

The Women's Press

Women in Hamilton, Raising our Voices.

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a woman leader is...

A woman of courage. Passionate, intelligent, and most importantly, can withstand a great amount of obligations. She has to have a lot of strength and support.

- **Dr. Dawn Martin-Hill**
Indigenous Studies Founder,
McMaster University

Someone who isn't afraid to stand her ground, voice her opinions, and hold the hands of the sisters around her to help them in their struggle.

- **Queen Cee**
Musician & Director of
Be-You-tiful Girls Club &
When Sistahs Get Together

A woman with a strong "why" - a mission, a focus and a goal in her engagement and involvement with the community.

- **Kathy Woo**
Social Media & Digital
Communications Leader,
McMaster Student Success Centre

Innovative and flexible. Open minded and knowledgeable, not just in cultures, but in abilities. Empathy is key.

- **Shanta R. Nathwani**
IT & Social Media Consultant
& Instructor, Sheridan College

Finding ways to mentor and build opportunities for growth through literacy; fostering positive change for future leaders and continuing to drive capacity for learning.

- **Amanda Kinnaird**
Business Partner,
Inspire Marketing

A servant leader who serves others with love and respect.

- **Semula Horlings**
Karen Refugee Settlement Counsellor,
Immigrant Women's Centre

When I'm called to lead, I stand on the shoulders of many who have walked before me, whether they are known to fight for justice, human rights, gender equality, rights for the LGBTQ community, the right to access shelter and food, or land claims and Aboriginal rights. I walk on a path beside those I support. I walk in the shoes of those who led before me. I am the change I see in the world.

- **Renée Wetselaar**, Social Planner, Social Planning and Research Council

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Queen Cee

When it comes to clever, engaging women in Hamilton, local musician, mother, and activist Queen Cee is a powerful example. The oldest sibling in a predominantly female family, Cee has always been encouraged to act as a leader and mentor in the lives of her peers, a calling she adheres to in every aspect of her life. When Cee noticed a need for more discourse on women's issues, she began connecting with friends and acquaintances for an exchange of views.

"I thought it would be good to create a sisterhood...amongst women," she explained, "Without women feeling that they have to alienate themselves because of culture, or because of race. To be able to sit down and talk, and just be women amongst women without feeling intimidated or hindered, emotionally or verbally."

While initially informal, the sessions inspired her to form her first organization: When Sistahs Get Together. Built on a premise of unification through art, it quickly

became an integral component of International Women's Day celebrations in Hamilton.

However, Queen Cee also realized that organizations and activities aimed at empowering women often failed to acknowledge an already-marginalized demographic.

In order to empower women, you have to start with girls.

"In order to empower women, you have to start with girls," said Cee. "Starting from elementary school, when they're as young as seven, is when you really have to instill that self-esteem and pride in who they are as individuals, and not as a collective first."

To meet the needs of girls in the Hamilton area, Cee founded the Be-You-tiful Girls Club. The group, consisting of predominantly middle-school aged girls, encourages self-confidence and participation in various art-forms and activities. By providing girls with opportunities to do the things they love and to discover new interests, Queen Cee hopes that one day they will use their experiences to benefit others like them.



Dr. Dawn Martin-Hill

When she was a university student at McMaster, Dawn Martin-Hill from the Mohawk Wolf clan remembered taking a North American natives course. It was far from what she expected. "[The course] was just a survey of what we ate. It didn't help me understand anything. It's like we didn't exist today," she remarked.

Disappointed, Martin-Hill started lobbying for more action to bring native perspectives into the university during her final undergraduate year in 1989. She began by searching for more native people, leading to a conference about native rights and culminating in the Indigenous Studies program, established in 1992.

Though progress has been slow, there have been improvements to raise awareness and support native rights in the university, said Martin-Hill, citing more courses, resources, and mentorship for native students. "Now we need to work on the big push. We need to

get more Aboriginal faculty at Mac."

In her quest to establish the program, Martin-Hill had faced the dual challenge of being a single mother to two toddlers and living in poverty. Her experience captures the complexities of being a native woman. They are not only responsible for families, but also for coordinating community events - be it fundraisers, cultural events, or funerals, she said. Native women act as glue in their communities. High rates of suicide in native communities present additional challenges as they continue to serve as the anchor of their family and community.

Native women act as glue in their communities.

"If you're not there, you lose respect and relationships. It's the number one burden of most native women. I'm the matriarch of my family. My identity is here," she stressed.

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