

VIEW FROM QUEEN'S PARK: Leading Women/Girls

By Chris Ballard, MPP
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Last week I had the honour of celebrating International Women's day by bestowing 23 women and girls in Newmarket/Aurora with recognition awards for their volunteer leadership in the community. These amazing women were celebrated at my annual Leading Women/Leading Girls Building Communities Recognition Program.

Spurred by the Ontario Ministry for the Status of Women, the award recognizes women who are breaking down barriers and encouraging girls to get involved in careers where women are generally underrepresented.

These community leaders are actively promoting issues such as equality, diversity, healthy equal relationships, violence prevention and reducing racism and discrimination. By leading the way, others in the community are led by these women and girls to participate in public or community service, or mentoring, coaching, leading events or organizations and being in countless ways in their communities.

March 5 to 11 was International Women's Week it's celebrated across the province, recognizing the economic, political, and social achievements that outstanding women and girls have made in Ontario. Recognizing the civic contribution of women and girls is part of Ontario's plan to create jobs, grow our economy and help people in their everyday lives. The highlight of this week takes place on March 8/International Women's Day.

This year's recipients are strong role models who provide a positive example to women and girls in their community. This year we recognized three representatives from the York Regional Police department. We had four young women whose accomplishments included encouraging other young girls to get involved with STEM, supporting seniors throughout our community and supporting people with Alzheimer's. We also had 19 women who are essential to supporting Mental Health, human trafficking and local non-profit organizations such as Inn from the Cold and the Newmarket Food Pantry.

I would like to congratulate Catherine Callaghan, Carol Rose-Kelduka, Lily Edmunds, Gwyneth Anderson, Martha Berry, Melissa Shafa, Lynn Bird, Tahirih Naylor-Thimm, Judy Brunton, Casandra Diamond, Deborah Gladding, Ashley Szakal, Sarid Layton, Bessie Shinas-Vlasis, Heather Bull-Senay, Karen Richards, Janis Bell, Toyin Adekusibe, Arianna Skoloudik, Tracee Chambers, Maya Bishop, Amanda Bishop and Elisabeth Hemen.

These women and girls are the heart of our community. They encourage others around them to be better, and set positive examples for all who are fortunate enough to be in their company.

Why do we work so hard to recognize these local leaders?

International Women's Week was established by the United Nations almost twenty years ago. It set out priorities and measures of success for alleviating poverty and improving health and education throughout the world. The target for completion was 2015 and we did see some progress.

However, we still see 51 per cent of the world's population making lower wages for work of equal value. We see women and girls overwhelmingly the targets of sex trafficking. The past few months have seen an unprecedented airing of sexual violence and harassment in the workplace. And we still have underrepresentation in senior positions in the public and private sectors.

As a government, Ontario's goal is for all women and girls to have access to and benefit from economic and social opportunities, have diverse leadership roles, and are able to participate fully in society. We will do this by: continuing to improve access to education, skills development, entrepreneurship and employment, promoting opportunities for women and girls through public institutions, such as schools and removing barriers that limit women and girls from reaching their full potential.

We cannot do it alone. Women's economic empowerment can be achieved through partnerships between business, government, public institutions and communities. Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls will require vigorous efforts, including legal framework, to counter deeply rooted gender-based discrimination that often results from patriarchal attitudes and related social norms.

I encourage everyone to follow the lead of these inspirational women and girls that I had the pleasure of meeting. In the Ontario government, our priority is fairness, when you strip race, creed, and color at the end we are all human beings. I recently heard a timely quote by Ani Castillo, "Do not treat me like a man, do not treat me like women, but treat me like a fellow human being." I look forward to continually supporting women and girls in our community who are role models for us all, and make us proud to be part of such a giving community.

Did you know? According to Bob McRoberts' publication Postcards of Olde Aurora, organized sports were introduced to the Aurora

High School in 1918 and in the 1951/52 yearbook documented that ?during the early 1900s the girls began their struggle for equality with the boys in the field of athletics?.

As always, I invite you to contact me on any issue. Please call my community office at 905-750-0019, or visit my website at www.ChrisBallardMPP.ca. My email is: cballard.mpp.co@liberal.ola.org. I look forward to hearing from you.