



NEWSLETTER

Muslim Social Services Waterloo Region



WHAT HAS MSS BEEN UP TO?

MSS has been busy creating new partnerships, programs, and collaborations these past six months. MSS is now collaborating with Reception House, CJI, White Owl, Lutherwood Employment Services, Family and Children Services WR, WRDSB, WRPS, and Women Crisis Services

- Prepared **250 meals** for the homeless
- Distributed **400 warmth kits**
- Hosted the annual community iftar, with over **300 attendees**.
- Distributed over **200 food baskets** during Ramadan
- Provided **2,500 hours** of counselling
- **150+ Volunteers** and **350+ Participants**
- **35+ people graduated** from the Community Safety and Wellbeing Program with WRPS



OUR REACH

MSS takes pride in its significant impact on the local community, receiving awards from local supporters and funders, including our executive director, Duaa Al-Aghar, for her outstanding leadership and commitment. Under her guidance, MSS has initiated various programs 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](#)



MSS SUCCESS AND MILESTONES

We are overjoyed to announce that Muslim Social Services is proud to announce our nomination for the Community Impact United Way WRC Spirit Award!

This prestigious recognition highlights our organization's unwavering dedication to serving the community and making a positive impact on the lives of individuals in the Waterloo Region. We are deeply grateful for the acknowledgment of our contribution, our exceptional leadership, and our unwavering passion,

We want to extend our heartfelt appreciation to United Way for recognizing our efforts and to everyone who has supported us along this journey. Your support, care, and determination have been instrumental in our ability to assist the most vulnerable members of our community, especially during these challenging times.



The Spirit Awards not only honour the work being done but also serve as a catalyst for inspiring further action within our community. Let's continue to build momentum and make a lasting difference together!



Our Executive Director Duaa Al-Aghar has been selected as the first Arab Muslim woman from Canada of Iraqi descent to be featured in the Encyclopedia of Leading Arab Women 2024! This achievement is not only a tremendous honor for her but also a source of pride and gratitude for all Arab sisters recognized alongside her.

Having such a leader is incredibly important for Muslim social services, as it provides representation, inspiration, and guidance for our community. Her leadership will empower women, break barriers, and foster inclusivity within our organization and beyond. With her at the helm, we are better equipped to address the unique needs and challenges faced by Muslim women and families.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the Arab Women's Media Network, Dr. Muath Salah al-Din, and the judging committee for this extraordinary recognition, which highlights the remarkable accomplishments of Arab women on both local and global scales.



519-772-4399 x 2707



info@muslimsocialserviceskw.org



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INTRODUCING NEW MEMBERS

New Staff - Counsellor

Malik Javed Awan is a highly qualified professional, holding a master's degree in psychology with a specialization in counselling. He is genuinely passionate about engaging with diverse individuals and understanding their unique stories. Malik thrives on the



opportunity to meet new people and provide them with the support they need. His journey began at the YMCA, where he initially embarked on his career path, immersing himself in the vibrant community and embracing the opportunity to make a difference. Malik's time at the YMCA served as a foundation for his commitment to fostering inclusivity and support within communities. There, he honed his skills in active listening, empathy, and community engagement, setting the stage for his future endeavors.

Throughout his career, Malik has dedicated over 15 years to assisting immigrants in integrating into society and empowering them while working at

Immigrant Services. Malik earned the trust and admiration of those he served through his genuine care and empathetic approach. In addition to his extensive experience with immigrant services, Malik has also contributed to various community-based initiatives, focusing on mental health awareness and support. His dedication to mental health advocacy has made a significant impact, helping to reduce stigma and promote understanding within diverse communities.

Languages: English, Urdu, Hindi, and Punjabi

New Staff - Counsellor

Razak Aziz completed his Master of Social Work degree from the University of Windsor and holds an undergraduate degree from the University of Manitoba. He is a registered Social Worker with the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers. Razak's clinical approach begins by meeting people where they are in their life journey, and then working together on the path to healing and growth. He employs a strengths-based perspective that helps build capacity, self-esteem, and a growth mindset.

