

Where Legacies Meet



Where Legacies Meet

This book is dedicated to the generations to come. May
you grow like a garden of flowers, each unique in
beauty and strength, forever nurturing one another
long after our own petals have fallen.

Where Legacies Meet

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We thank the women who shared their journeys with us.

We acknowledge that we are gathered on Treaty 1 Territory, the ancestral and traditional lands of the Anishinaabeg, Ininiwak, Anishininiwak, Dene, and Dakota peoples — and in the Homeland of the Red River Métis peoples.

These lands have long been places where women have led, as knowledge keepers, organizers, healers, protectors of language and culture, and defenders of community. Indigenous women here have carried generations through strength, ceremony, governance and resistance.

The women celebrated within these pages reflect the leadership, perseverance, and contributions of Asian women who have enriched our communities and helped shape Manitoba. Their stories remind us that Indigenous and Asian women have each navigated barriers, discrimination, and the challenge of having their voices heard, while continuing to lead, advocate, and strengthen society.

By building relationships grounded in respect and understanding, supporting one another's journeys, and working together in the spirit of reconciliation, we can help create a future where all women are valued, empowered, and able to thrive. Through collaboration and shared responsibility, we strengthen both our communities and our collective future.

Editorial Committee:
Sharan Tappia (editor)
Suenita Maharaj (co-editor)
Sohni Tappia (co-editor)

Asian Women of Winnipeg
Together we stand



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President's Message



“Nothing can dim the light which shines from within.”

Maya Angelou

Welcome to this milestone publication—a testament to resilience, sisterhood, and the enduring power of self-determination. This book is dedicated to the extraordinary women who broke barriers and continue to stand as beacons of hope and inspiration for generations to come.

Every movement has a catalyst, and mine arrived in 2014. I remember standing in the Manitoba Legislative Building during an International Women’s Day event. There were more than 400 women in attendance, yet as I looked around the room, I saw only four South Asian women—three from AWOW (Asian Women of Winnipeg) and one who was working as a staff member in a minister’s office. It was a stark awakening.

In that moment, I realized that within the existing system, Asian women were largely invisible. If we waited to be invited into spaces or acknowledged for our contributions and leadership, it could take more than a lifetime for our voices to truly be present and heard. It was then that I made a decision: if we were not going to be given a seat at the table, we would build one together; a place shaped by courage, determination, and the belief that future generations deserve to inherit a world where their voices are not only heard, but deeply valued.

Together, with a fierce, compassionate, and vibrant sisterhood, we planted seeds of hope and nurtured them with purpose, dignity, and unwavering faith in one another. Side by side, we built AWOW from the ground up—rooted in hard work, guided by vision, and strengthened through unity and mutual respect.

Over the years, this garden has grown into a sanctuary where everyone is welcome and where all can flourish. What began as a grassroots movement blossomed into a powerful force for change, earning recognition and support across municipal, provincial, and federal communities. Through gatherings that celebrated culture, leadership, and belonging, we created spaces where stories could rise, connections could deepen, and future generations could see themselves reflected with pride and possibility. In doing so, we did more than contribute to Manitoba's community—we helped transform it.

As you read these stories of struggle and triumph, my hope is that you carry forward the spirit of what has been achieved. To the next generation: the soil has been prepared, the foundation is strong, and the garden is in bloom. Stand tall, speak with conviction, and remember that you carry the legacy of the women who lit the path for us all.

With love, gratitude, and boundless hope for the future.
Sharan Tappia, President

INTRODUCTION

This collection gathers the lived experiences of women whose lives have been shaped by courage, endurance, and a commitment to future generations. Each has been recognized as a Woman of Distinction through the Asian Women of Winnipeg (AWOW) Awards—an honour that celebrates not only achievement, but the quiet and powerful ways these women care for their communities across Manitoba.

AWOW was founded with a vision to uplift, educate, and empower women while honouring the richness of diversity and service. Over the years, it has grown into a circle of recognition and care, where women are celebrated not only for what they accomplish, but for the lives they touch along the way. For many of the women in these pages, success is not solitary, it is to embrace the hands that reach out to help and to rise is also to reach back—to guide, mentor, and make space for other woman to walk beside you.

The women featured here come from many paths and places. Some arrived in Canada carrying the hopes and uncertainties of new beginnings, rebuilding their lives piece by piece. Others were born here, learning to navigate layered cultural identities, expectations, and responsibilities that shaped their journey. Though their stories differ, they are bound by a shared sense of purpose. Through leadership, advocacy, creativity, entrepreneurship, mentorship, and often through quiet acts of care that rarely seek recognition, each has opened doors for others. Each door is an invitation to enter; we invite you to leave your footprint to guide those who follow.

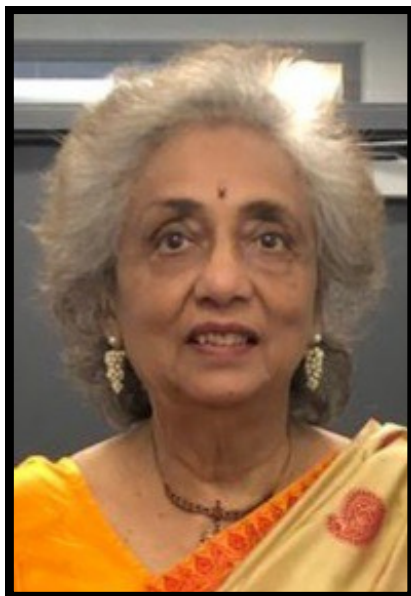
A stylized graphic of a woman's hair in shades of pink and grey, framing the central text.

Receipients of Distinguished Leadership Awards

Pamela Rebello, O.M.

A Legacy of Service, Compassion and Leadership

AWOW Awardee-2015
Advisory Chair AWOW



Pamela Rebello O. M.

*“Let us always meet each other with a smile,
for the smile is the beginning of love,”
Saint (Mother) Teresa of Calcutta*

A Legacy of Service Compassion and Leadership

There are people who shape change through constant visibility, and others who shape it through presence so steady it becomes impossible to ignore. Pamela has always been both. At times she moves quietly, like a hand gently guiding others forward. At other times, she arrives with unmistakable clarity—where change is required, she does not hesitate to stand in it.

When we first came together to recognize the women who had mentored, guided, and empowered young women in our community, her name surfaced again and again. Not as an introduction, but as a recognition. As someone already known in the ways that matter most.

She became one of our first awardees in 2015, a moment that did not mark the beginning of her impact, but rather the moment we formally acknowledged what had long been lived and witnessed. In Pamela, we saw something rare: a woman who could hold space gently, and also reshape it when necessary.

Born in India and rooted in Winnipeg, she has carried culture not as something to preserve behind glass, but as something alive—spoken, taught, danced, shared, and lived. Across classrooms, community halls, and cultural spaces, she has guided generations not only in what to learn, but in how to belong.

Her leadership has always moved between quiet influence and decisive action. She became the first woman to chair the Manitoba Intercultural Council, and the first racialized person appointed to the Manitoba Arts Council. These were not simply milestones of recognition, they were openings. Doors that did not just acknowledge her presence, but widened because of it.

In time, she was honoured with the Order of Manitoba, yet even such recognition never contained her. It only reflected what communities had already long known. One of her most enduring gifts is the India School of Dance, Music and Theatre. It is more than an institution. It is memory in motion. It is heritage that breathes. It is a place where young people learn that identity is not something to leave behind, but something to stand within with pride and strength.

And then there is AWOW—Asian Women of Winnipeg—where her influence continues to shape a living circle of sisterhood and support. Here, she has helped cultivate something simple and profound: that no woman should have to find her way alone. That belonging is not granted—it is built, shared, and protected.

She speaks often of sisterhood not as hierarchy, but as recognition. As the willingness to make space for another woman's becoming. Under her guidance, AWOW has remained a place where women arrive as they are, and are met with understanding rather than expectation.

Her influence does not belong to one moment or one institution. It moves through people. Through generations. Through the quiet confidence of women who now carry themselves differently because someone once believed in them enough to do so.

She is a bridge-builder, yes—but also a grounding force. A reminder that transformation does not always arrive gently. Sometimes it arrives with certainty. With clarity. With a voice that says: this must change now. And sometimes, that voice is hers.

Pamela's message to all of us:

"We do not always arrive quietly when change is needed. But we must always arrive with purpose...

Sisterhood is not a structure—it is the space we make for one another to rise... Culture is not something we carry alone; it is something we continue together...

When we make space for others, we are not diminished—we are multiplied. Om, Shalom, Shanti, Peace."

Dr. Anju Bajaj



Awardee - 2022

*“One child, one teacher, one book, one pen
can change the world.” —
Malala Yousafzai*

Dr. Anju Bajaj has dedicated her career to helping young people recognize possibilities within themselves they may never have imagined. As a STEM advisor with Manitoba Catholic Schools, her work extends far beyond academics. She believes education should empower students to feel confident, curious, and capable of shaping their own future.

