



# ANNUAL REPORT 2023

# CAWA

CANADIAN ARAB WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION

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CAWA

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CAWA

## 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.

## OUR IMPACT

In just one year, we've touched the lives of countless amazing women, particularly newcomers to our vibrant community, fostering lasting transformations beyond the programs and events they engage with. With our buzzing social media presence on WhatsApp and Facebook, coupled with the soaring demand for Arabic-language programming, our influence is set to skyrocket even further in the upcoming years. In 2023, our efforts manifested in serving and supporting over 1000 women in the region, marking a significant milestone in our journey of empowerment. Join us as we continue to make waves, forging connections, and empowering women to thrive!

## LEADERSHIP

### FOUNDER & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Asma Alwahsh

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Nadia Hashem

Saliha Haidar

Omar Hussein

Tova Davidson

Nadia Hashem

### BOARD OF ADVISORS

Bob Kalbfleisch

Shawky Fahel

## STAFF

**Alaa Allouh**  
PROJECT COORDINATOR

**Nahla Abdelbary**  
OUTREACH

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**Oula Almadhoun**  
OPERATIONS MANAGER

**Yolande Lansing**  
PROJECT DIRECTOR

**Hala Alzain**  
OUTREACH

**Sarah Saab**  
OUTREACH

**Iman Alhadare**  
OUTREACH

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

## **FUNDERS**

Canadian Women's Foundation

Government of Canada's New Horizons for Seniors Program

United Way Waterloo Region Communities

Waterloo Region Community Foundation

Women and Gender Equality Canada (WAGE)

## **PARTNERS**

Agency Employment Services

Breastfeeding Buddies of Waterloo Region

Canadian International Development Organization

Dress for Success Toronto

Family & Children's Services of the Waterloo Region

Greenway-Chaplin Community Centre

Guelph Police Service

Guelph-Wellington Women in Crisis

The Canadian Clay & Glass Gallery

Volunteer Waterloo Region

Waterloo Regional Police

Women's Crisis Services of Waterloo Region

# Welcome to CAWA

11 July 2024



Nadia Hashem  
Chair, Canadian Arab Women Association (CAWA)

## DEAR Community Members,

As the Chair of the Canadian Arab Women Association (CAWA), I am delighted to share with you the impact of our work on the community and introduce our new board members. CAWA is dedicated to connecting, supporting, and empowering Arab women in the Waterloo Region and Guelph. Our primary goal is to serve as a bridge between Arab women and the broader Canadian society, and we achieve this through a variety of engaging events and programs.

Our efforts have fostered a vibrant community where Arab women can connect, share experiences, and support one another. We strive to provide equitable opportunities to Arab women and girls, regardless of their backgrounds, religious, or political beliefs. By embracing diversity, tolerance, and acceptance, we have created an environment where every woman feels valued and respected. Through our programs, we have introduced Arab women to valuable resources that enhance their well-being and support their integration and participation in Canadian society. Our initiatives have not only empowered women but also inspired them to contribute positively to our community.

The positive impact of CAWA's work is evident in the stories of women who have found new opportunities, developed meaningful connections, and gained confidence through our support. We are committed to continuing this important work and to making a lasting difference in the lives of Arab women in our region.

Additionally, we are thrilled to welcome our new board members, Alaa Noui, Lindsay Walden and Fahmi Turk. We are excited about the fresh perspectives and expertise they bring to our organization. Their involvement will undoubtedly strengthen our efforts and help us achieve our mission more effectively. Thank you for your continued support and involvement in CAWA. Together, we can achieve great things and build a stronger, more inclusive community.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nadia Hashem', written over a thin horizontal line.

**Nadia Hashem**  
Chair, Canadian Arab Women  
Association (CAWA)



Asma Alwahsh, Executive Director & Founder  
Canadian Arab Women's Association

## DEAR FRIENDS,

I'm deeply moved as I reflect on the remarkable journey of CAWA, our shared dream of empowering immigrant Arab women in Canada. At the core of our mission lies the unwavering commitment to women's empowerment, a beacon guiding every step we take.

