

Muslim Coalition of Connecticut

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Letter From The President

Peace and Blessings Friends,

“The best preparation for tomorrow is doing your best today” – H. Jackson Brown, Jr. I cannot imagine it being 2018 already! It seems like just yesterday we were celebrating Eid at Lake Compounce or attending the annual Fall Leadership Banquet. This past quarter, with the help from our volunteers, we continued to provide home cooked meals every month at the Hartford Shelter. We talked about representation in the media at our annual banquet, and hosted a women’s health event for our community. In this issue, you will find some reflections and a look back at a productive quarter.

In 2017, 21 speakers provided educational presentations and panel sessions at 115 events that were conducted by the MCCT Speakers Bureau program and the Honest Conversation Series hosted in collaboration with the Hartford Seminary and the CT Council for Interreligious Understanding (CCIU). Over 2,300 individuals joined us for Eid celebration at Lake Compounce this year and 370 diverse individuals from various faith backgrounds joined us in breaking the fast during Ramadan.

In looking ahead for 2018, MCCT will be re-evaluating our programming to ensure it continues to be effective for the latest needs of the community, engage Muslims through Mosque presentations and outreach initiatives, and engage non-Muslims in Interfaith dialogue. Lastly, I would like to sincerely thank you all for your continuous commitment and support. Without our generous donors, motivated volunteers, and supportive partners, we will not be able to thrive in an environment filled with ups and downs. Please continue to keep MCCT in your prayers and to remain engaged with us throughout the months ahead.

Sincerely, Samia Hussein, MPH

MCCT BY THE NUMBERS – October to December 2017

- ✓ Speakers Bureau engaged 185 attendees at 7 events.
- ✓ Honest Conversations with Muslim Neighbors joint initiative with CCIU and Hartford Seminary continued to conduct many gatherings, where the total attendance has now topped 2,000.
- ✓ Approximately 400 people were served by at least 40 volunteers at the monthly Shelter Serves.
- ✓ 265 individuals attended the Annual Leadership Banquet

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WOMEN'S HEALTH AND FITNESS EVENT A GREAT SUCCESS

Layan Alnajjar is a high school junior and is also co-president of the Connecticut Teen Chapter of The Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom, an interfaith Muslim-Jewish girls' group

Salaam, I'm Layan Alnajjar, a junior at Hall High School who attended the Women's Evening of Fitness and Relaxation held at Health Tracks in Newington. This event was held for women across Connecticut looking for an enjoyable and social night spent with members of our community. It was a great night to relax, unwind, and enjoy the company of others. This event included various sessions such as Zumba, Aquazumba, Free Swim, Cardio, Social Room, and Spin. I attended Zumba, Cardio, Spin, and Social Room and had an amazing experience in all of them. I especially enjoyed Zumba, an aerobic fitness program featuring movements inspired by various styles of music and art. It was a lively and exciting session in which I made many new friends. I also enjoyed cardio because there was a variety of gym equipment available for us to use such as treadmills and weight lifting equipment.

Every year I come back to attend this program because it offers such a great way to socialize with the women in our community in a comfortable environment while also having the opportunity to exercise and relax. I've attended this program for more than 3 years and plan to continue attending in the future. I appreciate the efforts put into planning this program as it has become my favorite program that MCC coordinates. I look forward to participating in this event every year and I strongly recommend it to all women in the community.

Special thanks to Virginia Gorski (seen here with Aida Mansoor) and the staff at HealthTrax in Newington for helping us design special fitness programs and events especially for women.



MONTHLY SHELTER SERVE PROGRAM - VOLUNTEER PERSPECTIVE

Amir Suhail is a 12th grade student in Farmington and is an active volunteer with MCCT

The first time I went to the Mercy shelter to serve the Greater Hartford community, I was not sure how the experience would be. However, shortly into serving, I found myself enjoying it. On the surface, it was amazing to see the underprivileged from Hartford community, enjoy the food we had prepared.

But I realized there was a deeper meaning to what we were doing. The MCCT Shelter Serve provided a venue for Muslims fulfill their obligation to their community.

With the growing social stigmas surrounding Islam in the media, it's difficult for Muslims to represent the true values of the religion. It's not uncommon for hate crimes against Muslims to be clouded when the roles are reversed. Along with serving food, the volunteers at the Shelter Serve were first-hand representing Islam.

I will always remember the day when a lady claimed this was the first time she had interacted with the Muslim community, and I felt an instant sense of relief. Sure, the lady left with a full stomach, but she also left with an impression.

There was no comparison to the smile on the faces of those who were eating the warm, home-cooked food we were serving. There was no comparison to the gratitude they felt toward us, for coming in and preparing the food to them. And there was no comparison to the unifying feeling us servers experienced, as we met our goal of serving all those who came in that day.

Little by little, month by month, we are making a difference in being the change we hope to make. I hope that MCCT continues this program, as we are not only helping our local community in need, but also helping ourselves grow as Muslims and people.



