

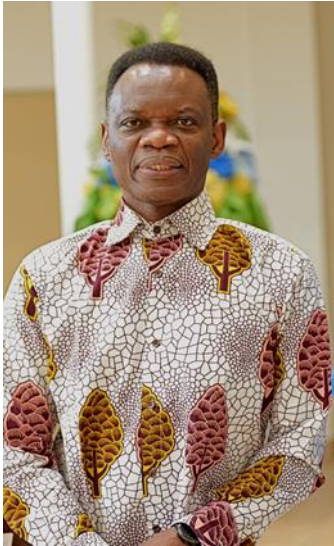


2023 GCAO ANNUAL REPORT



Ghanaian- Canadian Association of Ontario
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GCAO President's Message



Community Members, Associations, Churches, Nananom, Clergy, Mosques;

2023 was a year of growth and collaboration for Ghanaian-Canadian Association of Ontario (GCAO) alias, Ghana Union. I am grateful for the support we have been able to garner from our community and the constant prayers for the success of this great community we have.

Thank you to our Funders for the period of January 1, 2023 to December 31, 2023 include the New Horizon Grant, Canadian Women Foundation, Taibu Community Health Centre, City of Toronto, Rexdale Community Health Centre, National Alliance of Black Communities.

GCAO serves as an umbrella organization encompassing all Ghanaian-Canadian individuals, religious, professional, cultural, and social organizations in Ontario. We boast over 27 cultural associations, 25 faith groups (churches and mosques), numerous businesses, and professional group associations. We are a non-profit organization with a mission to enhance the well-being of Ghanaian-Canadians in Ontario. Our extensive membership of over 45,000 individuals across the Greater Toronto Area relies on our support and services.

As you read our 2023 annual report, it is with humility and astonishment the level of leaders, volunteers, subject matter experts, media, and other stakeholders who have contributed immensely to our success thus far. We thank you all for your unwavering support to our leadership teams and our community members.

We still have work ahead of us, our financial goal of reaching \$1,000,000 to secure our heritage centre continues to be a priority. The welfare of our community continues to be our aim. As we look to 2024, we look forward to journeying with you. To mention just a few; the heritage project, consolidating the gains we have made, attracting more volunteers, paid staff to man our HUB, and health education on physical, emotional, and mental health, international students integration, youth at risk, business development, mentoring, data analytics, and housing are the work ahead of us and we need your support. Please reach out and take some time to help. I have no doubt that we can accomplish our goals.

Please stay safe and get involved in your community. We need you, please!

‘Together We Build, The Time is Now’

E. Duodu

GCAO – President

Building the Community Together

In 2023, our community health took center stage as the GCAO embarked on a year of exceptional engagement and upliftment within the Ghanaian-Canadian Community in Ontario. Notable events and initiatives marked this period, showcasing the strength and unity of the community.

B'Well Clinic and Mental Health Program: The B'Well Clinic and Mental Health program played a pivotal role in promoting health within the community. This initiative focused on providing education and services aimed at enhancing the overall well-being of community members.

Ghanaian Community BBQ and Cultural Events: Festivities, such as the Ghanaian community BBQ, Ghana fest, Independence Day celebration, Africa Day, etc., served as joyous occasions that brought the community together. These events provided a platform for collective celebration and support.

Community Engagement through Partnerships: Initiatives like the Clean Up Chalk Farm project brought together different segments of the community, including associations and churches, fostering a sense of unity and shared responsibility.

Annual Soccer Tournament: The 2nd Annual Soccer Tournament brought together young men and women of various ages, using sports as a platform to share information on preventing violence at home. This event not only promoted physical activity but also facilitated important conversations within the community.

Youth Education and Seminars: Empowering the youth remained a priority, with educational seminars providing valuable information and preparation for their future success. These efforts aimed to equip young individuals with the knowledge and skills necessary for personal growth.

Homework Club Expansion: The expansion of the Homework Club's language program allowed individuals from across North America to participate and learn Twi virtually.

