

SULAH Program

August 2021 Evaluation Report

Prepared By:



Coalition of
Muslim Women
Kitchener-Waterloo



Executive Summary

Community Justice Initiatives (CJI) and the Coalition of Muslim Women Kitchener-Waterloo (CMW) embarked on a learning journey together to offer restorative responses to identity-based harm in our community. The result has been an innovative and unique community-based restorative response to the continuum of identity-based harm that occurs in our community. The following report identifies what we've accomplished to date.

Through the *Sulah* program, we have researched and implemented best practices, nurtured deep connections between *Sulah* and community organizations and cultural groups, offered restorative dialogues, trained and supported restorative dialogue volunteers, and evaluated our work.

Our key learning is that restorative practice has tremendous potential to impact the harm that our community experiences and to build human connection where there has been only discord. Our work has reinforced for us that people learn and change through building relationships, not punishment. When people experience harm, we will ask them what they need to begin the journey of healing. We have heard that some of these needs are safety, empowerment, recognition, and accountability. Restorative responses can be a crucial service to address these needs, if people voluntarily choose this option and the restorative approach is appropriate.

Our hope is that this report shines a light on the outcomes of our partnership, identifies the need for alternatives to policing and retributive responses to harm, and inspires other communities to consider developing quality restorative services to respond to identity-based harm that are deeply reflective and responsive. We welcome questions and comments. Please contact us at info@cjiwr.com and we would be pleased to connect with you.

"As a visible Muslim minority with a hijab, I've had some people make some really rude comments which initially made me very mad. I wanted to go after them. But, now I think there is an option for dialogue...maybe this person is saying these things not out of malice, but out of ignorance. We won't know that unless we have this dialogue. That is my biggest takeaway from *Sulah*."

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INTRODUCTION TO SULAH

Community Justice Initiatives (CJI) and the Coalition of Muslim Women Kitchener-Waterloo (CMW) are providing this report to celebrate and report on the work thus far completed in our partnership program, *Sulah*. In just a short time period, *Sulah* has dramatically impacted each of our organizations and offered restorative approaches to assist our community to meet the needs of people impacted by identity-based harm.

While offering so much potential for bridging divides and improving relationships, Restorative Justice (RJ) is not regularly offered to people impacted by hate and identity harm. *Sulah* is innovative and unique. Throughout this project, we have discovered no other service-provider in Canada who has created programming to intentionally engage identity-harm with restorative processes. Even more unusual is a partnership such as ours, where a Restorative Justice organization has partnered with a grassroots organization such as CMW to together offer RJ for Islamophobia, racism and xenophobia.

We would like to thank our funders, including the Ontario Trillium Foundation, Kitchener-Waterloo Community Foundation, and the Anti-Racism Action Program of the Government of Canada.

VOLUNTEERS SPEAK

“All those participating in *Sulah* cases (mediators and participants) have the opportunity to better realize the complexity of racism and acts of racism, particularly in understanding the impact our actions have on each other in deeply personal and long-standing ways. There is the potential for a high degree of accountability to each other in having to listen to the experiences of others, and in being vulnerable through sharing your own experiences with those that have caused harm or who you have caused harm to.

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Community Justice Initiatives of Waterloo Region, Ontario (CJI) is a volunteer-based Restorative Justice, peacebuilding organization. During our 45+ year history, we have creatively and innovatively applied Restorative Justice principles to address needs identified by our community. Our founding was the result of a grassroots movement that sought to build a community to transform harm through dialogue where all voices are heard.

We continue that mission today as we seek to inspire safe, healthy, and peaceful communities. We are motivated by our over 200 community volunteers, who contribute to our vision to have connected, peaceful communities, where people impacted by conflict, crime, and harm have the opportunity to access Restorative Justice. Our organization is known internationally for starting the first Victim Offender Reconciliation Program in 1974.

Our work focuses on bringing people together who are normally kept apart, so that they build relationships that result in a stronger, more connected community. We are inspired by our program participants who are experiencing very difficult situations, yet they demonstrate resilience and courage as they begin their work to heal together. Our services walk with people, meeting them where they are at, and assisting them to build connections that are meaningful in their lives.

*"OUR SERVICES WALK WITH PEOPLE,
MEETING THEM WHERE THEY ARE AT."*



Coalition of Muslim Women

Kitchener-Waterloo

Founded by a handful of Muslim women in 2010, the Coalition of Muslim Women of KW (CMW) is a federally registered not-for-profit organization with the mandate to empower Muslim women and girls to be leaders and change makers. CMW provides opportunities for personal and professional growth, and leadership and skills development for Muslim women while addressing issues of racism, discrimination and Islamophobia through advocacy, activism, and bridge building. CMW facilitates Muslim women's active participation and engagement in civic and democratic life, tirelessly working toward building a society where Muslim women are valued, engaged, empowered and recognized as leaders.

CMW has impacted our community in many ways. Recently, CMW has implemented a reporting line for hate incidents and discrimination, created a venue to communicate stories of Muslim women resilience, courage, determination, and transformation, and are training peer mentors to engage with Muslim families to work toward violence-free homes.

