

Inclusion is ?feeling safe enough to stand out with all our differences and uniqueness?



Inclusion and belonging are not achieved by ?fitting in?; instead it's achieved when ?we feel safe enough to stand out with all our differences and uniqueness.?

That was the message that York Regional Police Officer Mina Rahrvan delivered in Aurora last week as the York Regional Police welcomed more than 300 members of the community to its Don Hillock Drive headquarters for a special Iftar dinner, intended to break the Ramadan fast.

Residents of all ages and backgrounds came together for the sundown observance on March 27 which included a bounty of food, remarks from local Muslim leaders on the importance of fasting during this Holy Month, and from Police on doing their job in increasingly heated times.

?I can't overstate the significance of having multiple faiths tonight demonstrating their support for one another,? said York Regional Police Chief Jim MacSween. ?Tonight, at this interfaith Iftar, we are celebrating the Holy Month of Ramadan [and] we're also acknowledging the vibrant diversity of cultures, beliefs and traditions that make our community truly exceptional. Tonight, as we break bread together, we do more than just share a meal ? we're sharing stories, lived experiences and the universal human values that unite each other and every one of us.

?This Iftar is not just a tradition for our Muslim brothers and sisters marking the end of a day's fast during the Holy Month of Ramadan, it's a symbol of unity, of coming together across different faiths, to acknowledge and celebrate our diversity.?

Following a speech from Mohammed Hashim, Executive Director of the Canadian Race Relations Foundation, about the work his organization does, Rahrvan highlighted the work that she and the YRP have been doing closer to home.

She spoke of facilitating an environment where people are indeed comfortable to stand out with ?our differences and uniqueness? but ?without fear of being discriminated against and the fear of being targets of hate speech and hate-motivated crimes.?

A recent forum designed specifically for the Muslim community was related to Islamophobia and hate crime prevention and, at the end of the session came near, there were a series of ?quiet? questions directed on police.

?The questions had no voice, but they had heavy emotions,? said Rahrvan. ?The questions were, ?What do I do when somebody

pulls my hijab? What do I do when someone assaults me simply because I am wearing a hijab? Should I call the police? What do I do when after years and years of contributions for a democratic Canadian society that I get yelled at from across the street, 'Go back to your country?' just because I'm wearing a hijab. Should I call the police?'

Those questions were calls for actions. Those questions demanded to be heard, demanded to be voiced and to be humanized. This is why York Regional Police, in collaboration with Muslim Women of Vaughan, orchestrated two important [components] designed for our Muslim women in the community. They became a platform, a safe and authentic space for our Muslim women who wear hijab as well, to feel comfortable sharing their experiences, their thoughts, their fears, their emotions with a panel of female-only leaders and officers. That became a wonderful space for the officers, too.

At the end of the forum, the message of York Regional Police was loud and clear that here in the Region of York there is no space for hate. We all come together with our diversities and differences and are there to unite us not divide us and relay the message to our esteemed community that whenever hate knocks at your door, rest assured York Regional Police is here to respond to a call for help.

By Brock Weir
Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter