



RESPONDING TO THE QUEBEC CITY MOSQUE SHOOTING EMPOWER. ENGAGE. ENCOURAGE

Final Report

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The Coalition of Muslim Women of KW



Coalition of
Muslim Women
Kitchener-Waterloo

Executive Summary:

The Coalition of Muslim Women of KW (CMW) successfully completed its series of public forums and events offered between February and July 2017 in response to the Quebec City Mosque shooting. This project was funded by The Kitchener and Waterloo Community Foundation – The Motz Family Endowment and supported by KW Counselling Services. In addition Waterloo Regional Police Service, WRPS Hate Crime and Extremism Unit, City of Kitchener, Family and Children's Services of Waterloo Region, and National Council of Canadian Muslims provided financial and in-kind support for different components of the project.

This most recent series of forums organized by CMW Hate Crimes Project Team was to address the Muslim community's need to come together in the aftermath of the tragic Quebec City Mosque shooting in January, 2017. CMW has taken a multi-pronged approach to address the issue at hand. It has provided workshops for Muslim women and youth, organized a town hall with political leaders and the general public. It also spearheaded community bridge building projects such as "Salams KW, Salams Canada, KW' first Muslim community Blood Donation Drive, and Give 30 KW.

This series was highly successful due to several reasons. Firstly, it provided the Muslim community to come together in a safe space and share their hurt, confusion, frustration and sorrow which was a healing experience. Town hall and Allies against Islamophobia promoted a spirit of camaraderie between Muslim community and the larger community. Acts of kindness campaigns brought together our communities in a very powerful way, facilitating shared healing and hope for the future. Secondly, CMW acquired more experience in being a voice for the community regarding Islamophobia. Muslim women in particular felt empowered as they became the public face of the effort to address Islamophobia, which disproportionately affects them as they often are victims of explicit and implicit manifestations of Islamophobia. Thirdly, the larger community learned more about resources available to them. Fourthly, valuable partnerships were built throughout the project. Local mosques and Islamic organizations joined hands with CMW to raise over 12,000 for The Food Bank of Waterloo Region and to run a very successful blood donation drive for the Canadian Blood Services. Waterloo Region Police Services, City of Kitchener and Family and Children's Services of Waterloo Region provided the much needed resources throughout. And finally, the project also brought together diverse cultural communities and religious denominations within the Muslim community for a common cause, thus helping to overcome intra-community silos.

Project Activities:

CMW employed the following three-pronged approach to the issue at hand.

Empower Muslim Community (with a focus on women and youth) through education and connections

Engage the larger community in the discussion about Islamophobia and how to be an ally

Encourage connections between Muslim community and the larger community through acts of kindness.

EMPOWER

Forum for Muslim Women

The first forum was held on February 17th for Muslim women. The aim of the forum was to facilitate conversations for Muslim women, to enable them to share experiences and thoughts safely, to educate them regarding how to recognize and report hate crime/hate incidents, and to encourage them to actively participate in the larger community as the best way to counter Islamophobia. Women's forum was very well attended as around 45 women joined the conversation. Participants could openly share the incidents of hate they have encountered both in-person and online. Overall, women expressed concerns about their own safety, particularly about protecting their children from discrimination and bullying which occurs in schools and playgrounds. The forum included short presentations by CMW Hate Crime Prevention Project Coordinator, WRPS (Waterloo Regional Police Services) and Victims Services. The conversation that ensued with the presenters was very beneficial as the participants could ask their questions and share their concerns directly with the police officer.

Forum for Muslim Youth

The second forum was for Muslim youth and was held on February 25th 2017. It was more of an intimate group with 10 youth in attendance. Quebec City shooting had a different impact on youth born in Canada. These youths do not have a direct link to their parent's countries of origin. Their first identity is that of Canada, rather than their parent's dual identity of their countries of birth. Youth participants discussed discriminatory statements or jokes they have heard, both in their learning environments (i.e. classrooms), and on Social Media. However, both Muslim women and youth made a point to mention positive support they have received from the larger community after Quebec Mosque shooting. Youth also talked about arranging seminars in school that counter the many stereotypes attached to their Muslim identity. This forum had representation from WRPS, Hate Crime Prevention Unit, and Waterloo Region District School Board. Participants were again informed on how to recognize hate crimes vs. hate incidents, how to be safe, and who to contact while in school buildings if they feel unsafe.

Media coverage: <http://www.therecord.com/news-story/7160341-people-now-accepting-islamophobia-as-a-real-thing-teen-says-at-forum-for-muslim-youth/>

Coffee House

On March 29th, the Coalition of Muslim Women of KW presented a Coffee House titled "Still We Rise: Coffee House and Conversation at Café Pyrus" in downtown Kitchener. The focus of the event was two-fold: firstly, to uplift the voices of talented artists from the local Muslim community, and secondly, to create an occasion where the broader community could come together to converse about – and heal from – rising Islamophobic sentiments. This event specifically intended to uplift the voices of young Muslim women artists in the KW community. The event, open to both men and women, was planned, coordinated and presented by young Muslim women artists from KW. The venue (Cafe Pyrus) was packed with about 60 attendees, most of who were university students.