***"CMW IS WORKING TOWARD BUILDING A SOCIETY
WHERE MUSLIM WOMEN ARE VALUED, ENGAGED,
AND EMPOWERED."***

SULAH BACKGROUND

The roots for this project stem from a community consultation conducted by Waterloo Region's Crime Prevention Council and the CMW in November 2018 (<http://preventingcrime.ca/our-research/reports/report-islamophobia-web/>). At that time, it became clear that our region's Muslim population was regularly impacted by harmful and hateful actions from other members of the community. This experience was particularly common for Muslim women and happened in a variety of settings, including schools, workplaces, and public settings like parks or public transportation.

CMW believes strongly in addressing Islamophobia through relationship-building, and through helping others better understand Canadian Muslims. Inspired by teachings of their faith, Muslims from a diversity of cultures around the world express a strong preference for amicable settlement of differences. For these reasons, the community consultation report released by CMW and CPC in April 2019 recommended that restorative responses be made available for individuals in the community experiencing Islamophobia and other forms of interpersonal racism.

In order to make this recommendation a reality, CMW partnered with CJI following release of this report, and initial funding for a small-scale pilot project was provided by the Kitchener-Waterloo Community Foundation later that year. At this stage the project was called the Together Project and focused on Islamophobia and other hate crimes and incidents.

In July 2020, following receipt of the Ontario Trillium Foundation seed grant, CMW and CJI engaged in strategic discussions and made two decisions moving forward. The first was to re-name the program *Sulah*, and the second was to focus specifically on Islamophobia, racism and xenophobia because these three identity harms and their intersectionality are what most impact Muslim women in our community. Service would be made available to anyone experiencing one of these forms of discrimination, regardless of their faith. We then received funding from the Anti-Racism Action Program to further support our work.

The selection of the name *Sulah* was very deliberate. It was made with the intention that community members who might make use of this program would recognize the significance of this word as having meanings of peace, reconciliation and amicable settlement in many languages, including Arabic, Urdu, Turkish and Persian. While our *Sulah* program has its own process, we are hopeful that we are signaling inclusivity to our community with our program name.

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"IT BECAME CLEAR THAT OUR REGION'S MUSLIM POPULATION WAS REGULARLY IMPACTED BY HATEFUL ACTIONS."

SULAH RATIONALE

Sulah has been built on the strongly held belief of each of our organizations that humans do not learn or change through punishment. We believe that healthy relationships build healthy communities. When individuals are impacted by hate, they experience significant harm and suffering, and many have critical needs. These include the need for safety, empowerment, recognition, and accountability. Unlike other ways of responding, Restorative Justice can address many of these needs. Restorative Justice asks people what they need, and we at CJI and CMW assess if our services can meet those needs. Restorative Justice will not be the right service for everyone impacted by identity harm, but CMW and CJI believe strongly that it should be an option wherever possible.

In order to build our *Sulah* program, we engaged in research to build our awareness around best practices for responding to identity harm with Restorative Justice. As previously indicated, the opportunity to experience a restorative process is not readily available in identity harm situations, but we were able to identify some practitioners with expertise. We spoke with practitioners in the United States and the United Kingdom who have been doing this work, including Professor Mark Walters, author of “Hate Crime and Restorative Justice: Exploring Causes, Repairing Harms.”

Professor Walters explores research around hate crimes, including how victims are impacted. He indicates that victimization based in identity can be much more impactful than other forms of victimization:

"THE ENHANCED EMOTIONAL TRAUMAS CAUSED BY HATE CRIME ARE INTRINSICALLY CONNECTED TO THE FACT THAT TARGETED VICTIMIZATION GOES TO THE VERY CORE OF THE VICTIM'S SELF.[1]"

[1] Walters, Mark; Hate Crime and Restorative Justice: Exploring Causes, Repairing Harms; 2014 Oxford University Press; xxiii

SULAH RATIONALE continued

Hate incidents can be different from other forms of victimization as well because they can impact everyone who shares an identity with the victimized individual (and even those from marginalized communities who do not share this particular identity) as they can all come to fear for their safety when they hear about hateful behaviour. In addition, those who come from more privileged identities may be negatively impacted when they hear about identity-based harm because they do not feel their community is cohesive.

Despite these greater impacts of hate, Walters suggests that taking a punitive approach, even one that punishes hate-crimes more severely, does little to repair that harm. In addition, Walters posits that people who engage in hateful activity are unlikely to change their views if they are punished [2]. For example, if someone believes that immigrants are afforded greater opportunities than individuals born in Canada, then being punished for xenophobic acts may be seen simply as confirmation that the “system” is set up in favour of immigrants.

For those who have been harmed, Restorative Justice offers the opportunity to address the harm, seek accountability, and have their needs addressed; for those who have caused harm, it offers an opportunity to consider another way of thinking about the identity-group that they have targeted, while upholding their dignity. Walters cites research indicating that beliefs and expectations associated with having differing identities and cultures can be challenged through dialogue. He suggests that:

***"THE PROMISE OF RJ IS THAT INCLUSIVE DIALOGUE
MAY BE BETTER SUITED TO REDUCING THE HARMS
CAUSED BY HATE, WHILE SIMULTANEOUSLY
CHALLENGING THE UNDERLYING CAUSES WHICH GIVE
RISE TO HATE-MOTIVATED BEHAVIOUR [3]"***

[2] Walters xxi

[3] Walters xxiv-xxv

SULAH DESCRIPTION

Sulah involves offering RJ to people impacted by racism, xenophobia and Islamophobia. At CJI we have found that situations of *conflict* can be impacted by identity differences or concerns about being treated differently because of race. As a result, our *Sulah* services have been appropriate outside of the context of hate crimes or hate incidents. We have been able to also offer service in workplaces, families and neighbourhoods where conflict is occurring and where community members feel that racial differences make up one element of the conflict.