As I witness the transformative impact of our work, I'm reminded of the incredible power that lies within each woman who walks through our doors. From the moment they join our community, they are enveloped in a nurturing environment that celebrates their strength, resilience, and unique journey.

None of this would have been possible without the steadfast support of our funders, donors, and partners. Your belief in the power of women's empowerment has been the driving force behind every initiative we've undertaken. Your generosity has empowered us to provide essential resources and services that have transformed countless lives.

To our dedicated volunteers, mentors, and advocates, I extend my deepest gratitude. Your tireless efforts have been the heartbeat of CAWA, infusing our work with passion, purpose, and unwavering dedication. Together, we've created a movement that is breaking down barriers and paving the way for a brighter future.

As we look ahead, I'm filled with hope and optimism for what we can achieve together.

With your continued support, I'm confident that we will continue to uplift and empower immigrant Arab women, providing them with the tools and resources they need to thrive in every aspect of their lives.

Thank you for standing with us in our mission to empower women and build a more just and equitable society. Your commitment to women's empowerment fuels our passion and drives us forward, and together, we will continue to create lasting change.

With heartfelt gratitude,

**Asma Alwahsh**  
Founder & Executive Director,  
Canadian Arab Women's  
Association

**We have successfully empowered over 1,000 women and youth in the Waterloo Region and Guelph in 2023.**

# NEW PROGRAMS

CAWA's purpose as a non profit organization has always been to empower Arab women and girls through a safe network, resource connections, and supportive programs. This year we aimed to enable them to make positive contributions to their lives, families, and communities.

## NEW PROGRAMS

# BLOOM WITH CAWA

The Bloom with CAWA program offers a comprehensive array of services and sessions tailored to address the diverse needs and challenges faced by Arab immigrants in Canada, and particularly, Arab women. These services encompass various aspects of personal and professional development, aiming to empower women to thrive in their new environment and to positively impact their lives.

Through workshops, counseling sessions, and skill-building activities, participants are provided with valuable resources and support to navigate through various life circumstances. For instance, workshops cover diverse topics such as managing family dynamics, art therapy, financial literacy, and addressing domestic abuse, all geared towards empowering women in various aspects of their lives

Multiple positive changes in our participants' personal lives were reported back to us; the program offers marital relationship workshops, which have improved the understanding between them and their partners, giving women who have participated the confidence to overcome obstacles and improve communication with their spouses.

It is also worth mentioning that many mothers reported that after taking part in the program, they had a closer bond and understanding with their kids. They were more empowered and gained confidence in their ability to foster their kids' needs related to their well-being. They were able to build healthier relationships that helped in creating a more peaceful and encouraging home atmosphere.

The program offered financial literacy workshops -offered by RBC Bank- where women who participated in the workshops learned valuable skills related to managing money, understanding financial topics, including TFSA and RRSP accounts, and reading bank statements.

Furthermore, sessions addressing domestic violence have given women access to essential resources and support systems, which have helped them feel safe and empowered. The program's dedication to supporting Arab women in Canadian culture is constant, even as it develops further. It aims to offer a variety of experiences that meet their educational, psychological, and intellectual needs so they can better themselves and their families in the future.



*photo taken at a Bloom with CAWA gathering.*

## NEW PROGRAMS

# NEWCOMER IMMIGRANT PROGRAM

In the heart of Waterloo Region, the Canadian Arab Women's Association (CAWA) has become a crucial force in aiding new immigrants, particularly women, in their integration journey into Canadian society. CAWA addresses the unique challenges faced by immigrant women through targeted programs, workshops, and mentorship initiatives, ensuring they have the tools needed for successful integration.