Over the last 20 years, Razak has had and continues to have, the privilege of working with individuals in various social work settings. His extensive experience spans community organizations, mental health services, and educational institutions, where he has developed a deep understanding of the complexities faced by diverse populations.

Currently, Razak works as a school Social Worker at the Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District School Board. In this role, his expertise is focused on working with children and youth who are struggling with depression, coping skills, grief, and social media addictions. He utilizes brief therapy techniques to provide effective, targeted support that addresses these issues promptly. His dedication to his profession and his compassionate approach make him a valued and respected member of the social work community.



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New Board Member

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.



ENGAGING WITH OUR COMMUNITY

Distributing the Warmth Kits to unhoused people

In collaboration with Islamic Relief, Muslim Social Services (MSS) has distributed over 250 Warmth Winter Kits to unhoused individuals this winter. MSS also provided hygiene supplies and blankets to Ray of Hope and Women's Crisis Centre, supporting survivors of gender-based violence. We stand with these resilient women, offering them comfort and assistance when in need. Additionally, MSS extended its reach to YMCA shelters, ensuring that those seeking refuge have the necessities they require for a comfortable stay.

This is what community looks like – coming together to uplift and support one another. Join us in our mission to build an inclusive community and make a positive impact. Your support matters!



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Annual Community Iftar Dinner

On March 23rd, 2024, Muslim Social Services collaborated with Islamic Relief of Canada for the Annual Community Iftar. The event was a lovely testament to unity, compassion, and the essence of Ramadan, with numerous community leaders and organizations in attendance. Additionally, we shed light on the ongoing situation in Palestine, and through the generosity of attendees, many contributed to Islamic Relief to aid our brethren in Gaza. Truly thankful for the profound impact of such gatherings!



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Ramadan Food Drive

This Ramadan, we proudly completed a successful food drive, distributing over 100 food boxes to needy families throughout the Waterloo Region. This was made possible with the support of many partner organizations and generous community members like you!

As part of our ongoing efforts to combat food insecurity, we need your continued support. Every donation helps and reaches families who need it most.



Cooking for Unhoused Individuals

In April, Muslim Social Services teamed up with Islamic Relief Canada to cook and distribute over 200 meals to our unhoused neighbours at Ray of Hope. Together, we're making a difference, one meal at a time. Let's keep building a more inclusive, strong, and healthy community where everyone feels a sense of belonging and thrives. You can be part of this journey too! Help us end hunger by donating through the link below. Together, we can make a lasting impact.



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Mental Health at Intersections

We had the privilege of collaborating with some wonderful organizations to host the 'Mental Health at the Intersections' event. A big thank you to Camino Wellbeing + Mental Health, Kind Minds Family Wellness, and Bridge to Belonging.

We are grateful to the staff, volunteers, and speakers who made this event a great success!

Speakers: Iona Sky, Haniya Nazir, Nicole Brown Faulknor, Karen Lord, Alicia Pilgrim, & Desaree Rosskopf



Mental Health at the Intersections

Thursday, May 9, 2024
5-8PM EST

Camino Mental Health + Wellbeing
480 Charles Street East, Kitchener, N2G 4K5



On the Table Event with WRCF

On June 7th, we collaborated with Waterloo Region Community Foundation to discuss social infrastructure – the organizations, spaces, and experiences that help people connect, build trust, foster civic participation, and create a sense of belonging, all vital for sustainable community development.

The event brought together community members from diverse backgrounds to discuss the important topic of belonging. Many attendees shared how they feel safe and welcome when they visit Muslim Social Services, where they experience a true sense of belonging. We also explored the barriers to feeling belonging and brainstormed ways to reduce these obstacles in the Waterloo Region.

During our community dialogue, participants provided insightful responses on how they feel belonging and the challenges they face.