Throughout her career, Dr. Bajaj has worked to create inclusive opportunities for students across Manitoba, especially girls and youth from underrepresented communities who may not always see themselves reflected in science, technology, or leadership spaces. Through science fairs, innovation programs, mentorship initiatives, and community partnerships, she has encouraged students to ask questions, take risks, and believe in their abilities.

Her leadership is steeped in mentorship. She believes that one encouraging voice can change the direction of a young person's life. Whether supporting teachers, guiding students, or collaborating with Indigenous communities, she approaches her work with humility, compassion, and purpose. She often reminds youth that success is not determined by where they begin, but by their willingness to continue learning and growing. Dr. Bajaj's contributions to education have been recognized nationally, including receiving the Prime Minister's Award for Excellence in Education. Yet she emphasizes that meaningful change is never accomplished alone. Behind every successful student is often a community of people working together to create opportunities and encouragement.

At the heart of her work is a commitment to equity and belonging. She believes classrooms should be places where every student feels seen, valued, and inspired to dream bigger. Her leadership reminds young people that success is not measured only by personal achievement, but also by how we encourage others along the way.

For the many students whose confidence has grown because someone believed in them, Dr. Anju Bajaj's legacy is already being carried forward into the next generation.

Sangita Bhalla



Awardee - 2026

*“You can’t be what you can’t see.” —
Marian Wright Edelman*

Sangita Bhalla's journey into leadership began at a time when many professional spaces still felt limiting for women, particularly racialized women. After earning her Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Manitoba, she moved to attend law school at the University of Toronto. Although women had been graduating from law schools in equal numbers to men, leadership positions within the profession remained overwhelmingly male-dominated. Those experiences impacted not only her career path, but also her understanding of the importance of representation, mentorship, and visibility for future generations of women.

Returning to Winnipeg, Sangita built a career framed by service, inclusion, and relationship-building. Through her work with RBC Royal Trust and later as Head of the National Indigenous Wealth Team, she became deeply committed to economic reconciliation and supporting underserved communities. She believes leadership is not simply about professional advancement, but about ensuring institutions genuinely reflect and support the needs of the people who they serve .

Throughout her career, Sangita has been a strong advocate for workplace cultures that value equity, compassion, and authenticity. She often speaks about the importance of creating environments where women are not forced to choose between family and career, and where empathy and emotional intelligence are recognized as strengths rather than limitations. Her leadership reflects a belief that collaboration and kindness can exist alongside ambition and excellence.

For younger women entering professional spaces, Sangita understands how isolating it can feel to be the only racialized woman in the room. That understanding continues to shape how she mentors and encourages others. She believes visibility matters because when young people see leaders who reflect their experiences, it helps expand what they believe is possible for themselves. Her journey reminds future generations that leadership is not about fitting into existing systems unchanged. It is about helping reshape those systems with courage, humanity, and a willingness to create space for others to rise alongside you.

Anita Campbell



Awardee - 2024

“The Red River Métis has a long history of being a strong matriarchal society where women’s voices are valued and respected.”

Anita Campbell

Anita Campbell's life has been guided by service, leadership, and a deep commitment to uplifting Indigenous women and communities across Manitoba. A proud Red River Métis woman from Duck Bay, Manitoba, she has spent decades creating spaces where women feel empowered, connected, and supported. Her work reflects a belief that strong communities are built when people are given opportunities to succeed while remaining grounded in culture and identity.

As Spokesperson and Chief Executive Officer of Infinity Women Secretariat (IWS), Anita helped grow the organization from a small initiative into a thriving network serving more than 2,500 members. Through culturally grounded programs, advocacy, mentorship, and leadership development, she has worked to ensure Red River Métis women have opportunities to lead with confidence and pride in who they are. Her work focuses not only on addressing social and economic challenges, but also on encouraging younger generations to believe in their own potential.

Before joining IWS, Anita dedicated 35 years to the Ma-Mow-We-Tak Friendship Centre in Thompson, Manitoba, where she served as Executive Director. Under her leadership, the Centre became a welcoming place where urban Indigenous families could access support, services, and a sense of belonging. Her commitment to community building remained steady throughout decades of change and growth.

Her leadership also extends into Métis governance through the Manitoba Métis Federation, where she has served in several important roles, including Minister of Finance, Human Resources, and Information Technology. During the COVID-19 pandemic, she co-chaired the Métis COVID-19 Response Team, helping communities navigate one of the most difficult periods in recent history with compassion and strength.

Anita's contributions have been recognized through honours including the Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Medal, and the Governor General of Canada's Sovereign's Medal for Volunteers.

For young women searching for role models, Anita Campbell's story is a reminder that leadership is not about standing above others. It is about lifting communities, mentoring future generations, and ensuring no one is left behind.

Rita Chahal



Awardee - 2016

*"You must never be fearful about what
you are doing when it is right."
Rosa Parks*

Rita Chahal's journey is a powerful reflection of resilience, leadership, and the enduring impact of giving back. For newcomers and young women searching for role models, her story offers a meaningful reminder that beginnings do not determine possibility. Through courage, perseverance, and service, barriers can become opportunities, not only for yourself, but for entire communities.

Her journey began in 1966 when her family immigrated from Northern India to Canada, becoming one of the first South Asian families to settle in Prince Edward Island. Those early experiences shaped her understanding of what it means to adapt to a new country while carrying both uncertainty and hope. They also shaped her lifelong commitment to creating opportunities and support systems for others navigating similar journeys.

A graduate of Dalhousie University, Rita built more than four decades of leadership across academia, corporate sectors, and community organizations. Today, as Executive Director of the Mood Disorders Association of Manitoba, she continues advocating for mental health awareness, accessibility, and the removal of stigma. Her work reflects a belief that people deserve spaces where they feel supported, understood, and empowered to seek help without fear or shame.

Throughout her career, Rita has broken barriers while opening doors for others. She made history as the first woman of colour to serve as General Manager of the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce. Additionally, she held senior leadership roles focused on newcomer support and employment access. During critical moments, including Canada's response to the Syrian refugee crisis and the arrival of refugee claimants from the United States, her leadership helped guide compassionate and inclusive resettlement efforts.

Rita also remains deeply committed to mentoring young women. Through her leadership with the Women in Media Foundation, she helped connect women from diverse backgrounds with opportunities in broadcasting, film, and new media, encouraging them to pursue their goals with confidence.

Her contributions have earned national recognition, including being named one of Canada's Top 25 Immigrants and a Manitoba 150 Women Trailblazer. Her greatest impact continues to live in the young women she has encouraged, mentored, and inspired to rise alongside her.

Sandy Chahal



Awardee- 2024

*“Chase your dreams, not the approval of others. Stay
true to yourself and follow your own path”*
Sunita Williams

Sandy Chahal's story is one of purpose in action—a reflection of what it means to lead with resilience, and intention. Over more than two decades, she has shown that meaningful leadership is not measured only by professional success, but by the lives you influence and the opportunities you create for others along the way.

As Chief Operating Officer at Lawton Partners Wealth Management, Sandy leads with vision, discipline, and a strong sense of responsibility. Her professional journey began at CIBC, where she earned national recognition not only for her achievements, but for the trust and relationships she built with clients and colleagues alike. Those early experiences shaped a leadership style grounded in integrity, consistency, and empathy—qualities that continue defining her work today.

What makes Sandy's journey especially inspiring is her belief that success becomes more meaningful when it is shared. Fluent in multiple languages and deeply connected to her community, she has always viewed diversity as a source of strength and unity. Throughout her career, she has encouraged inclusive leadership and worked to ensure people from all backgrounds feel welcomed and represented.

Her influence extends far beyond the corporate world. Through her involvement with organizations such as the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce, Volunteer Manitoba, and Manitoba Opera, Sandy has helped strengthen community engagement while supporting initiatives that encourage inclusion, collaboration, and civic participation. She has also contributed to political and civic engagement efforts focused on ensuring leadership reflects the diversity of the communities it serves.

For more than a decade, Sandy has remained especially committed to empowering women and mentoring future leaders. She believes confidence grows when women are given spaces to lead, share ideas, and support one another openly. Through mentorship and encouragement, she has inspired women to pursue leadership roles they may once have believed were out of reach.

Her contributions have been recognized through the King Charles III Coronation Medal. For Sandy, leadership is about service, and creating pathways for the young women who will follow her.

Dr. Ganga B. Dakshinamurti



Awardee - 2018

*"To know the road ahead, ask those
coming back." Chinese Proverb*

For Dr. Ganga B. Dakshinamurti, leadership has always been grounded in learning, mentorship, and service. An educator, librarian, scholar, and cultural leader, she has spent decades creating spaces where people feel encouraged to grow, connect, and discover their own potential. Her journey reflects the quiet strength of someone who believes knowledge becomes more meaningful when it improves the lives of others.