Women's Conference: The Women's Wing organized their 2nd Women's Conference, focusing on engagement and empowerment while addressing gender violence. This event provided a platform for women to come together, share experiences, and support each other.

Newcomer and Refugee Support Program: A dedicated program by the welfare team aimed to support newcomers and refugees in Ontario, recognizing the unique challenges faced by individuals starting anew in a different country.

Golden Age Group Initiatives: The Golden Age group undertook various educational programs and field trips to combat social isolation among seniors, promoting continued learning and community connectivity.

GCAO Welfare Support Program: They focused on social support of Ghanaians in Toronto to assisting individuals facing various challenges, including distress, family loss, illness, and crises related to employment and housing.

Through these diverse initiatives and collaborative efforts, GCAO demonstrated a commitment to community well-being, education, and empowerment, fostering a sense of belonging and unity among the Ghanaian-Canadian community in Ontario.

“Together we build and indeed 2023, we continued building on our foundation for a better Ghanaian-Canadian Community.”

BWell Clinic and Wellness Program



In Collaboration with community organizations in the GTA, we aimed at promoting overall well-being, including physical health, mental health, nutrition, fitness, stress management, and preventive care.

BWell Clinics were held every month to provide community members with information and support with navigating health resources. The clinics held each month focused on different theme such as Wellness and Mental Health, spring into wellness, Diabetes Awareness and Education, Heart Health and Black History Month, etc. Community members attended Clinic throughout the year to obtain:

- free access to massage,
- groceries,
- blood pressure and glucose check and many went home with
- Free blood pressure monitor.

Together, we have protected over 5000 community members at various settings to ensure no one is left behind.

Thank you to Black Vaccine Engagement Team and North Etobicoke Cluster organizations, Black Physician Association of Ontario, African Food Basket.



GCAO Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) for Africans in the Diaspora (Project)



The Ghanaian-Canadian Association of Ontario (GCAO) under an awarded grant from the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC)'s supporting the Mental Health of those most affected by COVID-19: Black Communities in Canada implemented a project to promote health equity and service of Black communities in Canada.

Project: Mental Health First Aid for Africans in the Diaspora

This project is designed to build capacity amongst Black Canadians and Africans in Diaspora communities in Canada through the implementation of culturally focused and relevant Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) course. Education of mental health among Black or African communities is a major challenge and as a result, many who suffer from mental health fail to get the appropriate support to improve.



Black Community organizations nominated Mental Health First Aid Instructor who were trained for 5 days to build intervention capacity of individuals to provide immediate support for those experience mental health problems or in crises. 25 Instructors from across Canada were trained in the summer and fall season. From these 25, each is expected to train 25-50 community members.

GCAO understand that the involvement of all Black organizations across the province will enable us to reach the most Blacks and Individuals of African descent across Canada. So far, we have trained over 200 individuals from across Canada.



Youth Sports Program

A new program was established under the support of Foundation for Black Communities, a funding opportunity to support Black communities to explore ideas, projects, structures, and systems that positively impact youth wellness through sports and recreation in Ontario's Black communities (ages 6 - 29).

From this grant, we established the table tennis and soccer program. The objectives was to develop a youth program to expose our youth to different sports experience and raise awareness about different sports. This program was exciting as it exposed our community to resources and many opportunities. Participants learned how to play soccer and table tennis, at the end of their learning session, they took part in local tournaments.

At the end of program, many families and participants expressed interest in engaging in program in the next year and having more local tournaments. These tournaments served as a space for networking, collaboration and skill development.

DATES: MAY 2023 to AUGUST 2023

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS: 15 weekly participants and 50 people in the tournament



GCHRC Fundraising Launch

The Ghanaian-Canadian Heritage and Resource Center fundraising continued with the drive donations for the seed money needed to build the maiden and historic GCHRC. Leaders in this group visited various churches and Association to request for funds for the Heritage Centre.

We continue to encourage members to donate at least \$100 per year and Associations to donate at least \$5000 each year. 2023, we raised closed to \$90,000.

