



HEARTS OPEN FOR EVERYONE

2025

Impact Report

Building inclusive and
connected rural spaces
through open hearts

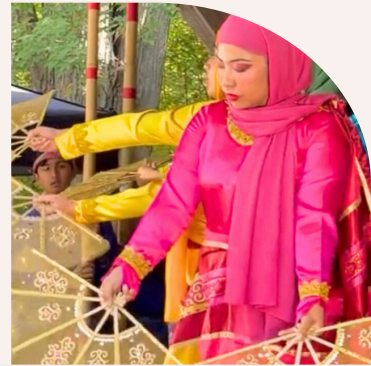


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A MESSAGE FROM OUR FOUNDER

I am so excited to share HOPE's very first Impact Report with you. For our small but passionate team, this is a chance to pause and reflect on how far we have come together, working side by side to build more welcoming and inclusive rural communities.



Looking back on 2025, I feel deeply grateful for the journey we have shared. Last year's program successes demonstrate the power of community, culture, and compassion in Woolwich Township and throughout Waterloo Region. The youth survey, conducted earlier this year with a Conestoga College placement student, gave us an important pulse check and yielded insights to shape and strengthen our future programs.

Our workshops became places where stories were shared, hearts opened, and real connections took root. For example, we honoured the legacy and strength of Black pioneers in Woolwich Township, explored the many lived experiences of Muslim culture, and grew closer to the land and to each other through teachings from the Tipi. These moments remind me of how much we can learn from one another when we show up with curiosity and respect.

At our events, we came together to celebrate culture and heritage. The unveiling of Braided Paths, our community mural, honoured the artist's Mennonite and Indigenous roots and brought people together in a meaningful way. At the 3rd annual Multicultural Festival of Elmira, the world arrived at our doorstep through dance, food, and traditional crafts. We ended the year with Holidays with HOPE, where neighbours of all ages discovered holiday traditions from Türkiye, Indigenous communities, Jewish culture, Colombia, and Nigeria.

None of this would have been possible without your generosity and support. To our sponsors, thank you for believing in HOPE's vision and helping us build bridges in our community. To our cultural ambassadors, speakers, artists, and youth leaders, your creativity and courage made every event special. And to our volunteers, who gave your time, energy, and heart, you are the heartbeat of HOPE.

Thank you for being part of this journey with us. I wish you a joyful and fulfilling 2026.

Abby Cooper
Founder and Executive Director

Territorial Acknowledgement

HOPE acknowledges the Indigenous peoples who have cared for and nurtured the land on which we stand for countless generations. We honour the Haudenosaunee, Anishinaabe, and Chonnonton peoples and their deep connections to this place we call home. We recognize that the past holds the pain of injustices and hardships faced by Indigenous communities due to colonization. We are eager to listen and learn from their stories, traditions, and knowledge. Their wisdom holds valuable insights that can enrich our understanding of this land and its history.

WHO WE ARE



Vision

To foster a multicultural rural community where everyone can be truly authentic and welcome.

Mission

At HOPE, we create shared community experiences while promoting compassion, togetherness, and a deep sense of belonging.

Values

We respect identities by strengthening voices, gaining knowledge, and seeking understanding, while weaving relationships and building trust.

Board of Directors

Mary Dowhaniuk, Chair

Rosa de Ramos Wanklyn, Treasurer

Karen Lebold, Secretary

Robyn Beckett, Director – Grant Oversight

Cassie Groot, Director

Amrita Maharaj-Dube, Director – Marketing & Communications

Leadership Team

Abby Cooper, Executive Director & Founder

Denise Dickieson, Director of Operations

HIGHLIGHTS: MULTICULTURAL EVENTS



3rd Annual Multicultural Festival of Elmira

The third annual Multicultural Festival of Elmira (MFE) brought together attendees for a vibrant celebration of diversity, inclusion, and global traditions. Our free, family-friendly event featured authentic cuisine from around the world, cultural performances ranging from reggae and Colombian cumbia to Indigenous drumming and Ukrainian folk music, and interactive workshops, including lacrosse instruction, origami, and Madhubani art. Participants also contributed to a quilt-inspired community mural led by artist Jen Horst, explored storytelling and crafts in the Cultures United Tent, and engaged with the new Mind & Heart First Aid booth.

We unveiled the community mural that attendees helped create during the MFE at the Waterloo Region Library – Breslau Branch. Designed by Jen Horst, “Braided Paths” serves as a lasting celebration of the creativity, collaboration, and cultural stories shared at the event.



Your Feedback



- *I feel at home after a long time being away from home.*
- *I'm so thrilled that Elmira has its own Multicultural Festival!!*
- *The event was very well organized and I was impressed by the number of shows and the variety of vendors and activities.*

HIGHLIGHTS: MULTICULTURAL EVENTS



Holidays with HOPE 2025

HOPE hosted a week-long celebration at the Woolwich Memorial Centre in Elmira, showcasing holiday traditions that had not previously been represented. With crafts, storytelling, music, and traditional snacks, Cultural Ambassadors shared personal reflections that inspired pride and curiosity across generations.

