

# Indo Canadian Women's Association

*“Serving immigrants since  
1984!”*

Annual Report 2013-2014



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# Highlights of 2013

- The year began with our 29th Annual General Meeting (AGM).
- Overall the fiscal year 2013-2014 was a success. A steady stream of newcomers and returning clients took advantage of the settlement services from Indo Canadian Women's Association (ICWA) Settlement Counselors at the Welcome Center for Immigrants (WCI.) The positive trends seen in the winter of 2012-2013, were maintained throughout the year.
- *The Senior's Program*, coordinated by Mr. Rajbir Kharod, hosted two hundred members throughout the year. The members of the Senior's Program had the opportunity to discover and explore Edmonton. This was a valuable experience for our seniors who otherwise would not have been able to visit these sites.
- The *English as a Second Language (ESL) Functional Literary* program was successful in catering to diverse communities. Mr. Chouaib El Bouhali excelled at equipping the individuals with the essential language tools for their successful integration and settlement in Edmonton.
- Students in the *Adult Literacy class* coordinated by Mrs. Farah Fatima reported massive conversational gains by the end of the program. They enhanced their grammar and pronunciation while improving their communication skills.
- *The Citizenship class* instructed by Mr. Paul Kalsi had another successful year with a total of two hundred and eleven students completing the course - most of whom passed the test.



## Highlights of 2013

- The ICWA Settlement team attended the “Diverse Voices Conference on Family Violence”, the “Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies (AAISA)” conference, and the “National Settlement Conference” in Ottawa. The conferences provided the team members with access to useful resources and networking opportunities with other service providers in the non-profit sector.
- Facilitated by Mrs. Shazia Ambreen, the *Women’s Resiliency Program* assisted newly arrived women with settling in Edmonton and provided them with social and cultural support to ease their transition. This initiative is offered by ICWA under the Edmonton Community Adult Learning Association (ECALA) program funding.
- The *Working Together* leads (Ms. Rajvir Gill and Ms. Preetpaul Atwal) were amongst the workshop presenters at this year’s “Impact of Family Violence” conference in Oshawa, Ontario. The project team is currently working to produce collaborative deliverables to assist with the inclusion of diverse ethno-cultural women and girls in addressing honour based violence. Another aim of the project is the improvement of the services that are offered by mainstream providers. The overarching hope is to implement this project as a tool for social change and awareness and ultimately to reduce and prevent violence against women and girls in the name of ‘Honour’.
- Mrs. Kishwar Ghani administered a successful year with the *Breast Health Awareness* program. Through workshops, informal gatherings and displays, South Asian women learned about breast cancer.
- A *Youth Advisory Committee* (YAC ) member won the first place in a community contest, “Combat Crime” , for her HAAV Heart (Humanity Against All Violence) campaign. Other members raised awareness about the stigma of mental health issues in the South Asian (SA)/Middle Eastern (ME) communities. They touched on the problem of stigmatization amongst the girls in the two communities in regards to mental health. A group amongst the girls made a presentation at the “Global Youth Assembly “ and was awarded funding to execute a plan for creating a safe space for girls to share their problems and concerns.

# About ICWA



The Indo Canadian Women's Association has been supporting new immigrants and advocating for women's rights for the past 30 years. As an organization, the ICWA has unwaveringly ensured the integration and settlement of newcomers in Canada. Our approach to the prevention of violence against women focuses on raising the status of women through dialogue and community mobilization. Thus, an attitude shift in the treatment and portrayal of women is essential. We believe that small modifications in the attitudes about women can create an enormous impact in raising the status of women. This is why we are proud to say, "ICWA has been changing attitudes since 1984!"

## **Vision:**

All new Canadians will achieve a sense of fulfillment and integration into the Canadian culture and society. Everyone will have an equal opportunity to fully participate in Canadian society.

## **Mission:**

The Indo Canadian Women's Association works to encourage and promote participation by the new Canadians in social, economic and political life in Canada.

## **Values:**

The Indo Canadian Women's Association is dedicated to promoting equality, opportunity and protection of rights for everyone.