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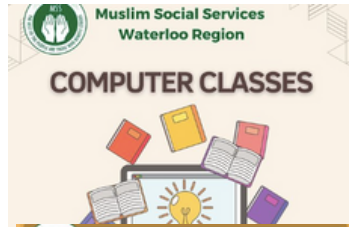


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NEW PROGRAMMING HIGHLIGHTS



Muslim Social Services is joining forces with CJL for an incredible initiative! Starting at the end of January 2024, we ran the Caregiver Conflict Coaching Group program for 10 weeks.

We hosted a special potluck party celebrating Black History Month in February to honour the diversity and rich history of Black culture.

We launched "Thrive Together for Boys" which is a dynamic program dedicated to support the mental health and social well-being of young boys through the power of sports. By creating a safe and engaging environment, we encourage participants to develop healthy relationships, build self-esteem, and foster teamwork, ensuring that every boy has the opportunity to thrive both on and off the field

We started weekly posts focusing on addressing various mental health topics and providing strategies to cope effectively. Our aim is to provide valuable insights and resources to support mental well-being journey. Together, we can promote mental health awareness and empower each other to thrive!

Aiming to create a stronger future, we are providing more services tailored to youth including Employment program

[Read More](#)



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TESTIMONIALS



Transforming Lives Through MSS Counseling Services

When one family first reached out to MSS, they were struggling with overwhelming challenges. The stress from financial instability, coupled with the emotional toll of adapting to a new country, had created a tense and challenging home environment. The parents were particularly concerned about their teenage daughter, who had become withdrawn and was struggling in school.

Upon contacting MSS, the family was connected with one of our experienced counsellors. From the very first session, the counsellor provided a safe, understanding, and non-judgmental space for each family member to express their concerns and feelings. She worked closely with them to identify the root causes of their stress and developed a tailored plan to address their specific needs.

Through consistent counselling sessions, the counsellor helped the parents improve their communication skills and rebuild trust within their relationship. She provided them with practical strategies to manage their stress and support each other better. Meanwhile, the teenage daughter received individual counselling to address her anxiety and academic struggles. The counsellor introduced her to mindfulness techniques and study strategies that significantly improved her mental well-being and school performance.

Over the course of several months, the family experienced a remarkable transformation. The parents reported feeling more connected and supportive of each other. Their home environment became more peaceful, and they learned how to manage conflicts constructively. The daughter blossomed into a confident and motivated student, finding joy in her studies and social interactions.

This family's story is just one example of the many lives MSS counselling services have positively impacted. Our commitment to providing compassionate and effective support has empowered countless families to overcome their challenges and build healthier, happier futures. The family is grateful for the guidance and support they received from MSS, and their success story stands as a testament to the profound impact of our counselling services on the community.



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TESTIMONIALS

Saving a Life Through MSS Counseling Services

When a young girl reached out to MSS, she was in a dark place, overwhelmed by feelings of hopelessness and despair. Struggling with severe depression and thoughts of ending her life, she felt isolated and believed there was no way out. Her family, devastated and unsure how to help, turned to MSS for support.

The girl was connected with an MSS counsellor who specialized in crisis intervention and adolescent mental health. From their very first session, the counsellor created a safe, compassionate, and non-judgmental space where the girl could openly share her struggles. The counselor listened attentively, offering empathy and understanding, while also reassuring her that she was not alone.

Through a series of intensive counselling sessions, the counsellor helped the girl explore the underlying issues contributing to her depression. They worked on developing coping strategies, such as mindfulness and stress management techniques, to help her navigate her emotions more effectively. The counsellor also introduced her to cognitive-behavioural therapy, which helped challenge and reframe her negative thought patterns.

Simultaneously, the counsellor provided the family with guidance on how to support their daughter during this critical time. They learned how to communicate more effectively, recognize warning signs, and create a supportive and nurturing home environment. Family counselling sessions helped rebuild trust and strengthen their bonds, fostering a sense of unity and resilience.

