



**Rights and Responsibilities Awareness Initiative**

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# **RRAI Annual Report 2020**

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## **Introduction**

Rights and Responsibilities Awareness Initiative is a community initiative aimed at spreading legal awareness in the London community. We propose to conduct a legal public awareness campaign based on the actual needs of newcomers and Londoners.

The objective of these seminars is to teach Individuals about their rights and responsibilities with respect to Canadian Laws and regulations to fill the gaps in some important daily life issues which are NOT considered by the regular settlement agencies.

The impact of this kind of information is very important in the daily life of newcomers who came from different countries with different laws, focusing on protecting them from Spam and scams, and enhance the value of honesty in them when they conduct any transactions.

## **Establishment**

RRAI was established after Mr. Hetham Karky created a funding proposal through the City of London/ Neighborhood Decision Making Initiative. The proposal aimed for organizing short courses or seminars in London neighbourhoods about the rights and responsibilities of newcomers to London. The funding proposals were subject to a neighbourhood vote in November 2019. The proposal was successful, receiving 233 votes, and the City of London provided a grant to fund those seminars.

RRAI is an incorporated not for profit, established under Ontario laws and regulations.

**RRAI Vision**

Ensure that all community members are fully aware of their rights and responsibilities as residents of Canada.

**RRAI Mission**

Spread the awareness of rights and responsibilities in the community through:

- Online webinars;
- In-person workshops (depending on Covid restrictions);
- Written materials in several languages;
- Online information, also in several languages.

**RRAI Objectives**

- Through community consultations, identify the topics that need to be covered in to support community members;
- Plan, coordinate, mobilize resources for the awareness campaigns;
- Conduct awareness campaigns to increase knowledge in the community;
- Collect and analyze feedback to assess organizational impact and make adjustments accordingly;

## **RRAI Pilot Project (City of London's Neighborhood Decision Making Initiative)**

RRAI conducted a small project funded by a grant from the City of London's Neighborhood Decision Making Initiative. Based on its success, we want to expand this project and benefit from this what we learned from this pilot project.

We considered this project as a pilot to design the full project based on the participants' feedback. We intend to expand the geographical area, topics, and experts as well as fine-tuning our delivery methods.

Between June and December 2020 RRAI conducted 10 awareness sessions that presented different topics. Following the sessions, we asked the participants complete a feedback form.

- Those topics for the pilot project were:
- Home-Readiness: Renting vs. Owning
- First Time Home Buyer Tips
- Access to Justice
- Loans: Costs and Obligations
- Small Claims Court
- How to Build a Credit in Canada
- Cultural Shock Impact on the Immigrant Family
- Wills and Powers of Attorney in Canada
- Health Care Decision-making in Ontario
- Landlord and Tenant Law

The total number of participants was 238 persons who attended our Zoom sessions. The participants provided 184 feedback forms with the following results:

- 93.07% of participants indicated that the workshop materials provided were appropriate and helpful
- 92.57% of participants indicated that their knowledge increased as a result of participating in the sessions
- 92.92% of participants indicated that they would recommend the sessions to other newcomers
- 92.94 % of participants who provided feedback indicated that they will consider attending another workshop organized by the Rights and Responsibilities Awareness Initiative (RRAI)
- 93.45% of participants that “Overall, I was very satisfied with today’s workshop”

The topics and results of the feedback can be viewed in the table below.

Workshop topic	Number of Participants	Feedback forms	Workshop materials	Knowledge increased	Recommend this workshop	Considering attending	Overall satisfied
Home Readiness Renting vs. Owning	30	26	9.24	8.92	9.36	9.24	9.28
First Time Home Buyer Tips	38	33	9.48	9.39	9.55	9.64	9.45
Access to Justice	21	17	9.29	9.18	9.18	9.29	9.35
Loans: costs and obligations	23	21	9.24	9.14	9.10	9.14	9.19
Small Claims Court	28	21	9.31	9.31	9.27	9.25	9.27
How to build a credit in Canada	16	11	9.63	9.63	9.44	9.63	9.6
Cultural shock impact on the immigrant family	13	7	9.28	9.28	9.14	9.00	9.42
Wills and Powers of Attorney in Canada	22	15	9.33	9.20	9.33	9.13	9.26
Health Care Decision-making in Ontario	16	11	8.8	9.00	9.00	9.10	9.10
Landlord and Tenant Law	31	22	9.47	9.52	9.57	9.52	9.52
<b>TOTAL</b>	238	184	93.07	92.57	92.92	92.94	93.45

This feedback shows:

- there is a need in the community for awareness in several topics
- the RRAI is capable of organizing and conducting the sessions

By providing diverse information to meet the needs of our community, the project addresses any gaps in services provided by other community service groups. Information provided includes legal, financial, and social/cultural education for newcomers to Canada. The project is currently local but aspires to be expanded regionally. We believe it has the potential to bring significant improvements to the lives of newcomers in London.

