



## Azerbaijani Women's Support Centre (AWSC)

### **Azerbaijani Women's Support Centre and COVID-19**

Despite the challenges during these unprecedented times, the AWSC has been busy and continued to offer services one way or another. Our member's resilience and dedication helped us support and be a voice for those who needed us.

*Webinars:* The AWSC organized webinars on different subjects:

- Careers in IT by Aysel Osmanli, on June 20, 2020;
- COVID-19 and its impact on the refugee and immigration application and family reunifications with Konan Law and its owner Konul Rashidova on April 13, 2020;
- financial supports (Employment Insurance, Canada Emergency Resource Benefit (CERB) and Ontario Emergency Assistance) to individuals due to COVID-19 with Elmira Mammadova and Konul Qurbanova on April 4, 2020.

*Financial Support and Donations:* The AWSC also helped hundreds of community members to apply for benefits, community programs, fill out the applications forms for permanent residency, citizenship, social insurance number, etc. and provided emergency counselling and crisis intervention. The AWSC member Minira Babayeva coordinated donations and social services to community members. She coordinated the AWSC donation to one of the shelters for domestic violence survivors in the GTA, books to Toronto South Detention Centre. The AWSC also collaborated with Shen for She Foundation and Addiction Pastry and its owner Engin Tiryaki to support the AWSC family. AWSC also donated winter clothing to those who needed them.

*Surveys:* The AWSC conducted two important surveys to highlight the needs of the members of our community. One of the surveys was about the perspectives on back to school during COVID-19, September 7, 2020. The second survey was about the hate crimes against Azerbaijani community members since the new military attack of Armenian military forces against Azerbaijan on July 12, 2020.

*Documentaries:* The AWSC also continued producing documentaries on Azerbaijan's history as per our community members' request. The documentary on the history of Caucasian Albania, the cultural and historical heritage of Azerbaijan was especially one of the crucial projects that have been accomplished this year. The English version was narrated by Jonathan Horchata Delgado and the Russian version by Fuad Akhundov. In the line of this subject, we also organized two webinars: one with Prof. Firudin Agasioglu Jalilov, Dr. Bayram Quliyev, historian Fatima

Quliyeva and Dr. Elsevar Samadov on August 20, 2020, and the second one with Fatima Quliyeva, Robert Mobili and Dr. Bayram Quliyev on December 13, 2020.

*Advocacy:* Considering our members' interests seriously, we have also become a voice for our community by writing emails and letters to the Right Hon. Prime Minister, Speaker of the parliament, members of parliament, Amnesty International, CBC, etc., concerning the systemic destruction of Azerbaijan's cultural and historical sites and the violence against Azerbaijan by Armenia.

*Collaboration:* In 2020, the AWSC continued collaborating with other organizations to bring to attention the challenges of COVID-19 in the life of ordinary people. For example, the AWSC member Yegana Jafarova also attended the fifth meeting of the National Muslim Christian Liaison Committee of Canada (NMCLC) on November 26, 2020. The Committee members listened carefully to Rev. Dr. Philip Mathai (Waterloo) and Rev. JoAnne Chung Yan Lam (Ottawa) of the Racial Justice Advisory Committee - Eastern Synod Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada regarding navigating race and religion in faith institutions during COVID-19. The committee also provided a forum for respectful dialogue regarding faith-related concerns and areas of sensitivity between Muslims and Christians and the importance of working together based on compassion, respect and collaboration.

On December 3, 2020, the AWSC member Dr. Nazila Isgandarova participated in the event co-hosted by the Canadian Interfaith Conversation, the Canadian Council of Churches and the Canadian Multifaith Federation with the Prime Minister of Canada, the Right Hon. Justin Trudeau on the Contribution of Faith Communities in a Pandemic. The meeting started with territorial acknowledgement and ended with a universal prayer. The closing reflection by an Indigenous leader, Deloria Bighorn, who began with "My dear relatives..." was especially meaningful. Even though the event was virtual, many participants felt moved by each faith tradition's spiritual presence. It was essential to see that all faith communities demonstrated true leadership committing to core values such as respect, justice, and responsibility by trying to do enough to address the needs of those who need them during these unprecedented times.

On December 10, 2020, members of "One Voice" - women of diverse faith traditions also gathered in a virtual meeting to talk about the incredible work they do in their communities. One Voice "brings together women of diverse faiths to deal with the issue of violence from within the faith communities and as a means to address this issue. The women are collectively working on a toolkit to enable all faith leaders to speak to this pervasive matter in their congregations." [1]

On November 13-14, 2020, our member Dr. Nazila Isgandarova presented a paper at a two-day joint academic conference co-organized by Huron University and Respect Graduate School where the theme was "Islamic Pastoral & Spiritual Care in the Global Pandemic: Connecting with the Quran & Sunnah during a time of New Challenges." She also had a chance to talk about the AWSC survey on the perspectives on back to school during COVID-19. The conference hosted over 20 scholars, chaplains, imams, physicians, nurses, therapists and graduate students who discussed cases related to various health, emotional and spiritual crises in the Muslim community.

The AWSC is committed to developing projects, events, workshops, and conferences in women's well-being and empowerment. Our projects aim to help Azerbaijanis in Canada

regarding their cultural identity, social welfare, unemployment, civic engagement, family dynamics, and gender equality.