MCCT Volunteers participating in serving food at the Mercy Shelter in Hartford

MCCT ANNUAL FUNDRAISER EVENT - TEEN PERSPECTIVE

Saja Gherri is an 8th grade student and Summer Gherri is a 10th grade student in Tolland. They are both very enthusiastic supporters of MCCT

A great fundraising, bonding, and educational event, the MCCT's Fundraising Banquet featured many speakers and occasional performers, bidding, as well as a beautiful dinner. With a goal in mind of supporting the Muslim Coalition of Connecticut, people come together and listened to these enticing guests and enjoyed a dinner together as a genial community. Having gone for a decade and creating many memories along the way, this fundraising dinner has not only collected a plethora of generous donations, but educational messages are also brought by sophisticated and erudite speakers and guests.

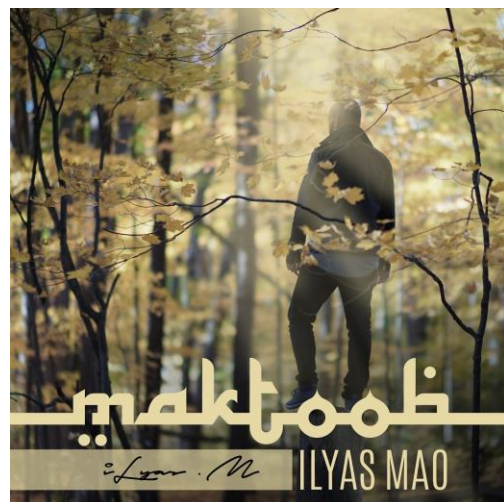
The dinner began with a quick introduction, which lead into a slideshow, showcasing the myriad of events presented by the MCCT, and presenting the dignified achievements of these events, which included the Leadership Banquet, and the Women's Health and Fitness Program. After recognizing the achievements of other MCCT members and participants, there were many guest speakers who spoke about the importance of MCCT and its achievements. They spoke of lessons of love and unrequited giving from the Quran, as well as modern cautionary tales on the consequences of discrimination.

The speakers were very interesting and meaningful. They spoke about life lessons and how we can apply them to our everyday lives just to spread some happiness in the world. We learned about how doing simple activities that the MCCT runs, (like food drives, fundraisers, etc.) can make the world a better place. The speeches were very powerful and had a lot of meaning to them. I would recommend this event to everyone, having seen such a wide variety of people attending and enjoying the event.

The performer, Ilyas Mao, was mesmerizing and filled with talent. His songs were good with a heartfelt message in every single one that was performed. With the songs being so good, I was truly surprised to find out that all of the background "music," was made by his own voice! With a great performance, the lyrics related back to the speeches with the messages of spreading positivity, being thankful, and helping those who are not as fortunate.

The event was enjoyable for people of all backgrounds and I would encourage all to attend as it taught many life lessons such as giving back to the community and being thankful. It was a great learning experience and I will definitely remember it for the rest of my life.

**Spoken Word artist Ilyas Mao
provided the entertainment at the
Annual MCCT Fundraiser Dinner**



MCCT LEADERSHIP BANQUET: AN AMAZING EVENING

Elaf Al-Wohaibi is a graduate student at UConn School of Law

It was a rainy autumn evening when Muslims and allies from across the east coast gathered at the Marriott in downtown Hartford to commemorate the amazing work the Muslim Coalition of Connecticut has accomplished and highlight opportunities to make a greater difference.

This year's MCCT Annual Leadership Banquet, titled "Muslims in the Media: Reclaiming the Narrative," provided a spotlight for organizations and individuals who present Muslims with a positive light in the media. This included Dean Obeidallah, Unity Productions Foundation, Islamic Scholarship Fund, and Susan Campbell. The speakers discussed various topics, such as personal anecdotes, professional backgrounds, and opportunities for young Muslims pursuing careers in the media.

As an aspiring lawyer, the event provided a wonderful networking opportunity by allowing me to meet local Muslim professionals, in addition to fellow students and activists. The atmosphere of the room was relaxed and serene, with bouts of laughter erupting periodically. The dinner was delicious, particularly the dessert, everyone's favorite part. Overall, the banquet left me with hope for the future and the extra nudge I needed to engage the media. I'm already looking forward to attending the next MCCT event!

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Speakers, Guests, and Board Members at the 13th Annual MCCT Leadership Banquet at the Marriott Downtown Hartford

NEWS FROM THE MCCT BOARD

Samia Hussein, MCCT Board President

Dearest Community Members,
Partners, and Friends:

With the changes of the season, come changes in leadership at MCCT. We would like to announce some recent changes in our Board of Directors.

Linda Miller, Mark Minor, and Imam Refai Arefin have resigned from their position as Board of Directors due to personal reasons. Dr. Colleen Keyes and Maheen Rahman are joining the Board.

