

ANNUAL REPORT

2022

*Empowering Women
Empowering Community*

CAWA

CANADIAN ARAB WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION

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

FUNDERS

Government of Canada's New Horizons for Seniors Program

Women and Gender Equality Canada (WAGE)

Kitchener Waterloo Community Foundation

United Way Waterloo Region Communities

Canadian Women's Foundation

PARTNERS

Canadian International Development Organization

Family & Children's Services of the Waterloo Region

Volunteer Waterloo Region

Waterloo Regional Police

Women's Crisis Services of Waterloo Region

Greenway-Chaplin Community Centre

Agency Employment Services

The Canadian Clay & Glass Gallery

Dress for Success Toronto

Guelph Police Service

Breastfeeding Buddies of Waterloo Region

Guelph-Wellington Women in Crisis



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

DEAR FRIENDS,

It has been another successful year for CAWA with lots of exciting news and stories to share! As life went back to normal after the pandemic, in 2022 our community eagerly returned to enjoy in person gatherings and parties. These celebrations and social support groups that we all need to maintain our mental health and wellbeing. Yet, COVID brought us the luxury of hybrid communications, where online tools saved us traffic and effort to get together. The beauty of this hybrid mode enabled CAWA to better support and empower Arab women and their families across the region.

Over the past year, CAWA has been working tirelessly to support and empower Arab women and their families across Canada.

Through a wide range of programs and services, CAWA has provided critical resources and support to those in need.

One of the most notable accomplishments of CAWA has been its work in recognizing the achievements of Arab Women. Through CAWA's Arab Women of the Year Awards, six women were selected as a testament to how we connect, support, and empower each other. The Award Ceremony held on September 17th provided an opportunity for everyone to come together in celebration of their contributions. This has not only had a positive impact on the individual women, but also on their families and broader community.

In addition to its direct support programs, CAWA has also been active in promoting Arab culture and heritage across the Region of Waterloo and Guelph. Through events like the First Annual Middle Eastern Festival and community outreach programs, CAWA has helped to foster greater understanding and appreciation for the rich cultural heritage of Arab communities.

Overall, the work of CAWA has had a profound impact on the lives of countless women and families across the Region of Waterloo and Guelph. I am honoured to have had the opportunity to support this incredible organization, and I hope that you will join me in continuing to support its important work. Thank you for your attention and support.

Sincerely,

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

The work of CAWA has had a profound impact on the lives of countless women and families across the Region of Waterloo and Guelph.



Saliha Haidar, Chair, Board of Directors

DEAR CAWA COMMUNITY,

As we reflect on our collective journey, I am filled with gratitude and deep admiration for the remarkable progress we have accomplished together. This past year stands as a testament to the resilience of our community. As the Canadian Arab Women Association (CAWA), we stand proud as a pillar of support for Arab women in Kitchener, Waterloo, Cambridge, and Guelph.

Throughout the challenges we faced, including the recent pandemic, we have emerged stronger with invaluable insights and enhancements. We have polished our ability to adapt and reach more women in need. In response, we have elevated our endeavors, going above and beyond to provide increased assistance to women during these difficult times.

Our growth as an association extends beyond mere numbers. It lies in our ability to cater to the dynamic needs of Arab women, ensuring their empowerment and addressing the unique challenges they face. By recognizing and adapting to their diverse needs, we foster an inclusive and supportive environment.

Since the beginning, our vision has revolved around connecting and empowering Arab women. Our commitment remains unwavering in meeting the evolving needs of women, ensuring that their lives are fulfilled. Throughout this journey, we uphold principles of gender equality, diversity, and inclusion, striving to provide every woman with the opportunity to thrive and succeed.

I am always reminded of my own experience as a newcomer, arriving in Canada with a family and dreams to become a valuable member in our community. It was a leap of faith, driven by the hope of creating a brighter tomorrow for ourselves and our children. This personal journey has shaped my commitment to learning from our experiences and advocating for women who are also seeking a better life for themselves and their families. Sometimes what a woman needs is someone to listen genuinely, to care, and to help her navigate the system to utilize the right support, services and opportunities.

To realize our vision, we must take the lead in shaping the future. This calls for enhancing our capabilities and establishing strong partnerships with other community organizations, friends and funders who share our goals and values.

Collaborations of this nature are crucial for driving positive change and establishing an interconnected system that advances our mission. Together, we can better serve our communities and make meaningful contributions to Canadian society as a whole.

Lastly, I would like to express my gratitude to all the valuable staff, led by our dedicated Executive Director, and our committed volunteers. Your unwavering dedication and commitment have been instrumental in our progress. I extend my appreciation to all our partners for their invaluable support. Together, we are making a significant difference in the lives of women and their families.