CAWA organizes events that celebrate Arab culture, fostering community and providing a platform for newcomers to share experiences. These events bridge cultural gaps and aid in the integration process. Recognizing education as a key integration driver, CAWA promotes language classes and skill development workshops, empowering women to actively contribute to Canadian society. CAWA combats social isolation through events that encourage networking and connections, creating a support network and fostering emotional well-being.

In conclusion, the Canadian Arab Women's Association is not just facilitating integration; it's shaping a future where every newcomer, especially women, thrives and contributes meaningfully to the Canadian mosaic. Their targeted support and community-building efforts are key drivers in creating a more inclusive and empowered society.



*Group photo taken at a social media training session.*



Staff photo taken at the Kitchener Job Fair.



Staff photo taken at the 2023 Eid celebration



# CONTINUING PROGRAMS

This year, the generosity of our funders gave CAWA the opportunity to revive and to continue providing some of our most successful and impactful programs to the Arab women in our community.

## CONTINUING PROGRAMS

# WORKPRO

CAWA has proudly served over 150 women through our WorkPro initiative in Waterloo Region and Guelph. Designed specifically for Arabic-speaking women aged 20 and above, WorkPro equips participants with the tools and knowledge needed to excel in the Canadian job market. Through virtual sessions in Arabic and English, participants receive comprehensive training and mentoring covering everything from networking strategies to resume writing and LinkedIn optimization.

Participants undergo comprehensive training and mentoring to enhance their employability skills through virtual sessions usually conducted in both Arabic and English. The program encompasses a wide spectrum, including valuable insights into networking strategies, effective job search tactics, advanced knowledge of Canadian-specific job market terminologies, refined resume writing techniques, and optimal LinkedIn profile optimization. Workpro provides pathways to economic security and self-sufficiency, it aims to empower women by offering services that help them achieve financial independence.

Program participants and alumni actively engage in the Job Finding Club, leveraging it as a valuable platform for sharing insights, job leads, and practical advice. Within this community, members collaborate to offer support and guidance to one another, enhancing their collective efforts in navigating the job market. It serves as a dynamic space where individuals exchange tips, discuss employment opportunities, and provide valuable mentorship to empower each other in their professional journeys. We are always so proud of our participants, as we move forward to celebrate the accomplishments of our program's graduates in a ceremony, our partner Dress for Success Toronto provides each graduate with a proper work attire.



*Staff and Participants at the WRPS mentorship workshop.*

## CONTINUING PROGRAMS

# MOTHER TO MOTHER

CAWA's Mother to Mother program addresses a crucial need for expecting mothers and those with infants up to 2 years old in the Waterloo Region, specifically catering to Arab refugees and immigrants. Central to this program is the emphasis on building connections among mothers, fostering peer-to-peer relationships, and offering emotional support within a supportive community. Through a combination of weekly virtual and in-person sessions, we aim to provide a nurturing environment where mothers can thrive and support one another through their unique journeys into motherhood.

Recognizing that with knowledge comes power, our program aims to provide information to empower women by including knowledgeable speakers who are healthcare experts and lactation consultants. These sessions are conducted in Arabic and cover topics such as pregnancy and childbirth, child development, and postpartum mental health.

The program serves as a nurturing environment specifically tailored to accommodate the needs of new mothers, offering a supportive platform for them to share experiences, exchange parenting expertise, and establish valuable connections within a community of fellow mothers. It provides a safe and inclusive space where mothers can gather with their children, fostering a sense of camaraderie and solidarity among participants. In this welcoming setting, children are encouraged to interact and play with one another, facilitating socialization and fostering friendships among both mothers and their kids. This holistic approach not only supports mothers in their parenting journey but also creates opportunities for meaningful social interactions and mutual support within the program community.

With funding from the Waterloo Region United Way and partnerships with the Greenway-Chaplin Community Center, Mother to Mother is able to continue establishing a secure environment for open discussions about difficulties and emphasizes the importance of seeking expert assistance. The primary goal is to normalize asking for help, fostering an environment where mothers feel comfortable seeking and receiving support.

