



Women's Multicultural Resource and Counselling Center

In 2003 the Women's Multicultural Resource and Counselling Centre (WMRCC) renamed to reflect the agency's services and target population more accurately. Created in 1993 as the Women's Rights Action Coalition of Durham, the WMRCC is a resource center for women and children who experience violence and/or immigration issues (1). It also addresses economic challenges, issues of literacy, and supports entrepreneurial pursuits through knowledge-sharing practices available at the center.



Mission and Vision of the WMRCC

A registered charitable organization, WMRCC was founded by Esther Enyolu after she moved to Durham region. Following a needs assessment study, Enyolu started her work in 1990 to fill the gap in dealing with issues around violence and abuse within racialized communities of immigrant and refugee women. With a vision of seeing all people respect one another irrespective of gender, race, religion, sexuality and class, the mission of the WMRCC is to see women and their children move past and recover from the trauma they've experienced in their lives (2). This is done through innovative and free programming and services – “no one is turned away” (3).

Programming

There are a multitude of programs available for youth, children, seniors, and women at WMRCC. The programs are hosted both in-house and externally and touch on a wide array of topics, including addressing systemic issues of anti-racism, diversity training, social justice, and human rights issues. Moreover, WMRCC recognizes the need for support services that apprehend the salience of intersectional experiences. In the one-on-one counselling services provided (by qualified social workers and counsellors), a holistic and integrated approach is taken, where issues of violence are not the only issues considered, but also one's race, socio-economic status, age, sexuality, geographical region, immigration status, language, education level, cultural practices, and religion (4).

At WMRCC, Math and literacy tutoring is available for women free of charge. In partnership with the Elementary Teacher's Federation of Ontario (Durham Chapter), the women are coached one-on-one in literacy and math skills. These skills not only empower them to be able to support their children in their learning, but also in their own learning,



but also in their own learning, development, and employment opportunities. From mentorship programs that connect women to other women in a supportive partnership, support groups to decrease isolation, resource guides and a variety of youth projects and seniors' programs – dynamic, relevant and pioneering programming is being offered at WMRCC; it is working to lift women and their families out of difficult and dangerous situations and empower them socially and economically through an intersectional and anti-oppressive lens.

WMRCC offers services specifically for Black children and youth and their families through three programming streams. The Enhanced Youth Outreach Worker Program (EYOW) serves youth from 12 years of age to 25, addressing “mental health, addictions, trauma, unhealthy relationships, family violence and/or human and sex trafficking” (5). The Together We Can Youth Mentorship program pairs youth with caring and dependable adults with a vision of increasing resilience and making healthy choices. The third programming stream is the Youth in Transition Worker program. Launched in 2019, WMRCC partnered with the Durham Children’s aid society and other community partners to provide support to youth aging out of the care of the Children’s Aid Society to transition to independent adults. The program works to empower youth to be proud and confident and provides tangible skills to make the transition out of care.

Funded by the Government of Canada, Elevate Talent is a workforce development program the aim of which is to “equip professionals from underrepresented communities with the skills and credentials they need to build thriving careers in the technology and innovation sectors”(6). In concertation with various community and business partners in the technology and innovation sectors, Elevate Talent is working to undermine barriers to thsector that are frequently faced by racialized and other marginalized communities which include those from the 2SLGBTQ+, BIPOC and Francophone communities.

The WMRCC’s advocacy for women’s rights and protection domestically and abroad, is a testament to their ability to unify like-minded persons to create and influence interrelated networks. The organizations with whom WMRCC have made partnerships are "creating a global



village that can work towards one common goal" (7). WMRCC is the only organization in Durham region focusing on immigrant women of colour, children and youth who have been impacted by violence.

WMRCC recognizes the possibilities and power of worker-cooperatives and offers services to equip people with the skills and knowledge necessary to form or join worker cooperatives. Through workshops, mentorship, tours, discussion forums, conferences, networking and volunteer opportunities and informational resources, the WMRCC is putting power into the hands of women and their families towards a financially stable, and economically inclusive life. It honors a commitment to diversity, social justice and anti-oppression by providing tailored training for the general public or organizations seeking diversity training. This is one stream of revenue for the WMRCC.



Funding, Partnerships and Governance

Like many non-profits, funding continues to be an on-going consideration for the center. Grants are the main source of funding for WMRCC. Some of the program funding comes from grants from various ministries, including the Status of Women Canada and the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth services. WMRCC connects with many different sectors, working together with businesses, non-profits, community sector organizations, cities, municipalities, corporations, ethnocultural groups and faith communities to raise awareness about issues of violence against women and children and provide education on preventing violence against women.

WMRCC is governed by an 8-member board of directors and lead by a small staff of 9. It participated in a global conference in New York, USA and at the national level, WMRCC presented on diversity and inclusion at a gender equality conference in Vancouver, Canada. Realizing the compounded challenges which are faced by immigrant women of colour is how WMRCC seeks to create equity. Acknowledging that marginalization is a multifaceted and



multi-lateral experience for racialized women who experience discrimination in a Eurocentric and patriarchal society is the type of approach WMRCC takes into account the diversity of women who look to them for support.

As a Nigerian-born woman working in the social sector, Esther Enyolu's lived experiences of prejudice motivated her work to combat the disenfranchisement of women of colour. She has been committed to implementing change agents in communities in Canada for women of colour for decades, an accomplishment which garnered her the esteemed Remarkable Woman Award. Even as the Executive Director of WMRCC, Enyolu is met with disrespect from various ethnic groups, citing internalized racism as a barrier she faces daily in the workplace. From a leadership level she is an exemplary model of resiliency demonstrating that "you need to know what you stand for and know who you are, and [can't] let people push you around" (9).

Enyolu suggests that the province can better integrate racialized people and immigrants into the social economy by fully addressing their needs instead of using a piecemeal approach to systemic issues. She also suggests working in concert with the communities themselves and providing more programs, funding, and services to bridge the gaps left by the public and the private sectors. Self-help is a key tenant of the social and solidarity economy. By empowering and working with marginalized communities, WMRCC is working to resist systemic economic and social exclusion in a sustainable and ongoing way. WMRCC is an innovative and pioneering presence in the Durham region and continues to galvanize marginalized women and their families through its programming.

More information on WMRCC can be found here:

<https://wmrcc.org/>



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References

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- 3. Women’s Multicultural Resource and Counselling Centre (WMRCC), “About,” last modified 2021. <https://wmrcc.org/about/#history>
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- 7. Esther Enyolu in conversation with the interviewer, 27 November 2019.
- 8. Esther Enyolu in conversation with the interviewer, 27 November 2019.
- 9. Esther Enyolu in conversation with the interviewer, 27 November 2019.