We have also found that, because of the disproportionate level of criminal charges that racialized individuals face, the individual harmed by racism is sometimes also the accused or offender that we are working with. When individuals experience racism in their daily lives, on occasion they will respond with violence and get charged by the police. While these individuals need to be held accountable for their violent response, they also deserve the opportunity to be heard with respect to the racism they experienced. *Sulah* offers this opportunity.

VOLUNTEERS SPEAK

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The *Sulah* program holds us all accountable to each other: that we have to consider our own upbringings, influences, decisions, and positions of power. We need to take responsibility to listen to each other, sometimes in ways we are not used to or that make us uncomfortable. However, these ways are necessary, can be done safely, and ultimately lead to a deeper understanding of ourselves and those in our community.

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SULAH ACTIVITIES

The primary tasks involved with offering this program are outlined below. *Sulah* staff include two Service Coordinators with CJI and the Together Against Islamophobia Coordinator at CMW. Funding for these three positions currently comes from multiple sources. The CMW staff person has responsibilities that extend beyond *Sulah*. CJI staff are directly involved in all of the tasks outlined below save for Brave Circles where they play a support role. CMW staff is the lead for Brave Circles and is also involved in the development of training materials and the outreach component as well as collaborating on program planning.

1. Developing Training Materials

Training materials were co-developed by CMW and CJI. The result was a 71 page training manual, and a 12 hour training program that includes experiential learning components. We continue to assess training needs and to consider adjustments to our training materials and program.

2. Training Volunteers

A critical component for establishing *Sulah* was having a group of volunteers who were trained to facilitate *Sulah* cases. Restorative Justice considers the community to be a key stakeholder when harm occurs; as such, CJI relies on volunteers from our community as facilitators. Hate and harm tear at the fabric of the community, and the community is invested in resolutions that repair harm while expecting accountability.

It was critical that our team of facilitators for *Sulah* cases include members of CMW, and members of the communities that can be impacted by racism, xenophobia and Islamophobia. Since we were training a group of volunteers who would be new to mediation, we engaged experienced CJI mediators to join them in doing this work. CJI mediations are conducted using a co-mediator model so this plan would allow us to match experienced CJI mediators with new mediators joining us for *Sulah*.

SULAH ACTIVITIES continued

We established a three-step process for training the volunteers. The first step focused on the new volunteers who engaged in CJI's Transformative Mediation training and Practical Skills training. Subsequently, the full group took part in CMW's training, which focused on Islam and Islamophobia. The final step was the *Sulah* training, delivered to the team of *Sulah* volunteers and some CJI staff. This training was co-developed and co-delivered. This training focused on preparing the volunteers for using the Transformative Mediation process in a situation of identity harm, specifically Islamophobia.

In October 2020, we identified a need for more volunteers on our *Sulah* roster and began the process of training a second cohort, following the model identified above. One difference for the third phase of the training, the *Sulah* training, was added emphasis on racism and ideas related to white fragility. This difference came about because of the decision in July 2020 for *Sulah* to focus on racism, Islamophobia and xenophobia, and because of heightened awareness around anti-Black racism within our community throughout the latter part of 2020.

3. Supporting Volunteers

We wanted to find a way to continue the learning of *Sulah* volunteers, and chose to do so through monthly Circle gatherings. The rationale for this decision is that Restorative Justice is not simply a tool to use when individuals are in conflict, but can also be used to build community and relationships; a restorative Circle model provides this latter opportunity.

VOLUNTEERS SPEAK

When asked to reflect on what they learned or gained from the *Sulah* training, comments from volunteers included:

- "Deeper understanding about impacts of identity harms on both the individual and community level"
- "To listen carefully, nonjudgmental, and work with both sides to come up with common ground rather than provide advice"
- "Personal reflection on my own biases"

SULAH ACTIVITIES continued

In addition to relationship-building among our volunteers, we identified the goals for the Circle gatherings as:

- modelling the Circle process so that volunteers can become more familiar with it;
- providing opportunities to discuss difficult topics like identity and microaggressions, in order to equip volunteers to address these topics in their cases; and,
- offering a space where volunteers and staff could share their learnings from *Sulah* cases.

Volunteers are also supported throughout the facilitation process of a *Sulah* case through debrief meetings with the Service Coordinator. During these debrief meetings, volunteers and the Service Coordinator can talk through issues that have presented a challenge in the case, discuss the appropriateness of continuing with the process or bringing in other supports for one of the participants, manage strong emotions that the volunteers are experiencing as a result of issues that have arisen in the case, as well as many other items.