## CONTINUING PROGRAMS **STRONG FAMILIES TOGETHER**

CAWA has extended support to approximately 300 families through our Strong Families Together program. This vital initiative provides Arab women with a safe space to delve into discussions on key life topics. From family law to successful parenting, sessions cover crucial areas like economic abuse, domestic violence, and fostering healthy relationships. Conducted in Arabic, with translation available upon request, these hybrid sessions aim to arm participants with vital skills and knowledge, empowering them to fortify their families and protect their well-being. Additionally, the program extends its support to survivors of domestic and gender-based violence, providing vital resources and connections to shelters and outreach workers. By offering comprehensive assistance, Strong Families Together strives to empower survivors to seek help, access support services, and begin the journey toward healing and recovery, highlighting its commitment to addressing the diverse needs of its participants in a safe and supportive environment.

## CONTINUING PROGRAMS **FITNESS CLASSES**

The Women's Fitness Program is a transformative initiative that seamlessly blends cultural expression with physical well-being. Through the incorporation of traditional Dabke in Kitchener and lively Zumba sessions in Guelph, the program empowers women of all backgrounds and ages. Beyond fostering physical fitness, the initiative serves as a platform for cultural preservation, mental well-being, and community building. Participants experience increased self-esteem and a greater sense of belonging, creating a supportive environment that extends beyond the dance studio. The program stands as a testament to the power of combining dance and fitness to not only strengthen bodies but also build lasting connections and celebrate cultural identity.

## CONTINUING PROGRAMS

# ENGLISH CONVERSATION CIRCLE

In Canada, proficiency in the English language is essential for Arab women seeking successful integration into society. CAWA is committed to providing educational programs that enhance both spoken and written English skills, recognizing the importance of language in building meaningful connections within the Canadian community.

The program offers a comprehensive approach to language learning, focusing on both spoken fluency and written comprehension. Weekly classes, led by dedicated volunteers Najat Nabhani and Helen Basson, provide Arab women with opportunities to engage in informal conversations and improve their spoken English skills in a supportive environment. Through these sessions, participants not only enhance their language proficiency but also develop a sense of community and belonging by interacting with fellow Arab women.

Our goal is to empower Arab women to express themselves confidently in English, enabling them to navigate daily interactions and pursue further educational opportunities in their new environment. By fostering a supportive and inclusive learning environment, CAWA aims to equip participants with the language skills they need to thrive in Canadian society.



*CAWA hosted a small food business regulations seminar at the Waterloo Public Library.*

WorkPro attendees celebrating their graduation.



2023 Eid celebration.



# YOUTH PROGRAMS

CAWA's commitment to holistic community development shines through our youth programs! Fostering connections, community engagement, and personal growth for teenagers, ensuring that the well-being of Arab families transcends gender boundaries.



## YOUTH PROGRAMS

### GIRL'S ZONE

The core of CAWA's goal is to empower and invest in the future of Arab women of all ages. For Arab girls, we were pleased to provide the Girls' Zone program; it was created with multiple goals in mind, one of which is for participants to develop leadership abilities and vital abilities like advocacy and independence. Throughout the course of the program, participants were urged to consider careers in STEM fields—science, technology, engineering, and mathematics—which are generally underrepresented by women, particularly Arab women. Furthermore, we advocated for sports and physical exercise as empowering means of enhancing self-esteem in fields that are traditionally dominated by men. Girls' Zone had a significant impact on Arab girls in the Waterloo Region and Guelph, empowering them and opening up their horizons to possibilities and viewpoints that some of them had never considered through a wide variety of interesting and age-appropriate activities. Every activity, from Robotics and Coding to leadership development sessions, from art workshops to traditional Arab dance (Dabkeh), was thoughtfully chosen to uplift, inform, and empower participants.



*Girls' Zone participants presenting the artwork they created during a program session.*

## YOUTH PROGRAMS YALLAH SHABAB

At CAWA, our commitment to Arab girls and women extends beyond individual empowerment—it encompasses a holistic view that recognizes the importance of family and community development. Understanding that progress involves nurturing the growth of all members, including brothers, sons, and future partners, we proudly introduce the Yallah Shabab! program.