## Structure and Governance

Since its inception, The Indo Canadian Women's Association has been run by a volunteer board. There are eleven elected Board members and four members-at-large. The board has three standing committees: personnel committee, finance committee and program & project committee. These committee members brief and orient new members, review policy and action plans, and they carry out current committee work. The Board holds eight meetings a year and spends approximately four hundred hours on administrative issues. The organization has no executive director due to the lack of funding



From left to right—Judy Axelson, Anjali Agarwal, Navneet Kiran, Netta Phillet, Jagjeet Bhardwaj, Nisha Bhatia, Miriam Thomas, Gita Das, Avau Fast, Dr. Zohra Husaini

# Settlement and Counselling

The settlement and counselling services are designed to welcome newcomers to the community and provide them with the necessary resources to integrate into Canadian society. The consultations not only convey valuable information to newcomers at a single forum, but also offer them with an opportunity to mingle and network with other immigrants from different parts of the world. All in all, these programs offered by the ICWA provide participants with valuable exposure and experience with the diversity that marks Canadian society.

The Newcomer Settlement Orientation program lays a strong foundation for a settlement plan for newcomers built upon one-on-one sessions or family sessions. Clients are asked to think about and discuss their reasons for choosing Canada as their new home. This is followed by a discussion of their expectations of life in Canada. Finally, they are asked to keep both these elements in mind while charting out their goals to keep a clear focus and eliminate undue stress.

Settlement counsellors and outreach settlement staff are trained by the Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies (AAISA) and other government, non-government and not-for-profit organizations.

# Edmonton Community Adult Learning Association (ECALA)

## ESL Functional Literacy

Our English as a Second Language (ESL) Adult Literacy Class empowers individuals with the language tools to successfully integrate and settle in Edmonton. In order to provide services to a maximum number of students, students are continually accepted into the program. We aim to have our students obtain basic skills in the English language such as speaking, reading, listening, grammar and writing. Our class is in high demand due to our practical teaching methods as well as our accessible location.

## Adult Literacy Class For English Language Learners

Our Adult Literacy classes for English language Learners are funded by ECALA. Conversational skills are enhanced in these courses with an emphasis on speaking, grammar and comprehension. The friendly atmosphere of these courses allows for students to read and write comfortably without the fear of judgements.

## Computer Literacy

Our Computer Literacy classes are offered at two levels: basic and intermediate. These classes are attractive to the adult population because they enhance employability. The classes equip our students with the confidence to apply to higher positions and advance in their careers. With the skills acquired from our classes, students are better able to integrate into the Canadian work environment. A greater socio-economic status gives our students independence. The ICWA gratefully acknowledges the funding of the 'Edmonton Community Adult Learning Association', for successfully running these classes.

## Citizenship Preparation for new Canadians:

Our Citizenship preparation class provides students with essential information to fully understand their rights, responsibilities and values as Canadian citizens. This diverse class caters to people from multiple walks of life. The instructor spends considerable amounts of time ensuring that his students get the best possible experience with unique study material and efficient instruction.

# Breast Cancer Awareness

The Breast Cancer Awareness project began in 2009 with the help of a grant from the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation Prairies/Northwest Territories (NWT) Region.

Since then, the ICWA has been proactively educating South Asian women about breast health. The primary goal of this initiative has been the identification of detection methods as well as the promotion of breast health education. The target population for this project are women who face barriers when accessing health care services.

The journey from the diagnosis of breast cancer to its treatment seems to be longer and more difficult process for South Asian women when compared to non-South Asian women due to cultural barriers. This results in these women experiencing a whirlpool of emotions such as fear, loss, isolation, embarrassment, and feelings of low self-confidence. Hence, many women sidestep evidence-based treatments in hospitals.

These women need a supportive network which fosters caring personnel. Our group excels in providing these women with the essential help they need to improve their lives. The correct information combined with psychosocial support, role models, and positive coping methods will ensure assistance for these women.



# Working Together

In March 2013, the ICWA began working on a two year project entitled, 'Working Together: An initiative to engage communities to end violence against women and girls in the name of 'honour'.' The project is funded by the Status of Women Canada and our partners include three local agencies: The Today Family Violence Help Centre, the John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights, and YWCA Edmonton. All of these agencies work on issues pertaining to women's human rights. The twenty-four month project will target women and girls from diverse ethno-cultural communities and aims to build partnerships between community agencies and stakeholders to develop strategies to address honour related violence.