Her contributions have been recognized through numerous honours, including Librarian of the Year from the Manitoba Library Association, the Outreach Award from the University of Manitoba, the Queen Elizabeth Golden Jubilee Service Award and the Distinguished Leadership Award from the India Canada Culture and Heritage Association. While these achievements are significant, those who know her best often speak first about her generosity, humility, and willingness to mentor others.

Throughout her career, Dr. Dakshinamurti has remained deeply committed to lifelong learning. She often reflects on knowledge as an endless horizon, reminding students and newcomers that what we know is only a small part of what remains to be discovered. That belief shaped not only her academic work, but also the compassionate way she guides the younger generation toward confidence and opportunity.

Even in retirement, she continues to contribute actively to Winnipeg's cultural and intellectual life. Through organizations such as Manohar Performing Arts of Canada, the Hindu Society of Manitoba, and the Dakshinamurti Academy of Hindu Studies, she has helped preserve Indian classical dance, music, literature, and philosophy while encouraging youth to remain connected to their cultural heritage.

Dr. Dakshinamurti's life experience is a reminder that leadership is not measured by titles or recognition alone. It is built slowly through wisdom, kindness, service, and the willingness to continue moving others forward long after personal success has been achieved.

Raman Dhaliwal



Awardee - 2025

*We cannot succeed when half of us are held back. We call upon our sisters to be brave – to embrace the strength within themselves and realize their full potential.” –
Malala Yousafzai*

Raman Dhaliwal is a leader whose work has helped shape how institutions plan, govern, and serve their communities in Manitoba. Canadian born and raised in Winnipeg, her leadership reflects service, accountability, and a pursuit of creating opportunity for future generations. Through her strategic vision and leadership, she continues opening doors for others while strengthening the institutions around her.

Raman holds a dual role at the University of Manitoba as Associate Vice-President (Administration) and Chief Risk Officer, becoming the first racialized woman to serve in this position. In this role, she oversees a portfolio of more than 500 staff. Her leadership style combines strategic thinking with empathy, collaboration, and a strong belief that institutions function best when people feel respected, supported, and included.

One of her most significant accomplishments has been leading the development and launch of the University of Manitoba's 30-Year Capital Plan and Prioritization Framework. The initiative established a transparent and long-term approach to planning investments across more than 100 buildings and campuses while embedding Indigenous design principles, climate resilience, accessibility, and fiscal sustainability into future development. Her work created a roadmap that aligns institutional growth with both academic priorities and community needs.

Raman's leadership was also instrumental during the COVID-19 pandemic. She helped establish the province's first vaccine clinics for healthcare professionals, and supported recruitment for the first vaccine super site in Garden Hill First Nation. During a time of uncertainty and fear, her leadership helped protect communities across Manitoba.

A graduate of the University of Manitoba with a Bachelor of Commerce (Honours), a CFA Level III candidate, and an MBA candidate at the Asper School of Business, Raman has used her knowledge to lead with vision and integrity. Her journey reflects the spirit of collaboration —lifting others, strengthening community, and building a lasting foundation for those who will follow.

Perla Javate



Awardee- 2019

*"We must open the doors and we must see to it that they
remain open, so that others can pass through."
Rosemary Brown*

Perla Javate's journey began with one courageous decision that would eventually change the lives of countless families in Manitoba's Filipino community. As a social worker supporting garment workers in the Netherlands, she refused to accept uncertainty when employment contracts were suddenly terminated. Instead, she helped secure opportunities in Winnipeg for 92 women and arrived in Canada alongside them in 1976.

That single act of leadership created a ripple effect that continues generations later. Many of those women sponsored their families, built successful lives, and helped establish a thriving Filipino community in Manitoba. Perla's courage and determination became the foundation for opportunities that extended far beyond her own journey.

Perla later spent 34 years with the Winnipeg School Division as a Community Liaison Officer and an Intercultural Worker. She became a trusted guide for newcomer families learning to navigate the Canadian school system. Through mentorship, compassion, and cultural understanding, she helped students and parents feel welcomed and supported during difficult transitions. For many families adjusting to life in Canada, she became both an advocate and a trusted presence in their lives.

In 2022, she was elected School Trustee for the Winnipeg School Division, continuing her lifelong commitment to education and community leadership. She also founded the Philippine Heritage Council of Manitoba, helping preserve Filipino culture while strengthening connections across Manitoba's multicultural communities.

Even after decades of service, Perla continues supporting immigrant and refugee communities with the same dedication that shaped her earliest work. Her story reflects the power of leadership and compassion tied to action.

Perla's legacy lives not only in organizations and policies, but in the generations of families whose lives became less difficult because she chose service, mentorship, and community over comfort or recognition.

Isha Khan



Awardee - 2021

“For to be free is not merely to cast off one’s chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others.” Nelson Mandela

Isha Khan has built her career around fairness, inclusion, and the belief that institutions should reflect the people they serve. Born and raised in Winnipeg, she pursued her education at the University of Manitoba and the University of Victoria before beginning a legal career grounded in advocacy and public service. From the beginning, she understood that the law is not simply about rules or systems—it is about people and the ways those systems shape everyday lives.

Her return to Winnipeg marked a shift toward community-focused leadership through organizations such as United Way Winnipeg and later the Manitoba Human Rights Commission, where she served as both legal counsel and Executive Director. Through this work, she addressed cases involving discrimination while helping strengthen public education surrounding human rights, accessibility, and inclusion. She became known for her thoughtful and collaborative leadership style, one grounded in listening carefully and creating space for meaningful dialogue.

In 2019, the Government of Canada appointed her to review the conditions of solitary confinement in federal institutions, a role requiring compassion, careful analysis, and a strong sense of justice. Today, as CEO of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, she continues creating spaces where storytelling, education, and lived experiences encourage reflection and understanding. Her work reminds Canadians that human rights are not abstract ideas—they are deeply connected to daily life and human dignity.

Beyond her professional accomplishments, Isha remains actively involved on various local and international boards: Main Street Project, the International Network of Museums of Peace, Balmoral Hall School, and the President's Advisory Committee at the University of Manitoba. She reflects leadership rooted in service and community connection. Through her thoughtful and collaborative leadership, Isha Khan continues to inspire future generations to pursue justice with integrity.

Manju Lodha



Awardee-2018

*"The best way to find yourself is to lose
yourself in the service of others."
Mahatma Gandhi*

For Manju Lodha, art has never been simply about expression—it has been a way to bring people together. A self-taught artist, writer, and community leader, she has spent decades using creativity to encourage dialogue, understanding, and connection between cultures, faiths, and generations. Her work reflects a belief that art has the power not only to inspire, but also to heal and build bridges where division once existed.

Through exhibitions, collaborative projects, poetry, and storytelling, Manju has explored themes of spirituality, peace, identity, and inclusion. Her work often invites people to reflect on shared values rather than differences. Collaboration with other artists brought her artistic vision into schools and community spaces, where young people were encouraged to engage with diversity in thoughtful and meaningful ways.

One of her notable initiatives, created in honour of Mahatma Gandhi's 150th birth anniversary, encouraged conversations around non-violence, compassion, and collective responsibility. Alongside her artistic contributions, she has remained deeply involved in community leadership, serving on the Board of Governors of the Winnipeg Art Gallery and participating in multicultural and interfaith organizations throughout Manitoba.

Manju also participated in establishing the Sharing Circle of Wellness, creating spaces focused on healing, reflection, and collective well-being. She often speaks about the importance of listening openly to others and being willing to challenge personal assumptions. For her, understanding begins with humility and genuine curiosity about the experiences of others.

For younger generations searching for mentors and role models, Manju Lodha's journey demonstrates how creativity can become a powerful form of leadership. Her work reminds us that meaningful change often begins with conversation, compassion, and the courage to connect across differences.

Suenita Maharaj



Awardee-2019

“Another world is not only possible; she is also on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing.”
Arundhati Roy

When Suenita Maharaj arrived in Canada from Trinidad and Tobago as a child, she expected school to be a place of friendship, excitement, and belonging. Instead, she encountered racism, bullying, and exclusion, experiences that shaped her perceptions of injustice and identity. Rather than allowing those experiences to minimize her dreams, she used them as fuel and became a lifelong advocate for inclusion, equity, and human rights.

Determined to create a more just society for future generations Suenita dedicated her career to advancing systemic change within education and public institutions. Her leadership led her into various equity roles including Employment Equity Outreach Coordinator for the City of Winnipeg, Human Rights Officer with the Canadian Human Rights Commission, and the first Race Relations Officer for a school division in Western Canada. Through these positions, she helped challenge discriminatory practices, such as religious exercises in Manitoba schools, contributing to the Province's elimination of religious exercises in schools.

