



# NEWSLETTER

Muslim Social Services of Waterloo Region



## WHAT HAS MSSWR BEEN UP TO?

MSSWR has recently welcomed new staff and members to the team, hiring full-time staff, new counsellors, practicum students, and board members. We introduced new programs, collaborations, and partnerships. Keep reading to learn more!

- Distributed more than **60 backpacks** to children in need
- Distributed **more than 65 toys** during Eid
- Provided **2,600+ hours** of counselling
- **160+ Volunteers** and **370+ Participants** have attended events and programs this year!



## OUR IMPACT

MSSWR takes pride in its significant impact on the local community. We are especially grateful for the support, commitment and leadership of our executive director, Duaa Al-Aghar. Under her guidance, MSSWR has initiated various programs, partnerships and collaboration to enhance the well-being of community members, such as educational initiatives, health and wellness workshops, and social support services tailored to diverse needs.

[Read More](#)





# WHAT'S NEW?

## NEW FULL-TIME STAFF

### Liz Cooper

Liz is the Operations Coordinator for Muslim Social Services. She holds an Honours Bachelor's degree in Religion and Culture, and a Master's degree in Religion, Culture, and Global Justice from Wilfrid Laurier University, during which she studied contemporary Muslim communities in Canada and the combatting of Islamophobia. Liz has been awarded the SSHRC Canada Graduate Scholarship and the Zafrin Khandani Memorial Undergraduate Scholarship in Religion and Culture for both her academic efforts and community involvement. Having been an active volunteer at various non-profit organizations throughout the Kitchener-Waterloo region, Liz has worked with helping immigrants through ESL, tutoring, and community-building services. She is passionate about social justice issues and initiatives that promote intercultural harmony.



### Mohammed Rafique

Mohammed Rafique holds a bachelor's degree in Global Business and Digital Arts, with a strong background in project management, user experience, and community service. Passionate about supporting marginalized communities, he has led programs promoting inclusion and empowerment for newcomers and underprivileged families. As Program Manager, Mohammed drives key initiatives, automates workflows, and ensures smooth program execution. His efforts have earned him awards like the Lincoln M. Alexander and Youth Leadership Awards, highlighting his dedication to making a positive impact in the Waterloo Region.



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# WHAT'S NEW?

## NEW COUNSELLORS

### Annelise Baker

Annelise is a counsellor with MSSWR, providing warm and empathetic therapy to children, youth and adults facing various life challenges. With a client-centred approach, Annelise utilizes a variety of trauma-informed and strength-based therapeutic modalities. When working with children and youth, Annelise incorporates art and play as tools to support a creative and engaging environment. With a background in community development, Annelise brings a culturally and spiritually informed approach to her work. Annelise is committed to social justice and equitable access to mental health supports for our community. Having received a Master's in Social Work from Wilfrid Laurier University, Annelise is a Registered Social Worker with the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers. She also has a Bachelor of Arts and Science in Neuroscience and Psychology from the University of Guelph. Annelise looks forward to connecting with new clients as they work towards their goals and navigate their journey of healing and wholeness.



### Sara Samy

Sara Samy is a Registered Psychotherapist (Qualifying) currently completing her practicum with Muslim Social Services. Passionate about the importance of mental health, she believes that mental wellness is essential to leading a balanced and fulfilling life. With a strong commitment to helping individuals navigate their emotional and psychological challenges, she supports clients in developing resilience, gaining self-awareness, and finding inner peace. Her approach to therapy is rooted in person-centered therapy, a humanistic approach that places the client at the heart of the therapeutic process. Person-centered therapy emphasizes empathy, unconditional positive regard, and genuineness, creating a safe and non-judgmental space where clients feel empowered to explore their feelings, thoughts, and experiences. She is particularly drawn to this approach because it fosters a deep connection with clients and encourages self-discovery and personal growth.



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# WHAT'S NEW?

## NEW BOARD MEMBERS

Our new board members, Takhmina and Asu were officially approved during our AGM in July 2024.

**Takhmina Shokirova** is a researcher, educator, and practitioner specializing in social justice and migration. She combines her interdisciplinary education in social work, peace studies, and human rights with professional experience in education and international/local NGOs. Since moving to Canada in 2012 to pursue a PhD in Social Work at Wilfrid Laurier University, Takhmina has called the Waterloo region her home. Her research, teaching, and practice focus on gender equity, migrant workers, international students, and children and youth in migration and global contexts.