Over time, the girl's outlook began to change. She started to feel a glimmer of hope and discovered new ways to manage her feelings. The support from her family, combined with the consistent and compassionate care from her MSS counsellor, played a crucial role in her recovery. She began to see a future for herself, filled with possibilities and a renewed sense of purpose.

Today, the young girl is thriving. She continues to work on her mental health, supported by her family and ongoing counselling. Her journey is a powerful testament to the life-saving impact of MSS counselling services. Her family is profoundly grateful for the guidance and support they received during their darkest hours, and their story stands as a beacon of hope for others facing similar challenges.

The dedication and expertise of the MSS counselling team have made a lasting difference in their lives, demonstrating the profound importance of mental health support in our community.



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TESTIMONIALS

Testimonial from Entisar, a Participant in the Gardening Program

"As a new refugee, I felt lost and isolated when I first arrived. Joining the MSS Gardening Program has been a blessing beyond words. The MSS community has become like family to me, offering support and friendship when I needed it most. Planting and tending to the garden has been a healing experience, providing me with a sense of peace and purpose. I find myself counting the days until I can return to the garden, where I feel truly at home. The joy and healing I've found here are something I will always cherish."

Testimonial from Hayat, a Senior Participant in the Gardening Program

"As a senior, finding activities that are both fulfilling and enjoyable can be challenging. The MSS Gardening Program has been a wonderful discovery for me. It has provided not only a peaceful and engaging hobby but also a sense of community and belonging. The warmth and support from everyone at MSS make me feel like I'm part of a big, caring family. Gardening has become a therapeutic escape, and I leave each session feeling rejuvenated and happy. This program has brought so much joy and purpose into my life."



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THRIVE TOGETHER YOUTH PROGRAM

Muslim Social Services and WCSWR

Supporting young men to thrive supports healthy communities



The Thrive Together Youth Program is delivered by Muslim Social Services in collaboration with Women’s Crisis Services of Waterloo Region, which provides services to women and children experiencing abuse. Thriving men are an important part of any healthy community. This new program was developed to address young men’s mental health and wellbeing. It provides a collaborative space for young men to explore, engage with, and learn about life topics that are necessary for their interpersonal and professional success.



Program facilitators work with young men aged 14 - 20 to help them better understand themselves and their role as contributors to their surroundings. In an inclusive and collaborative environment, participants gather while talking as a group, discussing topics with a counsellor, going on outings, and playing sports. This is a unique space where young men can explore topics that are meaningful to them and consider their desired place in the world, with the support and guidance of program facilitators and a trained counsellor.

“[I’m learning] a lot of new things.”

“You can...learn valuable life skills such as goal-setting, resume writing, and recognizing your emotions.”

Program Start: February 23, 2024
4-6 participants

Weekly on Fridays, resuming in the Fall
MSS Office - The Family Centre



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COMMUNITY SAFETY AND WELLBEING WITH POLICE



Muslim Social Services and WRPS

Increasing mutual awareness, understanding, and trust



Community Safety and Wellbeing with Police is a collaboration between Muslim Social Services and Waterloo Regional Police Services. This program provides a unique opportunity to increase awareness and inform participants of their legal rights and responsibilities. This space also allows for the development of trust and understanding between community members and members of the police force.

The police provided helpful information on issues such as cybercrime, hate crimes, bullying, and human trafficking. The meetings allowed community members and the police to engage in a non-confrontational context. Participants gained a better understanding of risks and safety within the community, as well as guidance on how to work with police to address any issues. Members of the police force gained an opportunity to connect with and better understand community members. The program is well attended, open to everyone ages 14 +. Here's what some of our participants enjoyed about the program:



“[I received] very important information.”

“The time and communications...everything [was] very organized and helpful.”

“I liked everything, I love everything about the police.”

“This program is a good chance to learn about our safety, rights, and community wellbeing.”