The Heritage and Resource Centre project is the core piece of GCAO's ambitious community project to combine affordable housing with a Resource Centre as one unique holistic model for our Ghanaian-Canadian community. For the Heritage and Resource Centre project alone, we have an estimated budget of \$5million to build or renovate an existing facility and operationalize it with all the programs afore mentioned.

Our target is to raise \$1 million by the close of 2024 to enable us to start Preliminary Engineering of the project in Q1/2025. The Needs Definition and Feasibility Studies have been completed.



To achieve this fundraising objective, we have designed sponsorship packages based on voluntary donations and naming rights to various areas of the facility.

All contributions are tax deductible. GCAO encourages all community members to donate at least \$100 per year.

Ghanaian Community BBQ & Picnic

The Community BBQ and Picnic was a success this year as it brought all the various Association and Churches together at Malton, Mississauga to enjoy each other's company, share laughter, and take a break from their hectic lives was truly heartwarming. The turnout was impressive, and it's safe to say that every participant had a great time.

This event showcased a diverse range of cultural displays, with the highlight being the Ga festival (Homowo). It provided us with a precious opportunity to reflect on the past few years, acknowledging the challenges and achievements we've faced and endured together.



Annual GCAO Clean-Up Chalk Farm

Each year during the spring, the Ghanaian-Canadian community come together for an Annual Community Spring Clean-up. This year, the community held two clean up. One at Chalk farm park, Toronto and, the other cleanup was held in Duggan Park, Brampton. These gathering is exciting as all the various cultural Association, churches and community members came together to help clean neighborhoods.



City of Brampton, Knights of Columbus in Collaboration with
The Ghanaian-Canadian Association of Ontario(GCAO)

COMMUNITY CLEAN UP DAY

ORGANIZED BY

DATE: JUNE 3RD, 2023

TIME: 10AM - 1PM (EST)

**LOCATION: DUGGAN PARK
(73 VODDEN ST. E.)**

**CONTACT: 905-903-9045 | 416-243-2003
EMAIL: INFO@GCAOCANADA.ORG**



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YOUNG ADULT ENGAGEMENT

The mission of our young adult engagement group is to elevate, cultivate, and inspire the strengths and collaborative efforts of the young generation, encouraging them to take charge as positive change agents while leaving an impactful and lasting footprint in local communities.

Objective

- Provide a space for reflection, communication, mentorship, and growth, through innovation and implementation.
- Showcase and promote local Ghanaian Canadian businesses and organizations
- Develop strategies to increase civic engagement, ensure representation in media and creative arts, grow Black wealth and ownership, and enrich mental health and physical wellness
- Enable the mobilization of young people to own initiatives focused on strengthening educational outcomes, improving access to social justice and community safety, and better facilitate diasporan efforts



ACTIVITIES

OF PARTICIPANTS

ACTIVITIES	# OF PARTICIPANTS
<i>A Visit to Ahenfie</i>	45
<i>Speed Dating</i>	40
<i>Youth Bowling Day</i>	35
<i>Financial Literacy</i>	32
<i>Social Networking Event</i>	60
<i>Table Tennis Tournament</i>	15
<i>Soccer Tournament</i>	120
<i>Social Network Holiday mixer</i>	45

Ghanaian Young Adult Social Networking Holiday Mixer



The aim of this festive gathering was to unite Ghanaian young adults in the Greater Toronto Area for a final gathering before the year concludes. On December 2, 2023, more than 50 individuals attended the event at the GCAO hub, fostering connections, networking, and building relationships.



At the gathering, participants engaged in entertaining activities such as Ghanaian trivia, game involving the elimination of countries etc. These games not only added excitement to the event but also facilitated knowledge about various African countries. Laughter filled the night as all attendees were encouraged to join in the games.

The positive response from attendees was evident, with many expressing enthusiasm for more events tailored to youth and young adults. The occasion provided newcomers to Canada with an opportunity to connect and interact with Ghanaians who have either lived in the country for years or were born here. This interaction served as a valuable platform for learning and seeking advice, especially regarding living in Canada during the winter.



