



RENISON FACES COVID-19



RENISON
UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE

AFFILIATED WITH THE UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO

2020/2021

RENISON REPORTS



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LET US BE THE BRIDGE...

Recently I was in the College to prepare for our Board meeting. I took a few moments to go out into the East West Garden- our beautiful oasis of sacred space at the centre of our usually very busy Renison. I walked onto the bridge. You know the bridge- the Renison bridge! It is usually a very active space with all of us coming and going, posing for grad photos, calendar images, goodbye and greeting moments.

The garden and the bridge felt lonely. I recalled a quote from Turkish poet and playwright Mehmet Murat Ildan: “The fate of the bridge is to be lonely; because bridges are to cross (over)- not to stay.”

Although the bridge in the East West Garden is seeing little traffic these days, it sits as a metaphor in the middle of this pandemic year for Renison. Even in ordinary time, Renison understands about bridges: transitions made, connections nurtured, diversities embraced, new days dawning. With a Renison imagining as our passport, we trek over bridges from here to there and often back again. In our transit across them, paths appear that were not there before and new worlds open.

Never has the need for a Renison imagined bridge-building, bridge-walking world been more overtly visible than in this year of COVID. The spaces between us, the gaps between where we are and where we hoped to be are wide. With the rest of the world community, Renison has been affected by the economic, spiritual and communal challenges of the pandemic. All of our teaching has been online, as have our meetings, discussions groups and worship services. Our many students from both the domestic and international community were able to engage with us only through a virtual lens. Our residence has been closed. Several of our short-term programs were cancelled. Given the economic impact of the pandemic many of our community were affected by reduced work through the Work-Share program, temporary and in some cases permanent layoff. As we turn, to face the next chapter in the Renison story our workforce is smaller and our tasks very focused.

But then...there is this bridge which lives at the heart of us.

This bridge calls us to connect and to hope.

We adapted: we stayed in close relationship with each other (Ubuntu); we articulated our Renison vision in new ways; we pursued and procured new work; we related in new ways; we created new budgets. We rose to the challenges of the hour and in many ways we overcame. In other ways we still struggle. But we persisted in our relationships and in our imagining.

There is this bridge which lives at the heart of us.

This bridge calls us to move, to transit, to journey.

Whatever challenges the world devises, still that bridge calls us to move: from here to there, ever in pursuit of a more liveable world fashioned by the choices we make and the education we embrace. And so we move and we change...bridges were made to cross (over); not to stay.

There is a bridge which lives at the heart of us.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Wendy Fletcher". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Wendy Fletcher





NOTES FROM THE BOARD

As we have struggled through this pandemic year, we've all had to drastically adjust our day to day operations. None more so than Renison. Classes are now taught on-line, not in person. Virtual meetings are held online. Residences are closed, and some staff have been laid off. Nevertheless, bills have to be paid and education must continue. Through all of this chaos, we have been fortunate to have such a strong yet compassionate leader as our President Wendy Fletcher. Her intelligence, energy and loyalty to Renison are of the highest order.

The Renison Board of Governors conducts an annual performance appraisal of the President. To that end, an Ad-hoc committee was formed including me, the Board Chair, Vice-Chair, Karen Spencer, Past Chair, Matthew Griffin, and Board member Liz Vitek to review feedback solicited from the President's direct reports, and from the President's self-evaluation. The feedback was discussed with the Committee and in phone meetings with Wendy.

The Ad-hoc Committee's Report was presented to the Board with Wendy present. All of the feedback was positive. The Ad-hoc Committee then asked the Board to extend deep thanks to Wendy for all she has done and continues to do for us all. This was passed unanimously. She indeed has been a woman for all seasons.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Brian Hendley".

Dr. Brian Hendley, Chair, Board of Governors

MAINTAINING CONNECTIONS



This past year has had me thinking a lot about connections and missed connections.

"You're frozen; you're still frozen; you're muted" have become as much a part of our daily lexicon as "how is your day" used to be.

As a recovering English major, I am still in the habit of pulling out my Oxford English Dictionary (OED) whenever I'm reflecting on a word. The OED defines connection as "the point at which two things are connected; a link; a relationship or association." It's also "a telephone link" and finally, it's "a relation of ideas."

