

International Women's Day – speaking with Councillor Deidre Brock



What are you doing to celebrate International Women's Day?

I'm really looking forward to attending a conference the feminist organisation Engender will be holding in Glasgow on Friday March 7th – **“Shaping Scotland's future: women's equality and constitutional change”**.

To quote from their invite:

“It's an exciting time to be a feminist in Scotland. This conference will bring together academics, gender equality experts, activists, and women from all walks of life, to talk about women's equality, and the choices that we face in the independence referendum and afterwards”.

That same evening I will be speaking at the launch of Dr Walter Stephen's new book 'Learning from the Lasses: Women of the Patrick Geddes Circle'. Dr Stephen is a noted scholar of Geddes and the launch of this new book, published by Luath Press, will be taking place at Central Library as part of our Edinburgh Library Service's celebrations for International Women's Day.

I've also been asked to attend an event later on in the month being organised for International Women's Day by the users of the MILAN service, which will celebrate the contributions of older Asian women to Edinburgh and Scotland.

What is your job?

I'm SNP Councillor for the Leith Walk ward, and Depute Lord

Provost for the city.

Would you give us a quick version of your career path?

Born in Perth, Australia.

Bachelor of Arts in English, John Curtin University

Diploma in Performing Arts, Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts.

Moved to Sydney, and worked as an actor for ten years. In between acting work worked in a wide variety of jobs, including retail, sales and marketing.

Moved to Scotland, where I met my partner and had two children.

Personal assistant to the Managing Director of a South African Wine Club here in Edinburgh.

Parliamentary assistant to Rob Gibson MSP in the Scottish Parliament.

Elected to the City of Edinburgh Council in 2007

2007-2012 Convenor for Culture and Leisure

2012 re-elected and was appointed Depute Lord Provost. Currently sit on the Planning, Transport and Environment, and Children and Families committees, and on the boards of the Edinburgh International Festival, the Centre for the Moving Image (Edinburgh International Film Festival and Filmhouse) and Creative Edinburgh.

If you had been given career advice on leaving school (knowing what you know now!) what would it have been?

If I was giving someone else career advice knowing what I know now it would be:

-Don't be modest and hang back, take the opportunities that come your way as soon as you see them – as a Scottish friend once said to me, shy bairns get nae sweeties!

-Try to get as much experience as possible at speaking in public – it's a very useful skill to have, no matter what career you're in – and I promise you the more you do it, the easier it gets!

-Your career doesn't always travel along a straight path – be ready to take up those sudden opportunities as they arise, even if they don't fit in with what you currently see as Your Life Plan.

Do you use any formal networking organisations? If you do which ones do you find useful?

Not formally, although I am aware of and support Scottish Women in Business and Investing Women, the first women-focused angel investment network in Scotland which launched last year, to name just a couple. In politics, my party the SNP mentors women members through its Women's Academy.

Do you think there are enough women in important positions in private and public organisations in Edinburgh?

No – although things are certainly improving, there is still much more to be done. The Council is making a lot of effort to some good effect in areas such as supporting women entrepreneurs through its Business Gateway service , and has certainly seen an increase in the numbers of women taking senior managerial roles in the last few years which is positive. The Scottish Government, through initiatives such as recently announced extensions in free nursery care, is playing an important part here too. I was heartened to note recently from the most up to date figures available that there are record numbers of women now in work in Scotland.

Who is your inspirational female figure and why?

Tough question! There are so many! May I at least choose two from the dozens??

One is Elsie Inglis, the quite remarkable doctor whose intelligence, guts and iron determination led to her becoming one of the earliest female doctors in Scotland, an energetic and influential suffragist, and, despite advice to the contrary from all sides including the War Office, led to her organising and taking out women only medical units to the battlefields of Europe in WW1 and saving countless lives.

The second is that tremendous actor Katherine Hepburn. Highly-educated, she was strong willed, talented, intelligent, forthright and fearless. Seen by many at the time as over-opinionated and eccentric, she was in fact a great role model for women at a time when the options for women to freely express themselves and their needs were few and far between. We're also told that when she was questioned about politics, she told an interviewer, "I always just say be on the affirmative and liberal side. Don't be a 'no' person". I have to agree with that!