

Newsletter of Advancement of Women Halton

AWH is a collaborative of twenty women's groups and social agencies that advocate and amplify the voice of women. The monthly meetings give us an opportunity to hear about the activities and challenges of member organizations. This newsletter is another avenue for readers to learn about AWH member activities.



May 2025

Message from the Chair

Well, it was a long election night. There were still votes being counted and ridings that had not yet been declared well into the following day.

It was an election unlike any we have seen - a 2 party race in our multi-party system. As a supporter of electoral reform I believe this is a stark picture of how our first past the post system leaves many voters feeling sidelined. Although voter turnout was up substantially, fear of our neighbours, whomever they are, should not be the reason more of us go out to the polls.

Worry about the menace to the south was a large factor in the results and Canadians have good cause to feel that way. But we have many other issues needing to be addressed that have nothing to do with him. Far too many Canadians are struggling and have been for a long while. We see these struggles every day in our own communities here in Halton.

I appreciate what Alex Himelfarb had to say on this topic.

"I understand that many will roll their eyes at that suggestion [for electoral reform] at a time when we want our governments focused on the threats to our sovereignty, the climate crisis, economic insecurity. But democracy is not a side issue. To meet our challenges we need an electoral system that favours cooperation over sniping and that encourages us to vote <u>for</u> rather than against."

AWH will continue to work for a fair, equitable, inclusive community and world. We believe it is achievable if we work together. Perhaps next time we can vote because we have hope.

Happy May Day!

Maureen

Stephen Lewis Foundation

Women Helping Women SW Ontario Regional Gathering

The Grandmother's Campaign Regional Gathering in South-west Ontario was jointly planned by Oomama, Bronte Grans and Burlington Ubuntu Grandwomen. 67 registrants and 6 guests participated in a wonderful, reaffirming day. The morning opened with the beats of the Naked Beat Drummers and the call and response to the West African song, "Funga Alafia" (We Welcome You), led by Linda Rafuse. Elizabeth Rennie, one of the founding members of the Burlington Ubuntu Grandwomen opened the morning with a stirring, heart-felt land acknowledgement.

Meg French, Executive Director of the Stephen Lewis Foundation was the keynote speaker. Her outstanding, timely address was titled, "The Importance of the HIV Response in this Turbulent Time." The freeze on international assistance and the dismantling of USAID represents a decrease of 24% in global funding for HIV. PEPFAR (the US President's Emergency Fund for AIDS Relief – initiated by George W. Bush) invested \$120 billion in the global HIV/AIDS response since 2003, saving 25 million lives, preventing millions of HIV infections, and supporting several countries to achieve HIV epidemic control – all while significantly strengthening global health security. This support has suddenly ended. \$44 million have been lost among 28 partners and programmes have had to be cut, reduced or paused. There is great fear that, as a result, we are facing a return to the early 2000s with a resurgence of HIV and an anticipated 6.9 million more deaths.



We were able to connect with Spiwe Chakawa in Chiedza, Zimbabwe via Zoom. (Spiwe is a passionate leader who advocates for children and youth who are at risk of falling through the education gaps.



Aman Dhindsa and Njavwa Mukwavi from the SLF Programmes Team, highlighted HIV and AIDS in 2025. They spoke of accomplishments and ongoing needs and challenges.

The workshop "Turning Periods into Pathways", led by Adrianne Franklin of "Days for Girls", was very engaging, enlightening and fun in a day of hearing difficult information.



Here Adrianne is leading the group in a multiple-choice activity to guess the nationality using different euphemisms for "period". For example, in Germany it is called "Strawberry Week".

Retired Teachers of Ontario (RTO/ERO)

Halton District 15 made a donation to offset the cost of this event. After all expenses were paid, a cheque for \$800 was sent to SLF Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign.

MPP Effie Triantafilopoulos wrote: This week, I was delighted to join Minister Charmaine Williams and MPP Natalie Pierre in Burlington as our government announced new funding to support women and children who have experienced domestic violence.

Our government is investing \$876,983 over three years to support Halton Women's Place and their new Haven to Home Program, which will ensure women and children in Burlington and Halton can recover, rebuild, and thrive.