Because *Sulah* is a new program to CJI, issues that present in cases may be new ones for some volunteers. Thus, there is a benefit to having these additional supports from the Service Coordinator (in comparison to what might be provided in other CJI mediation cases). This close connection to the volunteers throughout the mediation process also allows the Service Coordinator to learn alongside the volunteers, and gain knowledge and ideas to share with facilitators in future cases.

VOLUNTEERS SPEAK

When asked how participation in *Sulah* Circles has impacted them, volunteers said:

- “I appreciate the respect between the volunteers in the circle.”
- “The use of circles provides a safe and non-threatening way to dialogue with the various members in the circle that leads to both a better understanding of relevant issues as well as building community.”
- “The discussions and perspectives of the folks in the *Sulah* circles give a highly personalized experience...with an intimate, vulnerable view into the impact of racism and discrimination on their own identity, on their families, workplaces, etc. Listening and being witness to these conversations, I am challenged to reexamine past mediations and personal experiences...I feel a deeper sense of responsibility to sit with how I need to do better.”

SULAH ACTIVITIES *continued*

4. Community Outreach

Outreach has been a vital component of our work in *Sulah*. We want anyone who might have a need for *Sulah* services to be aware of its existence, along with community leaders or service providers who might hear about someone with a need for *Sulah* services. This outreach has included the following:

- Communication with CJJ's traditional referral source streams
- Communication with other service providers that might come in contact with individuals impacted by hate incidents.
- Communication with CMW stakeholders
- We work with ten peer workers from CMW who speak 8 languages
- Development of relationships with community leaders (particularly through organizations connected with the African and Caribbean communities as well as leaders who are engaging with newcomer and/or Muslim women)

5. Assessing & Responding to Referrals

It is the Service Coordinator's role to liaise with referring partners if they have referrals or inquiries regarding *Sulah* service. We explain the program and discuss the suitability of a referral, as the *Sulah* program is new and may not always be clear to other service providers. We also connect with the potential participants, where appropriate, to discuss their situation and its fit with the *Sulah* restorative dialogue process. For a variety of reasons, many inquiries and referrals do not move forward to the next step in the process.

VOLUNTEERS SPEAK

“Volunteers were asked for insights from being involved with *Sulah* cases. Among the responses were:

- “I learned that misunderstanding [and] lack of communication could go on for a long time, causing unneeded stress and discomfort that can easily be avoided through opportunity such as mediation.”
 - “There is a great reluctance of some participants to realize that simply saying they are not racist because they have a friendship with someone who is different does not mean that they [don't] have underlying racist biases.”
- ”

SULAH ACTIVITIES continued

6. Facilitating Dialogues

In some instances, a *Sulah* Service Coordinator will take part in a case as a facilitator. This could be due to the complexity of the case, particular needs of the participants, or because there is no volunteer available. In such situations, the staff facilitator will still have a volunteer co-mediator. They may additionally play the Service Coordinator role for that case, or the second Service Coordinator might do so.

Because of the amount of time spent in preparation for dialogue, *Sulah* cases are typically more time-intensive than other CJI community or Victim-Offender Reconciliation Program (VORP) mediation cases. We need to begin by establishing rapport and trust with each participant and slowly moving into the topic of identity harm as this can be anxiety-producing for both sides to discuss.

We need to assess safety risks and risks of further harm in a dialogue, both from the perspective of the person who caused harm (in terms of their likelihood of saying something harmful), and from the perspective of the person who experienced harm (in terms of their resilience for a difficult conversation). In this stage, we also talk about the issue at hand (racism, Islamophobia or xenophobia) so that both sides are ready and open to a dialogue on that topic.

Sometimes there are additional preparation pieces. For example, if participants want a support person, we spend time preparing that person for their role; if there is an interpreter involved, this will extend every step in the process; and if parties are reluctant to participate, we may spend time considering options other than a direct mediation, such as letter-sharing or shuttle mediation.

***"WE NEED TO BEGIN BY
ESTABLISHING RAPPORT AND TRUST
WITH EACH PARTICIPANT."***

SULAH ACTIVITIES continued

7. Best Practices Considerations

When we come across issues that need to be considered in terms of best practice, we as *Sulah* Service Coordinators collaborate with our CJI colleagues and look to other experts in the field. In *Sulah* cases, particularly situations referred by police and the criminal court system, we have found an increased need to consider the appropriateness of using a “surrogate” when the person harmed chooses not to participate in the process. A surrogate does not act as or speak for that party; rather, they share their own experience of being harmed in a way that is similar or related to the case at hand. We have spent time considering best practices regarding the decision to use a surrogate, as well as for choosing and preparing that person for the role.

We also want to see what identity characteristics participants in *Sulah* cases hold, so that we can identify which members of the community we are reaching and which we are not. We want to rely on self-reporting, inviting individuals to share what they wish regarding their identity. We have been developing this understanding by reviewing self-reporting tools used by other organizations as well as materials from the Ontario Human Rights Commission. We are continually refining this process so as to be as respectful and sensitive to participants’ needs as possible.

8. Brave Circles

An additional component of the Ontario Seed Grant funding for CJI and CMW was the development of Brave Circles: Conversations Without Hesitations. CMW has taken the lead on this aspect of the work.