The event aimed to educate and highlight the diverse ways communities commemorate this festive season.

Cultural Ambassadors

- Meltem Aydin Smith (Turkish)
- Hope Engel (Indigenous)
- David Kaufman (Jewish)
- Valentina Naranjo (Colombian)
- Olabode Fashina (Nigerian)



250

Attendees
(50 per day)



5

Cultures
Represented

Your Feedback



- *Having this in the Woolwich Memorial Centre lobby is an amazing idea!*
- *This was awesome, thanks for doing this for our community.*
- *It was all so great!*
- *Great to have access to a culturally enriching event in our community.*

HIGHLIGHTS: WORKSHOPS AND IMMERSIVE LEARNING



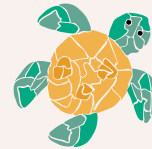
19

Speakers featured



9

Workshops



1

Immersive on-the-land
learning experience

Our workshops and immersive learning experiences aim to educate, promote, and engage in intercultural communication through positive, enlightening discussions on multiculturalism, mindfulness and racial and gender discrimination.

This year's series of activities included:

Beyond Boundaries: Embracing Diversity, Empowering Allies

Workshop on racism, oppression, and bias, facilitated by Laurel Boytim.

Beyond the Menorah: Illuminating Jewish Faith and Resilience

Exploring Jewish traditions and belonging with Ravit Lechter and August Adelman.

Finding Inner Peace: A Mindfulness Workshop

Guided meditation with Buddhist monk Rev. Kalubowila Ananda.

Healing Together: Navigating Mental Health in a Diverse World

The unique experiences of diverse voices and their impact on mental health.

Graceful Transitions: Navigating Grief, Aging & Cultural Care

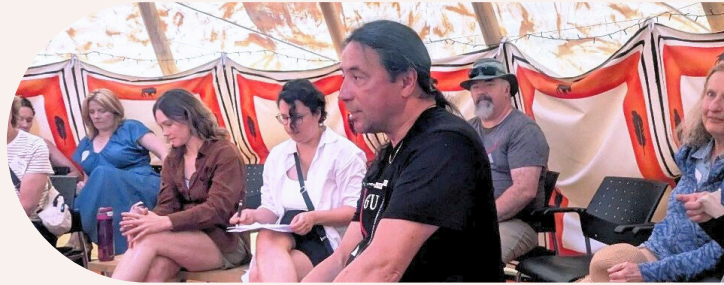
Brian Hill, Babur Mawladin, and Dreisinger Funeral Home speak on cultural sensitivity and healing.

Pathways to Horizons: Muslim Journeys of Faith & Belonging

Amir Naveed, Fauzia Mazhar, and Abiha Syed speak on faith, identity, and allyship.

(list continued on page 7)

HIGHLIGHTS: WORKSHOPS AND IMMERSIVE LEARNING



Series of activities (continued):

Pieced Together: Mix, Patch and Create Your Story through Collage Art
Hands-on workshop with Donnique Williams exploring identity and uniqueness.

Roots of Courage: Black Pioneers who Shaped our Community
Tracy Johnson presents untold stories of early Black settlers, brought to life with music.

Teachings from the Tipi: A Journey through Story, Spirit and Sacred Knowledge
A guided tipi visit hosted by Christin Dennis, exploring 7 Sacred Teachings.

Threads of Connection: Weaving Understanding Together
An inside look at the various Mennonite groups that make up our region.

Voices of Resilience: An Indigenous Journey
Kelly Welch shares her story on cultural rediscovery, healing and reflection.

Community Outreach Activities

- Conestoga College Student Fair
- Township of Woolwich Recreational Fair
- Welcome to Elmira Fair - Gale Presbyterian Church

Your feedback



- *I enjoyed learning about the unique traditions, etc among the various Mennonite groups and having a workshop like this in our community.*
- *Hearing about recovery and healing is inspirational!*

FEEDBACK THAT FUELS OUR MISSION



209

of feedback received

Feedback from the community is more than input for HOPE; it's the fuel that keeps our mission alive. It helps us understand real needs, shape programs that truly matter, and stay accountable to the people we serve. Every voice offers insight, every story guides our direction, and every suggestion strengthens our impact. When the community speaks, we grow more responsive and more connected. That's how meaningful change happens: with the community, not just for it.

Something I have learnt from volunteering...

Seemingly small things like meaningful conversations, immersing myself in someone's culture or experience, or broadening my horizons can lead to a deeper sense of community with others.

- Amybeth



My favourite part about volunteering is feeling like I can make a difference and have an impact in my community.