I want to extend my gratitude to local partners like Halton Women's Place and Home Suite Hope for their extraordinary dedication to this program, which is designed to deliver impactful support to end gender-based violence in our communities.





In My Backyard: A Winter Walk & Talk with Unhoused Neighbours

On a chilly, rainy Saturday we gathered at the Burlington Public Library for a guided walk and afternoon of reflection and exploration. Despite the uncertain weather, over 40 people joined our peer team to hear stories, ask questions, and explore solutions together. Our walk followed a route based on stories shared by two of our peers, who provided us the opportunity to both "walk a mile in someone else's shoes" and view the neighbourhood through another lens.



The stories included experiences with urban architecture in the surrounding park and neighbourhood, such as sleeping on park benches and in bus shelters to escape inclement weather. We talked about how the walking route reflected what an average day might look like, especially during the winter months, for someone experiencing houselessness. The critical necessity for spaces like recreation centres and YMCAs for access to showers and water sources, community meals and spaces where people can gather and find belonging, and places where people can exist and keep warm, such as café lobbies, the mall, and the library. Each of these spaces represent a lifeline for someone who is in survival mode, having to spend so much time and energy to obtain necessities.

Lunch and Learn: A Vital Conversation on Afghanistan



An exclusive conversation with War Child President and Founder, Dr. Samantha Nutt and Afghanistan country director, Waseeullah Mujaddidi about the work of War Child in Afghanistan. War Child has been in Afghanistan

since 2002. They started work in the city of Herat, in the Western region, providing food, cash assistance and vocational training to internally displaced families. They focus on supporting children and families affected by conflict and instability, providing education, protection, and livelihoods, with a particular emphasis on empowering women and girls. Mujaddidi explained how the work has spread to multiple locations throughout the country and Kabul and involves a delicate negotiation between the Taliban, the four male coordinators, and the female doctors, nurses, social workers and teachers who carry out the programs. Samantha Nutt described the hundreds of women who are escorted to the centres each day and once inside, discard their burqas and enthusiastically embrace the educational programs, the professional and business training, the ante-natal clinics and the parenting courses. President Trump's slashing of USAID will have a dramatic effect and there will be more reliance than ever on donations from other countries and organisations. As an Afghan proverb says: "Even on a mountain, there is still a road."



THE LANCET Zhiming Dai

Maternal and child health adaptation to declining fertility in China

China's persistent decline in fertility rates and the accompanying demographic shift towards an ageing population have brought challenges to the country's health-care system, particularly in the realm of maternal and child health. The decline in fertility rates in China is not merely a matter of fewer births; it is indicative of broader social and economic factors that influence reproductive decisions. The rising costs of raising children, educational pressures, and the demands of modern work—life balance have led many families to delay or forgo having children altogether. This trend has resulted in older maternal ages, higher pregnancy-related complications, and a growing number of high-risk pregnancies.



health-care resources becomes essential. One approach is to strengthen the primary health-care infrastructure, particularly in underserved rural areas, by integrating telemedicine and home health-care services. This improvement includes comprehensive prenatal care, early interventions, maternal screening programmes, and timely vaccinations for children. Strengthening the skills of health-care providers to handle high-risk pregnancies and childhood diseases is key to reducing maternal and child morbidity and mortality. Ensuring that all women, regardless of location or income, can access such services is fundamental. Policies such as paid parental leave, childcare subsidies, and greater financial support for families with children would also help. National databases and health information systems should be enhanced to track trends in fertility, maternal health, and paediatric care so that policy makers can anticipate future health-care needs and adjust services accordingly. By aligning health-care strategies with population trends and societal needs, China can not only stabilise its population but also ensure that its mothers and children receive the care they need.

"Profitizing" Home Care – Hosted by The Care Economy.

The discussion was led by **Armine Yalnizyan**, now the Atkinson Fellow on the Future of Workers. She noted that although healthcare in Canada is publicly funded, there is no accountability, and recent restructuring has resulted in chaos.



Cynthia Cranford, U of T professor and researcher on precarious labour markets, noted that there are 104 private equity franchise companies in the GTA alone, providing services to insured members of the middle class. The franchises employ immigrant labour with precarious citizenship. Little training is provided, and the pay is low.

