

CCMW strives to provide Canadian Muslim women with tools to develop strong identities and overall well-being, so they can participate fully and effectively in Canadian society.

Since September 11, 2001, the experiences of Muslims, and Muslim women, have changed dramatically. Unfortunately the changes have been to the worst, particularly as they relate to experiences of discrimination and lack of Muslim women's socio-economic and civic engagement in Canadian society. During the past several years CCMW has undertaken a number of initiatives to understand and address these issues. We have developed many tools and offered informational and educational workshops on a range of topics to Muslim women as well as to stakeholders that come into contact with them. These workshops include topics such as civic engagement and family law. Until now the focus has been on adult Muslim women. Our focus must now turn to young Muslim women, especially those who are at the middle and high school levels, as their future success in becoming contributing members of Canada's economic, social and civic life depends on their positive experiences within the education system where they find relevance and respect for who they are.

We have anecdotal evidence, gathered from local communities, about the stress and conflicts facing young Muslim women. An assessment is needed to determine what the issues and challenges are for the young women as well as for educators dealing with them in the schools. Strategies need to be developed that would facilitate the young women's full participation in education, social integration, future employment, financial independence and leadership.

Young Muslims continue to face a number of difficulties such as racism, discrimination, clash of family and broader society values, the tensions in developing an identity which is inclusive of their multiple characteristics. Many are children of recent immigrants who are grappling with adaptation issues, such as the integration of culture and religion in their lives. Added to these is the heightened visibility and sensationalizing of Islam and Muslims. World politics impinge on them daily and we wonder how they are dealing with this.

As schools play a vital role in the young people's lives, we think that it is in these settings that the issues can be addressed and the young can be taught how to deal with their issues by developing a strong sense of their identity with its myriad aspects.

Also, education is valued amongst Muslims and immigrants, and parents look to educators to facilitate their children's participation and integration into mainstream society. At the same time parents are anxious that their children are losing their cultural and religious values so that teachers themselves need to be educated about the lives and experiences of these students.

This project is important because it addresses issues facing Canadian Muslim families, especially young women. Our grave concern is that young Muslims are feeling discriminated against in their own society and in schools. Their future is jeopardized by stereotyping and lack of understanding they are subjected to. The danger is that either these young women will learn to reject their own identity or become isolated from mainstream society. It is vital that Muslim girls feel welcomed and integrated into their new country. For some of the young women Canada is the country of their birth yet they often feel that they are still considered the "other" or strangers in their own land. The project will lead to young

women becoming more secure, more participatory, more integrated and more capable of managing their lives.

A significant issue is of violence against women and girls. We use the term violence in its broader implications, such as the restrictions sometimes placed on young girls by some families. The limiting of their choices or the responsibility placed on them for the family name and honour. The fears of some parents, which may lead them to arrange early marriages for their children, and how this may adversely affect young women.

The kit materials will include respectful and thoughtful explanations and interpretations for the families and the girls.

This project will address the urgent need of facilitating participation and integration of young women who happen to be Muslims and of various ethnic and racial origins.

The activities of the project can be broadly divided in two. The first part involves working with 7 schools in Southern Ontario to develop leadership skills. Committees comprising students will be set up in the identified schools, and will carry out activities aimed at raising awareness of the issues/challenges young Muslim women face in the education system.

The second part involves conducting a learning needs assessment and developing an educational resource kit, for educators. The kit will provide accurate, sympathetic and culturally appropriate information and will have an educator's guide and other material about the context, diversity and realities of young Muslim women, including discrimination and marginalization.