly basis as well, to ensure they are doing well, and not in need of something.

The program was funded through the Kitchener Waterloo Community Foundation and sponsored by Volunteer Action Center, now also known as Volunteer Waterloo Region.

WORKPRO

WorkPro is an Arabic language employment program for Arab women in Waterloo Region and Guelph, it was something that was requested many times. Arab women experience among the highest levels of unemployment in Canada, according to Canada's Labour Force Survey (LFS), conducted in July 2020. In 2020, only 46% of Arab women were employed in Canada, in comparison to 66% of white women. Through a CAWA survey, Arab women expressed that lack of Canadian experience, the English language and the difficulty of transferring degrees were their biggest obstacles for finding employment.

WorkPro aims to help more Arab women to prepare to enter the workforce, by helping them create effective resumes, working on their interview skills and providing them with a solid understanding of Canadian work culture. The program is supported by volunteers and CAWA staff, and facilitated by Employment Coach Sarah Dodeen. The program started in October 2021, and 20 participants will be graduating from the program in January 2022, ready to enter the job market. A new group will start in January 2022, and CAWA will continue offering this program in 2022 multiple times.

Currently enrolled in Workpro are women who are looking to pursue careers in the medical field, engineering and hairdressing, and other fields. This program is funded by Kitchener-Waterloo Community Foundation and WAGE- Government of Canada.

STRONG FAMILIES TOGETHER

Strong Families Together started in August, 2021. This program focuses on making Arab families in Waterloo Region and Guelph stronger, together. Participants learn about healthy relationships, family law in Canada and parenting, by attending this weekly virtual program. CAWA partners with Women's Crisis Services for Strong Families Together, and their Outreach Worker provides support and sessions for this program as well.

In addition to the weekly virtual program, the program is supported by CAWA's team of Outreach Workers and a Community Services Worker. The Community Services Worker has connected with Arab women in the community and beyond to ensure that they have access to resources, information and programs they, or their families need. While CAWA has always worked with individual cases, 2021 is the first time that the organization could provide the support of a professional. CAWA's Community Services worker has worked with over 20 Arab clients from the start of the program until the end of 2021. Clients needed support with applying for a variety of benefits, navigating volatile relationships with family members, and accessing essential services in the community, for themselves or their children.

Over 110 women are registered up for the program as of December 2021. Over two-thirds of the Strong Families Together participants are newcomers (having arrived in Canada 2016 or later), and over half of the participants identify as low-income.

The program is funded by the Canadian Women's Foundation and is delivered in partnership with Women's Crisis Services Waterloo Region.



WE HOSTED 70 VIRTUAL PROGRAM SESSIONS



275 WOMEN PARTICIPATED IN OUR PROGRAMS



A BIG THANK YOU

The Canadian Arab Women's Association extends a warm thank you to our volunteers, funders, and partners, without whom our work would not be possible. CAWA has been able to hire a dynamic and responsive team, expand our reach across multiple cities, and provide much-needed support only thanks to the dedication and generosity of our supporters.



VOLUNTEERS

CAWA is eternally grateful to the unwavering support of our volunteers who share our vision and dedicate their time to helping the organization foster safe, supported, communities of Arab women.

Banan Al Kilani

Btissam Essoltani

Hanan Hamdani

Iman Elhaydari

Kinda Aouf

Minan Al Hamdani

Mona Elgargani

Muna Abu Ayesh

Rania Riad

Sarah Saab

Suzan Koujan

Thank you to our funders and partners, whose generosity and commitment are critical in advancing CAWA's mission and vision.

FUNDERS

Government of Canada

Wage and Gender Equality Canada

Kitchener Waterloo Community
Foundation

United Way Waterloo Region
Communities

PARTNERS

Family & Children's Services of the
Waterloo Region

Women's Crisis Services of Waterloo
Region

Canadian International Development
Organization

Greenway-Chaplin Community
Centre

Volunteer Waterloo Region

Waterloo Regional Police

Agency Employment Services

Dress for Success

The Canadian Clay and Glass Gallery