Through the needs assessment, we identified that the barriers and needs of women from diverse ethno cultural communities and project resources were directed towards developing and implementing a feasible and relevant multi-agency strategy plan. The multi-agency strategy that has been developed ensures the maximum inclusion of diverse ethno-cultural groups and takes into consideration relevant knowledge and literature about gender based violence, existing gender-power structures, and 'honour' related issues within the project's context.



# Making Change

Supported by the Status of Women Canada, Making Change is a joint initiative of the Canadian Council of Muslim Women, the Indo-Canadian Women's Association, and the Intercultural Action Committee for Advancement of Women.

In February, the project was formally launched. The interaction between the elders of the South Asian (SA) and Middle Eastern (ME) communities, young women, and the project team set a healthy momentum for future project activities. In the first phase of the project, the intention was to engage SA/ME girls in a meaningful dialogue to identify the barriers that restricted their active involvement in Canada's civic, political, and community life.

In an effort to promote leadership among girls, the Making Change Youth Advisory Committee (YAC) members participated in certain projects and campaigns that sought to raise awareness in the community about factors that limited women's leadership potential.



# Senior's Group

Every Monday, seniors from the Edmonton area gathered to discuss their daily life struggles and accomplishments, and were provided information about the city. The structure of the programs were built around the interests of the participants. At times, professionals were invited to deliver lectures and to accommodate to the needs of the seniors. Topics on the importance of physical health and nutrition were covered. Major illnesses such as diabetes, heart and stroke, prostate cancer, were also discussed. Seniors were taken on field trips around the city. From these outings, the seniors gained a sense of independence and a boost of confidence. This group enabled these seniors to have an outlet for their interests as well as an opportunity to discuss their barriers while adjusting to life in Canada.



# Women's Resiliency Program

The Women's Resiliency Program is a program developed primarily to support newcomers. In the two hour bi-weekly sessions, we have had a steady attendance of ten to fifteen women per session. A variety of activities and workshops were designed to facilitate the processes of integration into Canadian society. A majority of the activities were based the demands of the participants. Here are just a few of the activities:

	<b>CATEGORY</b>	<b>WORKSHOP/INFORMATION SESSSION</b>
1.	Vocational Skills	Sewing classes
2.	Career Support	Resume writing workshop
3.	Language Skills	Information session about English language classes and government funded programs for learning and language improvement
4.	Health	Medical/personal care during pregnancy Weight loss management
5.	Networking	Networking and socialising opportunities for newcomers
6.	Involved Parenting	Communication with teachers at school Dealing with issues/concerns at the school
7.	Settlement	Services provided by agencies that serve immigrants Referral to the Welcome Center for Immigrant settlement team
8.	Sources of Information	Importance of libraries Library tour Assistance with using the library resources

# Casino Fundraising

This year's annual Casino Fundraiser was held on January 27th and 28th, 2014. With the assistance of thirty-six volunteers, we are able to raise funds to support the following programs and events

- Women's Program (Aimed at Hard to Reach Women)
- The Seniors Program
- The Youth Development Program
- Winter celebration event

# United Nations' Human Rights Day

The ICWA joined the, 'International Association of Citizens for Civil Society' in honour of the 65th anniversary of the United Nation's Declaration of Human Rights. This event was held in the month of December.

The purpose of this occasion was to use human rights as a tool to ensure social justice in our presently turbulent world. The event was organized by the Master of the Ceremony, Mr. Satya Das.

Mrs. Jagjeet Bhardwaj was the opening speaker. Other renowned speakers included Canada's ambassador for Disarmament, Douglas Roche, and journalist and David Evans.

Many human rights activists, interfaith members and other like-minded individuals joined in a fruitful dialogue about pluralism, global ethics, and the significance of the involvement of the new generation in the face of social change.

Deputy Premier, Dave Hancock, was also amongst the participants and shared his thoughts on multiculturalism and the importance of peaceful co-existence.



# International Women's Day

The ICWA celebrated the International Women's Day in combination with its 30th anniversary on March 29th, 2014.

Our guest speaker for the evening was Deputy Chief Danielle Campbell, of the Edmonton Police Service. She gave a riveting presentation on how women can empower themselves in fields such as hers, that have historically been largely male-dominated. She reflected on the barriers and challenges she had to face as she rose in the ranks of the police force. Her message was clear— in the face of adversity, one should still strive persistently towards their goal.

