

**Application for the King Charles III
Coronation Medal award
on behalf of
Irene Marie Clarke**

Irene Clarke wanted the world to be a better place and she heeded Margaret Mead's advice: *"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."*

Having raised four children and worked as a nursing administrator, Irene devoted her retirement to volunteer work that advanced the cause of social justice at the local, national, and international levels.

Irene Clarke was a compassionate advocate for social justice. She was a deep thinker, a researcher, and an organizer who applied her calm leadership skills to build solidarity for activism within grassroots movements. She was a feminist who had a passion for equitable access to health care and the rights of women and girls to a life free of gender-based violence. She combined her passion to improve access to affordable medicines with remarkable amounts of talent and energy.

In the last two decades Irene has been at the forefront of several initiatives:

Grandmothers Advocacy Network's Right to Health team addressing access to medicines for families in Africa (GRAN-National)

When GRAN was formed, Irene joined the Steering Committee and was the Chair of the Access to Medicines Team. The cost of drugs for Tuberculosis in sub-Saharan Africa was unaffordable for most people. Irene contacted MSF (Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders) and they agreed to work with GRAN on a campaign. Rallies were held in New York city in front of the drug pharmaceutical company, Smith Klein and French (SK&F). In addition, GRAN targeted Pfizer and GSK pharmaceutical companies, advocating to decrease the cost of the pneumonia vaccine in the developing world. Irene built a strong relationship with both national and international entities and earned the respect of Doctors Without Borders. These 2-year campaigns resulted in the drug companies agreeing to lower their prices.

Through Irene's efforts, MSF supported and created advocacy opportunities for GRAN that included a petition campaign and an MSF-generated video including GRAN members.

Chair of Golden Horseshoe Grans (GRAN-Southern Ontario)

Irene founded and chaired this regional GRAN group. She organized a conference in Kitchener-Waterloo of all GRAN groups in the Golden Horseshoe area and continued to Chair monthly meetings for many years.

Irene's passion for social justice was infectious. When she spoke about the urgent need for equitable access to medicines, women listened, followed her lead, and membership was significantly expanded. Irene's work grew the knowledge of the importance of activism. She made an exceptional contribution to increasing GRAN's effectiveness and reputation as an advocacy organization with a strong team behind her.

Grandmothers Act to Save the Planet: a nonpartisan organization working to create a green legacy for future generations (GASP-National)

In 2018 Greta Thunberg, a young climate activist, challenged world leaders and the "Boomer" generation to take immediate action to mitigate the effects of climate change. Irene became a founding member of Grand(m)others Act to Save the Planet (GASP), a grassroots, non-partisan environmental group whose members care deeply about the world that their children and grandchildren will inherit. The first action was to join young people who were rallying in the Fridays for the Future marches. Irene was the first to step up. She, along with her 8-year-old grandson, joined the first Toronto Rally. She became the iconic GASP grandmother standing with her grandson in the fight for a livable future for the next generation. Since then, hundreds of GASPs and friends have joined in climate actions aimed at leaving a healthy planet.

Irene's talents made the difference in a myriad of other campaigns/organizations:

- Irene became an active member of Oomama, a Halton group that is part of the Stephen Lewis Foundation's Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign, standing with African grandmothers who are caring for their grandchildren orphaned by HIV/Aids. She was the active and passionate Chair of Advocacy for this group.
- When GRAN was invited to a United Nations' Civil Society hearing on HIV/AIDS, Irene was chosen to represent them.
- Irene rallied the students of McMaster University to sign petitions and write letters to their MPs to raise awareness of the need for changes to Canada's Access to Medicines Regime (CAMR).
- As part of the UN initiative "Orange the World", Irene organized the first 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence in Oakville;

presented a motion to Oakville Council that was passed; and led the campaign for many years (even making orange hats for participants to wear at a rally in Nathan Philips Square in Toronto).

- She organized a protest, involving all levels of government, in support of the girls kidnapped in Nigeria by Boko Haram.
- Irene made her mark in the political arena by working on campaigns that supported her equitable vision of the world. Pam Damoff and Hart Jansson are two political candidates, one federal, one municipal, who praise Irene's tireless efforts to ensure their election.

Central to Irene's passion and commitment was her belief in a world where the rights of older women, children, and youth are recognized and protected. Irene inspired others, worked tirelessly, created partnerships, and managed to work through obstacles that frequently deter others.

Irene's wisdom and light were extinguished on July 12, 2024, but the substantial results of her work will live on. We, her friends, ask that she be honoured posthumously as a most worthy recipient of the King Charles III Coronation Medal.

Carole Holmes
Sandy Milakovic
Patricia Evans
Lorraine Green
Daniela Jansson
Bev Lefrançois
Sherry Ardell