**Asu Negash** is a committed professional currently enrolled in the University of Waterloo's Bachelor of Arts Honors in Psychology program. Asu has a strong background in youth leadership, customer service, and educational support. She brings many skills and a wealth of experience to her roles. She has excellent organizational and analytical abilities. Asu has made noteworthy contributions in her roles as a summer camp leader at Muslim Social Services, a youth leader at Chandler Mowat Community Center, a tutor at The Family Centre, a peer leader at the YMCA and a member of the Muslim Youth Council.



## OUR NEW NAME

This year, with the collective decision of board members, staff, and community members, Muslim Social Services Kitchener-Waterloo has formally changed its name to **Muslim Social Services of Waterloo Region**.

This new name truly encompasses our vast reach of services, from Cambridge, Waterloo, Kitchener, and Breslau.

With this new name and with your support, we hope to expand our reach further to more towns and cities in the region.



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# NEW PROGRAMS FALL 2024



**Focus on Healthy Living:** In collaboration with Focus for Ethnic Women, we designed a program to empower women with the knowledge and tools to live a healthier, more fulfilling life. This program ran weekly on Wednesdays at Camino Westmount from September 25 to November 7th, from 1-3pm



**Girls in Sports:** This free program was designed specifically for immigrant girls aged 12-16, and offered an incredible opportunity to develop skills, build confidence, and embrace the spirit of Canadian sports. Whether you're into volleyball, basketball, badminton, or more, this program had something for everyone! This program ran on Thursdays at 6:30pm at Kingsdale Community Centre from Sept 19th to November 7th.



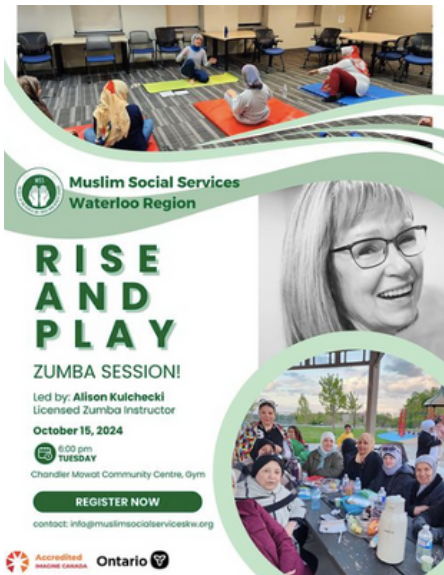
**Champions of Future Youth Program:** The program focused on engaging young boys in weekly sports activities while incorporating mental health and wellness sessions once a month. It was a great way to build physical fitness, develop teamwork, and learn important life skills in a supportive, inclusive environment. It ran on Wednesdays, 6 pm at the gym in The Family Centre.

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# NEW PROGRAMS FALL 2024



Muslim Social Services  
Waterloo Region

## RISE AND PLAY

ZUMBA SESSION!

Led by: **Allison Kulchecki**  
Licensed Zumba Instructor

**October 15, 2024**

6:00 pm  
TUESDAY

Chandler Mowat Community Centre, Gym

**REGISTER NOW**

contact: [info@muslimsocialserviceskw.org](mailto:info@muslimsocialserviceskw.org)

Accredited IMAGINE CANADA Ontario

### RISE & Play: Program for senior women

Seniors! Join our new "Rise and Play," a fun and energizing fitness program designed specifically for senior women!

It was a great opportunity for senior women to stay active, socialize, or simply have fun in a supportive and uplifting environment. No prior experience was needed—just come and enjoy!

It ran on Tuesdays at 6pm, bi-weekly at the Chandler Mowat Community Centre Gym



Muslim Social Services  
Waterloo Region

United Way

## Men's Empowerment Program

Safe space for men to discuss and address various challenges they face, with a special focus on mental health and wellness

**KITCHENER LIBRARY TOUR!**

**TUESDAY, OCTOBER 15 FROM 6 - 8 PM**

KPL Central Library  
85 Queen St N, Kitchener

This is a fantastic opportunity to explore and learn about the library's vast resources and services.

To register contact:  
[info@muslimsocialserviceskw.org](mailto:info@muslimsocialserviceskw.org)

Accredited IMAGINE CANADA

### Men's Empowerment Program

We ran a Men's Empowerment Program bi-weekly on Tuesday evenings, packed with valuable insights and engaging activities designed to uplift and empower the men in our community.