Program Dates: February 14, 2024 - May 15, 2024
15 - 20 participants

Bi-monthly on Wednesdays
Country Hills Community Centre



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MINDFUL GARDENING

Muslim Social Services and White Owl

Healing and wellness in connection with land

The Mindful Gardening Program is a partnership between Muslim Social Services and White Owl, an Indigenous, land-based organization which provides education and fosters healing through wholistic practices. The Mindful Gardening program is intended to promote healing and wellness by combating isolation and building community connections.



The program launched on May 24th and participants have already begun to provide positive feedback. This program provides a space where newcomers, refugees, and Indigenous people share knowledge and care for one another, practicing harmonious living with land. Participants have met together to see the garden space and begin planting. They will continue to work together, learning from professional gardeners about cultivating mindfulness, nurturing green spaces, and general gardening practices.

The program is off to an exiting start and we look forward to participant feedback in the future!

Program Start: May 24th, 2024
15 - 17 participants

Weekly on Fridays
466 Queen Street South, Kitchener



519-772-4399 x 2707



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HEALING THROUGH ART

Muslim Social Services

Two separate programs, for adults and children

Healing Through Art is a program delivered by Muslim Social Services, which utilizes the connection between creativity and wellbeing to support participants. Staff facilitate two separate groups for children and adults, where participants can connect with each other in a safe space and express themselves through creative projects. The adult’s program is open to adult women and the kid’s’ program welcomes children ages 4 – 14.



Engaging in fun, creative activities allows participants to explore emotions in a supportive environment, discussing topics like belonging, daily challenges, grief, and successes. Facilitators work with children to explore emotions and learn about emotion management through fun activities. Adult participants enjoy gathering together, talking about life and family, and taking time away from their responsibilities to care for themselves.

“[I enjoyed] the art and the leaders.”

“We are meeting new friends and it is safe.”

“[This is] an organized and creative program.”

Program Start: January 9, 2024
15 - 20 Participants

Weekly on Tuesdays
Forest Heights Community Centre



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NEW PARTNERSHIPS

We have established partnerships with CJJ, White Owl, Starling Community Services, Family and Children Services, WRDSB, WRPS, and Women Crisis Services. Moreover, we have formalized Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with the WRDSB and the FACS. Additionally, we are currently in the process of finalizing an MOU with Khalil Center, a psychological and spiritual community wellness center dedicated to advancing the professional practice of psychology grounded in Islamic principles.



FAMILY & CHILDREN'S SERVICES OF THE WATERLOO REGION



KHALIL CENTER
A ZAKAT FOUNDATION PROJECT



WATERLOO REGIONAL POLICE



Women's Crisis Services
OF WATERLOO REGION



MUSLIM SOCIAL SERVICES

KIDS SUMMER CAMP

RECREATIONAL AND EDUCATIONAL CAMP FOR KIDS AGES 4-14

MANY FUN ACTIVITIES:
Outdoor adventures, Art therapy, Active games, Learning new things, Weekly field trips!

150\$ PER CHILD FOR EACH WEEK!

Week 1: August 5-9
Week 2: August 12-16
Week 3: August 19-23
Week 4: August 26-30

August 2024
9:30 AM - 3:00 PM
Camino, 645 Westmount, Kitchener

More Information
519 772 4399 ext. 2707
info@muslimsocialserviceskw.org
Subsidies available upon approval!

REGISTER ONLINE:
<https://forms.gle/gs4oCUNkGVCnwKqt8>

UPCOMING EVENTS

- The Annual General Meeting on July 18th
- Volunteer Appreciation Party on June 18th
- Ontario Trillium Foundation Recognition Event on June 18th
- Summer Camp
- Job fair by end of August



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CLICK TO DONATE TODAY.

3 easy ways to give financially:




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e-transfer at:
msskwdonations@gmail.com

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

Volunteer



Please visit
muslimsocialserviceskw.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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