Warmest regards,

Saliha Haidar

Chair, Board of Directors
Canadian Arab Women's Association (CAWA)

NEW TERRITORY

While CAWA's focus has always been catering to Arab women in Waterloo and Guelph, 2022 is the year that we expanded our work to serve specific demographics within our community and beyond.

NEW TERRITORY INVESTING IN FUTURE GENERATIONS

While we are proponents of investing in young Arab girls and their development, we know that there are families in our communities who are unable to enrol their children in recreational activities and programming due to financial barriers. In the summer of 2022, with funding from the Kitchener Waterloo Community Foundation, CAWA was able to provide programming for Arab girls between the ages of nine and thirteen at no cost to low-income Arab families.



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

Girls' Zone was a program focused largely on fostering leadership and developing skills, such as independence and advocacy. These young participants had the opportunity to explore careers in fields where women, particularly Arab women, are underrepresented, such as science, math, engineering, and technology. Additionally, physical activity in sports was promoted as a tool to help build confidence in areas which are typically male-dominated.

Ninety Arab girls in Waterloo Region and Guelph were empowered through the **Girls' Zone** program. They participated in fun and age-sensitive activities which provided them with access to new opportunities and new ways of thinking. Through innovative programming and partnerships, CAWA continues to invest in future generations of Arab women.



Photos from the Girls' Zone graduation hosted in September 2022.





Participants at a You Are Not Alone session about knitting.

SERVING THOSE WHO CAME BEFORE US

The issue of isolation runs rampant in the Arab community, particularly for newcomers and refugees, and has only been exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic. CAWA has noted that women over the age of 55 years in our community are disproportionately affected and we have worked to promote connections, especially for those who may face social exclusion. That is why, with funding from the **Government of Canada's New Horizons for Seniors Program**, CAWA developed and implemented a program: “You Are Not Alone”.

The **You Are Not Alone** Program promote connections between women of all ages in the Arab community. From the very beginning, this program has encouraged these women to participate in the community, and many of the program participants are contributing to future generations by offering mentorship to Arab girls and women between the ages of 17 and 21. Through educational sessions, art therapy, book clubs, social gatherings, and cooking classes, CAWA has successfully fostered the full participation of isolated Arab seniors in our community.

A photo taken at a You Are Not Alone session where participants cooked with one another and bonded over their love for food.



EXPANDING OUR CONNECTIONS

Although CAWA's primary focus is to serve Arab girls and women, we believe serving their families is of utmost importance as well. Investing in Arab boys is investing in the friends, brothers, sons, and future partners of Arab girls and women in Waterloo Region and Guelph. That is why this year, we decided to embark on fresh territory and implement a two-day program for Arab boys between the ages of sixteen and nineteen.

In partnership with the **Guelph Police Service**, **Yalla Shabab Go!**, was designed to foster mutual understanding and trust with the Police as well to equip Arab boys with the knowledge they need to maintain their safety and that of their loved ones. Participants engaged in facilitated and interactive discussions, played in team sports with the police, and formed connections that will undoubtedly persist for years to come.



Yalla Shabab Go! participants during an outdoor excursion.

MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS

Mental health is a taboo topic in much of the Middle East, and this is no different for the Arab world. Women's mental health is even less understood and discussed, and this lack of awareness can be detrimental to Arab women. Through funding from the **Canadian Women's Foundation** and a partnership with **Women's Crisis Services of Waterloo Region**, CAWA started the **Recovery Program** in late October. The purpose of the **Recovery Program** is to empower Arab women to overcome their challenges and concerns by prioritizing their mental health and well-being. This program provides professional advice delivered in culturally sensitive ways by specialists, licensed therapists, and mental health experts. Each of these experts are well-versed in female mental health and empowerment. Together, we are breaking down the cultural stigma associated with poor mental health and letting Arab women know that it is okay to ask for help.

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 **MOTHER TO MOTHER**

First implemented in 2020, **Mother to Mother** program is an effort to address issues faced by vulnerable groups of women: pregnant Arab immigrants, refugees, newcomers, or those with very young children. From heightened feelings of isolation from the pandemic to coping with the transition period of becoming and being a mother; these women, babies, and children face tremendous stress on their health. Coupled with living away from family, this can be a significant challenge to face alone.

Thanks to funding provided by **United Way Waterloo Region** and partnerships with **Greenway-Chaplin Community Centre** and **Breastfeeding Buddies of Waterloo Region**, CAWA was able to revive this important component of our overall programming. With a particular focus on normalizing postpartum depression in the Arab community, CAWA has made professional advice accessible to Arab women through virtual and in-person sessions with experts in maternal health. Expectant mothers and those mothers with children under the age of two are provided with opportunities to explore a wide range of topics, including postpartum mental health, breastfeeding, and child development.