Homework Club

The Homework Club is focuses on teaching young children ages 6-16 years the Ghanaian language and culture as well as supporting them with Math. In 2023, the program continued to provide twi education to larger community around the country. The program offered various activities such as career planning, life skills, budgeting, money management, arts and other recreations. The goal is to inform and help prepare the students for post-secondary.

The programs were all held virtually and as a result, more students were able to participate. Below are few activities held:

- Virtual Batik program
- Educational workshops
- Game day
- Christmas Giveaway
- Back to School Giveaway
- Weekly cultural instruction and practiced Twi language.
- Weekly virtual math support with their peers and their teachers/mentors.



Women, Stronger together!



Gender-based violence is a harmful act directed at an individual based on their gender. It is often rooted in gender inequality, abuse of power and often impact women and as a result, the GCAO women's wing focused on creating programs and activities that supports Ghanaian Women in Ontario. The aimed is to support Ghanaian women of all ages and working together to eradicate poverty, violence, lack of self-confidence and employ creativity, cultural heritage and leadership among women to support the community.

Activities

Bi-Weekly Keep Fit Zumba With Anna Aidoo

Fun Party To Celebrate Women Valentine's Day & Black History Month

Empowering Our Women & Girls

The Criminal Justice System

Mother's Day Brunch

Come De-Stress & Treat Yourself To A Relaxing Day(Boat Cruise)

Annual Women's Conference - Igniting Our Collective Power

We are a community, we want every women to have the best-lived experience. We want to be the advocate for women and so we are here to support women experiencing violence, mental health, and any challenges.



Men's Wing Inauguration



The launch of the GCAO Men's Wing in early 2023 marks a significant step towards creating a safe space for Ghanaian and Non-Ghanaian men to address issues such as gender violence, mentorship, and community building. This initiative aimed to actively involve men in discussions and actions against gender-based violence. The engagement of community leaders from various associations and churches underscores the broad support and reach of the initiative. On the launch day, 85 community leaders attended.

Utilizing platforms like WhatsApp and incorporating sports events like soccer games to educate men about gender violence highlights a proactive approach to engaging the community. By leveraging these channels, the Men's Wing can effectively disseminate educational messages and foster a culture of respect and non-violence. Over 70 men came out to play soccer in August 2023.

Additionally, the GCAO's focus on post-COVID recovery programs reflects a holistic approach to community development. Initiatives targeting mental health, financial education, cultural preservation, and relationship building demonstrate a commitment to addressing diverse needs within the community. By collaborating with experts and creating networks of professionals, the organization aims to provide accessible resources and support systems.

The emphasis on passing down culture and tradition to younger generations and fostering understanding between different age groups speaks to the importance of intergenerational dialogue and heritage preservation. Furthermore, the commitment to joint sessions with the Women's Wing underscores a collaborative approach to addressing gender-based issues and promoting mutual understanding.

Overall, the GCAO Men's Wing's multi-faceted approach to community engagement and empowerment holds promise for creating positive social change and fostering a more inclusive and respectful society. Continued evolution and expansion of programs will be crucial in achieving long-term impact and promoting gender equality and violence prevention.



GCAO Golden Ages Program



This program is designed to connect seniors to programs to reduce isolation by engaging them to actively participate and run programs for themselves and address their needs. The program focuses on the following activities:

- Senior Digital Literacy
- Exercise and wellness programs
- Counselling Programs
- Peer-to-Peer connect
- Intergenerational engagement (seniors and youth engagements, homework club volunteering)
- Senior Educations Such as:
 - ✓ Falls Prevention
 - ✓ Financial Management as Seniors
 - ✓ Chronic Health Management education
 - ✓ Personal Hygiene
 - ✓ Safety Checks
 - ✓ Other Disease Management
 - ✓ Aging 101



2023 ACTIVITIES

OF PARTICIPANTS

<i>Falls Prevention</i>	35
<i>Baby Boomers, Are you properly protected</i>	82
<i>Elderly Abuse, Scam & Fraud Prevention</i>	64
<i>Planning Ahead Seminar: Are your Affairs In Order?</i>	127
<i>Seniors Lunch at Wok of Fame</i>	70