Linda Miller has been such a wonderful asset to MCCT's Board since January, 2016. We would like to personally thank her for her time and efforts in chairing the Speakers Bureau program. She will continue to actively volunteer and participate with us at MCCT events and we are

grateful for her dedication and service.

MCCT would like to also thank *Mark Minor* for his dedicated service throughout the years and as chair of the Habitat Build events during his time with us since 2013. Mark will continue to be engaged with MCCT events and programs in the future.

For eight years, *Refai Arefin*, has served on the board and has made extensive contributions to MCCT whether it may be legal or religious advice. We would like to personally thank Imam Refai for serving as board member over these many years and for continuing to be engaged with us in any capacity he can.

MCCT would also like to announce the addition of two new board members, *Dr.*

Colleen Keyes and *Ms. Maheen Rahman*. Both Colleen and Maheen have actively participated in MCCT events and are active leaders in their communities. Dr. Keyes comes to us with extensive interfaith and non-profit experience in the community. Maheen Rahman brings her motivation and creativity to the board.

Please join me in thanking Linda Miller, Mark Minor, and Imam Refai Arefin for their service over the years and also join me in welcoming our newest addition to the MCCT family, Dr. Colleen Keyes and Maheen Rahman. We wish the very best to all of them. Look out for more information and interviews with our two new board members in the next issue of our newsletter!

Heartfelt thanks to board members Imam Refai Arefin, Linda Miller, and Mark Minor



MCCT SPOTLIGHT

Quotes and Success Stories from our Partners

“I would like to thank Linda Miller and the Muslim Coalition of CT for the wonderful talk that she gave at our church Oct. 22nd. The feedback that I have received has been enthusiastically positive. We appreciated Linda's knowledge, wisdom and humor and enjoyed learning from her. It was a great session and I thank you for all that you do to promote interfaith understanding.”

- Thank you letter sent to MCCT speaker Linda Miller

“Lejla, thank you so much for your presentation to today. Our person who was counting those present had problems getting an accurate count because of people going in and out. Her best estimate was 65.

The response was excellent. I appreciate your scheduling at such short notice. People were very receptive! I believe we all came away with a much improved understanding of Islam and our Muslim brothers and sisters.”

- Thank you letter sent to MCCT speaker Lejla Duric

UPCOMING MCCT EVENTS

PLEASE NOTE: Dates and venues are subject to change – please look out for announcements via email and on our website closer to each date.

Tuesday, February 13 - MCCT Board Meeting Public Session
Newington Library, 7:00 pm

Saturday, March 3 - Shelter Serve
Mercy Shelter, Hartford 11:30 am

Saturday, March 3 – Women’s Health and Fitness Event
Newington HealthTrax, 5:30 pm

Saturday, April 7 - Shelter Serve
Mercy Shelter, Hartford 11:30 am

Saturday, April 21 - Habitat Build Interfaith Day
Hartford (Location TBA)
7:30-3:30 pm

Saturday, May 5 - Shelter Serve
Mercy Shelter, Hartford 11:30 am

Sunday, May 6 - Walk Against Hunger
Hartford, 12:00 pm

***Shelter Serves are held the first Saturday of each month in Hartford. Board meetings are generally held the second Tuesday of each month (venue to be announced)**

GET INVOLVED!

If you are interested in volunteering with MCCT or would like more information about our events, please send your inquiry to info@mcct.us. We are currently looking for interested members of the community who would like to serve on one of our program committees, or volunteer at one of our events. Programs include:

- **MONTHLY SHELTER SERVE**
- **HABITAT BUILD**
- **WOMEN’S EVENTS**
- **SPEAKERS BUREAU**
- **WALK AGAINST HUNGER**

We are also looking for volunteers to help us with web design, marketing design, videographers, photography, social media, volunteer coordinating, newsletter editors, etc.

OUTSIDE EVENTS OF INTEREST

Muslim Women's Annual Retreat



Masjid Al- Islam(CT): "Remember ME and I will Remember You": Qur'an 2:152

8th Annual Muslimah Get-A-Way: A Retreat for Sisters

Theme: Identity Awareness: "Who Am I ?"
April 27 -29, 2018
Camp Washington, Lakeside CT

Special Speaker /Workshop Presenter:
C. Islaah Abd'al-Rahim

Includes: Workshops, Discussions, Qiyamul layl, Networking, Vendors, Entertainment, Relaxation , Group games, Mini-Spa, BBQ Lunch, and Formal Deen & Dine Dinner .

Register online:
buytickets.at/muslimahgetaway2018

Contact: 203 376 7189
admin@masjidalislam.net
Registration: Sumayah or Matiniah
203 444 5767

Early Bird	Regular Prices
Cabins: \$150	\$200
Main House: \$200	\$250

Early Bird Deadline 4-1-18

Registration includes:
Fri-Sun
Room and Board,
5 Halal Meals &
All Activities!

Environment is green, safe, tranquil, Sister friendly,

Retreat Registration Link:

<http://buytickets.at/muslimahgetaway2018/129106>