



Native Women's Resource Centre of Toronto  
191 Gerrard Street East  
Toronto, ON M5A 2E5

## **3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Minaake Awards celebrate six Aboriginal women who are “walking the good path”**

**March 26, 2015**

**Toronto, ON** – On Tuesday, April 14<sup>th</sup> Toronto's Aboriginal, business and not-for-profit communities will gather to celebrate the achievements of six Aboriginal women and youth at the Minaake Awards.

In Ojibway, Minaake means “people who are walking a good path.” This year's awards, now in its third year, were created by the Native Women's Resource Centre of Toronto to recognize and celebrate the achievements of women and youth in the Aboriginal community who often go unnoticed.

Presented by the Native Women's Resource Centre of Toronto and CIBC, the awards will be held at CIBC Commerce Court West (199 Bay Street 56<sup>th</sup> Floor, South Gallery, Toronto) from 5:30pm-8:00pm. Tickets can be purchased at <http://minaakeawards.weebly.com/> or by calling the Centre at (416) 963-9963 ex. 211. Lee Maracle, distinguished poet and author, and Carla Robinson, Canadian broadcast journalist and television host, will be the Co-Masters of Ceremonies. Special guests include Olivia Chow, Dr. Dawn Lavell-Harvard, interim President of the Native Women's Association of Canada, Deputy Minister Deborah Richardson, and Minister Tracy MacCharles, with past attendees including the Honourable Carolyn Bennett, MPP David Zimmer, Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs, and Councillor Kristyn Wong-Tam.

This year's winners are making a difference in the lives of Aboriginal people in the City of Toronto in the areas of Leadership, Advocacy and Human Rights, Culture Keepers, Youth, LGBTQ/Two-Spirit, and in Walking the Good Path.

Award recipients include Pauline Shirt, who has been an active voice in Toronto's Aboriginal community for over 40 years and Joanne Dallaire who, through her business Healing Works, supports Aboriginals within several agencies, including the YWCA, Queen West Community Health Care, Toronto District School Board, Aboriginal Legal services, Chiefs of Ontario, Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs, the Dodem Kanonsha and maintains private counselling.

## **2015 Award Winners**

### **Challenger (Youth) Award**

**Cheyenne Squires**, Anishnawbe Kwe from Neyasshiinigmiing (Cape Croker) Ontario

Cheyenne grew up on the Cape Croker reserve and moved to Toronto when she was 13 years old. She has been actively involved on different Councils since moving to Toronto, beginning with the One Nation in Unity Youth Council based out of the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto. Currently, she is employed with Native Child as Casual Relief Staff and she is also an Assistant to the Aboriginal Youth Employment and Skills Building Program AYESBP, a program which she had partaken in to obtain her GED. She is also a member of the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto's Youth Advisory Council and serves as the indigenous youth voice as a member of the Toronto 2015 Pan Am Games Youth Advisory Council. Cheyenne has shared her story with the United Way Winter Relief program, in hopes of communicating her tribulations as well as success with others, especially her Youth peers, who experience similar struggles. She wishes to become a Child and Youth Mental Health Worker.

### **Culture Keeper Awards**

**Pauline Shirt**, Plains Cree from Saddle Lake Alberta.

Pauline has been an active voice in Toronto's Aboriginal community for over 40 years. She helped found Wandering Spirit Survival School (now known as First Nations School), and during the 80's she was the Vice President of 'Indian Rights for Indian Women' which helped reinstate 'Bill C31' Indian Status to Native women who married Non-Native men. Currently, Pauline shirt dedicates her time between working at George Brown College Aboriginal Services, performing opening and closing prayers for Government and community events, as well as balancing her time between her family and community members. Pauline is well respected as an elder, a member of Three Fires Medewiwin Lodge and as the Buffalo Dance Society. Pauline shares her teachings, wisdom, and her heart with great humility and love.

### **LGBTQ/Two-Spirited Award**

**Monica Forrester**, Trans-woman from Curve Lake First Nation

Monica is very active in the LGBTQ2S community as the founder of Trans Pride Toronto-Transitioning Together, a non-profit agency working to better the lives of Trans people. She worked at The 519 for ten years, and currently works with Maggie's and Elizabeth Fry in Toronto as outreach coordinator and a counselor. She has also worked with PWA Circle of Care, Sherbourne Health Bus and PASAN/Black Cap. She is very vocal for the rights of Sex workers, trans-women and marginalized women of colour, reflecting on her own life experiences online, in printed newspaper articles, or during one of her powerful speeches. Her work in harm reduction and sex work education are a great contribution and resource for the safety of Toronto's sex worker community. Monica was also present as a speaker at several of the Sisters In Spirit Vigils held every October 4<sup>th</sup> at Allan Garden.

### **Advocacy and Human Rights Award**

**Monica McKay**, a member of the Nisga'a Nation, from Greenville, British Columbia

Monica is the Director of the Ryerson Aboriginal Student Services, a space on campus where Aboriginal students, faculty and staff can feel welcomed, supported and cared about. In addition to being the Director, Monica helped in its inception and growth. She also works tirelessly to educate the Ryerson community about the challenges, concerns, strengths and successes of Aboriginal students. Her commitment to access to education for her community is profound. Monica has also been active in the Toronto District School Board, the Toronto Police Services and on a committee looking at Aboriginal

issues for the City of Toronto. She builds internal and external partnerships with faculty, staff, and the broader Aboriginal community while leading outreach initiatives including national, provincial and local networks, communities and joint projects. In each case, her presence has been significant with respect to city building and community engagement.

### **Leadership Award**

**Joanne Dallaire**, Shadow Hawk Woman of the Wolf Clan, is Cree Omushkego with ancestry from Attawapiskat, Ontario

Joanne Dallaire holds many roles at Ryerson University including, Elder at the Aboriginal Education Council, she continues in her role as Traditional Counselor for Ryerson Aboriginal Student Services and she is recognized as the Elder for Ryerson University. She has facilitated talking circles on behalf of the Council in areas such as University advancement in identifying how to create a respectful working relationship. Joanne also participated in the working group which created Ryerson's first Aboriginal Knowledges and Experiences certificate. As Traditional Counselor, she counsels the faculty, staff and students, offering holistic support as well as providing Aboriginal students with the skills to be self-sufficient, strong, proud of their identities and in control of their goals and decisions.

Joanne, through her business, Healing Works, works supporting Aboriginals with several agencies within Toronto, the YWCA, Queen West Community Health Centre, Toronto District School Board, Aboriginal Legal Services, Chiefs of Ontario, Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs, the Dodem Kanonsha and maintains a private counselling practice. She mentors several women within our community.

### **The Good Path Award**

**Christine McFarlane**, Saulteaux from Peguis First Nation

Christine has overcome many obstacles in her life and has learned and developed strength from her cultural teachings and language. This has led to her being given her spirit name Misko Nootin Kwe, Anishnaabe for Red Wind Woman. Christine experienced a turbulent childhood as a product of the 60s-70s Scoop, impacting her mental and physical wellbeing into her adulthood. In 2005, Christine entered the Academic Bridging Program at the University of Toronto and enrolled part time at the university, while doing freelance work with First Nations media outlets and a work-study position at First Nations House, University of Toronto. It is through her writing that she has learned to heal and find her voice. The Centre for Addictions and Mental Health has recognized her person recovery with depression, anxiety disorders and eating disorders when she won the Transforming Lives Award in 2012.

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**For media passes or more information, contact:**

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