When diverse communities interact with each other, many issues often remain unaddressed due to participants’ concerns around discussing sensitive and controversial topics (especially topics related to race). For example, many members from the larger community have a lot of questions about Muslims and their faith; however, they may feel there are no direct avenues for them to ask difficult questions openly.

***“WHEN DEALT WITH MATURELY AND RESPECTFULLY,
CONFLICTING PERSPECTIVES CAN CREATE POWERFUL
OPPORTUNITIES TO WORK TOWARD COMMON SOLUTIONS.”***

SULAH ACTIVITIES continued

The CMW believe it is important to address this ‘elephant in the room,’ instead of simply brushing these challenging issues under the carpet. Thus, the aim of ‘Brave Circles’ is to create a space where those difficult questions can be asked. The CMW believes this is the first step to a truly inclusive society: creating spaces where we can develop understanding and trust with one another.

‘Brave Circles’ invite communities to come together for an open dialogue around controversial topics, within a container of civility and respect. Conflicting perspectives are not inherently a problem – they are a natural outcome of a diverse society. And when dealt with maturely and respectfully, they can in fact create powerful opportunities to work towards common solutions.

Brave Circles Goals are:

- To provide a space where community members can ask difficult questions in a respectful manner
- To dispel harmful, negative stereotypes and misconceptions around Muslims (and Muslim women in particular)
- To create a positive appreciation of the community and their culture
- To develop an appreciation of the vast diversity within the community
- To engage with different perspectives, even if it makes us vulnerable
- To learn what we do not know about other communities and their attitudes
- To address/confront implicit fears, prejudice and privilege

SULAH RESULTS

1. Case Referrals and Facilitation

Sulah has received 28 referrals with 88 participants. The issues and types of cases that *Sulah* has engaged with have been quite varied. One powerful aspect of *Sulah* common throughout all cases is the open-hearted listening that we offer to participants. Everyone is given the opportunity to tell their story, and to be heard by our facilitators without judgment.

"WHEN PARTICIPANTS COME TO SULAH, WE LISTEN. THEIR STORY MATTERS."

In cases that were referred to us, not all individuals who were impacted by identity harm had the opportunity to tell that story to the person who harmed them. However, when they were able to talk with our facilitators about the harm that they experienced, they benefited. People who face criminal charges can feel shut down by the system, that their story does not matter, and that they are only defined by their poor choices. But when they come to *Sulah*, we listen. Their story matters.

VOLUNTEERS SPEAK

Volunteers were asked about the value *Sulah* contributes to our community. Here is a sampling of what was shared:

- "The program is important as it shines a light on our need to work with as many as possible in the community, to see that regardless of skin colour, race or religion, we all want to be respected, feel safe and contribute to our community."
- "*Sulah* and its RJ approach offers benefits to both side of the mediation, working towards healing and/or improving in emotional wellbeing."

SULAH RESULTS continued

We also had opportunities to bring members of the community who had harmed others and who had experienced harm into a dialogue process with each other. These individuals were able to speak to the impact on a community when identity harm takes place. Participants were affected by what they heard because of the emotions that were expressed. Fear and sadness are universal, and when we recognize them in others, we begin to see our actions in a different light.

Participants learned from the stories they heard in a way that they might not have if they were just given facts or statistics. They will remember the individuals who took the time to listen and to share.

***"FEAR AND SADNESS ARE UNIVERSAL.
WHEN WE RECOGNIZE THEM IN OTHERS, WE BEGIN
TO SEE OUR ACTIONS IN A DIFFERENT LIGHT."***

When appropriate, *Sulah* participants are contacted post-process for their feedback. With most participants, we use our "*Sulah* Participant Evaluation Form." This form may be adapted if it is not suitable for the role a participant played in the process (e.g., a community member who has joined a Circle to provide education regarding identity harm to a community of which they are a member). We may also choose not to seek feedback when the process has not been completed (e.g., where someone attended a preparation meeting but then chose not to continue).

Participant Feedback

To date, we have collected feedback from thirteen participants. Highlights of the findings include:

·When asked if facilitators were respectful throughout the process, thirteen of out thirteen said yes, and many were very enthusiastic regarding the role that the facilitators had played.

·When asked if the dialogue contributed to increased understanding, seven of ten who were asked said yes, and three of ten said somewhat. The question was not asked where it was not applicable to the circumstances.

When asked if they felt better about the situation after the dialogue or meeting, all seven who received the question said yes.

SULAH RESULTS continued

Five out of seven participants said the process met their goals, and two said somewhat (one of these two was involved a case where one party withdrew prior to dialogue, and the other also did not have that opportunity for dialogue). The question was not offered to three of the community members and three direct participants as it was not applicable.

Four community members believed the harm-doers came to understand the harm they had caused/took responsibility; seven out of seven participants who had caused harm agreed that they were given the opportunity to take accountability in a non-judgmental way; one of two participants agreed that the other individual had understood the harm and taken accountability in a meaningful way (the other said somewhat)

2. Outreach

Sulah staff and volunteers have connected with many organizations and communities who are impacted by identity-based harm. Since the beginning of the project, we have had 45 meetings with unique organizations, meeting with 350 people to talk about how our services might meet a need in their organization or community.

Some of the the communities and individuals who have been interested in the ground-breaking work of *Sulah* with whom we have met are: MP Bardish Chagger, MPP Laura Mae Lindo, Green Party candidate for Kitchener Centre Mike Morrice, Waterloo Region Crown Attorney's Office, Waterloo Region Police Service, Crime Prevention Council, variety of ethno-cultural groups, Centre on Hate, Bias and Extremism, Canadian Race Relations Foundation, three local post-secondary institutions, local social service agencies, Youth Probation Services, City of Waterloo staff and councillors, Huron County and Waterloo Region Immigration Partnerships, local and national Muslim serving organizations, and Waterloo Region District School Board.

We have also focused on specific organizations who often bear responsibility for responding to hate crimes on behalf of the community including the Waterloo Regional Police Services and the justice system. These organizations have been a large focus as we hope to see more community-led safety responses to hate incidents.

SULAH RESULTS continued

The Waterloo Region Police Service is an important referral partner for *Sulah*. We have strengthened our relationship with WRPS through engagement of the Equity, Inclusion and Diversity Unit (EID), through regular meetings since July 2020 (monthly since January 2021). The WRPS receives reports of hate incidents that do not qualify as a criminal offence, and these can be referred to *Sulah* if the complainant is interested. In addition, police do not need to lay a charge for every offence reported to them. In particular, the Youth Criminal Justice Act encourages police to use extrajudicial measures wherever possible to respond to youth crime. A major topic of discussion with the EID unit has been raising awareness among WRPS members about *Sulah* and establishing a referral pathway. We have great appreciation for the EID Unit's interest in offering a restorative approach to some hate crimes and to providing community members with options when a hate incident takes place.

"A MAJOR TOPIC OF DISCUSSION WITH THE EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION UNIT HAS BEEN RAISING AWARENESS AMONG WRPS MEMBERS ABOUT SULAH."

Building on CJJ's long-standing relationship with the Waterloo Region's Crown Attorney's office, these justice personnel have been an important referrals source for *Sulah*. The referrals have been throughout the justice system process: pre-charge, as diversion, and prior to sentencing. The Wellington County Crown Attorney's Office has also expressed interest in providing referrals to *Sulah*.

SULAH RESULTS continued

3. Volunteers

Volunteer engagement has been a major component of the *Sulah* program. The *Sulah* volunteer team is a group of 20 quality, trained facilitators who care deeply about impacting our community. These 20 volunteers have given 810 hours of volunteer time completing *Sulah* activities.

Volunteers have been involved in training, volunteer Circles, facilitating cases, interpreting for cases, surrogates for cases, coaching newer volunteers in the learning process, outreach to the community through social media and engagement with *Sulah* staff in outreach planning.

Throughout this report, the volunteers' quotes speak to their dedication to transforming our community. During their work, their own lives have also been altered as they witness how restorative justice can provide a healing opportunity for those impacted by identity-based harm.

VOLUNTEERS SPEAK

“ I think now, more than ever, with Islamophobia and racism being present and active in our society, we need to emphasize more on the importance of *Sulah* and its RJ approach in hate motivated cases. ”

SULAH RESULTS continued

4. Recognition and Influence

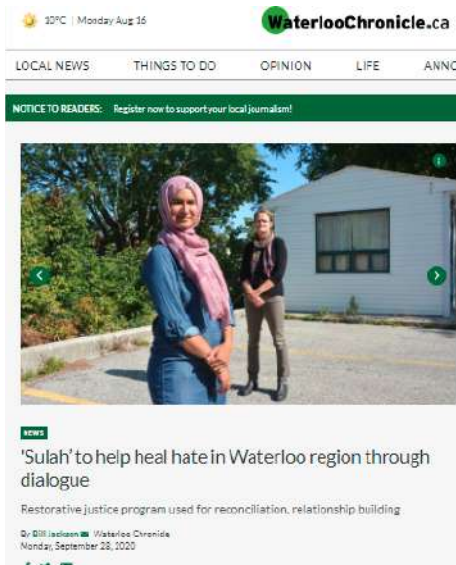
Sulah has had opportunities to be recognized in our community as a unique and innovative way to respond and prevent identity-based harm. Our staff have also had international and national opportunities to share our learning. There is a growing interest in the use of RJ in identity-based harm and hate crime.

In the last several months, *Sulah* staff have twice been sought to engage on an international scale regarding the learnings from *Sulah*. On June 16, one CJI *Sulah* Service Coordinator, along with CJI's Director of Programs, presented to 56 members of the international community at an online seminar entitled "Community Mediation and Dialogue Around the World" hosted by Gishurim in Israel. On August 31, a CJI *Sulah* Service Coordinator will be one of five guest speakers featured at an online webinar entitled "Restorative Justice Solutions for Hate Crime." This webinar is being hosted by the Enhancing Stakeholder Awareness and Resources for Hate Crime Victim Support project which is implemented by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights together with the Association of Counseling Centers for Victims of Right-Wing, Racist and Anti-Semitic Violence in Germany. We are also presenting in November 2021 at the Canadian National Restorative Justice Symposium on our learnings and challenges with this project.

Below you will find links to our media coverage and videos, as well as visuals of some of the articles that featured *Sulah*.