Kenyon Wallace, a reporter in the Toronto Star's Business department, investigated higher death rates in private equity homes during Covid. Ontario Health and Ontario Health At Home distribute medical supplies. During the pandemic, either no supplies were received, or else they were incomplete.

- 1. the formulary was not ready (A **formulary** is an evolving list defining the prescription drugs to be covered under a benefit program.)
- 2. The forecast of quantities needed was too low by a factor of 50 %
- 3. Supply companies had been "consolidated" so that there were now only two providers province-wide, in place of the 14 LHINs.

Mary Bugbee, of the Private Equity Stakeholder Project in the US, noted a tremendous upsurge in private equity investment in homecare, because huge profits can be made. Care homes are saddled with debt load, and this leads to understaffing, low pay, poor working conditions and cost cutting throughout.

Armine argued public-private partnerships are inefficient when people end up in hospital due to failed care. Profit simply does not belong in the health care system.



Parents, childcare workers, and policy experts joined a webinar to speak about the strengths of our current childcare system.

We learned about the threats we are seeing to replace \$10aDay childcare with a tax credit model that favours for-profit childcare.

The language of "choice" and "flexibility" was discussed. Speaker after speaker spoke to how this direct-funding-to-parent model has been proven to **not** create high-quality, affordable, and accessible childcare.

Watch Carolyn Ferns here

Ontario Minister of Education Paul Calandra sent a letter to all childcare centres across Ontario asking them to forward it to families. The letter says that parent fees could go up from \$22/day next year if more federal funding is not secured. The Minister's letter is misleading and feels intentionally designed to create panic among parents and daycare providers. The truth is that the province and federal government reached an agreement-in-principle to extend \$10aDay childcare for 5 more years back in March. Premier Ford's government needs to finalize and sign the agreement as soon as possible.

The \$10aDay program does need to be adequately funded by both levels of government, so that it can be improved and expanded. But it was disingenuous for the province to be taking this step in the middle of an election, when negotiations with the federal government could not genuinely be underway.



The Ontario government is providing \$9.44 million to enhance and expand services at 14 Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Treatment Centres across the province, ensuring survivors receive comprehensive, high-quality care whenever they need it. Joseph Brant Hospital in Burlington

will receive \$96,000 in new base funding for the addition of a Clinical Nurse Team Leader.

Also, nine drug injection sites have successfully transitioned into new Homelessness and Addiction Recovery Treatment Hubs. These are part of the almost \$550 million investment in 28 new HART Hubs across the province to protect the safety of children and families, while improving access to recovery and treatment services for people struggling with addictions.

MPP Effie Triantafilopoulos

Autism's Lost Girls New Scientist



Cognitive neuroscientist Gina Rippon

found gender bias at the heart of decades' worth of autism research and the effect it has had on autistic girls. Because we think of autism as a predominantly male condition, researchers have turned it into a self-fulfilling prophecy: the more they thought of autism as a boy thing, the more their studies confirmed this assumption. Now, neuroscientific studies have finally turned to look at autistic girls and found that their brains look very different from what we have come to expect from boys. This new understanding has huge implications, not only for how we approach autism in girls and women but also for the condition as a whole



We send our congratulations to **Morna Ballantyne**, Executive Director of Child Care Now, who was recently appointed to the newly established **Sectoral Table on the Care Economy**.

We also send Morna our sympathy, because sadly, her mother and role model, Edith Ballantyne, died in March aged 102. Edith was born in Czechoslovakia and fled to England in 1938 after Hitler's invasion of the Sudetenland. The family made their way to Canada. While working as a maid in Toronto, Edith discovered the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. They taught her English and made her feel like a person again. Edith met Campbell Ballantyne, who was working with the International Labour Organization. When the ILO moved with the UN to Geneva, Edith worked there as copy editor for the World Health Organization. When her children were well established, Edith got involved with the WILPF again and became secretary-general and then president.



At the world conference in Nairobi in 1985 to mark the end of the UN decade for women, Ms Ballantyne created a "peace tent" where daily sessions were held to discuss the effect of war on women and children . In 1995 Ms. Ballantyne received the Ghandi Peace award and the first International Peace Woman Award in 2003. Morna said, "She believed really passionately and sincerely in humanity. She dedicated her life to making the world a better place and she never, ever, gave up hope."

