

Leading Women, Girls honoured as change makers



By Brock Weir

Building bridges, challenging stigma, and helping young peers break through glass ceilings are just three of the wide-reaching reasons that brought 23 women together to mark International Women's Day on Thursday, each recipients of the 2018 Leading Women/Leading Girls Awards.

Hosted by Newmarket-Aurora MPP Chris Ballard, the fourth annual awards ceremony honours local residents, women and girls, who are making a real difference in the world around them, and helping bring up the female leaders of tomorrow.

"We're here to celebrate 23 dynamic leading women and leading girls in our community," said Mr. Ballard at the ceremony held at Newmarket's Old Town Hall. "We're here to recognize and celebrate their exceptional leadership in working to improve others in their communities and through their volunteer work. Thank you for showing us what it means to be great leaders.

This week, and next, we will shine a light on each of the recipients with their individual citations.

CATHERINE CALLAGHAN

Catherine is a successful lawyer, mother and wife, who devotes a lot of her time to advocating for people with disabilities and her commitment for those in need seems to be infinite. She has worked many times on pro bono legal services for people with learning disabilities. Catherine has also taken on the role of Vice President of Community Living Central York. She has dedicated much of her time to helping support people with learning disabilities.

CAROL ROSE-KUDELKA

Carole has been an active volunteer with Aurora United Church, helping with the Rise 'n' Shine free breakfasts and as a parish nurse. She has helped people in need throughout the community with things such as coordinating care for seniors, working with Alzheimer's patients, and visits local hospitals and long term care homes. Carol is also a member of Welcoming Arms, whose primary focus is to relieve poverty and assist low-income people in Aurora.

LILY EDMUNDS

Lily is a 15 year old girl in Newmarket who has shown extraordinary care and commitment to the patients of the Alzheimer Society's health and wellbeing. She has participated in and helped organize the Walk for Alzheimer's. Lily has been the recipient of RBC's Make 100 Count award, as well as the Canada 150 Commemorative Medal. Lily exemplifies the virtues of good citizenship and goes above and beyond in all she does.

GWYNETH ANDERSON

Gwyneth has committed not only her personal life, but also her professional life to the child mental health system. She is one of the founders of the Bully Free Community Alliance. She is also a prominent member of Southlake's Mental Health Patient and Family Advisory Committee as well as the York Region District School Board's Anti-Bullying Working Group. Gwyneth combines lived experience, her knowledge and her passion into making sure that all children feel safe and welcomed at home, in school and within their communities.

MARTHA BERRY

Martha Berry is a valuable asset to Inn From The Cold. She treats everyone she meets with respect and dignity. Martha works tirelessly to organize events and programs for Inn From The Cold and always makes time to listen to others no matter how busy she may be. Martha's passion to help others is felt by all who meet her.

MELISSA SHAFI

Melissa is a hard-working woman who goes above and beyond the call of duty in her community. Melissa is an advocate and companion to those in need and to new immigrants that join our community. She works diligently with the Food Bank and many other charities to help make a difference in other people's lives. Melissa was one of the top fundraisers for the Inn From the Cold ?Coldest Night of the Year? Walk.

LYNN BIRD

Lynn has helped change the lives of many people through her work with the community and with various organizations. Lynn is a cofounder of the Art Building Children's Dreams, supporting children in Tanzania. Lynn volunteers with Big Brothers Big Sisters of York and is a member of the Newmarket Rotary Club. Lynn is always encouraging the community to get involved to help build her community up. She inspires women and girls alike to join in and help make a difference.

TAHIRIH NAYLOR-THIMM

Tahirih is an advocate for the spiritual and moral education of children and mothers in her community. She helped create weekly playgroups where mothers and young children can come together in a home-like environment to network and help each other with parenting struggles. She has contributed innumerable hours to help mothers with young children better connect with their kids. Tahirih develops loving and trusting relationships with moms and children and listens to their needs. Through this, she is able to help provide them with programs to help address their needs.

JUDY BRUNTON

Judy is an advocate for mental health awareness and has helped organize many fundraisers for the Canadian Mental Health Association. She has helped change the stigma of mental health and the way it affects families and individuals. Judy has been, and continues to be, a voice for the mental health community. Judy's non-profit fundraising Facebook page, Judy Brunton's Canadian Mental Health Awareness and Fundraising continues to bring awareness to end the stigma round mental health.

CASSANDRA DIAMOND

Cassandra Diamond works tirelessly to support girls and women trapped in sexual exploitation. She is an immense advocate for women's safety from abuse. Cassandra is the founder of BridgeNorth Women's Mentorship & Advocacy Services. Cassandra provides mentorship and direct services to women and girls. She is a true leader as she speaks on behalf of those who have been trafficked and abused by providing education to teachers, schools, physicians, social workers and politicians to help in the prevention of exploitation. She is also the recipient of the Attorney General's Victim Services Award of Distinction.

DEBORAH GLADDING

Deborah is a tremendous advocate and a huge supporter of breaking down the barriers between police and the community. She has served with the York Regional Police for many years and is active in many different community groups, such as Planet Africa and the Markham African Caribbean Association. Deborah has inspired and counselled many girls and young women over the years and inspires them to reach their ultimate potential. Deborah seizes any opportunity to engage and challenge other females to become leaders themselves.

Next week, The Auroran will highlight: Ashley Szakal, Sarid Layton, Bessie Schinas-Vlasis, Heather Bull-Senay, Karen Richards, Janis Bell, Toyin Adekusibe, Arianna Skoloudik, Tracee Chambers, Maya Bishop, Amanda Bishop, and Elizabeth Hempen.