Yallah Shabab! is a dynamic youth initiative aimed at fostering connections, community engagement, and personal development among teenagers. Through a range of activities such as sports, after-school support, interactions with law enforcement, leadership training, and more, we provide a platform for young men to connect, learn, and grow together. By embracing both young women and men, we strive to create a harmonious environment that uplifts the entire Arab community.

This inclusive approach not only promotes social interactions but also cultivates a sense of belonging and empowerment among youth. Yallah Shabab! embodies our dedication to the holistic well-being of Arab families, ensuring that every member has the opportunity to thrive, connect, and positively contribute to our community.



*Yallah Shabab Go! participants during an educational session and a photography.*

*Yallah Shabab day at the Waterloo Region Police station.*



*Celebrating the 2023 Girls' Zone completion hosted at Arabesque.*



# UNIQUE PROGRAMS

CAWA's distinctive initiatives extend beyond conventional program categories, offering specialized services that cater to the nuanced needs of women in the Canadian Arab community. From targeted support for cultural integration to fostering entrepreneurial ventures, these unique programs reflect CAWA's commitment to addressing diverse challenges and empowering women in novel and impactful ways.

## UNIQUE PROGRAMS YOU ARE NOT ALONE

Experience the transformative power of "You Are Not Alone for Seniors" at CAWA, an inclusive program dedicated to promoting social participation among senior women within the Arab community. Through engaging sessions that include creative work and social activities, our program has proven to be a beacon of positive change for participants. By fostering a sense of community and providing a platform for meaningful connections, we witness the profound impact on mental well-being and social bonds among our senior participants. It has created an environment where shared experiences and social gatherings replace virtual counseling sessions, becoming a turning point in the lives of those seeking connection and support. "You Are Not Alone for Seniors" is not just a program; it's a catalyst for positive transformations and a testament to the healing power of community bonds.



*A "You Are Not Alone" get together at Waterloo Park.*



## UNIQUE PROGRAMS

# GUELPH COMMUNITY KITCHEN

The Guelph Community Kitchen, funded by the United Way, conducted comprehensive six-week training rounds, equipping a diverse group of women with culinary skills. The program, delivered in Arabic, covered a range of topics, including recipes from international cuisines with Arabic focus and essential education on safe food handling practices. As part of this initiative, some of the participants underwent the Food Safety Handler test, earning certification, alongside additional certificates in "Occupational Health and Safety Awareness in 4 Steps" and "WHMIS Symbols Training". A City workshop, introducing food-based business concepts in Guelph, further enriched the participants' practical knowledge and exposure.

The impact of the Guelph Community Kitchen initiative extended beyond training. Some women are actively applying their skills in a second component, participating in the CAWA catering program. The catering service menu, featuring dishes learned during training, not only empowers participants to contribute to the culinary landscape but also fosters entrepreneurial skills. Additionally, the Cooking Class initiative, led by program graduates, serves as another dimension, showcasing the transferability of skills as participants learn popular Arab appetizers. Overall, this project not only enriches knowledge but also provides practical pathways for economic empowerment, enabling women to apply their culinary skills and potentially establish their own successful businesses in Guelph.



*Photo of the Guelph Community Kitchen participants.*

*A photo taken at a Guelph Community Kitchen learning how to make authentic Hummus and Fattoush*