And Morna is doing the same.

VISIT STAND ON GUARD SITE



CFUW Oakville will be hosting their Annual Meeting and Dinner on May 5th at the Convention Centre. Guest speaker Bill King will talk about his book, "Hamilton – Weird and Wonderful"



L-R S. Thomson, UN Agency Observer OC President S. Shaw Barb Dumoulin, CAMEUS, IR Committee L. Coles, Chair Parallel Session

Sandy Thomson of CFUW wrote: The 69th session of the Status of Women (CSW69) comprised good news and bad news. The good news is that there are so many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) like ourselves who continually work for the education and equality of all women. On the negative side, the rights of women globally have fallen behind and the operative words for the week were "Backlash" and "Push for Progress." But we should not let any backlash deter us. The key messaging I took away from the multiple presentations were: "Thank a Politician," "Talk Hopefully," "Duty to Hope," "Positive Narratives," "Everything is about the Law" and "Relation Leadership vs Transactional Leadership".

So many women are either afraid to enter politics or have dropped out due to safety and online bullying and harassment. This has to change.

We need to support these courageous women as we need more women in leadership and decision-making positions to change the laws and make the laws. Dr. S. Bahous, UN Under Secretary General and Executive Director of UN Women stated, "No more complacency." So, I leave the clubs to the challenge of making changes starting in your communities.



Tariffs, the Trade War and Women's Work

The US tariffs and trade war have created economic chaos globally. And things are changing daily. We got together on April 10, Equal Pay Day, to make sense of what is happening, hear from women on the front lines about how their work is being affected, and strategize to make sure no one is left behind. We need an overall national strategy, and soon.

We heard from a Unifor member working in car assembly. Car manufacturers support families, communities, and whole economies but tariffs mean there has never been as much uncertainty as there is now

We heard from Caroline Ferns that the 10\$aday childcare agreement ends in 2026. Ontario has not signed on to extend this. The program is not safe and assured, but we all know it is crucial to economic success.

We heard that the Care Economy (98% women) everywhere is undervalued, underpaid and understaffed.

Solidarity has never been so important.



In Ukraine, firewood deliveries stopped. In Kyiv, families desperate for support called a crisis hotline only to be met with answering machines. In Egypt, struggling communities braced for longer delays in critical health care services. In Sudan, vital food supplies sat untouched in warehouses at the port. The thread binding these crises together? The US Agency for International Development's abrupt suspension of nearly all its programs. More than 60% of the \$71.9 billion allocated to foreign assistance in 2023 was handled by USAID. Established by President Kennedy in 1961, USAID provides emergency relief to disaster-stricken areas. The \$71.9 billion in foreign aid that the government spent in fiscal 2023 works out to 1.2% of that year's total federal outlays, which were more than \$6.1 trillion. But the money can be life changing for recipients.

CDH Data Watch

Household Food Insecurity in Halton: Challenges, Successes, & the Path Forward

Drawing on new data from local charitable/ community charitable food organizations, this report documents how rising costs, stagnant wages, and housing challenges are reshaping hunger in our community. The report also includes data from the 2024 Ontario Nutritious Food Basket survey for Halton. To provide a basic healthy diet for the reference family of four, the weekly cost is \$290.57.

Households receiving Ontario Works, Ontario Disability Support Program, or earning minimum wage cannot afford both rent and nutritious food while meeting other basic needs.

102 Food service programmes/ hunger relief agencies were surveyed and 49 responded. The response showed the use of Food Pantries had more than doubled.

The food security sector struggles with unsustainable program funding, increasing costs, wages that do not compete with government and private sectors, volunteer shortages and declining infrastructure for supporting volunteers.

The CDH report calls on **Policy Makers: to**

- Implement a Guaranteed Livable Income policy
- Index social assistance rates to inflation
- Invest in affordable housing and related policy impacting affordability.
- Find new ways of investing in the nonprofit sector that provides sustainable funding that promotes collaboration, community-based approaches and long-term planning.