Her commitment to community engagement extended into media and public service. As host of Folk Arts Café on CKND Television, she created space for diverse cultural voices and leadership to be celebrated. Additionally she served on the Board of Directors at St. Mary's Academy and Manitoba's Advisory Council on Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, contributing to important conversations surrounding systemic discrimination embedded in public institutions.

Although retired, Suenita is still in pursuit of equality in education. She continues her advisory role on the RCMP Commissioners Diversity Committee and her work with Manitoba Employment Equity Practitioners. Currently pursuing her PhD, her focus is on barriers faced by neurodiverse students in the educational system.

Her achievements have been recognized through honours including the Islamic Social Services Association ANSAR Appreciation Award and the Prime Minister Recognition Award for Volunteerism. She is also the author of *Rousing the Sleeping Giant*, a book promoting mindfulness in the workplace.

Suenita Maharaj's journey reminds future generations that adversity does not need to limit what is possible. Through resilience, courage, and service, challenges can become the foundation for meaningful leadership and social change.

Dr Srisala Navaratnam



Awardee-2017

*“Leadership is about improving lives and
creating hope where it is needed most.”*

Ela Bhatt

Dr. Srisala Navaratnam's career has been guided by vision, compassion, and a deep commitment to improving healthcare for others. As the former President and Chief Executive Officer of CancerCare Manitoba, she dedicated her leadership to ensuring Manitobans facing cancer received not only excellent treatment, but also dignity, support, and hope during some of the most difficult moments of their lives.

Her appointment marked an important milestone in Canadian healthcare history, as she became the first woman appointed as President and CEO of a cancer agency in Canada. For many women pursuing careers in medicine and leadership, her achievement represented more than personal success—it reflected the importance of perseverance, representation, and breaking barriers within systems where women have often been underrepresented.

Alongside her executive leadership, Dr. Navaratnam has served as an academic physician and Professor of Internal Medicine at the University of Manitoba. She has remained deeply committed to mentoring future healthcare professionals, believing strong healthcare systems are built not only through expertise, but through collaboration, compassion, and the willingness to invest in others. Students and colleagues alike recognize her ability to lead with both excellence and humanity.

Her work extends beyond Manitoba through community engagement and global outreach initiatives focused on improving cancer care and health outcomes worldwide. She believes healthcare should transcend borders and that meaningful progress happens when knowledge, innovation, and empathy are shared openly between communities and institutions.

Dr. Navaratnam's leadership reflects a balance of strength and humility. Throughout her career, she has remained focused not on recognition, but on improving lives and creating opportunities for better care. For future generations of women in healthcare, her story is a powerful reminder that leadership is not simply about reaching positions of influence—it is about using those positions to create lasting change for others.

Sheila North



Awardee-2024

**“I have to let people know ... about the possibilities –
how we can achieve goals and dreams.”**

Sheila North

For Sheila North, leadership has always been grounded in responsibility—to community, to truth, and to future generations. At the centre of her life is her role as a mother and kookom, identities that continue shaping how she approaches leadership, advocacy, and service. Her children and grandchildren remain her greatest motivation, reminding her that leadership is ultimately about creating a better future for those who come next.

Before entering formal leadership, Sheila spent years working as a journalist and storyteller, helping bring Indigenous voices and lived experiences into public conversation. Through her reporting, she created opportunities for greater understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities while building relationships rooted in honesty, trust, and respect. Her ability to tell stories with compassion and truth helped amplify voices that had too often gone unheard.

She later became the first female Grand Chief of Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak (MKO), representing northern First Nations communities across Manitoba. During her leadership, she witnessed firsthand the dedication of local leaders working tirelessly for their communities, often without recognition. One of the most important initiatives during her tenure was the development of Keewatinowi Inininew Minoyawin (KIM), a health transformation project designed by and for First Nations communities. Grounded in cultural knowledge and community priorities, the project focused on creating healthcare systems that reflected the needs of the people they served.

Sheila often speaks openly about the uncertainty she initially felt stepping into leadership. Guided by the wisdom of an Elder, she came to understand leadership not as privilege, but as responsibility. That lesson continues shaping how she approaches advocacy, storytelling, mentorship, and community work today.

For Indigenous youth and future leaders, Sheila North's story is a powerful reminder that leadership begins with truth, courage, and the willingness to use your voice to create change. Through resilience, truth, and compassion, she continues inspiring younger generations to dream bigger, lead boldly, and remain connected to community, culture, and purpose.

Senator Dr. Flordeliz (Gigi) Osler



Awardee-2025

“The motto of nothing about us without us...that disabled people’s organizations frequently use ...speaks to the need to include the people who are being affected and impacted by the work that you are doing.”

Senator Dr. Flordeliz Osler

Senator Dr. Flordeliz “Gigi” Osler has dedicated her life to strengthening healthcare, advancing equity, and creating opportunities for future generations to lead. Born and raised in Winnipeg to immigrant parents from the Philippines and India, her journey reflects the experiences of many families who came to Canada carrying hope, sacrifice, and the belief that education and service could create a better future.

After completing medical school and residency training in Otolaryngology–Head and Neck Surgery at the University of Manitoba, Senator Osler built a career grounded in both excellence and compassion. As Head of the Section of Otolaryngology–Head and Neck Surgery at St. Boniface Hospital, she helped modernize surgical practice while mentoring medical students and residents who now serve communities throughout Manitoba. For many young physicians, particularly women and racialized students, she became a visible reminder that leadership within medicine could look different and become more inclusive.

In 2018, Senator Osler made history as the first female surgeon and first racialized woman elected President of the Canadian Medical Association. During her tenure, she led the development of the CMA’s first policy on equity, diversity, and inclusion, helping embed inclusive leadership principles into national medical governance. She later served as President of the Federation of Medical Women of Canada, continuing to advocate for mentorship, leadership pathways, and greater opportunities for women physicians across the country. Her work challenged institutions to recognize that representation is not symbolic—it strengthens systems, broadens opportunity, and improves care for everyone.

As Co-Chair of Canada’s Virtual Care Task Force from 2019 to 2022, she also helped shape recommendations that expanded healthcare access for rural and northern communities, including many Manitobans who previously faced barriers to specialized care. Appointed to the Senate of Canada in 2022, she continues advocating for healthcare innovation, sustainability, and social equity. Her journey reflects the spirit of leadership, mentorship, community-building and building bridges for future generations.

Zaleena Salaam



Awardee-2017

*"If you don't see a clear path for what you want,
sometimes you have to make it yourself"*
Mindy Kaling

Zaleena Salaam's story is one of determination, growth, and the courage to believe in possibilities beyond what others may expect. Today, she serves as Chief Executive Officer of Creative Office Furniture, but her journey with the company began much differently—as a sales representative learning every aspect of the business from the ground up. Through persistence, discipline, and a willingness to continue learning, she steadily advanced until reaching the organization's highest leadership role.

Her path is especially inspiring for young women entering business and leadership spaces where confidence and representation can sometimes feel difficult to find. Zaleena often speaks openly about the importance of believing in yourself even during moments of uncertainty. She encourages aspiring entrepreneurs to avoid placing limits on their goals and instead focus on taking steady steps forward while remaining open to growth and opportunity.

Throughout her leadership journey, she has emphasized mentorship and continuous learning. She believes success is never achieved alone and credits many mentors and colleagues who encouraged her to think bigger and move beyond her comfort zone. In turn, she remains committed to mentoring younger professionals and supporting women pursuing leadership roles within business and community organizations.

Beyond her professional accomplishments, Zaleena has remained deeply involved in community and cultural leadership throughout Manitoba. Inspired by childhood memories of attending Folklorama with her family, she became a volunteer and later served as President of Folklorama. Her community involvement also includes leadership with the Guyanese Association of Manitoba, the Indo-Caribbean Paradise Pavilion, Toastmasters Manitoba, and the Cancer Society of Manitoba.

Zaleena Salaam's journey reminds future generations that leadership is not determined by where you begin. It is built through resilience, mentorship, humility, and the willingness to continue learning every step of the way.

Dr. Kernjeet Sandhu



Awardee-2022

*"It takes courage and strength to be empathetic,
and I'm very proudly an empathetic and
compassionate leader"*
Jacinda Ardern

Dr. Kernjeet Kaur Sandhu's story is one of compassion transformed into action and service. As a physician serving Winnipeg's Punjabi community and beyond, she has committed her life not only to treating illness, but also to creating understanding, trust, and confidence among the people she serves. Her work reflects the belief that healthcare is most meaningful when patients feel seen, respected, and supported as individuals.