CONTINUING PROGRAMS **WORKPRO**

Arab women, particularly refugees and immigrants, often face difficulty when seeking employment in Canada due to a range of factors including language and cultural barriers as well as a lack of Canadian experience. Throughout 2022, CAWA has continued providing the **Economic Integration of Canadian Arab Women in Waterloo Region and Guelph program**, typically referred to as **WorkPro**. This program facilitates the entry of Arab women into the Canadian workforce. At no cost to participants, thanks to the generosity of the **Kitchener Waterloo Community Foundation** and **Women and Gender Equality Canada**, Arab women over the age of 20 years old with a post-secondary diploma receive professional training by certified career coach, Sarah Dodeen.

The **WorkPro** program is part of CAWA's effort to promote the participation and integration of Arab women in Canadian society as well as their financial security, independence, and economic prosperity. In 2022, we celebrated the achievements of our 45 program graduates in a ceremony. Each graduate was provided with a work-appropriate outfit courtesy of **Dress for Success Toronto**.

CONTINUING PROGRAMS **STRONG FAMILIES TOGETHER**

CAWA is committed to breaking down cultural barriers and exploring taboo topics in the Arab community as part of our programming mandate to help Arab Women with personal safety concerns. In 2022, the **Strong Families Together** program continued to equip Arab women with the resources and knowledge they need to support themselves and their families, to maintain their safety, and to recognize signs of unhealthy relationships and domestic abuse. Particularly targeted towards newcomers and refugees, **Strong Families Together** sessions are hosted by professionals in the fields of immigration and family law, domestic violence, and family counselling. These professionals shared vital knowledge with participants in culturally sensitive ways both virtually and in-person.

This program is funded by the Canadian Women's Foundation and is delivered in partnership with **Women's Crisis Services of Waterloo Region**, who work with CAWA to connect newcomers to local resources that they can turn to in times of need.



Attendees at a Strong Families Together event.

CELEBRATING OUR **COMMUNITY**

In 2022, as public health regulations eased in the aftermath of COVID-19, CAWA was able to provide large-scale, in-person events for the first time in two years. We decided that this opportunity should be used to celebrate our culture and recognize the members of our community that are making a difference.

CELEBRATING OUR COMMUNITY MIDDLE EASTERN FESTIVAL

As well as serving the members of the Arab community, CAWA strives to educate the broader community about Arab culture and celebrate with people from all backgrounds and walks of life.



CAWA staff and their family members during the Middle Eastern festival.



On August 13th 2022, we hosted the first ever Middle Eastern Festival in Waterloo Region's history. The event took place in Carl Zehr Square outside Kitchener City Hall, and the day was full of laughter, joy, and connection. Thanks to support from local vendors, the generosity of our sponsors, and the talents of our many performers, CAWA was able to share the rich Arabic culture, music, and food with hundreds of community members.

In addition to forming connections between Arab women, CAWA continues to invest in fostering connection and understanding beyond our community. We hope to continue hosting the Middle Eastern Festival on an annual basis, and are so proud of our debut this year.

THANK YOU TO THE SPONSORS OF THE MIDDLE EASTERN FESTIVAL

Renison University College · Natural Delights · ICON Dental Clinic · Friends of the Foundation for Palestinian Studies · The Tax Mates · Chicken Kitchen Cambridge



Photos taken during the Middle Eastern Festival.







Board members and CAWA's founder and executive director with four of the Arab Women of the Year Awards winners (L to R: Board member Nadia Hashem, winner Amina Ismail, winner Noura Khwiled, winner Ansam Shafie, founder & executive director Asma Alwahsh, winner Bahiyye Ahram, board member Saliha Haidar).

ARAB WOMEN OF THE YEAR AWARDS

In February of 2020, CAWA hosted its first ever Arab Women of the Year Awards ceremony. At this ceremony Arab women from our community were recognized for their contributions, dedication, and achievements at this prestigious event. Although we were unable to celebrate in 2021 due to the pandemic, we continued these celebrations in 2022 with a large-scale, in-person event. This year, we honoured six outstanding Arab women located in Waterloo Region or Guelph at CAWA's Second Annual Arab Women of the Year Awards. Together with our funders, community partners, and supporters, we celebrated their diligence and perseverance in making a difference. Each of these women were nominated by community members, which is a testament to how Arab women lift each other up and the supportive environment we strive to foster. Through recognizing the work of Arab women in this way, we encourage them to push boundaries and commit to the areas that they are passionate about. CAWA continues to foster growth and recognize excellence in the Arab women of Waterloo Region and Guelph.