BEZOS' ANGELS



An all-female crew venture into space on the self-piloted New Shepard operated by Jeff Bezos' Blue Origin. Yes, it cost billions and was shamelessly self-promotional, but the crew consisted of bioastronautics research scientist and civil rights activist Amanda Nguyen, CBS Mornings co-host Gayle King, pop entertainer Katy Perry, film producer Kerianne Flynn, former NASA scientist and entrepreneur Aisha Bowe and Lauren Sánchez, fiancée of Jeff Bezos. The journey took 11 minutes and reached the Kármán line at approximately 96 kilometres above the earth. (Kármán line, boundary separating Earth's atmosphere and outer space. The line is neither sharp nor well defined but is often taken to encircle Earth at an altitude between 80 to 100 km above mean sea level.) Blue Origin advertised the enterprise as an incentive to draw girls to pursue careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).



The members of Ontario's legislature chose Donna Skelly as the province's first female Speaker, a milestone she calls remarkable, albeit many years too late. Skelly has represented the Hamilton-area riding of Flamborough-Glanbrook for the Progressive Conservatives since 2018 and has served as a deputy Speaker.



Ontario's Lieutenant Governor, **Honourable Edith Dumont**, delivered the Speech from the Throne, a time-honoured tradition that marks the commencement of the parliamentary session.

In a phrase with rhythms very similar to those of former NDP leader Jack Layton, the LG said, "Together, let us be bold. Let us be ambitious. Let us be fearless. Together, let us protect Ontario."

Newly appointed as Parliamentary Assistant to Minister Stan Cho at the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming, MPP Effie Triantafilopoulos wrote, "The province is investing \$213 million to support the first call for proposals that will create or expand up to 80 primary care teams. This funding is part of the more than \$1.8 billion the Ontario government is investing to add 305 new primary care teams across the province, connecting two million more people to publicly funded primary care within four years."

WAGE



Wendy Kaur, The Walrus

When Prime Minister Mark Carney cut the position of cabinet minister of women and gender equality and youth, or WAGE, Debbie Owusu-Akyeeah was in New York, to attend the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. She is co-director of policy and advocacy at Action Canada for Sexual Health and

Rights. She expected that there should have been a heads-up from the Prime Minister's Office.

According to Canadian senator Marilou McPhedran, some insiders were caught equally unawares, including former WAGE minister Marci Ien, who only found out when she watched the swearing-in. Sen. McPhedran regards Carney's decision as a calculated one. "They knew that there wouldn't be a mobilization against the decision, because even a Liberal government under a corporatist prime minister such as Mark Carney is potentially less damaging to equality-seeking communities in Canada than a Trump-inspired Conservative government."

The changes he made to WAGE could well become permanent if Mark Carney wins the election.

"We have reverted and regressed by more than fifty years," McPhedran asserts.

"We have less now than when I was a young lawyer fifty years ago, because we've always had a dedicated Status of Women office—as it was called for decades." There has been a member of cabinet working on issues on the status of women for more than six decades in Canada. During the time of Stephen Harper, women's issues were a cabinet position, but there was no department devoted to them. Then Trudeau called it Women and Gender Equality Canada and made it a full ministry, which made momentous changes.

"We want to see a commitment on if the Liberal Party were to form government after the election there will be a minister for women and gender equality and youth," says Owusu-Akyeeah.

Some AWH members attended a live "Women In Politics" event.

The host introduced the MPS:- Karina Gould, Marci Ien, Ya'ara Saks and Lisa Hepfner. (Anita Anand arrived, saw the noisy demonstrators outside and, with apologies, went home again).



Our host mixed questions from the audience with her own to create what turned out to be a soft and pleasant evening.

How had they got into politics? (Someone else pushed them) Did they have to cope with imposter syndrome? (All new MPs do) Had they felt marginalised in a traditionally man's world? (Under Trudeau, absolutely not at all.) How had they been able to protect themselves against trolling on social media? (No one knows how to do that) Had they had to face sexist remarks? (Yes, from the Press) What had been highlights of their time in office? Lisa Hepfner described going to the UN for CSW68. On arriving, she was quite overwhelmed when representatives of governments all over the world came up and said, "Oh my god, you're Canadian! You are leading the world in terms of what you do for women!"