Born and raised in Manitoba, Dr. Sandhu understands the experiences many newcomer families face while adapting to life in Canada. She has witnessed the challenges of navigating unfamiliar healthcare systems, overcoming language barriers, and adjusting to new cultural expectations. In these moments, she has become more than a physician. She has been an advocate, mentor, guide, and source of reassurance for patients and their families.

Her approach to medicine emphasizes continuity of care and patient education. Dr. Sandhu believes healthcare should empower people with knowledge and confidence, ensuring individuals are equipped to care for themselves and their loved ones long after appointments end. By building strong relationships grounded in trust and cultural understanding, she has helped create a sense of stability for many within the community.

Being recognized by Asian Women of Winnipeg reflects the impact of her service and leadership, but her greatest accomplishments are often found in the lives she has touched quietly over the years. Patients and families continue to look to her not only for medical expertise, but also for compassion during moments of fear and uncertainty.

For young women considering careers in healthcare, Dr. Sandhu's story is a reminder that leadership is rooted in empathy. Her journey shows that strength is not always loud or visible. Sometimes it is found in kindness, consistency, and the willingness to care deeply for others every single day.

Councillor Devi Sharma



Awardee-2026

“This victory belongs to you,” (Councillor Devi Sharma) she shouted to dozens of enthusiastic supporters who jammed her campaign headquarters in a Leila Avenue strip mall.

Devi Sharma's leadership journey has always been grounded in service, inclusion, and community connection. Born in India and having built her life in Winnipeg over several decades, she understands both the uncertainty and opportunity that come with starting over in a new country. Those experiences shaped her commitment to public service and her belief that leadership should remain connected to the people it serves.

When Devi was first elected to Winnipeg City Council, she became the first Indo-Canadian woman to hold that role. Later, she made history again as the first woman elected Council Speaker in Winnipeg. While these milestones are significant, she often speaks less about recognition and more about the responsibility leadership carries. For her, leadership means listening carefully, creating dialogue, and ensuring communities feel represented and respected.

Her work in public office has focused on infrastructure, governance, neighbourhood development, and community engagement. What connects all these efforts is her belief that stronger communities are built when people feel heard and included in decision-making. She understands policies affect everyday lives, and she approaches leadership with practicality, empathy, and accountability. Outside City Hall, Devi has remained deeply involved in volunteerism and community initiatives throughout Winnipeg. She believes leadership does not begin or end with elected office—it continues through mentorship, cultural engagement, and everyday acts of service. She often reflects on the influence of her mother, whose resilience and strength shaped her values and determination from an early age.

Throughout her career, Devi has encouraged women and newcomers to step forward with confidence, even when leadership spaces feel unfamiliar. She understands the importance of visibility and representation for younger generations searching for role models who reflect their own experiences.

For aspiring young women looking for leadership opportunities, Devi Sharma's story is a reminder that leadership is not about standing above others. It is about standing beside communities, listening with compassion, and helping create opportunities where everyone feels they belong and can succeed with dignity and confidence.

Shahina Siddiqui



Awardee-2015

*“At the heart of human rights is human dignity”
Shahini Siddiqui*

Shahina Siddiqui has spent her life raising her voice for people too often left unheard, unsupported, or pushed to the margins. Early in her journey, she recognized that many individuals and families—especially those from newcomer and marginalized communities—were struggling to find care that honoured their cultural, spiritual, and emotional realities. Rather than accept those barriers as unchangeable, Shahina chose to build spaces grounded in dignity, compassion, and understanding, creating ripples of change that continue to reach communities locally, nationally and internationally.

As co-founder of the Islamic Social Services Association, Shahina helped grow a small grassroots effort into a nationally respected organization offering counselling, mental health support, education, crisis intervention, and outreach programs. At a time when culturally responsive care was often overlooked, she helped reimagine what inclusive community support could look like. Through her leadership, thousands of individuals and families found safety, guidance, and belonging during some of the hardest moments of their lives. Beyond ISSA, she was also instrumental in establishing the Canadian Muslim Women's Institute and the Institute for Muslim Mental Health–Canada, both dedicated to supporting immigrant, refugee, and marginalized communities through advocacy, mental health awareness, and culturally grounded care. Her impact has been recognized through her inclusion on the Canadian Museum for Human Rights Wall of Immigrants Who Have Enriched Manitoba, as well as receiving an Honorary Doctor of Laws degree from the University of Manitoba.

Throughout her career, Shahina has never turned away from difficult conversations. She has spoken openly about mental health stigma, domestic violence, Islamophobia, systemic discrimination, and the barriers faced by racialized communities. Through countless workshops, public speaking, and collaboration with educators, healthcare providers, community organizations, and law enforcement, she has worked to foster greater cultural awareness, accountability, and compassion within the systems people rely on every day. The numerous organizations who depend on her wisdom are far too many to note here. Her work has not only supported individuals through times of crisis, but has also challenged institutions to serve communities with greater fairness and humanity.

Her contributions have been recognized nationally through honours including the Canadian Red Cross Humanitarian of the Year Award and the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal. Still, Shahina's greatest legacy are the people she has empowered along the way—leaders, families, and communities who continue carrying forward the care, courage, and change she helped bring into the world.

Dr. Reeni Soni



Awardee-2020

*“Great leaders are people who don’t seek power but
take responsibility because they have the capability
and empathy to help others.”*

Theodora Lai

Dr. Reeni Soni's journey reflects dedication, resilience, and a deep commitment to helping children and families through some of life's most difficult moments. Born in Bhopal, India, she immigrated to Canada as a young child with her family and eventually made Winnipeg her lifelong home. From an early age, education became a pathway toward possibility and service.

After graduating from St. Mary's Academy and receiving the Governor General Award, she earned a full scholarship to study Physiology at McGill University. She later returned to Manitoba to complete medical school and residency training in Pediatrics before receiving a prestigious Commonwealth Medical Fellowship to pursue Pediatric Cardiology training at Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children in London, England.

In 1998, Dr. Soni returned to Winnipeg Children's Hospital during one of the most challenging periods in the program's history following the Pediatric Cardiac Inquest. Rather than stepping away from uncertainty, she chose to lead. Appointed Head of Pediatric Cardiology in 2000, she spent the next two decades strengthening heart care for children and families across Manitoba, Northwestern Ontario, and central Nunavut.

Her leadership helped establish the Western Canadian Children's Heart Network, Canada's first formalized interprovincial pediatric cardiac program. Yet beyond her medical expertise, families and colleagues often speak most about her compassion and calm leadership. She understands that caring for children also means supporting parents through fear, uncertainty, and hope.

Today, as Associate Medical Director of Winnipeg Children's Hospital, mentor, educator, and leader, Dr. Soni continues inspiring future generations to pursue excellence while remaining grounded in empathy and service. Her story reminds young women that leadership is not only about achievement—it is about using knowledge, mentorship, and compassion to improve the lives of others.

Yenny Trinh



Awardee-2022

"The only way that we can really create change is not just changing peoples' minds. We also need to find ways to change peoples' hearts."

Cecilia Chung

Yenny Trinh's journey into law reflects determination, resilience, and a strong commitment to creating opportunities for others. Becoming the first Vietnamese female lawyer in Manitoba was a historic milestone, but for Yenny, it was never only about personal achievement. It was about representation, mentorship, and ensuring younger generations could see themselves in spaces where they had previously been absent.

After beginning her legal career, Yenny quickly recognized the importance of inclusion and mentorship within the profession. In 2015, she co-founded Mercado Trinh Law LLP, helping create a workplace where mentorship, collaboration, and diversity became part of the culture. Through her leadership, she has guided and encouraged many young professionals entering the legal field, particularly women and individuals from underrepresented communities.

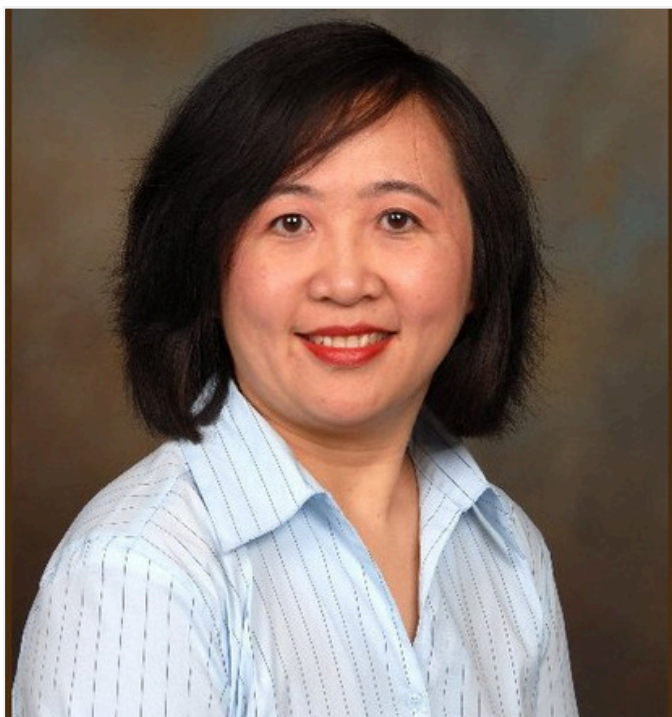
Her commitment to community extends far beyond law. Yenny has been involved in initiatives addressing anti-Asian racism, cultural representation, and community development throughout Manitoba. Through volunteerism, advocacy, and leadership roles, she has worked to strengthen relationships between communities while encouraging greater understanding and inclusion across different backgrounds and experiences.