Learn to empower, connect, get active, and have fun! This program runs Tuesdays from 6:00 PM - 8:00 PM at the Chandler Mowat Community Centre



Muslim Social Services  
Waterloo Region

## BUILDING BRIDGES

bringing senior women together through a series of engaging workshops

**Learn to Knit Workshop!**

Thursday, October 17th

12:00 PM  
THURSDAYS

Forest Hills United Church

**REGISTER NOW**

contact: [info@muslimsocialserviceskw.org](mailto:info@muslimsocialserviceskw.org)

Ontario Accredited IMAGINE CANADA WATERLOO REGION Community Foundation

### Building Bridges: Knitting Class

In collaboration with Forest Hill United Church, we offered a Knitting Workshop as part of our Building Bridges program. This initiative aimed to bring senior women from diverse backgrounds together to share in the art of knitting, fostering community connections and cultural exchange in a warm and welcoming environment.

Thursdays bi-weekly at 12:00 pm at Forest Heights Community Centre

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# Muslim Social Services Waterloo Region

## Strategic Plan Snapshot 2024 - 2028



### Mission

MSSWR is a charitable organization that provides culturally- and spiritually sensitive humanitarian and social services to the Muslim and non-Muslim communities of the Waterloo Region. Our mission is to build community capacity through education, empowerment, advocacy, and collaboration, along with providing mental health supports and services that are grounded in spirituality and values of the Islamic faith.

### Vision

A healthy, thriving and inclusive region where all people can live with dignity and respect.

### Values

- Diversity, Equity & Inclusion
- Respect & Compassion
- Social Justice
- Confidentiality
- Collaboration
- Celebration
- Accountability

### Strategic Priorities



**Strategic Goal 1:** Be a Competent, Thriving Organization.

**Strategic Goal 2:** Build, Strengthen, & Broaden Partnerships.

**Strategic Goal 3:** Be a Pulse for the Community.

**Strategic Goal 4:** Be a Leader in Faith-Based, Culturally Sensitive Programming.

**Strategic Goal 5:** Be a Key Accessible and Diverse Service Hub.



Serving the community since 2007.



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## **MSSWR IN THE COMMUNITY**

### **Trip to Niagara Falls**

MSSWR organized an unforgettable trip to Niagara Falls, bringing together over 85 participants, including women, children, seniors, and youth.

A special thank you to our dedicated staff, Sally and Amina, for their incredible efforts in making this trip a reality. With two buses filled with excitement, we headed to the Falls, where the day was packed with breathtaking views, laughter, and meaningful connections.

This trip wasn't just about sightseeing—it was about building community, fostering new friendships, and breaking the isolation many newcomers and seniors face. At Muslim Social Services, we are committed to creating a welcoming space where refugees and newcomers can feel a sense of belonging in their new country. Through trips like this, we aim to help participants build meaningful relationships, reduce isolation, and promote well-being.

Our mission is to ensure that everyone in our community has the opportunity to thrive. Together, we're creating an inclusive, vibrant community where everyone is valued and supported.



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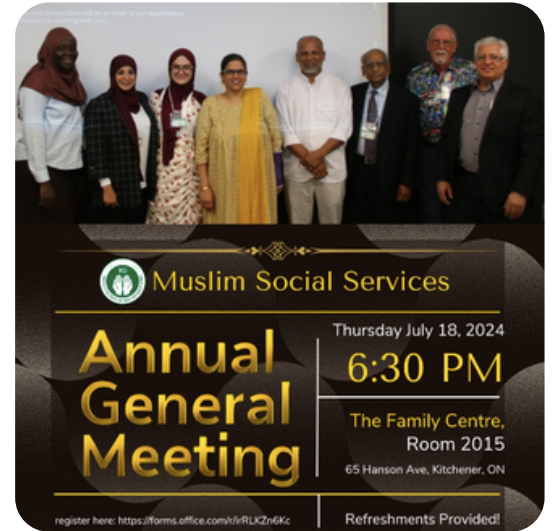






# ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

We want to extend our heartfelt thanks to everyone who supported us during our Annual General Meeting on Thursday, July 18. Your presence and positive feedback made the event a huge success and a significant milestone for our organization. We are excited to announce that we have officially changed our name to Muslim Social Services Waterloo Region to better reflect our growing reach and impact.