<i>Field Trip to Toronto Island</i>	70
<i>Seniors Summer BBQ</i>	120
<i>Stress Reduction for Seniors</i>	35
<i>Seniors Holiday Party</i>	120
<i>Seniors Weekly Fitness Program</i>	144
<i>Wednesday Trivia and Games</i>	381
<i>Thursdays Chat Time</i>	144
<i>Golden Age Members WhatsApp Chat</i>	381



Newcomer Support Program

Toronto, renowned for its diversity, stands as one of Canada's most cosmopolitan cities, attracting a substantial number of newcomers, including individuals and families from diverse African countries. In the current year, Toronto has welcomed numerous individuals seeking refuge, driven by factors such as escaping conflict, persecution, and various hardships in their countries of origin.



In a commendable effort to support asylum seekers, the GCAO utilized community donations to provide relief items to 200 individuals at the Revival Time Tabernacle in North York, Ontario. This initiative reflects the community's commitment to extending a helping hand to those in need, especially newcomers facing challenges in their resettlement process.

Recognizing the ongoing needs of African refugees and asylum seekers, the United Way Greater Toronto (UWGT) awarded GCAO with funds, specifically towards aiding newcomers across Peel Region, Toronto, and York Region. GCAO supported to over 150 newcomers from Ghana who arrived in Canada between the months of September to December 2023. The assistance includes:

Housing/Rent Subsidy: GCAO facilitated housing and rent subsidies, recognizing the importance of stable and affordable housing for the well-being and integration of newcomers.

Winter Clothing Distribution: Winter clothing, including essentials like coats, scarves, gloves, socks, and boots, were provided. This initiative is crucial for helping individuals adapt to the colder Canadian climate.

Food Support for Cultural Appropriateness: The organization extended support for obtaining culturally appropriate foods by providing assistance to grocery stores. This ensures that newcomers can access familiar and culturally relevant food items.

Gift Cards to Walmart: GCAO distributed Walmart gift cards, offering flexibility and empowering newcomers to choose essential items based on their individual needs.

These initiatives demonstrate the collaborative efforts of the community, GCAO, and the support from United Way Greater Toronto in addressing the immediate needs of newcomers. By focusing on housing, winter essentials, food security, and providing practical resources, these efforts contribute significantly to the well-being and successful integration of African refugees and asylum seekers in the Toronto region.

GCAO Welfare Support

The GCAO Welfare Support Program in Toronto took a comprehensive approach to addressing the social support needs of Ghanaians in the community. The program was dedicated to assisting individuals facing various challenges, including distress, family loss, illness, and crises related to employment and housing. Here are key components of the program:

Visitation and Guidance: Leaders from the GCAO welfare support program actively visited individuals undergoing distressing situations. They provided personal guidance and support to those facing difficulties, fostering a sense of community and solidarity.

Referral Services: The program offered practical assistance by referring individuals and families to essential services. This included guiding them to food banks, legal services, health and mental health services, childcare resources, and housing support. These referrals aimed to connect people with the necessary resources to address their specific needs.

Crisis Management: In situations involving distress or crisis, such as family loss or housing and employment challenges, the welfare support program played a vital role in offering immediate assistance. This could involve coordinating with relevant services and organizations to ensure timely support for affected individuals.

Funeral Arrangements: In cases where deceased individuals were not accounted for, the program collaborated with funeral services to ensure proper and dignified burials. This compassionate approach addressed the emotional and practical aspects of handling loss within the community.

Community Fundraising: Leaders in the GCAO welfare support program actively engaged the community in fundraising initiatives. Bringing communities together, these efforts aimed to raise funds to support families experiencing distress. This collective approach strengthened community bonds and provided tangible assistance to those in need.

The GCAO Welfare Support Program demonstrated a commitment to holistic well-being by addressing not only immediate crises but also connecting individuals and families to ongoing support services. Through visitations, referrals, crisis management, funeral arrangements, and community fundraising, the program played a pivotal role in fostering a supportive and resilient community for Ghanaians in Toronto.

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