

## COMMENT

## PHILANTHROPY

## Expand power to do good

## Three key steps to increase ability to make a difference

SHEREE MEREDITH

Clara Miller has been described as one of the “ringleaders” of a new breed of philanthropists who want to expand the definition and impact of philanthropy. As CEO of The Heron Foundation, a North American leader in philanthropic innovation, her mantra is the world has changed and so must we.

Over the past decade, The Heron Foundation has transformed to understand and tackle evermore complex societal problems by forging new and unconventional partnerships, sharpening its focus and undertaking groundbreaking strategies to align all of its assets with its mission.

So, why is this important to Hamilton and what does it mean to the average person?

Hamilton’s revitalization has been the focus of increased national attention. We are on a positive trajectory that has been fuelled by innovation, collaboration and a strengthened self-image. Further, we have seen growing agreement that neither the blame nor the solutions for the challenges we face as a community lie within one sector.

This combination creates an ideal platform for expanding the power of philanthropy to “do good”. Hamilton Community Foundation, established by thoughtful citizens in 1954, has been at the forefront of this movement, particularly in addressing complex issues. Over the last decade, its focus on poverty reduction and strengthening neighbourhoods has underscored the critical importance of leadership, partnerships and resident engagement in creating real, sustainable change. While citizens must be both at the heart and in the “driver’s seat” when it comes to change, the greatest impact is made when this work is undertaken collaboratively with stakeholders such as government, business and local agencies. The McQueen neighbourhood in east Hamilton is proof of the potential being realized through collaboration.

As the philanthropic leader in this work, Hamilton Community Foundation has acted at various points as a catalyst, funder, advocate, strategist and service provider in addressing some of Hamilton’s greatest challenges. None of this would be possible without an array of HCF donors who believe in the importance of focusing their charitable giving on the local community and taking on complex and entrenched problems. Recent research also affirms that donors expect community leadership when choosing what organizations to support: people give to make a difference, not simply to get a tax receipt.

Historically many believed that only the wealthy could legitimately call themselves “philanthropists”. This is simply not so. Opportunities for individuals to engage in meaningful philanthropy at any level have never been greater. This is further magnified when individual philanthropy is part of a larger, community collaborative focused on positive change. Hamilton Community Foundation’s mission is “to drive positive change by connecting people, ideas and resources”. We see the powerful difference philanthropy makes every day.

So how do people increase their ability to make a difference within this new context?

There are three key steps:

1. Identify what it is important to you. Often people are responsive rather than proactive and deliberate in their giving. Simply put, decide what you care about and focus on it.

2. Learn all you can about that issue. This will help you sharpen your focus to give more strategically for more impact.

3. Be creative about how you expand your personal impact to address what you care about. We all have a range of resources we might not consider: time, skills, networks (social media, employer, personal), and of course, charitable giving dollars. Build your own personal philanthropic plan using a combination of all of these.

Change is happening in Hamilton. Initiatives such as the Hamilton Anchor Institution Leadership (HAIL) group as well as HCF’s own Women’s Change and ABACUS programs to increase high school completion and post-secondary access are but three examples of people working together to make change. In each, philanthropic leadership and dollars are playing a key role and expanding the potential to “do good”. November is National Philanthropy Month and a perfect time to reflect and ask yourself “What difference do I want to make?”

Sherree Meredith is Vice-President of Philanthropic Services at Hamilton Community Foundation, and is passionate about helping people discover and make the difference they want to make.

## TRUMP IN THE WHITE HOUSE

## The struggle just got a lot harder

What else is there to do but focus on the future instead of reacting in the expected way?



DEIRDRE PIKE

When I was considering a run at the council seat in Ward 1 during the 2014 municipal election, I chatted with a handful of current and former politicians about the nature of the job and what I should be pondering in advance of this possible life-changing decision.

Each one asked me in one way or another (not as a prophecy, I hope) how I would handle waking up a loser the day after the election. Some described their own experiences of this as the loneliest day of their lives. How would I prepare and would I be able to get up the next day and hold my head high in the face of defeat?

Thankfully, both a woman and a member of the LGBTQ community each tossed their hats into the ring before I’d decided and, thinking I might split the potential votes even further, chose to forgo the risk and opt instead to wake up a winner every day in my current state of life.

So it was with that memory in my mind and an ache in my heart that I watched Hillary Clinton finally take the podium on the flag-adorned stage, ending hours of suspense along with the horrible background music playing for the amusement of the press gallery anxiously assembled to hear her first public words post-vote tallying.

What on Earth could she possibly say to ease the pain of the people who voted for her along with the millions of people outside the borders of the United States who had held their collective breath and believed in the polls they didn’t really understand, in the hope of a new day? Surely this result was not OK after a campaign filled with the most racist, misogynist and homophobic words ever spoken on prime-time television from the mouth of a presidential candidate.

Yet there she was, admitting defeat and pledging support to the next president of the United States of America without crying or swearing or showing any outward sign of disbelief or resentment at a rigged system.

“We must accept this result and then look to the future. Donald Trump is going to be our president and we owe him an open mind and a chance to lead.”

She spoke words of inspiration and hope, devoid of the sobs I had imagined coming out of my own mouth upon such a loss. “I hope that he will be a successful president for all Americans,” she steadfastly professed, echoing Trump’s own words just hours earlier.

She shared wisdom-filled words and phrases about responding to setbacks and loss. Words and phrases apparently lost or not able to be heard yet by the thousands of people who have taken to the streets across America with shouts of “Not my president” and “Impeach Trump” in protest of the president-elect.

