



Photo by Carla Antonio

Alia Hogben, executive director of the Canadian Council of Muslim Women, answers audience questions during her presentation at Capers restaurant on Oct. 30. The event highlighted common misconceptions of the Muslim faith and the perception of Muslims in Canada.

Speaker offers Muslim perspective

By Carla Antonio

In a time of extreme need, the Muslim community of Canada can rest assured that they have a strong and resilient voice speaking on their behalf.

It was a full house at Capers restaurant last Thursday night as Alia Hogben, a Kingston Whig-Standard columnist and executive director of the Canadian Council of Muslim Women, spoke on behalf of Canadian Muslims as part of the Bay of Quinte Federal Liberal Association speakers' series.

It was a timely presentation following the tragic shooting and killing of Corporal Nathan Cirillo on Parliament Hill in Ottawa on Oct. 22.

The appearance included a speech from Hogben followed by a lengthy question-

and-answer session. She opened with the topic of the devastation in Ottawa, and highlighted the effects on Canadians and specifically, Muslim Canadians.

"It is almost surrealistic that this has happened in Canada," she said.

"There's ongoing surmise and assumptions as we try to understand the reasons for such killings."

She discussed the mother of the shooter's beliefs that her son's actions were a result of mental instability while others assume it was strictly an act of terrorism.

"As Canadian Muslims, we are fearful. We share with all of you the fear of violence amongst us."

"And in addition, we are fearful of what is being proposed by legislation to combat homegrown terrorism or as (Prime Minister) Stephen Harper calls

it, self-rationalized individuals and its focus on Muslims." She explained how recent media reports say that the federal government is moving quickly to pass legislation giving the state "extraordinary powers" in the detention of people that they believe might be involved in terrorist efforts.

Hogben said she recognizes how difficult it is to talk about whom our Canadian Muslims are without raising the issue of the Ottawa shooting perpetrator as well as the incident in Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, Que. in which an Islamic man purposely attacked a group of Canadian military with a vehicle.

"Although we can say their actions are beyond Islam, we can't deny that they believe in the religion," she said.

"After all, they said they were Muslims,"

she said.

Hogben moved on to discuss a basis of Muslim beliefs in order to give the audience a better understanding of their often misunderstood faith. Beginning with the historical background of Muslims in Canada. She talked about the first Muslim family that came to Canada in 1867, who emigrated from Scotland.

"Can you believe it? I love telling this story," she said with a laugh.

She went on to explain the fundamentals of the Muslim faith, highlighting the similarities to Judaism and Christianity, such as teachings from the biblical stories of the prophets.

"I know the perception of Islam is that it is violent and intolerant," she said.

"But in fact, what the Qur'an asks is that Muslims be people of the middle

way and to stay away from extremes." However, although there are many similarities to be found, Hogben stressed that it is the differences in the religions that causes so much friction as well as the constant negative media attention that is received.

She said that she understands what she is saying must sound much different from what we are hearing in the media. She talked about the media's role and how they are often only interested in spreading stories that are negative despite the much more positive Muslim stories that need to be spread in a time of such prejudice.

"I say to them 'why you don't do a good story.' We just celebrated five Muslim women who are remarkable in their area of work. Would you want to do some stories on them?" she said.

Sharing the experience of volunteer work

By Tristan Urry

When you think of volunteer work, you most likely don't picture someone with a disability doing it.

"People in this general sector of society have been viewed as people who tend to only take from society. Everyone needs to be desensitized to people with disabilities and they need to realize that there is a real person in there and they have a lot to say and a lot to contribute," says support worker Robert Moreton.

Moreton has been a support worker for Community Living in Belleville and Area for the last 25 years and during that time, he has worked with many individuals and formed unique bonds with every single one of them.

But the longest-lasting bond would be with Julie Henderson. Henderson was born blind and a quadriplegic and she has been with Community Living since she was 21. Henderson's parents thought it would be best if Julie could live her own life and get out of the house like most normal adults that age do. Moreton has been her main support worker for the past 10 years.

Henderson and Moreton have volunteered at local thrift shops together two days a week for the past decade.

"Volunteerism really gives us a sense

of self-esteem because it means that you are part of something and it's your way of giving back. Julie definitely values that role," says Moreton. It all falls under the agency's '21 outcomes.'

Community Living is an accredited, non-profit organization that has provided a wide range of services and support to adults and children for over 60 years.

"To become an accredited agency, they needed to follow the 21 personal outcome measures," says Moreton.

Those 21 are then put into three categories such as: My Self: Who I am as a result of my unique heredity, life experiences and decisions, My World: Where I work, live, socialize, belong or connect, and My Dreams: How I want my life to be.

Moreton says he believes that all 21 outcomes are important to help make sure each individual lives a normal life.

Part of this normal life is having friends. Community Living tries to introduce people with similar interests who they think would enjoy spending time together.

Henderson recently made a new friend from Tweed thanks to that effort. Community Living in Belleville also tries to connect the people with events that they might enjoy. For example, Julie is a huge fan of Nickelback so they sent her to their concert in Toronto a couple

years ago.

One of the main outcomes, says Moreton, is providing opportunities that mean something to the individual.

"People need to have meaningful days and what's meaningful to me isn't necessarily what's meaningful to you or what's meaningful for Julie. It could be as simple as bowling in a non-segregated area with other non-handicapped members from the community," says Moreton.

It is very important to give each individual a variety of choices so he or she can decide for themselves what they want, he adds.

"There are never two choices, because that isn't a choice, it's a dilemma as to which one, so it's at least three to four choices."

Each person has control of his or her own life. They can choose where they want to shop and go each day because the support worker is there to support them, not to control them.

"The most important thing of what we do here is that we don't just look at people as someone we are just going to look after but we look at them as our friends," says Moreton.

"Yes, we may be paid staff, but Julie is a friend and, much more than that, she is family... and the highest honour is to be considered as family by those people as well."



Photo by Tristan Urry

Julie Henderson and Robert Moreton have been pricing books as volunteers at the Belleville Salvation Army Thriftshop every Monday and Thursday for nearly a decade now.