THANK YOU TO THE SPONSORS OF THE MIDDLE EASTERN FESTIVAL

Toyota Motor Manufacturing Canada Inc. · YourHomeSold Guaranteed Realty · Friends of the Foundation for Palestinian Studies · JG Group of Companies

THE ARAB WOMEN OF THE YEAR



WOMAN IN STEM

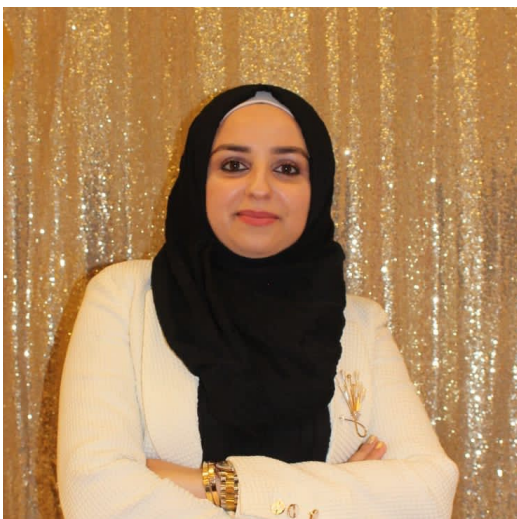
Dr. Heba Alzaben

Dr. Heba Alzaben is an assistant professor at the mechanical engineering department at Al-Hussein Technical University in Amman, Jordan. She received her PhD from the Mechanical and Mechatronics Engineering department at the University of Waterloo, where she was a visiting professor during the Spring 2022 term. She also has a research collaboration with the Department of Mechanical Engineering at her alma mater, where she explores thermodynamics, heat transfer, and energy systems. Dr. Alzaben is a recipient of the 2021 L'Oréal UNESCO for Women in Science Levant Young Talents Program Fellowship.

COMMUNITY IMPACT

Ansam Shafie

Ansam Shafie is an educational assistant with the Waterloo Region District School Board, where she provides support to children with special needs. She employs her gentle and calm approach in her classes for students with autism. Ansam has a passion for community service, and has been recognized for this passion as a recipient of the Transchem Community Contribution Award presented by Conestoga College. She has helped to coordinate and facilitate local initiatives, such as Ramadan Meals on Wheels, a project organized by The Muslim Chaplaincy of Wilfrid Laurier University. In addition, her love for reading makes her the perfect candidate to facilitate book clubs in both English and Arabic for women in the community.



WOMAN IN THE WORKFORCE

Noura Alkhwiled

Noura Alkhwiled is a chef assistant at the University of Waterloo and an entrepreneur with ten years of experience of teaching Arabic and Middle Eastern cooking in Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Canada. Recognizing the great heritage and history of Middle Eastern food, Noura decided to pursue her passion in innovative cooking by reintroducing Middle Eastern cuisine to the Arab community in Canada and the rest of the world. Her social media initiatives focus on teaching her audience how to execute her delicious recipes using the Instant Pot.

THE ARAB WOMEN OF THE YEAR

FUTURE LEADER

Amina Ismail

Amina Ismail is a young and active member of the Waterloo Region community who works and volunteers in the not-for-profit sector. She is currently pursuing a Bachelor of Public Relations at Conestoga College. During her co-op term, Amina worked as a marketing assistant for a medical technology company. Additionally, she created communications material for the KW Chamber Orchestra. As a member of the Mennonite Centre Committee's sponsoring group, Amina has helped to fundraise money for Food4Kids.



MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN GUELPH

Yasmin Haloubi

Yasmin Haloubi, a Syrian woman, uses her extensive experience, human resource skills, and academic background to support newcomers and refugees. She has achieved exceptional success in her field in Syria and Turkey and is committed to using the lessons she has learned there to help others succeed in Canada. As a Community Connections Specialist at Immigrant Services Guelph-Wellington, Yasmin empowers women and girls economically, and advances women's entrepreneurship in Canada.

EXCEPTIONAL ENTREPRENEUR

Bahiyye Ahram

Palestinian-Turkish interior designer Bahiyye Ahram is the founder of Design by Bebo, a staging and design business. Bahiyye is a member of the Board of Directors for the Coalition of Muslim Women. She possesses a bachelor's degree in Architectural Engineering from Beirut Arab University and a Diploma in Interior Decorating & Design from Mohawk College. With ten years of experience in staging and design, she serves clients in Waterloo Region and Hamilton.