## Key Highlights from the AGM:

- Celebrated the incredible achievements and progress of the past year.
- Announced our new programs and initiatives aimed at enhancing community wellbeing.
- Discussed upcoming projects focusing on mental health, women's empowerment, and community safety.
- Received valuable feedback and support from various organizations, reinforcing our mission and vision.

Thank you for your continued support and commitment to making a positive difference in our community.

Together, we are building a brighter future for all!



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# PROGRAMS & EVENTS

## Al Nour Project

We celebrated the Al-Nour Project, a transformative program empowering young women (13-25) to embrace their strength and uniqueness. Participants explored vital topics like strengths, healthy boundaries, self-advocacy, and more!

Al-Nour Project ran for a course of five weeks in August 2024



## Summer Camp Celebration

We're deeply grateful to everyone who made the MSSWR Summer Camp unforgettable! Huge thanks to our volunteers, staff, and supporters like the Canada Summer Jobs program, Waterloo Region Community Foundation, Camino Wellbeing, WRPS, and Islamic Relief Canada for their contributions. We ended the season with a joyful celebration at Police Headquarters, thanks to the warm hospitality of Chief Mark and John Goodman. Your support made it all possible!



## Greenhouse with Indigenous Communities

This Islamic History Month, MSSWR is celebrating by building a greenhouse with the Indigenous Community!

Join us as we work together, make new friends, and learn from the Indigenous community. Together, let's work on individual reconciliation and decolonization through community work.



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## Volunteer Appreciation Party



Thanks to a generous grant from OTF, we've been able to expand our capacity, enhance our strategic planning, and better serve our community. On June 18th, we had the honor of hosting MPP Jess Dixon, who acknowledged our efforts during our Volunteers Appreciation Event. "MSSWR is directly addressing a distinct gap in culturally relevant social services," said MPP Dixon. "Their commitment to community engagement and strategic planning is truly making a difference."

A heartfelt thank you to our incredible volunteers who make all of this possible. Your dedication and hard work are the backbone of our success. Together, we celebrated our milestones and looked forward to a future filled with more growth and community impact!

## Community Garden BBQ

The Community Garden BBQ this past summer with Wisahkotewinowak and Crow Shield Lodge was a great success! We were able to strengthen our bonds as community organizations and learn from each other through delicious food.

The community garden is more than just a project; it's a shared journey towards sustainability, education, and togetherness. Exciting times ahead as we continue to work hand in hand, planting seeds of change.



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# JOURNEY OF RESILIENCE

## Suzan's Story: How Muslim Social Services Changed My Life

When I first arrived in Canada as a refugee, my life was full of fear and uncertainty. As a survivor of domestic violence, I was emotionally broken, unsure of where to turn or how to rebuild my life. I had left behind everything I knew, and although I was safe, I felt lost.

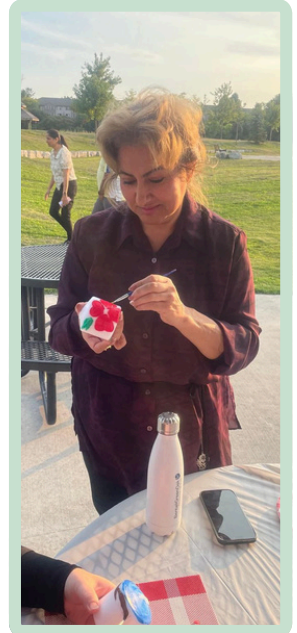
That's when I found Muslim Social Services (MSSWR) in the Waterloo Region. I came across their counselling services, and from the first session, I knew I was in a place where I could finally start healing. MSSWR provided me with not just professional, culturally-sensitive counselling, but also with a safe space to open up about my trauma without fear of judgment. My counsellor's kindness and patience helped me regain my sense of self-worth, and slowly, I started to believe that my past did not define my future.

As I began to heal, MSSWR introduced me to their various programs, and one in particular stood out: the Healing Through Art program. Art had always been a quiet passion of mine, but I never imagined it could be such a powerful tool for recovery. Through art, I found a way to express my pain, my hopes, and my journey of healing. Week by week, I started to reclaim my voice and my sense of control over my own story. The program connected me with others who had similar experiences, and together, we formed a supportive community that empowered one another.

With the support and encouragement of MSSWR, I gained the confidence to begin dreaming again. I had never thought that I would one day be in a position to help others, but here I am now, working part-time at Muslim Social Services, leading the very Art program that helped me so much. It feels surreal to be able to give back in such a meaningful way and to help other women on their own healing journeys. Seeing them grow and gain strength through art, just as I did, fills me with hope every day.

