One of the directives of the McMaster Students Union (MSU) is to advocate for the needs of the students, and deliver services that cater to a variety of these needs. Advocacy and service implementation start with an idea, and are then backed by research, outreach, and collaboration with a number of campus and community groups. The Women & Gender Equity Network (WGEN) is a great example of a service that has come to fruition through this process.

In its first four months, WGEN has been busy establishing campus partnerships, building working relationships, and securing physical space from which to operate. Set to launch on January 29, 2015, WGEN will begin to host speakers and events throughout the second semester, beginning with a visit from Susan Gapka. Gapka is the founder of the Trans Lobby group, and will speak about her experiences as a trans woman, as well as Bill C279, an act to amend the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Criminal Code. Following her visit, WGEN will partner with trans activists Janani Balasubramaniam and Alok Vaid Menon to host a workshop addressing grassroots organizations surrounding gender.

Following its January 29 launch, WGEN will continue to collaborate with various McMaster groups and departments, including: the McMaster Indigenous Student Community Alliance, the McMaster Anti-Violence Network, and McMaster Human Rights and Equity Services (HRES), to highlight an Indigenous Women's Week. This week will feature guest speakers and an art installation. The travelling art exhibit will take place from February 10 to 14, and will include the Faceless Doll Campaign, a vigil, and a starlight tour.

In early March, WGEN will also host International Women's Week in partnership with a variety of on-campus women and gender groups. Participating groups, including: Her McMaster, the McMaster Womanists, and MacAlliance for Body Peace, will be working together to lead a poster campaign focused on body positivity. Additionally, WGEN will work with McMaster’s Engineers Without Borders to host a panel session about working and volunteering abroad as a woman; as well as HRES, to arrange a visit from Vivek Shraya and Casey Mecija, two acclaimed artists, on their “Family Ties” tour.

In addition to these events and workshops, WGEN will launch its Safe(r) Space program at the beginning of February. WGEN is currently working with the McMaster Student Union’s (MSU) Queer Student Community Centre, and its Peer Support for Gendered Violence Committee to create a policy paper for Safe(r) Space, which will serve as a guideline in the planning and formation of the space itself. Complementing Safe(r) Space will also be a mobile resource library, bi-weekly book club, and documentary screening which, it is hoped, will address feminist issues both on campus, and beyond. WGEN can be found in the McMaster University Student Centre (MUSC) room 226, and is open Monday to Friday from 4:30 - 10:30 PM. Be sure to check the Service tab at msu.mcmaster.ca for updates on hours and events.

Lastly, WGEN, along with the Student Representative Assembly’s External Affairs and Operations committees, are working on devising a policy paper to ensure Trans Accessibility on campus.

The planning and development stages of WGEN have been a collaborative process that would not be possible without the participation and support of the many groups of McMaster, the Hamilton community, and the MSU. I am looking forward to seeing the growth of such a meaningful project after its launch, and the impact it will have in the years to come.