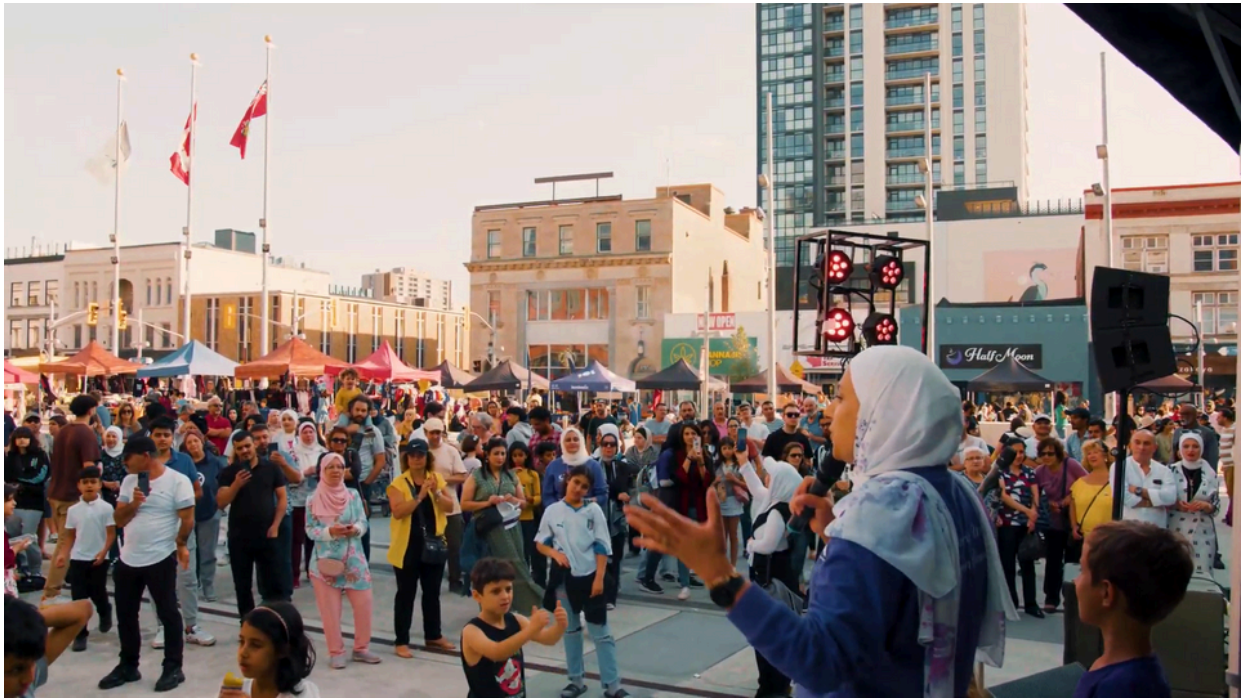
# EVENTS

In 2023, CAWA eagerly seized the chance to organize larger-than-ever in-person events, emphasizing the importance of face-to-face interactions. This unique opportunity allowed us to joyously celebrate our culture and pay tribute to community members who have positively impacted our community.



## EVENTS

# MIDDLE EASTERN FESTIVAL



*Asma Alwahsh speaking to the crowd and welcoming them to the festival.*

Returning for its second year, Waterloo Region is gearing up for the Middle Eastern Festival on August 19th, 2023, at Carl Zehr Square, Kitchener. Hosted by the Canadian Arab Women's Association, this annual event continues to be a one-stop-shop for all things Middle East, offering attendees an immersive experience with a diverse range of food, artisan booths, and live music.

The festival's purpose is to showcase the beauty of various Middle Eastern cultures and instill pride in local Arabs about their roots. Beyond this, the festival aims to strengthen connections between the Middle Eastern community and others in Waterloo Region, promoting the region as an inclusive and vibrant place to live.

This year's culinary offerings include tantalizing dishes like chicken shawarma wraps, freshly squeezed juice, baklava, and many more delicacies representing the culinary diversity of different regions of the Middle East. As the Arab community in the region continues to grow, the festival stands as an annual celebration, acknowledging its rich history and cultural contributions to the heart of Waterloo Region.