It suddenly brought home the fact that Canada really is the best country in the world.

On the way out, Teri Shaw spoke to some of demonstrators outside and found them endearingly young and naïve.



We launch a new podcast. Join us for engaging conversations, as we build a community of support and inclusivity. Plus, we make sure to have a lot of fun along the way! Whether you're looking for motivation, education, or just a good laugh, Disability With Possibility is the podcast for you. Check it out here!

Halton Police Board review of the 2024 crime statistics in the region.



More than 20% of those arrested for intimate partner violence in Halton are repeat offenders on bail, according to Halton Police Chief Stephen Tanner. Halton Police arrested 739 people for intimate partner violence in 2024. Of those, 159 were out on bail, accounting for 21.5 per cent of the arrests for that crime. Silvia Samsa, executive director for SAVIS (Sexual Assault and Violence Intervention Services) of Halton, said one of the biggest issues is that those charged with intimate partner violence are treated as first-time offenders by the courts.

Without a previous record, offenders are often released with a promise to have no contact with the victim and to appear for a court date. As the statistics would indicate, quite often those conditions are ignored.

Samsa said, "We would like (the courts) to send a strong message that this is not a family matter – it's a crime.



Pope Francis, trailblazing Jesuit with a heart for the poor, dies at 88

As Pope Francis' legacy is debated, one key area for examination will be his advancement of women in the Vatican, whether his changes were sufficient and whether they will last.

Undoubtedly, Francis appointed more women to positions of authority; he appointed both the first female prefect of a Vatican dicastery and the first female president of the Vatican City.

Francis also appointed the first woman secretary and several women undersecretaries, both religious and lay. He believed women were better managers than men, particularly in the areas of government and the economy. Despite his strong opposition to ordaining women to the priesthood, Pope Francis did officially open several lay ministry roles to women, though women had served in them unofficially for years.

This openness did not extend to ordained roles, though he allowed debate about this topic in a way that previous popes had not.

Asked to justify the ban on women priests, Francis invoked the concept of the "Marian" and "Petrine" ministries, arguing that women, like Mary, are meant to serve in a motherly role, whereas men, like Peter, are given the duty of ordained institutional leadership.

How women's progress in the Vatican will continue depends on—Francis' successor's willingness to push forward, the women's willingness to continue in unforgiving roles, and the "patriarchal mindset" of the Vatican. Ultimately, only the long view of history will show whether the Francis papacy represented a shattering of the church's "stained-glass ceiling" or only a few broken panes.



Earth Day Clean Up April 26

"The 34th annual Earth Day Clean Up of Oakville Nature Sites took place on Saturday, April 26 at seventy nature sites" said Stephen Dankowich, co-founder and Executive Director of the Oakville Community Centre for Peace, Ecology and Human Rights (OCCPEHR).

At each Clean Up site, volunteers were greeted by Site Coordinators who had bags, disposable gloves in various sizes and hand sanitizer, provided by the Town's Parks and Open Space Department.

The Theme for the 34th annual event encouraged everyone to "Pitch-in for a clean, green, litter-free Oakville."

The weather cooperated, Oakville had never looked so pristine and over 1000 volunteers had a lot of fun!

Election Day April 28

It was a nail biter to the end. The Liberals won, Poilievre lost his seat and the NDP lost official party status. "Big Daddy" Mark Carney is in charge. The country still faces an affordability crisis, a housing crisis, a climate crisis, and all the economic and security risks and challenges that come with Trump looking to remake the US—Canada relationship and the world. Carney's "polite austerity," his promise of a balanced budget, is exactly the wrong policy for the moment. Big Daddy isn't here to save you, he's here to save the economic status quo. And that status quo, will only further entrench inequality and inequity, exacerbating existing problems and perhaps leading to new ones, too.

Elections end; Accountability doesn't

Coming Soon:



BICN Annual Report 2024-2025

Our **Annual General Meeting will be held on May 16, at 11 ET, via Zoom**. We'll send you more information and ask for an RSVP when we get closer to the event.



































Fair Représentation Vote équitable Canada au Canada