Town Hall on Islamophobia

This event provided a safe space for members of the Muslim community to share their concerns about and experiences of Islamophobia with their political leaders. Over 180 community members attended the forum. The Honourable Bardish Chagger, MP Marwan Tabbara, MP Raj Saini, MPP Daiene Vernile, Mayor Berry Vrbancovic, Mayor Dave Jaworski and Police Chief Bryan Larkin opened the forum with providing their own reflection on what can we do as a community to address rising Islamophobia following by about 90 minutes Q/A session. Questions ranged from what number to call to report a hate incident / hate crime, to how to deal with everyday experiences of "micro aggressions" and what actions Muslim community can take to build bridges with the larger community.

Pictures can be viewed here:

https://www.facebook.com/pg/CoalitionOfMuslimWomen.KW/photos/?tab=album&album_id=1455805497814606



Coffee House: March 29th, 2017 @ Café Pyrus



Town Hall on Islamophobia: April 22nd, 2017 @ Victoria Hills Community Centre

ENGAGE

Allies Against Islamophobia

Allies Against Islamophobia was held on July 10th at Victoria Park Pavilion, Kitchener. Over 150 individuals representing several community organizations, politicians and community members attended the forum which started with a keynote by Melissa Finn, a post doc researcher at University of Waterloo. Her work specializes on issues related to political participation, civic engagement, and social belonging among ethnic minority youth in Canada and East Africa, and how activists among them mobilize citizenship and invigorate the public sphere. Melissa presented on Islamophobia and L.O.V.E: Leveraging our Oneness with Vibrancy and Equanimity.

The second presenter Amira Alghawaby, travelled from Ottawa to present on Canadian history and stats about Islamophobia and increase in hate crimes against Muslims in general in the past few years. Amira Alghawaby is an activist and advocates human rights & civil liberties of diverse communities. She is the Communication Director for National Council of Canadian Muslims.

The most powerful segment of the forum was “Lived Experience Panel”. Three Muslim women including a youth talked about their personal stories of being harassed by strangers because of their appearance and faith. The audience was moved by their presentations and many people became emotional after hearing their personal stories.

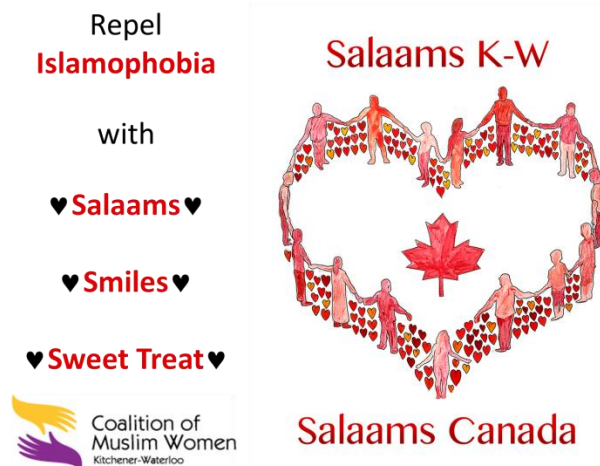
The last topic was about practical steps for “Being an Ally”, presented by Fauzia Mazhar, Chair of the Coalition of Muslim Women of KW. Attendees left the forum with some practical steps that each of them can practice at personal and professional levels to address the Islamophobia.

Kristin Little from Hate Crime and Extremism Investigative Team introduced her department and its role in monitoring hate crimes on social media at regional and provincial levels.

We received verbal feedback from audience and comments on CMW face book page about the event and how inspiring and educational it was for attendees. The most liked segment was the lived experience panel as it helped people to understand how sometimes small negative interactions or a negative comment can destroy a person’s self-confidence and self-esteem.



Allies Against Islamophobia: July 10, 2017 @ Victoria Park Pavillion



The Coalition of Muslim Women of KW's **Salaams KW, Salaams Canada** campaign (Feb 14 to Feb 28) was a heartfelt idea of sharing kind sentiments and sweet treats in our community with the hope that by sharing a simple smile, salaam (Arabic word for “peace” and the common everyday greetings Muslims use), and sweet treat, we will be able to continue our efforts as a community to fight Islamophobia and build bridges of communication. The idea was inspired by a group of women in Dartmouth Nova Scotia.