**THANK YOU TO THE SPONSORS OF THE CANADIAN ARAB FESTIVAL OF KW**  
Damask Resto Market · Elias Jiryis · Waterloo Region Community Foundation



*Photos taken during the Middle Eastern Festival.*



## EVENTS

### KW JOB FAIR

Funded by Immigration Partnership and in collaboration with Lutherwood Kitchener, CAWA organized a highly successful job fair, drawing nearly 500 attendees. The event featured approximately 20 exhibitors, comprising a mix of community partners and employers offering various recruitment and volunteer positions. It provided an excellent networking platform for attendees to connect and apply for jobs, with many job seekers sharing resumes tailored by CAWA specifically for the Canadian job market.

Additionally, CAWA offered a resume editing station staffed by a career coach who provided instant feedback and revisions to job seekers. This service was instrumental in helping attendees refine their resumes for better job prospects. The interactive nature of the station facilitated real-time improvements, empowering job seekers with valuable insights and enhancing their chances of securing employment. Overall, the job fair served as a dynamic environment for individuals to explore opportunities, gain valuable feedback, and take proactive steps towards achieving their career goals.

## EVENTS

### Guelph Job Fair

The Guelph Job Fair 2023, hosted by the Community Arab Women's Association (CAWA) with support from Lutherwood Employment Services Guelph, showcased notable success in fostering employment opportunities and community engagement. With over 100 attendees and 15 exhibitors from diverse industries, the event served as a vital platform for job seekers, particularly within the Arab community, to connect with employers and access valuable resources.

The event's inclusive approach, evident through collaboration with community partners and integration of local colleges, further emphasized its significance in promoting diversity and professional development. Extensive marketing efforts and strategic budget allocation contributed to the event's seamless execution, while post-event support initiatives highlighted CAWA's commitment to sustaining long-term career success for participants. Overall, the Guelph Job Fair 2023 demonstrated a significant impact in empowering individuals and facilitating meaningful connections within the community.

## EVENTS

### EID TOYS

The Waterloo Chapter of the Knights of Columbus, along with the Waterloo Regional Police Service (WRPS) Women in Leadership, teamed up with CAWA to gather and distribute approximately 600 toys to children of all ages on the occasion of Eid AlFitr. This collaborative effort exemplified community unity, providing joy and celebration for the feast.



Photos taken during the KW and Guelph Job Fair.



# DIVERSITY

In 2023, CAWA eagerly seized the chance to organize larger-than-ever in-person events, emphasizing the importance of face-to-face interactions. This unique opportunity allowed us to joyously celebrate our culture and pay tribute to community members who have positively impacted our community.

## DIVERSITY

# TELL ME ABOUT YOUR COUNTRY

Reaching 10,000 views on social media, "Tell Me About Your Country," a captivating short documentary by the Canadian Arab Women's Association, offers a moving exploration of cultural identity and heritage through the personal narratives of nine Arab Canadian women. Produced by ii3 Studios and helmed by director Mariam J. Momani, this documentary invites viewers on a nostalgic voyage, immersing them in the childhood memories and ancestral lands of its featured women.

Funded by the Canadian Government, this project serves as a compelling tribute to the diversity and depth of Arab Canadian perspectives. Through intimate storytelling, the documentary not only illuminates the individual journeys of its subjects but also provides profound insights into the broader cultural mosaic of their respective countries. By fostering dialogue and encouraging a deeper appreciation of cultural differences as strengths rather than barriers, it effectively bridges cultural divides.

"Tell Me About Your Country" amplifies marginalized voices and promotes a greater understanding and celebration of cultural diversity. It embodies the transformative power of storytelling in fostering inclusive communities. This documentary stands as a testament to CAWA's unwavering dedication to celebrating diversity and fostering cross-cultural dialogue, leaving a profound impact on audiences and enriching the collective tapestry of Canadian identity.



Screenshot from the "Tell Me About Your Country" documentary.

# THANK YOU!

As we conclude this year's impact report, we extend our deepest gratitude to all our supporters and donors. Your unwavering generosity has been instrumental in empowering countless women throughout the year. Without your support, none of our achievements would have been possible. Thank you for standing with us on this journey towards empowerment and positive change.