"THERE IS A GROWING INTEREST INTERNATIONALLY AND NATIONALLY IN THE USE OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE IN IDENTITY-BASED HARM AND HATE CRIME."

SULAH RESULTS continued



Kitchener-Waterloo

'Sulah' program aims to address hate crimes through restorative justice



Helping people understand why actions are hurtful more impactful than punishment, Sarah Shafiq says

Kate Buccick - CBC News - Posted: Aug 31, 2020 7:00 AM ET | Last Updated: August 31, 2020



Marchers call for more restorative justice approaches at a rally for Tina Fontaine in Winnipeg in 2018. A new program called Sulah aims to use restorative justice to address Islamophobia, racism and hate crimes in Waterloo region. (Jeff Stapleton/CBC)

1 frommark

KITCHENER | News

Community groups offering safe space to talk about Islamophobia and racism

Carman Wong

CTV News Kitchener

Published Thursday, August 27, 2020 9:39PM EDT

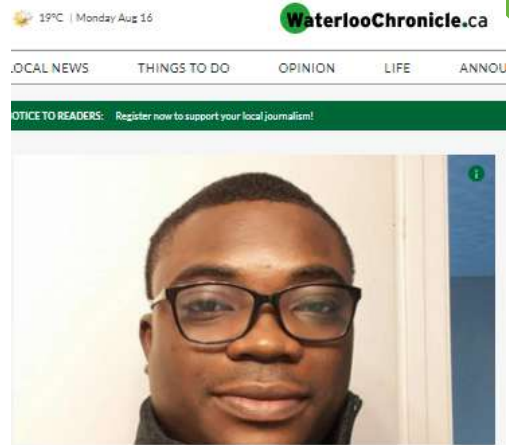


Dismantling hate through reconciliation
From CTV Kitchener's Carman Wong: Two groups are working to tackle Islamophobia, xenophobia and racism through reconciliation.

SHARE [Facebook](#) [Twitter](#) [Email](#) [Print](#)

KITCHENER — Two community groups in Waterloo Region have come together to address Islamophobia, racism and xenophobia.

The groups want to dismantle hate through reconciliation.



OPINION

How Sulah helps us talk about harm caused by acts of Islamophobia, racism or xenophobia

It is our collective responsibility to create a society where we listen to peoples' stories and respect what is unique about each culture and community, writes Niran Akintunde

Muslim women's group receives provincial grant money to address hate incidents

By Lisa Mansoura Record Reporter
Thu., Aug. 27, 2020 | [lisa.mansoura@news.com](#)



A government grant will help Community Justice Initiatives and the Women of Kitchener Waterloo address hate incidents through reconciliation.

As a condition for the funding, both organizations will share information with the Trillium Foundation to address hate incidents such as

SULAH RESULTS continued

Links to Media Coverage and Videos

<https://youtu.be/T50lQ4rzE-8>

<https://youtu.be/-S6QdbxbCCg>

<https://www.waterloochronicle.ca/news-story/10209241--sulah-to-help-heal-hate-in-waterloo-region-through-dialogue/>

<https://www.kitchenertoday.com/local-news/local-group-granted-provincial-funding-to-establish-program-to-respond-to-hate-incidents-2668849>

<https://www.therecord.com/news/waterloo-region/2020/08/27/muslim-womens-group-receives-provincial-grant-money-to-address-hate-incidents.html>

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/kitchener-waterloo/sulah-restorative-justice-hate-crimes-waterloo-region-1.5703877>

<https://kitchener.ctvnews.ca/community-groups-offering-safe-space-to-talk-about-islamophobia-and-racism-1.5082398>

<https://www.waterloochronicle.ca/opinion-story/10332117-how-sulah-helps-us-talk-about-harm-caused-by-acts-of-islamophobia-racism-or-xenophobia/>

SULAH RESULTS continued

5. Brave Circles

The CMW appointed a Steering Committee, which included a *Sulah* Service Coordinator from CJI, to guide and assist them in developing the format of the Brave Circles. The Steering Committee members brainstormed to formulate the objectives, structure, themes and logistics of hosting the Brave Circles, and participated in one pilot session of the Brave Circles.

The CMW has held four Brave Circle sessions virtually. The topics covered were the following:

- Muslim spousal relationships
- Parent child relationship in Muslim families
- Muslim women's clothing choices
- Marriage traditions in Muslim cultures

20 community members have attended each of these sessions. Questions for the circle were received via Survey Monkey and in the zoom chat feature. The formal evaluation results will be available in Spring of 2020. In the interim, we received the following feedback:

"I really enjoyed the opportunity to be in the session yesterday. I am just appreciating you...in your perspectives and how you approach sensitive topics. You all did outstanding."

"There were so many things that I am reflecting on and just glad to learn and be a part of Brave Circles. One thought in particular was your statement Fauzia that all but one Muslim country was colonized. I think more about the connection to how western hegemonic structures of domination continue to control the narrative of individualism and globalism in collectivist societies. I wonder what would have happened if this level of domination would have never taken place. No idea what things would look like but just so much food for thought."

The CMW intends to host 2 to 3 cycles of the Brave Circle program in the next year. Each cycle will have 6 to 8 thematic sessions.