The idea was simple. Bake cookies, package them with a message of gratitude and distribute them at various locations on the Family Day weekend. The community was invited to help bake and package cookies. Baking and packaging itself became a great community building activity when a very diverse group of volunteers came together: men and women, young and young at heart, Newcomers and those who have been here longer. We were able to distribute over 2000 homemade cookies across KW on Family Day which included Kitchener City Hall, Uptown Waterloo, Waterloo Memorial Recreational Complex, Bridgeport Community Centre, and at the Waterloo Festival on Feb 26. In addition, CMW members and volunteers shared cookies with their neighbours and coworkers workplaces. Younger volunteer shared cookies in their schools.

The response from the community was heart-warming as people came out to meet volunteers after reading about it in the paper or hearing about it on the radio. Others shared their support on Family Day with kind words and some even reciprocated the gesture by bringing the volunteers sweet treats and hot drinks. Salaams KW, Salaams Canada campaign opened channels of communication and provided an opportunity for members of the larger community to engage with their Muslim neighbours.

Media coverage:

<https://www.therecord.com/news-story/7149830-muslim-women-give-out-treats-and-greetings-to-dispel-islamophobia/>

http://kitchener.ctvnews.ca/mobile/muslim-women-offer-sweet-alternative-as-way-of-getting-to-know-neighbours-1.3293733#_gus&_gucid=&_gup=Facebook&_gsc=qPVeASF



Salaams KW, Salaams Canada Campaign pictures

Blood Donation Drive

Upon receiving a request to help with the shortages of blood from Canadian Blood Services, the Coalition of Muslim Women of KW reached out to the local mosques to organize KW's first Muslim community blood donation drive. Kitchener Mosque, Waterloo Mosque and Islamic Humanitarian Services partnered with CMW in this initiative. Over 50 members of the Muslim community donated blood. Over 90% donated blood for the first time in Canada and found the experience not only personally fulfilling but also informative. Many thought that they are not allowed to donate blood at all due to their upbringing outside Canada. Many participants shared that the power of being able to join other Canadians in this selfless act of giving increased their own sense of belonging (often expressed by "I feel like a Canadian").

A second blood drive is scheduled on Thanksgiving weekend with this theme of "Give Thanks by giving Blood". This blood drive has been organized in response to the many requests that we received from Syrian newcomers who wanted to donate first time but could not due to the unavailability of interpretation services. Canadian Blood Services has very strict guidelines about language interpretation to protect the privacy of the donors. This time, CBS is providing specially trained Arabic interpreters and Shamrose for Syrian Culture, a local organization supporting Syrian newcomers, is helping to coordinate the drive.



Give 30 KW

The Coalition of Muslim Women of KW brought the Give 30 national campaign to KW this Ramadan (Fasting month for Muslims). Give 30 is a national initiative which invites everyone regardless of their faith to donate \$30 (or more) to their local food banks during the month of Ramadan. The idea came from how fasting during Ramadan helps people to save on their everyday coffee and that this saved up money can be used to fight hunger in one's community. Local mosques and Muslim organizations joined hands with CMW to run a very successful Give 30 KW in support of The Food Bank of Waterloo Region. First year's target was set at \$7000. The campaign raised \$12,311.80 in its first year and engaged many community members and Regional Chair Ken Seiling as Give 30 ambassadors.

Video links:

Regional Chair Ken Seiling's Give 30 message: <https://www.facebook.com/Give-30-KW-1246199798839335/>

Give 30 KW Campaign video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=4&v=qQHml-NuXuE



Learnings and Outcomes:

- Forums provided a safe space for the Muslim community to come together and share their hurt, sorrow, frustration, confusion after the attack on Quebec City's Mosque. Participants related how being in the forum helped them realize that they are not the only ones facing situations of prejudice, thus forming camaraderie. The main solution discussed was to be involved in the larger community.
- Forums also brought together allies from the larger community which also brought further goodwill and engendered a sense that the fellow community members cared about issues facing Muslims community.
- CMW's Hate Crimes Project team built on its experience in this field of Islamophobia and furthered its learnings on how best to serve the community with better knowledge base.
- This series also helped spread the word about CMW's as a resource to address growing Islamophobia. Various groups contacted CMW with speaker requests and materials/handouts for their own community programs.
- Valuable partnerships were established between WRPS, WR Crime Prevention Council and CMW. Blood donation drive and Give30 campaign also brought diverse religious denominations within the Muslim community for a common cause – thus bridging intra-community silos.

Conclusion

The generous support of Kitchener Waterloo Community Foundation (Mozt Family), along with the support provided by the KW Counselling Services, Waterloo Region Police Services, Hate Crime and Extremism Investigative Team, City of Kitchener, Family and Children's Services of Waterloo Region and area mosques and Islamic organizations was critical to the success of the events listed above. It helped CMW's Hate Crimes Project to continue the momentum on its work to address Islamophobia by raising awareness within the Muslim community as well as the larger community and by bringing our communities together through acts of kindness.