

2017 YWCA TORONTO WOMAN OF DISTINCTION

# TRANSFORMING LIVES



## CONNIE WALKER

*Media* – Senior Reporter, Investigative Unit at CBC News

In today's ever-changing world, the need for conscientious reporting on social justice issues is of paramount importance. Connie Walker is at the forefront of Canadian journalism achieving just that with her groundbreaking reporting on the disproportionate rates of violence against Indigenous women in Canada and the embedded societal and systemic issues that surround these cases.

As a Cree woman from the Okanese First Nation in Saskatchewan, Connie's unique perspective fuels her passion for the topics she covers as a Senior Reporter in the Investigative Unit at CBC News.

In December 2013, Connie helped launch CBC Indigenous, a web portal that has become a leading voice for coverage of Indigenous issues and one of the CBC's most successful community engagement units. A crucial element of this portal is the highly regarded and recognized interactive site: *Missing & Murdered: Unsolved Cases of Indigenous Women and Girls* where Connie and her colleagues investigate women's stories from across the nation. The team has won multiple awards including the 2016 Canadian Association of Journalists' Don McGillivray award, a Canadian Screen Award and the prestigious Hillman Award.

Connie has also broken new ground with her podcast *Missing & Murdered: Who Killed Alberta Williams?*, which investigates the unsolved murder of an Indigenous woman who was killed in British Columbia in 1989.

The connection Connie has to her family and roots is a source of motivation to tell these stories. Connie is leading the dialogue on Indigenous women's rights and social justice in Canada. As one of a small group of Indigenous reporters at the CBC, Connie mentors up-and-coming reporters and speaks out on the importance of representation of Indigenous peoples in the media.

Connie also helped produce *8th Fire*, a documentary series on CBC television that examined the relationship between Indigenous peoples and the rest of Canada. She was also a board member for imagineNATIVE, an organization that champions women filmmakers.

For over 15 years Connie's reporting identified critical issues faced by Indigenous communities and beyond. As more Canadians learn the truth about the realities that Indigenous peoples face in Canada, the whole nation is benefitting from the results of her work.



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## CETA RAMKHALAWANSINGH

*Public Service & Social Justice – Feminist, Activist  
and City Builder*

Lifelong social justice advocate, city builder and public servant, Ceta Ramkhalawansingh has shown tireless grit and determination to create a more inclusive and equitable community. For three decades she was the Equity and Diversity Manager at Toronto City Hall, establishing pioneering diversity and human rights policies and programs emulated by many organizations and helping to make Toronto a social justice leader.

Ceta's family moved to Toronto from Trinidad and Tobago in 1967, shortly after which she became an undergraduate student at the University of Toronto (U of T). She soon was a student leader fighting sexism on campus, promoting student participation in university governance and advocating for the introduction of women's studies. These initial efforts evolved into U of T's Women and Gender Studies Institute, offering graduate and undergraduate degrees.

Creating change in Toronto paralleled her commitment to achieving women's empowerment globally. Over a 20-year period she worked on international women's rights development advocacy as President, Treasurer and Board Member of the MATCH International Women's Fund. She helped to establish the Commonwealth Women's Network and on two occasions was the Non-Governmental Organization representative on official Canadian delegations to meetings of Commonwealth Status of Women Ministers. While serving on the Ontario Government's Advisory Council on Women from 1983 to 1988, she was a formidable advocate. Recently, she worked on campaigns for a gender neutral national anthem and gender equality in the Canadian Senate.

Ceta is a legend in the downtown Grange neighbourhood where she successfully saved and increased rental and affordable housing, protected heritage and green space, and fought developments, with numerous interventions at Ontario Municipal Board hearings. In 2014, Ceta was selected by City Council as the Ward 20 City Councillor, winning the appointment from among 26 candidates.

She has received many awards for feminist, anti-racism and human rights advocacy, publishing, heritage preservation and volunteerism. Currently, she chairs the boards of The Word on the Street Canada and the Learnx Foundation. Her board memberships include the Toronto Foundation, Friends of Fort York, Innis College Council and the Investing in Diversity Scholarship program.

Feminist to the core, Ceta is always adding accomplishments to her story. For Ceta, the work is never done.

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**DENISE DWYER** B.A., L.L.B., M.ED.

*Law* – Assistant Deputy Minister, Ministry of Education

Denise Dwyer was raised in a home rich in robust discussion about justice, equality and race. The Canadian Constitution adorned the family room wall and her parents' message was clear, "Educate yourself to achieve – then no one can hold you back because of the colour of your skin." It is no surprise that Denise found her professional destiny in the law.