We are establishing a database of experts as well as an information database translated to common languages including Arabic, Spanish, and Mandarin, that will be available on the project website. This will work to reduce language barriers in the targeted groups.

Online webinars are carried out live on Zoom. They are promoted in advance on social media and through community partners. We will also provide written materials for all related topics. The printed materials will eventually include posters, brochures, and pamphlets, and will be provided for the public with a subtitle translation in different languages.

This service fills a gap that is not covered by settlement agencies. Because RRAI is not limited to certain geographical areas and is not limited to particular groups it is open to the public by providing high quality professional information at a low cost.

The online sessions are recorded so they can be easily accessed and they will remain as references with the written materials. The distribution of the sessions and materials can be expanded to benefit others across Ontario, and even across Canada.

## **The Impact of Awareness (including the COVID-19 Pandemic)**

Awareness of legal information is critical to the daily life of newcomers who come from different countries with different laws. As newcomers often place considerable weight on word of mouth in deciding on many life issues such as where to work and/or study, it is very important to ensure that they have the right information. This information must come from trustworthy sources that focus on protecting community members from misinformation when conducting their daily transactions.

The project fills the gaps of information by giving the newcomers information about the Canadian legal system and the rule of law. We seek to increase their awareness on the significant differences in law and culture between countries (what works there does not necessarily work here) as well as inform newcomers about legal aid sources if they have legal issues.

We believe that by bringing legal awareness to them, we will help newcomers and their children to succeed and thrive in their new country. It will assist them to find jobs and build businesses, ensure their children have opportunities, and they will in turn make our community stronger. Legal awareness could help reduce pressure on the judicial system by preventing problems before they occur.

This project would help our local community to realize:

- The importance of access to justice and understanding of our legal system for newcomers to Canada;
- An understanding of the legal issues faced by newcomers;
- The spread of, and the resistance to, the values of liberal democracy;
- The increasing complexity of modern legal systems;
- The importance of social empathy and social justice.

As an example, we found that there was often confusion and a lack of clarity about the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB), the COVID-19 vaccine, COVID -19 testing for travel, and gathering restrictions. We believe it is crucial to ensure that accurate information reaches the newcomer community for the duration of the pandemic.

## Public Support

Having a rights and responsibilities awareness initiative has garnered strong support in the London community on both individual and institutional levels. As stated above, our first funding proposal was submitted through the City of London Neighborhood Decision Making Initiative, and was subject to a community vote in the Northwest area of London in November 2019. The City of London subsequently provided a grant to fund seminars that educated London newcomers on their rights and responsibilities in a variety of areas.

The idea was supported in different aspects by the following institutions:

- In support of the nature of RRAI work, the Pillar Non-profit Network supports RRAI with office space at no cost for a limited period of time;
- London Public Library provided a venue for the sessions (before the COVID-19 pandemic);
- London Police Service provided presenters for the contact sessions on anti-spam and anti-fraud;
- Community Legal Services clinic at Western Law provided presenters to conduct awareness sessions;
- WIL Employment Connections connected the project administrative with presenters who conducted awareness sessions on financial issues;
- The Cross Cultural Learner Centre (CCLC) advertised the awareness sessions among CCLC clients;
- CBC Radio aired an interview on November 29, 2019 with Hetham Karky (Project Manager) on London Morning;
- University Heights Public School provided a venue for the sessions before the COVID-19 pandemic;
- Canadian Arab Society of London provided a venue for the sessions before the COVID-19 pandemic and advertised the awareness sessions;
- Neighbourhood Legal Services provided presenters to conduct awareness sessions;
- Employment Solutions advertised the awareness sessions;
- London Muslims Mosque advertised awareness sessions;
- The London Free Press published an article on August 28, 2020 about RRAI activities.

**RRAI Board of Directors**

- **Douglas D. Ferguson** – Chair – Lawyer and former Director, Community Legal Services, Faculty of Law, Western University
- **Rafet Sayegh** - Vice-Chair - Business Owner
- **Oday Ensour** - Treasurer - Business Owner
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- **Hetham Abu Karky** - Executive Director and Visiting Scholar, Western University