Like President Barack Obama who spoke a few hours after Clinton, I am trying to be heartened by Trump’s acceptance speech

and his commitment to being “a president for everyone; to deal fairly with everyone — all people and all other nations; to seek common ground, not hostility; and partnership, not conflict.” He actually pledged to “bind the wounds of division.” How is this possible?

Yet, what else is there? “We are now all rooting for his success in uniting and leading the country,” proclaimed Obama.

This summer I read a powerful piece called “Contemplation and Transformation” by bell hooks, an African-American author, feminist and social activist. She suggested that instead of taking to the streets and triggering the 1992 Los Angeles riots after the initial acquittal of the police who beat Rodney King, African-American people and their allies might have been more powerful if they had stayed home in silence for a week, contemplating an action different from what was expected of them.

I hope the protesters and the rest of us wondering what’s next will take a page from hooks’ recommendation and spend some time in contemplation before acting, because as Renée turned to me and said solemnly when the election results were clear, “The struggle just got a lot harder.”

Deirdre Pike is a freelance columnist for The Hamilton Spectator. Her columns appear every other Saturday. She is reflecting in silence on the effect of exclusion as demonstrated by the U.S. election results. She can be reached at [dpikethepec@gmail.com](mailto:dpikethepec@gmail.com) or on Twitter @deirdrepke.

## THE MIRACLE OF GIVING

## How a small act of caring changed lives



THOMAS FROESE

KAMPALA, UGANDA — It started with a skipping rope — a plain green skipping rope, the kind you’d find at any dollar store.

It was a simple investment. You’d be forgiven for opting to instead spend the money on your morning double-double.

But what do you do when you can’t shake a certain picture from your head? Or a story? Maybe it’s from Africa, as so many are, a photo of some poor boy or girl, the sort of photo that often lands on fridges across the rich world.

It was the face of Sharon Mutesasira that struck Diane Reader Jones. Diane saw that photo of young Sharon, a face on a table, in a Hamilton church. It was 2003. Children needed sponsors. Sharon lived in a slum in the Kibuli district of Kampala. She was 13. She didn’t know of Diane any more than she knew of Walt Disney.

Covering school fees was impossible for the Ugandan girl. Her mother, a tailor, didn’t earn enough to make ends meet. Her father was dead. For the family, even getting enough food was a daily grind.

Diane, a longtime Burlington resident, decided to make the investment. Of course, she didn’t know what might become of it. Nobody ever does. This is the nature of it, of investing in people. Ask any parent. They can be as disappointed in their children as anyone might be disappointed in the returns of precious gems on the stock exchange.

Yes, there’s a certain blind faith to it all. So, having known my wife and her beginning work in Uganda, Diane asked if my wife could personally bring young Sharon that skipping rope. She did. Other gifts from Sharon followed. Simple gifts. Something for Sharon’s hair. Pens. Canadian-flagged trinkets.

Time went on. Years. With each gift, Sharon would write Diane a note of thanks. She kept studying. And when Sharon eventually finished high school and was identified by Compassion Canada for her leadership skills, Diane also kept at it. She helped top up Compassion’s support for Sharon’s five-year journey through medical school.

When Sharon couldn’t afford text books, Diane sent a used laptop so the young Ugandan could access the Internet. And Sharon got creative. For costs at the medical univer-



PHOTO BY THOMAS FROESE

Dr. Sharon Mutesasira with Diane Reader Jones, a longtime Burlington resident, meeting up in Uganda. Diane helped Sharon find her way out of the slums of Kampala.

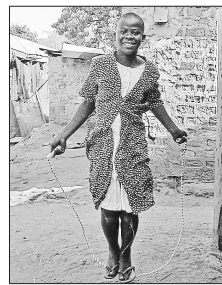


PHOTO BY JEAN CHAMBERLAIN FROESE

Sharon Mutesasira, then 13, and her skipping rope in the Kibuli district of Kampala, a slum where Sharon lived in 2003.

sity — it’s in Bushenyi, near the Rwandan border — she’d wake early to buy discounted clothes at market, fix and clean them, then sell them to fellow students for profit. Anything to keep going.

Now, 13 years on, Sharon Mutesasira has become Dr. Sharon Mutesasira. She’ll work as a general practitioner for two years before studying three more in obstetrics. She knows the horrible need of mothers in a place like Uganda, the very need that, interestingly enough, has brought my family to live our own years here.

An estimated 6,000 Ugandan women die

in childbirth every year. That’s part of a worldwide scourge of an estimated 287,000 dead mothers, the equivalent of two 747s crashing every day. Two jumbo jets down. Yesterday. Today. Tomorrow. Dead mothers strewn across the developing world, not entirely unlike Canada — read the old tombstones in the old graveyards — a few short generations ago.

Sharon wants to help change things. As an aspiring obstetrician in Uganda, she wants to change even small things, the only way to change anything, really. Hers is a remarkable story, with partnerships working on all sorts of levels, a story of a world, her world, already changed.

To celebrate it all, Diane visited Uganda. She finally met Sharon, just a few days ago. It was something. I was there. Sharon teared up when remembering her days in the slums of Kampala.

“If it wasn’t for people like you, I wouldn’t have reached where I am,” she told Diane. “I’m thankful for your heart. People can bypass you, whether they have money or not.”

And, “I still remember that skipping rope. It was green. We used it and used it. It lasted for years. Everyone would come around.”

This is the drumbeat of life here. It’s harsh enough for plenty of Ugandans on plenty of days. But with a hand up, something the Sharons of Africa aren’t too proud to accept, other days have their joys and songs. Their remarkable twists and turns.

Thomas Froese writes about news, travel and life. Find him at [www.thomasfroese.com](http://www.thomasfroese.com) and [www.dailydad.net](http://www.dailydad.net)

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