

Zonta Club of Ottawa, Canada (ZCO CA)

Submissions to the Zonta District 2 - May 2026 Newsletter

ZCO CA 2026 Award Winners

Zonta Club of Ottawa, Canada is proud to announce our '2026 Jean M. Coon Humanitarian Award' Winner – Sifa Gulin Tarakci



Sifa is a Grade 12 student at Merivale High School whose community service is driven by a deep commitment to inclusion. As a Muslim immigrant woman, she is dedicated to inclusivity and creating spaces where everyone belongs. Some of her notable initiatives include founding the Panorama Multicultural Festival, which drew over 650 attendees and raised more than \$1,000 for a non-profit supporting newcomers and launching a women's swim initiative so Muslim women in her community could stay active without compromising their religious values. In her free time, she enjoys playing volleyball, going on long runs, travelling, and watching classic movies—her current favourite being Dead Poets Society.

PANORAMA Cultural Fair <https://panoramacf.com/services/>

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Zonta Club of Ottawa, Canada is proud to announce our
2026 Zonta Young Women in Leadership Award winner 'Umaiza Ahmmed'



Umaiza Ahmmed is a grade 12 student planning to pursue health sciences, with a strong interest in neuroscience, particularly research for Parkinson's disease. She is the co-founder of Care for Cubs, where she leads interactive workshops designed to reduce children's fear of healthcare environments, reaching hundreds of participants. As a member of her school's robotics team, she contributes to both technical and business operations, including organizing outreach events and securing sponsorships. She is very dedicated to volunteering in several causes and has contributed extensively to her community through volunteer service, reflecting her commitment to healthcare education and outreach.

In addition, Umaiza loves music and plays the piano and flute as well as working as an assistant piano teacher. She loves to read and can often be found at the library!

Donation link: <https://buymeacoffee.com/contactcar1>

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ZCO CA 2025 Award Winners

Congratulations to our ZCO CA 'Zonta Women in STEM Award' Winner *Rija Ansari



Rija Ansari is a chemist, chemical engineer and data scientist dedicated to developing innovative solutions to climate change. Holding an Honours Bachelor of Science in Chemistry from the University of Toronto and a Professional Education Certificate in Applied Data Science from MIT, she is currently completing a Master of Engineering in Chemical Engineering with an emphasis in Data Analytics and Machine Learning at the University of Toronto.

Rija's research career is rooted in clean energy and environmental science. As a Research Council Officer at the National Research Council of Canada, she has led projects in sodium-ion battery development, hydrometallurgical battery recycling, and carbon capture utilization and storage (CCUS). Her work has resulted in IP filings, peer-reviewed publications, and hundreds of thousands of dollars in research funding. She is engaged in applying cutting-edge data science techniques to accelerate sustainable energy solutions. Her MEng project focuses on using machine learning models to predict the carbon capture capacity of novel combinations of amine-functionalized silica.

Beyond the lab, Rija is a community builder serving as Community Manager for Toast Ottawa, where she leads engagement and fosters meaningful professional connections. As a host for upcoming Toronto Climate Week (TOCW) events in June, she aims to educate and empower individuals to implement a sustainable approach to their personal and profession lives regardless of their standing or sector. A recipient of the 2025 Zonta Women in STEM Scholarship, she brings the same leadership and dedication to every space she enters.

Rija's work sits at the intersection of chemistry, chemical engineering, data science, and sustainability. She is driven by a conviction that rigorous science and intelligent technology are essential tools in the fight against climate change.



Get ready for an exclusive sneak peek at 'The Murder of Roger Ackroyd' with OLT and ZCO CA – it's going to be a killer show!

OLT & ZCO CA welcome you to the exclusive preview fundraiser performance of 'The Murder of Roger Ackroyd' at **Ottawa Little Theatre!** Join us on **February 22, 2026 at 2:00 PM** for a thrilling experience. Get ready to immerse yourself in a world of mystery and suspense as the story unfolds on stage. Don't miss this opportunity to witness a captivating performance in person.

Sent on behalf of: Christina Hasley, PR & Communications Committee Chair

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