- Amanda



On Supporting HOPE

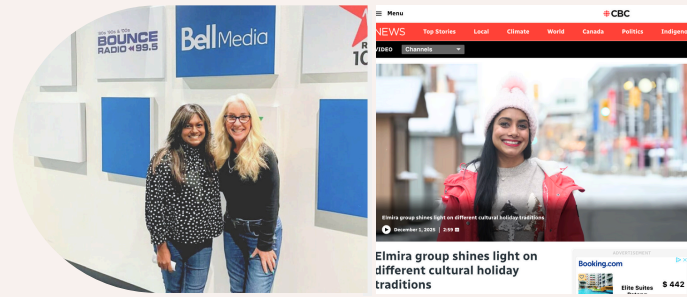
The Multicultural Festival of Elmira is an example of living heritage in action: a space where people can connect, exchange stories, celebrate diversity, and enjoy the music, food, and traditions that make our region vibrant.

- John Glass, Chair of the Waterloo Region Heritage Foundation

I appreciate all that you at HOPE do to create such meaningful learning experiences for folks like me. Every HOPE workshop I have attended has nudged me to keep asking questions and re-examining my ways of seeing and being in my community and beyond. So thank you.

- Workshop Attendee

AMPLIFYING OUR STORY

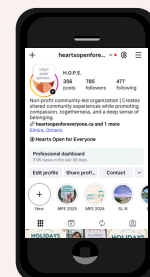
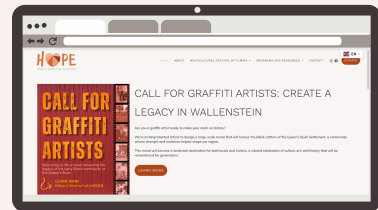


Every day, Hearts Open for Everyone is lifted by the voices that advance our mission. Our growing media presence has helped amplify the stories of resilience and community that define our work. Increased website visits indicate that more people are seeking to learn, connect, and participate in our vision. And our expanding social media reach reflects a vibrant, engaged community that believes in opening doors and creating belonging. Together, these touchpoints help us tell a story that is bigger than any one moment — a story shaped by the people who walk alongside us.

In the Media

Interviews and articles by:

- Behind the Business Podcast - Greater KW Chamber of Commerce
- Bounce Radio 99.5 FM
- CBC Radio
- CKMS FM 102.7
- City News 570
- Guelph Today



10,000+

Website Users (approx.)

415,822

Social Media views across all channels

3981

Total content interactions

A YEAR OF HOPE: 2025 MEMORIES



1



7



11



2



8



3



9

1 Sharing stories at "Beyond Boundaries: Embracing Diversity, Empowering Allies"

2 MFE attendees dancing their heart out during a performance

3 Discussions during "Healing Together: Navigating Mental Health in a Diverse World"

4 MFE Ambassadors - Diya, Meher, and Nandana

5 Collage creations at "Pieced Together" youth worksop

6 Learning about "Roots of Courage: Black Pioneers Who Shaped Our Community"

7 HOPE at the KW Oktoberfest Women of the Year Awards

8 Students enjoying snacks at "Holidays with HOPE"

9 Presenters and HOPE team at "Pathways to Horizons: Muslim Journeys of Faith & Belonging"

10 Listening to Kelly Welch's personal journey at "Voices of Resilience"

11 Participants at "Teachings from the Tipi" immersive experience



4



10



5



6

OUR CIRCLE OF SUPPORT



MFE Planning Committee 2025

We are truly grateful for the support of our sponsors, grant funders, volunteers and partners who are driving meaningful change in rural communities across the Township of Woolwich and the wider Region of Waterloo. Their commitment strengthens every aspect of our work, from expanding access to essential programs to creating spaces where neighbours feel seen, valued, and supported.

Grant Funding



Sponsors



Arnold Hearing Centres
Cabinet Effects
Conestoga Meats
Dreisinger Funeral Home
Elmira Community Nursery School
Elmira Maple Syrup Festival
Enova
France-Anne Sweeny "Making A Difference" Fund

Greater Kitchener-Waterloo Chamber of Commerce Corporate Challenge Fund
Josslin Insurance
MCC Thrift & Gift
Region of Waterloo Cultural Drivers Program
SOS Physiotherapy
Woolwich Counselling Centre
Woolwich Community Lions Club
Media Partner (2025-2026): Guelph Today

Our Supporters

Foodland (Elmira)
Never Enough Thyme Catering and Gourmet Foodshop
Local Renaissance Cafe
Starbucks (Elmira)

A heartfelt thanks to all our hardworking volunteers who champion our work!



Join us in transforming rural spaces. Follow our journey, lend your time as a volunteer, or make a meaningful donation to help fuel our mission. Every action brings us closer to a community where everyone belongs.

HOPE

HEARTS OPEN FOR EVERYONE



info@heartsopenforeveryone.ca
heartsopenforeveryone.ca