Muslim Social Services didn't just provide me with help when I needed it the most; they gave me a community, a sense of belonging, and the tools to rebuild my life. Today, I am stronger than I ever imagined I could be. MSSWR gave me the courage to transform my pain into something beautiful, and for that, I will forever be grateful.

To any woman out there who feels lost or unsure of her future, know that healing is possible, and organizations like Muslim Social Services are there to guide you. I'm living proof that with the right support, a new chapter filled with hope and purpose is always possible.



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# STORY OF HOPE AND HEALING

## Entisar's Journey of Healing and Belonging with MSSWR

Entisar came to Canada as a refugee from Iraq, fleeing war and instability in search of a better life for her family. After spending some time in Burlington, she and her family moved to Waterloo, hoping for a fresh start. However, upon arriving in a new city, Entisar felt lost and overwhelmed. She had no local support system and was struggling with the emotional toll of her past experiences as well as the challenges of adjusting to a new life. The sense of isolation weighed heavily on her, and she began to experience depression and other mental health challenges.

Everything changed when Entisar met Duaa Al-Aghar, the Muslim Social Services Executive Director (MSSWR). Duaa immediately welcomed her with warmth and understanding, recognizing the emotional burden she carried as a newcomer. Duaa introduced her to MSSWR's many supportive programs and connected her with Shiwan, an Arabic-speaking counsellor at MSSWR. For the first time since arriving in Canada, Entisar felt truly understood and safe to express her feelings in her native language. Through her counselling sessions with Shiwan, she began to confront her trauma and work through her emotions in a culturally sensitive and supportive environment.

Duaa also introduced Entisar to MSSWR's Mindful Community Gardening Program, a collaborative project with Indigenous organizations that fosters mental well-being through reconnecting with nature. This program allowed Entisar to grow fresh produce and build meaningful relationships with others in her community. It was here that she found solace and peace, discovering that gardening was a way to nurture her healing.

Entisar didn't stop there. She also joined MSSWR's Building Bridges Program, where she connected with other women through workshops and activities designed to empower participants to build strong support networks. Being part of a community of women who shared her struggles and triumphs helped Entisar rediscover her self-worth and develop a sense of belonging.

In addition, she became involved in the Healing Through Art program, where creative expression allowed her to process her trauma in a new and transformative way. This program became an outlet for her to express her emotions, and it gave her the strength to face her mental health challenges head-on.

Through MSSWR's Healthy Living Program, Entisar began to take better care of her physical and emotional well-being. She learned to embrace a balanced lifestyle that supported her journey toward mental and physical health.

The transformation in Entisar's life has been remarkable. With the support of MSSWR, she found herself surrounded by a caring community and a network of programs that empowered her to reclaim her mental and emotional health. Entisar describes MSSWR as her "big family," where she found healing, hope, and a sense of belonging that had been missing since her arrival in Canada.

Today, Entisar is thriving. She continues to participate in MSSWR's programs and is deeply grateful for the support she received. Her story is one of resilience and the power of community, showing how MSSWR's culturally sensitive counselling services and programs can truly change lives. Entisar now feels that Waterloo is her home, and she credits MSSWR for helping her rebuild her life and giving her the tools to create a brighter future for herself and her family.



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## LEGACY AWARD



On December 9th, MSSWR attended the Partners Meeting at the Family Centre to discuss accomplishments from 2024 and future plans for 2025. MSSWR has been a partner at the Family Centre for many years, and were presented with the Legacy Award from the Family Centre. We are honoured to accept this award and extend our thanks to the Family Centre for their recognition and partnership!

### IMPORTANT NOTICE

Please note that we have recently changed our email domain to **@msswr.org**. Please update this email address in your contacts list accordingly.

Our website's address has changed to **www.msswr.org**



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# WARM HEARTS, OPEN MINDS

## MSSWR COUNSELLING HOLIDAY CAMPAIGN

This holiday season, join us in bringing hope through Warm Hearts, Open Minds, our online campaign supporting Muslim Social Services' vital counselling programs.

Your contribution helps empower newcomers, youth, and families facing emotional and mental challenges by ensuring access to culturally sensitive care and a compassionate space for healing. Together, we can make a lasting impact. ✨

Donate today and be part of the change!