She has also supported organizations focused on arts, culture, and individuals with intellectual disabilities, reflecting the wide scope of her commitment to service. Her contributions have been recognized through awards from both community organizations and the City of Winnipeg, yet she remains focused on helping others succeed rather than personal recognition.

For Yenny, mentorship is not simply about offering advice. It is about creating opportunities, sharing knowledge, and helping others move forward with confidence. She believes representation matters because when young people see leaders who reflect their own experiences, it expands what they believe is possible for themselves.

Yenny Trinh's journey reminds future generations that leadership becomes more meaningful when success is used to open doors for others. Through determination, and mentorship, she continues inspiring young women to pursue their goals with courage while helping create more inclusive spaces for those who follow them.

Dr. Christine Q. Wu



Awardee-2020

*“A woman who learns to stand firmly in her own
sprit...becomes like bamboo in the storm-graceful
enough to bend, yet strong enough never to break.”
Chinese Proverb*

Dr. Christine Q. Wu's journey reflects resilience, courage, and an unwavering commitment to helping others through some of life's most difficult challenges. Born in China, she completed her early education at Peking University in Beijing before immigrating to Canada to continue her studies at the University of British Columbia and later the University of Manitoba. Through determination and academic excellence, she built a successful career as a Professor and Research Chair at the University of Manitoba.

In 2015, Christine's life changed dramatically when she was diagnosed with lung cancer. The years that followed brought immense physical and emotional challenges, including treatment side effects, uncertainty, and depression. Yet rather than retreating inward, she transformed her experience into advocacy, mentorship, and support for others facing similar struggles.

As a Patients Research Advocate, Christine began collaborating with organizations including Lung Cancer Canada, the Canadian Association of Psychosocial Oncology, and the International Association for the Study of Lung Cancer. Through this work, she helped ensure patient voices became part of important conversations surrounding healthcare, research, and treatment accessibility.

She also became a strong advocate for reducing the stigma surrounding lung cancer, particularly the misconception that it affects only smokers. One of her most meaningful initiatives was founding the Chinese ROS1 Lung Cancer Group, creating a supportive space where patients, caregivers, medical professionals, and advocates could connect, share information, and support one another through difficult journeys.

Christine's story is deeply inspiring because it reflects the power of turning adversity into purpose. Through openness, mentorship, and advocacy, she continues reminding others that even during life's hardest chapters, there is still room for hope, connection, and meaningful change. Her leadership encourages future generations to face challenges with resilience, compassion, and the courage to help others along the way.



Over the past decade, our International Women's Day celebrations have expanded into ever more diverse voices and experiences. Some participants have walked alongside the organization since its early days, while many others have joined and strengthened the journey over time.

Many who may not be pictured here are part of that continuing story; new chapters will be written from here to eternity.





What began as a small Mother's Day gathering over a decade ago has grown into a community connected across generations and experiences.

Some faces remain familiar after a decade, while many new faces reflect the strength that comes from welcoming others into the journey. Even during the isolation of COVID, when in-person gatherings were not allowed, AWOW continued to bring people together through Zoom — showing that our community can endure and support in times of distress.



My perspective on Mother's Day celebration

by Divya Sharma (Past AWOW Board Member. 2021)

The Mother's Day celebration hosted by AWOW was more than just a celebration. It was a day full of empowerment that would go on to inspire, hope and confidence. Hearing from female community leaders, Councilor Devi Sharma, Ms. Tappia, Dalvinder Ji and so many others encouraged a sense of compassion for the strong women around the globe. From young to old, all women were accounted for. Most importantly the significance of a mother and her devotion were acknowledged and honored. This was commemorated by various forms of love and artistic expression such as poetry and shayari.

An additional component was the heartfelt videos shared by community members which shared the depth of love that we as children have for our mothers. One important detail in particular was the wisdom shared with future generations, future mothers. The empowerment and strength, brought forth, that females today and especially mothers are a crucial part of the global society.

At last, it was an eye-opening experience to hear from all the women and participants who shared their stories and appreciation of mothers. In this event the characteristics of mother's were highlighted, through which I came to the realization that I had found so many mothers and mentors through AWOW. As the youngest member of AWOW, I have so much respect for each of the members, who I cannot wait learn from and grow with.

Reflections & Gratitude

Sohni Tappia, (On behalf of Youth Council AWOW)

As young women reading the stories within these pages, we are reminded that many of the opportunities our generation has today were made possible by women who came before us. Many of them entered spaces where they were not always welcomed, heard, or represented, and still chose to lead, speak up, and create change, not only for themselves, but for us.

To every woman featured in this collection, we thank you. Thank you for your courage, your sacrifices, your leadership, and the ways you continued showing up for your communities even when the path was not easy.

As youth, we often step into opportunities without fully realizing who helped create them. This collection reminds us that progress did not happen by accident. As some of our elders would say “we did not spend time chasing butterflies, or waiting for someone to bring us flowers.” These women persevered in the face of adversity, and helped build communities where future generations of women and girls would be empowered to demand their voices be heard and respected.

We hope young women and girls reading this book will see parts of themselves reflected in these pages. More importantly, we hope they recognize that there is no single way to lead, no single definition of success, and no limit to what women can accomplish when they support one another.

Together They Came

Together they came,
Searching for a path wide enough to hold many stories.
A path built to weather storms,
to guide, to embrace, to celebrate.
Along the way, they found one another.

Empowerment was their name.

Each one carried a unique light,
a unique history,
a unique way of shining their light.
Some flourished boldly,
others quietly transformed through resilience and time,
all held gently within a circle of hope, courage, and possibility.

The path continues forward,
making space for future generations,
offering strength where there is uncertainty,
guidance where there is fear,
and celebration where we rise together.

Health & Wellness

Caring for Ourselves

Caring for Each other

A healthy community is one that looks after the physical, emotional, and mental well-being of one another. In many cultures, women are taught to place the needs of their children and families before their own. Over time, exhaustion becomes normal and goes unnoticed, stress goes unspoken, and self-care is treated as the last item on the list of “To Do’s”.

When women neglect their own well-being, it affects not only themselves, but also the families and communities around them — especially the young women and girls who are watching closely. We are their role models.

Over the years, AWOW has drawn upon the expertise of healthcare professionals, educators, and community leaders to create culturally meaningful conversations around health and wellness, because caring for ourselves is essential for the well-being of future generations.

An Intentional Life

by Tara Maniar

When I was developing a workshop on Success the disciplines of Sadhana, Satsang, Seva, Swadhaaya and Samarpan came to me. Previously, these systems were applied to spirituality; however, I've discovered that they can be applied to all interactions at home, play and work. I've learnt that when we bring the essence of spirituality into every aspect of our lives, we enjoy bliss and abundance. Sadhana is the spiritual practice to develop the right attitude and skills for a successful life. Through my sadhana I created the signature system of 'Intention to Transformation' which is applicable at home, work and leisure. We have the choice of what energy or quality we bring into every situation. Each morning we determine the energy we want to carry with us during the day. This becomes our intention. We connect with your eternal self and bring the essence of our intention into every interaction.

When we bring the essence of our Sadhana into every interaction with family, friends, co-workers, strangers, etc. we are in Satsang. We pay attention, listen actively and respond to the other from our eternal self. Living consciously, we know when the ego wants to lead. Acknowledge the ego, feel into the heart and lead from the eternal self. Then everyone feels heard and all benefit from the interaction. When we act from my eternal self we are in Seva, selfless service. The Law of Karma tells us we will reap the consequence of our intentions and actions. This knowledge gives us the freedom to perform our duties at home, work and play with the attitude of Seva for the benefit of all. When we bring Seva into all our actions, we enjoy bliss and abundance.

Swadhaaya is self-study to discover the truth of who we are beyond the roles we play in this drama of life. With introspection, reflection and contemplation, we learn to differentiate between the ego and the eternal self. When we discover and live from our eternal self, we enjoy bliss and abundance. Samarpan is offering all to the Universe. We appreciate and accept all the manifestations of our interactions. When we live every moment selflessly and skillfully, with integrity, compassion, courage, confidence and enthusiasm, not attached to the fruit of our actions, we enjoy bliss and abundance. We are co-creators of our lives. When we bring the attitude of Sadhana, Satsang, Seva, Swadhaaya and Samarpan into every interaction with self and others, we enjoy bliss and abundance. We live from our inner power and experience the grace of Shakti.