As an Assistant Crown Attorney, Denise prosecuted many complex sexual assault and domestic violence cases during a time when the criminal justice system was evolving to balance complainants' rights. She excelled in the public service to become a Deputy Director in the civil litigation division and eventually, the Legal Director for the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services. Denise was the first Black person to hold these leadership positions in the Ministry of the Attorney General. Her next promotion was to the role of Assistant Deputy Minister, advancing justice and public safety with a portfolio focused on the modernization of police education and training.

Currently, Denise is an Assistant Deputy Minister in the Ministry of Education promoting equity of opportunity, safe and healthy schools and enhancing well-being for Ontario students. She sees these critical initiatives as the true antidote to the youth justice issues she encountered as a prosecutor.

Denise's active support does not stop at the thresholds of formal institutions. In 2006, she founded the Black Female Lawyers Network by inviting women into her home to foster dialogue, professional development, and mentorship. It is now a thriving not-for-profit. The inaugural gathering has evolved into an annual retreat and fundraiser called Sistahs-in-Law, welcoming women from across the nation. The retreat has expanded in partnership with the Ontario Justice Education Network to include 10 high school girls from low-income neighbourhoods who are matched with lawyer mentors and develop skills to transform their futures. This work has been recognized with the Lexpert Zenith Award for Diversity and Inclusion.

Only her determination and courageous voice parallel Denise's legal firsts. As an advocate for an inclusive legal profession, Denise inspires other women to accomplish their goals and soar.



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### JANICE FUKAKUSA

**Corporate Leadership** - Chief Administrative Officer and Chief Financial Officer, Royal Bank of Canada (retired January 31, 2017)

It may be counter-intuitive to think that the first female Chief Administrative Officer and Chief Financial Officer at Royal Bank Canada (RBC) has the time to help others, but Janice Fukakusa's actions have debunked that notion since 2004. As an avid champion of diversity and inclusion Janice has always made time to support the goals and aspirations of female professionals through mentorship and advocating for systemic change.

Her leadership on the Advancing Women in Leadership Group at RBC has driven change in the senior representation of women, helped build the pipeline for the next generation of women leaders, and championed leading-edge diversity initiatives. For example, RBC is currently rolling out a Career Continuation Program for Women with Ryerson University, which will prepare women who have been on leave for re-entry into the workforce by combining training on innovation and entrepreneurial skills with work rotations.

Since joining RBC in 1985, Janice has held positions in retail and business banking, corporate banking, account management, corporate finance, treasury, strategic development and corporate functions. In 2007 Janice was inducted into Canada's Most Powerful Women Hall of Fame and in 2016 she was named one of the 25 Most Powerful Women in Banking by American Banker magazine for the fourth consecutive year. With only eight percent of executive-level positions across Canada's top 100 publicly traded companies held by women, Janice's position makes her a powerful role model for women in business.

Not only is she a powerhouse in Canadian banking, Janice is also an exemplary philanthropist and volunteer. In 2015, Janice and her husband made a major gift to Ryerson University's Brookfield Institute for Innovation and Entrepreneurship, securing resources to support the next generation of young women and under-represented youth interested in technology and innovation. She was elected Chair of Ryerson University's Board of Governors in 2014, and has served on the charitable boards of the Princess Margaret Cancer Foundation, the Wellspring Cancer Foundation, Schulich Dean's Advisory Group and United Way Toronto and York Region Campaign Cabinet.

Janice has dedicated her life and career to ensure future generations of women will have the chance to shine brighter and achieve their dreams.



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## HIBAQ GELLE

**Community Development** – *Community Development Coordinator,  
Community Action Resource Centre*

Hibaq Gelle is a community mobilizer and social justice champion who advocates for Somali refugees and immigrants, and mentors young women who are navigating systemic barriers.

Day-to-day you can find this 27-year-old working on the frontlines as a community development professional where she is empowering women and girls. Whether she is working on provincial action or securing food security for women in Somalia, her imprint can be found locally and internationally. Her deepest desire is to help the most marginalized and vulnerable people in our society. It is Hibaq's bold ideas and passion for giving people the support they need that has led to watershed achievements far beyond the scope of her job.

She led two fundraising campaigns, Feed Somalia and Teach Somalia, raising millions of dollars in humanitarian and educational aid, demonstrating the power of using local action for global impact. In 2015, Hibaq was invited to Mogadishu by the Somali government to attend the National Youth Conference and to participate in building the first-ever National Youth Policy.