SULAH RESULTS continued

6. Agency Impacts

Because of Sulah, CJJ and CMW have experienced significant impacts. Both CJJ and CMW are trailblazers in our community. We are strong organizations; however, with this partnership we are deepening our expertise, connections, and perspectives. *Sulah* has impacted CJJ and CMW as we remain curious and learn from one another, and as we consider further opportunities for growth and collaboration.

As one staff member commented:

"ALLIANCES AND PARTNERSHIPS BUILD STRENGTH... WE'RE ROWING IN THAT DIRECTION TOGETHER WHEN IT COMES TO ADDRESSING HARM.

I LOVE WHEN COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS COME TOGETHER. THAT COLLABORATION, ALLIANCE, AND STRENGTHENING OF WHAT WE CAN DO IN THE COMMUNITY BENEFITS ALL."

Our organizations are better because of the relationships that we have built through the Ontario Trillium Foundation Seed Grant, having gained long-lasting friendships between our staff and volunteer teams. There is a genuineness about our relationship that affirms our positive intentions of addressing identity-based harm together as a community.

We have been doing this work together since 2019, and our commitment to each other's organizations remains strong. Our volunteers from the Muslim and wider community are friends with each other, and we have modelled what *Sulah* is all about: building understanding through dialoguing and connecting across cultures.

SULAH RESULTS continued

As a result of the connection with CMW, CJI has changed our volunteer pool, which has been transformational for CJI. We have a quality, diverse volunteer roster with excellent skills, that has allowed us to be educated and sensitive to various types of identity-based harms. The insightful questions asked and complex dialogues facilitated by *Sulah* volunteers open up new avenues to discuss lived experiences of racism in a respectful way.

The partnership has also brought new information and perspectives to both of our organizations. As we have worked together, our partnership has blended into a holistic approach to addressing harm in our community. CMW is addressing the prevalence of hate and Islamophobia that exists in our community. CJI is working to proactively build resilience to Islamophobia, and to address the harm in a way that creates learning and builds relationships so as to prevent future occurrences. As a team, we are supporting and contributing to one another's work. This has been powerful both in terms of our organizational missions and our personal experience as individuals.

Most of all, we have discovered that together we can provide an alternative to police and court involvement: supporting victims of identity-based harm in a way that is community-led and driven. *Sulah* can be a vital support for people who do not want to go down the traditional criminal justice route, but still want to open a dialogue about the harm that they have experienced.

VOLUNTEERS SPEAK

“

I feel a deeper sense of responsibility to sit with how I need to do better, and more authentically face my own assumptions, and strive to have conversations with family and friends that are more honest.

”

LOOKING AHEAD

In addition to continuing with the work laid out throughout this report, we envision several other opportunities for *Sulah* to grow. These include:

Setting up a training process for peers to support individuals going through our process or otherwise dealing with identity-based harm;

Greater outreach within communities (once the COVID-19 pandemic allows) so that community members can hear from us directly about the program;

Offering prevention-focused Restorative Circles within communities at risk;

Developing partnerships with different communities at risk for identity-based harm (including LGBTQ2+, disability, Jewish, Sikh, East and Southeast Asian, along with continued relationship-building with the Caribbean, African and Black communities) and look for funding opportunities with these communities to expand our work.

"THERE IS A LOT OF UNADDRESSED RACIALIZED HARM THAT IS HAPPENING. RESOURCES NEED TO BE AVAILABLE TO PEOPLE. THIS IS AN ONGOING NEED AS WE BUILD A MORE RESTORATIVE COMMUNITY."

Sulah staff member

CONCLUSION

As Canada becomes increasingly multicultural and multiracial, identity-based conflict is inevitable. We must establish methods beyond seeking retribution through the justice system. In recognition of this, we are dedicated to finding sustainable funding to continue the work of *Sulah* with our community. As organizations, we are also interested in furthering community-based solutions to community safety. For example, CMW has recently established a hate reporting tool for individuals to document incidents of identity-based harm. We predict that this reporting tool will also encourage more individuals to access *Sulah*.

Our community recognizes that sometimes legal options are not options at all because a crime has not been committed, but there is still harm. *Sulah* interventions can be a safer and non-threatening way to dialogue with community members that leads to a better understanding of relevant issues. Although restorative processes may not eliminate long-standing viewpoints, there is an opportunity for a shift in perspective with respect to those who hold different identities than us or those with whom we are in conflict. This possibility brings our community hope of a more inclusive and safer community for everyone.

"GIVING PEOPLE A CHANCE TO UNDERSTAND YOU IS IMPORTANT, BECAUSE AT THE END OF THE DAY, OUR NEIGHBOURS ARE NOT GOING ANYWHERE. I CAN'T IMAGINE LIVING IN A WORLD IN WHICH YOU CAN'T LOOK EYE TO EYE WITH YOUR NEXT DOOR NEIGHBOUR. THERE HAS TO BE A BETTER OPTION THAN MOVING OUT OF YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD OR CALLING THE POLICE. THERE HAS TO BE A MIDDLE WAY. WHAT CJI AND CMW PROVIDE, THROUGH SULAH, IS ONE SUCH WAY."

Sulah Staff Member