[\*\*DONATE NOW\*\*](#)



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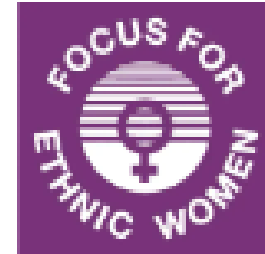


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# NEW PARTNERSHIPS

We have established partnerships with Women that Give, Ruh Care, The READ Project, Schlegel-UW Research Institute for Aging and Focus on Ethnic Women. Moreover, we have formalized Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with Focus for Ethnic Women (FEW), Women That Give, and Ruh.





# SPECIAL EVENTS

## WARM HEARTS, OPEN MINDS

### COUNSELLING WORKSHOP

To wrap this campaign, we will be hosting an in-person workshop to further the understanding of culturally sensitive counselling.

 **Date:** January 10th, 2024

 **Time:** 6:00 PM – 7:15 PM

 **Location:** 645 Westmount Rd E Kitchener, ON N2E 3S3  
(Camino Building Downstairs Board Room)

#### What to Expect:

Learn more about MSSWR's counseling services, including their role in supporting newcomers, youth, and families. Gain insights into culturally sensitive mental health care. Discover how your support contributes to healing and growth within our community.

For more details, please contact [mrafique@mssw.org](mailto:mrafique@mssw.org)

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# EMPOWER AND ELEVATE AWARDS GALA



On November 13th, we proudly hosted our first annual **Elevate & Empower Community Builders Awards Gala!** Held at the beautiful Victoria Park Pavilion, the evening celebrated the changemakers who strengthen and uplift the Waterloo Region with unity, resilience, and compassion.

Guests enjoyed a delicious halal meal, a lively silent auction, and an inspiring keynote by Amira Elghawaby, Canada's first Special Representative on Combatting Islamophobia, whose speech emphasized hope and collective efforts for inclusivity.

Thank you to our partners, sponsors, and everyone who joined us in making this night an unforgettable celebration of empowerment and community building.

We're grateful to everyone who joined and contributed to making this evening an unforgettable celebration of hope, empowerment and shared commitment to community building. Here's to continuing the mission of uplifting each other and nurturing a stronger, more inclusive Waterloo Region.



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## OUR SUPPORTERS

MSSWR is honoured and grateful for the support received by our community at this gala. Several organizations supported and sponsored us at our gala. Thank you to our sponsors: Islamic Relief Canada, Aim Direct, Family & Children's Services Foundation, Kaleem Rehman, Realty Executives, Mennonite Central Committee, Starling Canada, Kindred Credit Union, BrokerLink, Region of Waterloo, Coalition of Muslim Women, SHORE Centre, City of Waterloo, and Porchlight. With your support, we ran an incredibly successful event!



## Sincere Thanks to Our Community Partners!

We deeply appreciate the businesses and organizations that supported our silent auction for the Empower and Elevate Gala.

Your generosity empowers our mission to foster a more inclusive and compassionate community, supporting programs that uplift mental health, youth, and families.

Together, we're creating meaningful change and building a brighter future!

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# OUR AWARD WINNERS



**SPIRIT OF  
MSSWR**



**Afnan Al-Najjar**



**FOUNDER'S SOCIAL  
JUSTICE**



**Fauzia Baig & Mike Morrice**



**EMERGING  
LEADER**



**Haniya Nazir**



**INSPIRING WOMEN**



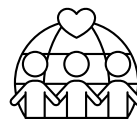
**Zahra Mohamed & Hoda Ghonim**



**BEACON OF  
STRENGTH**



**Rubina Bilal**



**COMMUNITY  
ALLYSHIP**



**Camino Wellbeing +  
Mental Health**





# MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

## CLICK TO DONATE TODAY.

3 easy ways to give financially:




**Online at:**  
[canadahelps.org](http://canadahelps.org)

**e-transfer at:**  
[msskwdonations@gmail.com](mailto:msskwdonations@gmail.com)

**Call us at:**  
519-772-4399 ext. 2707

### Volunteer



Please visit  
[msswr.org](http://msswr.org)

to learn about the latest opportunities to help

## INCREASE YOUR IMPACT WITH MONTHLY GIVING!

Consider becoming a MONTHLY DONOR! Monthly giving provides ongoing program support to newcomers and marginalized individuals within the region. To become a donor, please give us a call at 519-772-4399 ext. 2707

[DONATE NOW](#)



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