The Global Obesity Epidemic: Sex-Specific Impacts and Ethni Disparities*

by Paramjit S. Tappia, PhD; FIACS

Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that global obesity rates have nearly tripled since 1975. As of recent global estimates, over 1.9 billion adults are classified as overweight, with more than 650 million meeting the criteria for obesity. Driven by an increased intake of energy-dense foods and increasingly sedentary lifestyles, this pathogenic accumulation of adipose tissue (body fat) presents a critical threat to global public health. While the epidemic affects all demographics, its distribution, physiological presentation, and clinical outcomes vary significantly by sex and ethnicity.

Sex-Based Differences in Adiposity (excessive fatty tissue in the body) and Pathology

Sexual dimorphism plays a major role in how obesity manifests and impacts patient health.

Fat Distribution and Severity:

- **Morphology:** Women typically exhibit gluteofemoral adiposity (fat storage in the hips and thighs), whereas men are more prone to central (visceral) adiposity, which carries a higher immediate metabolic risk.
- **Prevalence:** Globally, obesity rates are higher in women than in men. In the United States, for example, more than two-thirds of women are classified as overweight or obese. Furthermore, the prevalence of severe obesity is significantly higher in the female population.

Shared and Sex-Specific Comorbidities:

Obesity acts as a primary catalyst for a broad spectrum of chronic diseases, though some risks are highly sex-specific:

Disease Category & Clinical Implications & Risks

Cardiovascular & Metabolic: Hypertension, dyslipidemia (elevated LDL cholesterol), stroke, and Type 2 diabetes.

Oncology: Increased risk of colorectal, kidney, esophageal, gallbladder, and pancreatic cancers. For women, it significantly elevates the risk of uterine, ovarian, and postmenopausal breast cancers.

Systemic & Mechanical:

Gallbladder disease, cholelithiasis (gallstones), hepatic steatosis (liver disease), obstructive sleep apnea, and osteoarthritis (driven by mechanical load on the knees, hips, and spine).

Psychological Impact: Pronounced psychological morbidity in women, including distorted body image, low self-esteem, eating disorders, chronic stress, clinical depression, and reduced quality of life.

Reproductive Risks in Women

Because cardiovascular disease (CVD) remains the leading cause of mortality in postmenopausal women, proactive weight management is a clinical imperative. However, the reproductive-age window carries its own severe obesity-related risks:

- **Fertility:** Obesity is directly linked to subfertility, anovulation, and prolonged time-to-conception. Additionally, obese Asian women experience higher rates of assistive reproductive technology (ART) and natural pregnancy failure.
- **Early Pregnancy Complications:** Obese maternal profiles correlate with higher rates of spontaneous early pregnancy loss, stillbirth, and congenital birth defects.
- **Late Pregnancy & Labor Risks:** Increased incidence of gestational diabetes, pre-eclampsia, macrosomia (large-for-gestational-age infants), and mechanical labor complications requiring surgical intervention.

The Compounding Effect of Ethnic Disparities

The health burden of obesity is not distributed equally. Ethnic minorities suffer disproportionately from both the prevalence of obesity and the severity of its secondary complications.

Micronutrient Deficiencies:

Ethnic minorities frequently exhibit higher rates of vitamin D insufficiency. In obese populations, this deficiency is strongly linked to heightened cardiovascular and metabolic risk profiles.

Phenotypic and Oncological Variations in Asian Populations:

- **South Asian Phenotypes:** Individuals of South Asian descent exhibit a higher susceptibility to developing obesity and metabolic syndrome at lower Body Mass Index (BMI) thresholds than white Caucasians, accelerating the onset of Type 2 diabetes and coronary artery disease.
- **Oncological Prognosis:** Evidence indicates that obesity exerts a more aggressive negative impact on breast cancer risk and survival rates in women of Asian ancestry.

Barriers to Care and Interventional Strategies

Addressing obesity requires moving away from a one-size-fits-all methodology. South Asian populations, for example, experience poorer clinical outcomes, less aggressive therapeutic interventions, and higher complication rates. This discrepancy is driven by a complex matrix of socio-clinical barriers:

- Lower disease awareness and delayed health-seeking behavior.
- Delayed diagnoses resulting from atypical clinical presentations.
- Language barriers and distinct religious or sociocultural factors.

Conclusion

To effectively mitigate this global epidemic, preventative and therapeutic strategies must be explicitly tailored to the patient's biological sex and racial background. While sustainable weight loss remains the primary therapeutic target, clinical frameworks must integrate structured physical activity, nutritional optimization, and behavioral stress management to successfully reduce long-term morbidity.

**This article is based on the original article by the author published in CV Network 20(2): 2021, 6-9. The official news bulletin of the International Academy of Cardiovascular Sciences (www.iacsworld.com): Editor-in-Chief- Dr. Paramjit S. Tappia*

Keeping the beat going: The Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines

By Jacqueline L. Hay,

MSc and CSEP Clinical Exercise Physiologist

From the moment you wake up until you put your head on the pillow go to sleep, small choices can add up to keep your heart healthy.

Move more

Fewer than half of Canadian adults meet the physical activity guidelines, which recommend 150 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous activity each week, such as walking, hiking, and gardening. While that might seem like a lot, every minute counts. Even a single session of activity decreases your blood glucose and blood pressure in the hours afterward. So, starting small and being consistent improves your heart health now, and the benefits add up over time!

Lift more

Lifting weights is just as important as aerobic activity and can help you lower your blood pressure, improve your blood glucose control, and reduce your cholesterol. For optimal benefits, you should engage in muscle-strengthening activities two times a week. You don't need a gym membership or expensive equipment. Body weight exercises are a great place to start.

Sit less

Build activity into your entire day! Many of us spend long hours sitting at desks, in cars, or caring for others. But prolonged sitting is detrimental to our metabolism and makes our hearts work harder. Short “movement snacks” every hour, like standing, walking to refill your water, or doing a few squats at your desk, help keep blood flowing and our metabolism going.

Sleep better

Sleep is your body and heart's nightly reset. During your deep sleep cycles, your heart rate and blood pressure naturally decrease. This gives your heart and blood vessels a chance to recover from the day. Adults need, on average, 7-9 hours of sleep. Creating a simple sleep routine, dimming the lights, maintaining a consistent wake and bedtime, practicing a screen-free wind-down, and taking a warm shower before bed can all help your body recognize when it's time to rest and help you fall asleep faster.

Small steps boost heart health

Heart health is shaped by the rhythm of your whole day, including how you move, how much you sit, and how well you sleep. To increase success, include family, friends, and coworkers in activity breaks. Remember, it is impossible to change everything all at once. Try starting small, focusing on one behaviour at a time, like sleeping better. With more rest, you may feel more energized to move more, helping you make an even greater impact on your heart health now and in the future!

To learn more about the guidelines for all ages, please visit the Canadian 24-Movement Guidelines:

<https://csepguidelines.ca/>

To get free online or in-person support to improve your health, please visit the Health Management Group Program Guide:

<https://wrha.mb.ca/groups/>

Greetings

With appreciation to the many community leaders, elected officials, organizations, and supporters who have encouraged, uplifted, and stood alongside our communities over the years. Their support and encouragement remind us that we do not stand alone.

The following messages represent a selection of greetings shared in celebration of this project.



Recognition at Manitoba Legislative Assembly



Member's Statement
October 27, 2024



A Message from the Lieutenant Governor of Manitoba

“I alone cannot change the world, but I can cast a stone across the waters to create many ripples, said Nobel Peace Prize recipient, Mother Teresa.

Members of Asian Women of Winnipeg (AWOW) have been making the best kind of waves for more than a decade by promoting, educating and empowering local women to pursue their dreams.

Through shared vision, practical support, and mutual respect, the organization is succeeding in helping women develop confidence and a sense of community – valuable supports to both new and established female residents.

Asian Manitobans continue to play important roles in our capital city, and province as a whole, contributing to our great quality of life and enhancing our remarkable multicultural mosaic. AWOW’s success ultimately is shared with all Manitobans.

Congratulations to the board of directors, members and supporters of AWOW for all of your good work in our community. Your efforts help members, while also encouraging inter-cultural respect and understanding, creating positive ripple effects that strengthen society today, tomorrow and for generations to come.



I wish you continued success.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Anita R. Neville".