Mirroring that success at home, Hibaq became one of two Black Muslim women appointed onto the Premier's Council on Youth Opportunities where she advises the government on policy issues. She is also a key advisor on local municipal strategies that impact marginalized communities. Always keeping her Somali roots at the forefront of her work, she also volunteers as a director for Positive Change – an initiative tackling violence in collaboration with Somali mothers, Toronto Police Services and other social service institutions.

A true force of nature with a generous spirit, Hibaq can often be found connecting young women with resources or opportunities.

Hibaq holds a unique perspective and has her finger on the pulse of the communities she serves. Sought-after for her expertise, she has spoken on CBC Metro Morning, The National, BBC and has been featured in Canadian publications such as Metro Toronto, NOW Magazine, and the Toronto Star. She recently received the CivicAction Emerging Leader Award for her outstanding commitment to improving her community.

Hibaq's efforts in challenging norms and making a tangible difference in the lives of Somali refugees and immigrants will be felt for generations to come.

  
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## ISHITA AGGARWAL

*Young Woman of Distinction – Advocate, Writer and Human Rights Champion*

Ishita Aggarwal's interests and activist work are richly varied, but all have one thing in common: creating opportunities and sharing stories to advance girls' rights.

Ishita has been encouraging girls' participation in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics programs since she started Science4Girls – a high school club – where she encouraged girls' to learn about the work and lives of prominent women scientists. Ishita's personal experiences and Honours Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Toronto (U of T) has spurred on her passion to get other girls involved in the sciences.

During her time at U of T she was instrumental in the creation of the first national Women In Science and Engineering (WISE) conference which raised over \$300,000 and attracted 1,500 delegates, 200 industry professionals and went on to host keynote addresses from staff at Google, WIND Mobile and Hydro One. She was also an avid student blogger, covering stories of access and equity and reaching over 80,000 readers across U of T's three campuses and beyond.

Ishita is constantly looking for new ways to tell women's stories. She uses her role as an on air reporter at VIBE 105FM at York University to profile women's human rights stories. In 2015, she launched BEHIND-THE-SCENES Magazine, a global e-zine that aims to identify gender-based issues. Ishita accepts and anonymously publishes prose, poetry, art and photography that detail contributors' lived experiences with gender prejudice and discrimination.

Ishita is currently a Research Associate at the International Women's Rights Project and is immersed in writing impact reports and blog posts on topics important to women around the world. Ishita also serves low-income pregnant women through Mom's The Word, a travelling workshop she founded in an effort to support and educate pregnant women and mothers with newborn babies.

Ishita has received a Volunteer Recognition Award from the City of Vaughan for her outstanding contribution and dedication to the community.

No matter what Ishita takes on next, it is certain that girls' and women's rights will be at the heart of each action and accomplishment.



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**DR. MARJORIE E. DIXON** MDCM, FRCS(C), FACOG, REI  
*Health* – CEO & Medical Director, Anova Fertility and Reproductive Health Centre

Inclusivity reigns supreme for renowned reproductive endocrinologist, Dr. Marjorie E. Dixon, and her defining work in the fertility and reproductive health field.

Marjorie, a mother of three young children, is a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians of Canada and the American Congress of Gynecologists; an Assistant Professor in the Department of Medicine at the University of Toronto; a Reproductive Endocrinology and Infertility Specialist; and the founder and CEO of Anova Fertility and Reproductive Health Centre in Toronto. Behind these prestigious titles is Marjorie's guiding belief that anyone, regardless of their gender, race or sexual orientation, should have access to the best care and the option to start a family should they want one. These principles have been the foundation for her career and now guide her pioneering integrative fertility and reproductive health centre.

An advocate for women and the LGBTQ community, Marjorie was appointed to Ontario's Expert Panel on Infertility and Adoption to advise the government on how to improve access to fertility treatment as well as how to improve Ontario's adoption system. She was recently involved in providing advice on In Vitro Fertilization (IVF) funding for the Government of Ontario's new fertility program. The program now provides funding for those who would otherwise be unable to afford IVF treatment.

Marjorie leads by example and never misses an opportunity to mentor young female doctors or speak to young women about their reproductive health and sexual safety. Her expertise is in high demand with engagements including monthly appearances on CityLine, and coverage of her work in Time Magazine, Chatelaine and on Global News.

At the root of Marjorie's advocacy for women's health and fundamental rights is her love of life and firm belief in women's empowerment. Particularly as a mother raising socially conscious and dedicated world citizens, she understands the responsibility of being a public figure and is a consummate role model for girls and young women who are aspiring to success in their own lives.

As technology and innovation burgeon in the fertility field, we know that Marjorie will be leading the charge and making sure no one is left behind.

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