Danielle's keynote address was dynamic and powerful, captivating the audience from the beginning to the end, resulting with a standing ovation.

The event was ushered in by a classic Indian Dance, "Tavara", choreographed by Usha Gupta.

Also, three ladies who have worked for the Association for the last three decades; Mrs. Jajgeet Bhardwaj, Mrs. Gita Das and Dr. Zohra Husaini were honored.

Finally, a tribute to Koki Davies was given for her generous donation.



# Girl Rising



Alongside Center to End all Sexual Exploitation (CEASE) and the YWCA Edmonton, ICWA was a proud sponsor of, 'Girl Rising'

A film discussing the lives of nine girls around the world, Girl Rising was hosted by Chelsey Smith. Chelsey is currently a student of the Professional Communications at Royal Roads University, as well as an active volunteer and engaged citizen. This film successfully demonstrated the influential strength and courageous spirit of the featured young women.

Girl Rising is not limited to this motion film —it's a global movement with a powerful message, 'Educate girls and you will change the world.'

# Winter Festival

To commemorate the holiday season, ICWA held a winter celebration which is largely an intercultural celebration.

The main purpose of which was to foster the significance of diverse festivities that occur during this season for people from all walks of life. The merry-making helped newcomers build social networks as well as learn about the diversity within Canada as well as the importance of multiculturalism.



# Rendezvous

This project was supported by Making Change, a project that aims at creating enabling environments for girls to realize their full potential and actively participate in Canada's civic, political, and cultural life.

As the project continually aims at promoting leadership among Canadian girls and young women of the South Asian and Middle Eastern heritage, a leadership forum was organized in March 2014.

This conference provided a platform for young girls to connect with female role models and leaders in Alberta. The event was a thunderous success where both the guests as well as the speakers benefitted enormously through the networking opportunity.



# Special thank you

The Indo Canadian Women's Association would like to express its gratitude to the following sponsors for their generous donations:

- ◆ Servus Credit Union
- ◆ James Brown & Associates
- ◆ Avau and Malcolm Fast
- ◆ The Singhmar Family
- ◆ Shorie Bhatia LLP
- ◆ Bhatia Khurana LLP
- ◆ Rohit Group of Companies

# Supporters & Funders

**The ICWA especially thanks the following agencies and organizations for their continuous support for our projects and programs:**

Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission



Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation



Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC)



Edmonton Community Adult Learning Association (ECALA)



Status of Women Canada



# Board of Directors

## Board:

Miriam Thomas—**President**  
Anjali Agarwal—**Immediate Past President**  
Gita Das—**Vice President**  
Jagjeet Bhardwaj—**Treasurer**  
Netta Phillet—**Secretary**  
Dr. Zohra Husani—**Director**  
Ratna Basappa—**Director**  
Navneet Kiran—**Director**  
Avau Fast—**Director**  
Judy Axelson—**Director**  
Nisha Bhatia—**Director**  
Sherry Ahmad—**Director**  
Saadat Chaudhary—**Member-at-large**  
Mita Das—**Member-at-large**

## Volunteer hours by board

**Board meetings:** 440 hrs

- ♦ 8 Board meetings,
- ♦ 10-12 members in attendance
- ♦ 2-3 hours long/meeting

**Executive Committee work:** 400 hrs.

- ♦ Executive committee spends 27 hours a month.

**Standing committee hours:** 700hrs hours

**Program & Project work:** 1400 hrs

**Total volunteers hours**

**contributed by board: 2940 hours**

# Staff

Rajvir Gill—Project Director

Preetpaul Atwal—Project & Program Coordinator

Sogand Zakerhaghighi— Office Coordinator

Farah Fatima—Settlement Counsellor, Adult English class  
Instructor

Saima Tanwir—Settlement Counselor

Shazia Ambreen—Outreach Worker

Rajbir Kharod—Outreach Worker

Paul Kalsi—Outreach Worker (family and domestic violence ),  
Citizenship Instructor

Kishwar Ghani—Breast Health Educator

Jaya Saxsena—Computer Instructor

Chouaib El Bouhali—English as a Second Language (ESL)  
Instructor

**INDO CANADIAN WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION**

*Changing attitudes since 1984!*

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