Cynthia Shewan, BA’65, has never forgotten how the door opened for her undergraduate studies at McGill. A longtime student counsellor, Rev. Clifford Knowles, made it possible for her to attend the University by arranging for a scholarship and bursary.

“That paved the way for me and I made sure that I studied hard and did well, so I was able to have financial funding through scholarships and bursaries until I graduated,” says Shewan, who obtained her BA (Honours Psychology).

Shewan went on to earn a master’s and doctorate at Northwestern University in speech-language pathology.

Now, she’s creating meaningful opportunities for others at McGill, from Syrian refugees to an endowed bursary for female students pursuing science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) studies.

Lina Akbeek, a student in the Faculty of Arts who is a refugee from Syria, received support from McGill’s Scholarships and Student Aid Office last year, through a donation from Shewan. Akbeek had been living in Jordan and feared her dream of going to university was out of reach. “There are no words to explain how happy I am and the feeling inside of me,” says Akbeek.

Thanks to Shewan’s generosity, her financial support is continuing this school year, along with funding for other students from similar circumstances.

Shewan supports McGill’s Institute for Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies. She also established a bequest for McGill in her estate plans, which will further augment all of her generous initiatives.

Now retired, Shewan taught at universities and conducted research in speech-language pathology. Also, as director of research in non-profit organizations, research has always been her passion.

“I have a very fond spot in my heart for McGill. I got to work with some pretty famous people,” she says, mentioning the late Donald O. Hebb and Professor Emeritus Ronald Melzack, both renowned psychologists.

Education has been particularly important to her, Shewan says about her motivation for giving. “I have my mother to thank for that because she did not have the opportunity to attend university – although she was certainly smart enough to. She always advocated that I get a good education, and I did. I have been distressed by the fact that women do not always get the opportunities that they should in education, and also just believe in giving back,” Shewan says.

“I was afforded an opportunity because someone helped me. And it’s important to pay that forward.”