**The Honourable Anita R. Neville, P.C., O.M.
Lieutenant Governor of Manitoba**



PRIME MINISTER • PREMIER MINISTRE

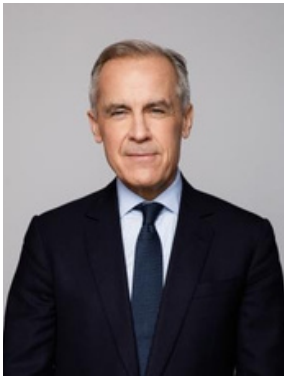
Message from the Prime Minister of Canada

I am pleased to extend my warmest greetings as you celebrate and commemorate 10 years of the Asian Women of Winnipeg. This milestone publication offers a meaningful opportunity to reflect on a decade of dedication, leadership, and community-building. Since its founding, Asian Women of Winnipeg has played an important role in empowering women, celebrating cultural diversity, and fostering strong and inclusive connections within the community.

Through education, leadership initiatives, and inclusive programming, your organization has helped build spaces where community members can thrive, share their stories, and contribute to a more vibrant and welcoming society. The contributions highlighted in this publication stand as a testament to the vision, values, and commitment of your members, volunteers, and supporters. Your efforts continue to strengthen not only communities in Winnipeg, but also the broader fabric of our country.

On behalf of the Government of Canada and all Canadians, I would like to thank you for your ongoing work and congratulate you on this important anniversary. I wish you continued success in the years ahead.

Please accept my very best wishes.



Ottawa
2026



**PREMIER
OF MANITOBA**

Legislative Building
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3C 0V8
CANADA

A MESSAGE FROM THE PREMIER

On behalf of the Province of Manitoba, I want to congratulate the Asian Women of Winnipeg (AWOW) on 10 years of supporting Manitobans.

By providing training opportunities, education, and community, AWOW plays an important role in creating the Manitoba we all want to see: one where every person can access the support they need to thrive. Over the past decade and beyond, Asian women have contributed so much to Manitoba, and I'm happy to see these contributions being recognized through this book.

To everyone at AWOW, thank you for your decade of service of our province. Your work has shaped Manitoba in a positive way by giving Asian women a space to come together and connect with each other. I look forward to continued collaboration as we work together to build an inclusive Manitoba where everyone belongs.



A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, likely belonging to Wab Kinew.

***The Honourable Wab Kinew
Premier of Manitoba***



A MESSAGE FROM THE MAYOR

On behalf of the City of Winnipeg, I would like to congratulate Asian Women of Winnipeg (AWOW) on over 10 years of leadership and achievement.

Empowered Voices: The Legacy of AWOW Honourees celebrates a decade of stories and accomplishments by women living in Winnipeg. Through their dedication and contributions, these women have helped shape our city into a more inclusive and compassionate community.

Winnipeg is strengthened by the diversity of its people. The stories captured in this publication reflect not only personal success, but also the power of community, mentorship, and cultural pride. They remind us that when women are empowered, entire communities benefit.

I commend AWOW for its ongoing commitment to uplifting and supporting women, and for creating a lasting record that will inspire future generations of leaders. This book stands as both a celebration of the past ten years and a source of encouragement for those who will continue building a stronger Winnipeg.

Congratulations on this important milestone, and best wishes for continued success.

Scott Gillingham,
Mayor City of Winnipeg



CONSTITUTION OF THE ASIAN WOMEN OF WINNIPEG

Asian Women of Winnipeg (AWOW) is a dynamic, community-driven non-profit organization that recently celebrated its milestone 10th anniversary. Conceptualized on April 22, 2014, and formally incorporated under The Corporations Act of Manitoba on September 9, 2016, AWOW has spent over a decade dedicated to uplifting women and fostering systemic change and community resilience.

Mission & Purpose

AWOW aims to promote, educate, and empower women living in Manitoba. Our goal is to enhance their spiritual, political, social, and economic strength by boosting their confidence, knowledge, worth, morale, and personal values.

Vision Statement

Our vision is to provide leadership and support to gain respect, equality, and education for all women.

Core Values

At the heart of everything we do is an unwavering commitment to our foundational pillars:

- Mutual Respect
- Diversity
- Equality

Constitutional Objectives

To fulfill our mission and serve the community effectively, AWOW operates under the following mandated objectives:

Community Leadership: To provide strong, visible community leadership and advocate for the advancement of women across Manitoba.

Intergenerational & Intercultural Communication: To bridge gaps and foster meaningful dialogue across different generations and cultural backgrounds.

Family & Community Engagement: To actively engage families to cultivate a deeper understanding of gender equality and diversity.

Bicultural Heritage: To celebrate, preserve, and promote our rich bicultural heritage within the multicultural fabric of Canada.

The Story Behind the AWOW Logo

The eye-catching logo for AWOW exclaims in a whisper, I am Woman! Daughter, Sister, Mother, Spouse, Partner, Friend, Elder. The result, a whistle at the emotion it stirs up. The artist began with a look at the Mona Lisa and her enigmatic smile, but strayed away from copying it. Instead, she went on to depict a more grounded and humbler woman. Her lowered eyelids referring to her deference to her culture, heritage and upbringing.

A woman for all seasons, and stages in life, receptive to all ideas, from the strawberry streak young woman, to the raven-haired beauty and the silver fox elder.

The feminine nature is captured in the face and jaw line and inherent in our speech and actions. The overtones and layered hairdo represent the multifaceted nature of women in the home and work place.

The colours indicate a modern woman and a commitment to service or Seva in the community.

Asian Women of Winnipeg
Together we stand



This Journal belongs to: _____

Honoring the journey of: _____

Completed On: _____

To Remember, To Preserve, To Pass On

I believe every immigrant woman carries several worlds within her: the one she came from, the one she carries silently, and the one she helps build for future generations. As a first generation immigrant and the mother of three Canadian-born children, I reflect on the bridge between generations — the memories we carry, the sacrifices we make, the traditions we preserve, and the wisdom we hope to pass on.

Like my mother, many immigrant women leave behind familiar places, languages, traditions, and loved ones to create opportunities for their children. Yet too often, their stories remain untold.

It is our hope that this journal serves as both a keepsake and a gift — a place to honour the journey that shaped you and preserve the reflections, memories, and wisdom that future generations may one day treasure. Whether completed for yourself or gifted to a woman you cherish, may these pages help ensure that our stories are remembered.

With honour for the past and faith in the future,

Suenita Maharaj (she/her)

Co Editor

PART I — ROOTS & CHILDHOOD

1. Where were you born and raised?

Describe your hometown, village, or neighbourhood.

2. What did your surroundings look like?

Describe the colours, streets, homes, weather, nature, markets, or landscape.

3. What sounds do you remember most from childhood?

Music, voices, prayer, traffic, birds, laughter, languages, celebrations.

4. What scents or smells instantly bring you back home?

Foods, flowers, rain, spices, soap, ocean air, bread, wood smoke

5. What was daily life like for girls and women where you grew up?

6. What traditions or customs were most important in your family?

PART II — LEAVING HOME

7. Why did you leave your homeland?

8. What was the hardest part about leaving?

9. What did you miss most after immigrating?

People, language, food, celebrations, community, familiarity, freedom.

10. What surprised you most about your new country?

How did you navigate that experience?

11. Did you ever feel torn between two cultures?

12. What sacrifices did you make that others may never fully see?

PART III — VALUES, STRENGTH & IDENTITY

13. What values were you taught by your parents or elders?

14. Which of those values guided you most throughout your life?

15. What gave you strength during difficult times?

16. What parts of your culture were most important for you to preserve?

17. What are you most proud of surviving or overcoming?

18. What does “home” mean to you now?

PART IV — WOMEN WHO SHAPED US

19. Who was the most important woman in your life?

Describe who she was and how she influenced you.

20. What did she teach you about womanhood, strength, or love?

21. What qualities in women do you admire most?

22. How have the women in your family carried one another through hardship?

PART V — WISDOM FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

23. What values do you hope young people carry into adulthood?

24. What parts of your culture or upbringing should never be forgotten?

25. What do you hope your children or grandchildren, friends or partners, remember about you?

26. What does success mean to you now?

PART V — WISDOM FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

27. If you could speak to your younger self, what would you say?

28. If you could give one piece of advice to young women today, what would it be?

29. What kind of world do you hope future generations will live in?

PART VI — LOVE, MEMORY & LEGACY

30. What moments in your life felt most meaningful?

31. What family recipe, saying, song, prayer, or tradition do you hope continues?

32. What do you believe is the greatest strength immigrant women possess?

33. What legacy do you hope to leave behind?

What I Will Take Into Tomorrow

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

This image shows a single page of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, leaving small margins at the top and bottom. There are no vertical margin lines, text, or other markings on the page.

What I Will Take Into Tomorrow

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



Asian Women of Winnipeg Inc.

✉ Asianwomenofwinnipeg@gmail.com

🌐 Asianwomenofwinnipeg.com