Our home wifi connection has become the point at which I am connecting with my office coworkers and colleagues each day, but also with my family and close friends. Christmas morning found me on a family Zoom call with 8 of my siblings joining in from Hong Kong, Michigan, St. Catharines, London and Sarnia. In a strange way, it was the first time since I was a child that all of my brothers and sisters were together on Christmas morning.

Despite the miles between us, if I were to close my eyes, I was able to picture us all sitting around my parents' living room in Sarnia, under the glow of the Christmas tree lights, telling stories and sharing laughter as the first whiff of roast turkey made its way into the room. Family connections are strong.

If you are reading this issue of Renison Reports, you are part of the Renison family. We may not be connected the way we once were – meeting over a meal or a coffee in the Great Hall; sharing stories and laughter in the Luscott Ministry Centre; decorating our residence room door on Moose Track or FUBAR – but we remain connected by the ideas that we share. The idea that we are all trying to improve our planet; the idea of One Sky Over All.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Cort Egan'. The signature is stylized and cursive.

Cort Egan, Director
External Relations & Communications

REFLECTIONS ON RENISON



Ajirioghene Evi
BA SDS (Renison) – 2008 / 2010
BSW (Renison) – 2010 / 2011
MSW (Western) – 2012 / 2013

Being encouraged to answer to and embrace your own name should not be noteworthy. And yet, when I sat down over Zoom to interview Ajirioghene (Ah-Jiri-Or-Ganeh) Evi a few months into the COVID-19 pandemic, she explained to me how meaningful this was during her time at Renison, and how it continued to shape her career. "When I arrived in Canada, there was a lot of pressure for me to adopt a shortened version of my name; it was really empowering to be told by Renison faculty that, no, this is your name, this is who you are; embrace it."

Having emigrated to Canada in 2005 from Nigeria, West Africa to study law at York University, Ajirioghene found herself being drawn towards a different path after meeting several social workers in her classes at York. "I admired their commitment to working to improve lives in their communities. I knew that this goal was important to me, too. Many of them recommended Renison – a school I had never heard of – but I decided to check it out." After consultation with a Renison program advisor, Ajirioghene enrolled in Social Development Studies (SDS). This Renison program, which has grown to become one of the University of Waterloo's most popular Faculty of Arts options, offers courses in human and social development, including



psychology, sociology, and social work. Students develop skills in critical thinking, problem solving, interpersonal relations, leadership, civic engagement, and global citizenship; it is a common gateway into the School of Social Work.

From the moment she was enrolled at Renison, she was hooked. She loved the small classroom environment and noted that there was a fair bit of diversity at Renison. Renison has always attracted a large number of international students, and there was an exchange program with India at the time. "This was the first time in my academic career, outside of Africa, that I had other Africans in my classes. I was part of a larger cohort of mature students who had left our homes and families behind to come and study in Canada. We found the space welcoming and supportive. Many of us would meet on the Front Porch,* where there was always free-flowing coffee, tea and snacks; here we were able to create our own sense of family and community within Renison. We would bring our music and our stories and listen and learn from each other."

Ajirioghene recounted some of the cultural barriers that she needed to overcome. "In my country, elders are the wisdom keepers and they are treated with great reverence and respect. It would be unusual for a young person like me to approach an elder without a mediator. I remember experiencing some culture-shock in my first placement in a home for the elderly; I needed to adjust my frame of reference. I was encouraged to take a gerontology course to better understand the role I can play in the lives of elders in the Canadian context – I found that very helpful. This helped me to overcome some of the barriers that I had due to my own lived experiences. I learned that with the help and support of the right people I could overcome any barriers I might have to succeeding in this chosen field."

*The Front Porch is the student community space in front of the Chaplain's office that provides snacks, beverages and space to connect socially.

"One thing that stood out for me during my time at Renison was that my personal narrative was appreciated. I would bring my lived experience into a project or assignment, which was not necessarily the Canadian lived experience – and it was embraced by my peers and my instructors. I wanted to write projects about human trafficking and child abuse, and I was supported and encouraged to follow this area of study and research."

Today, Ajirioghene serves as the Anti-Black Racism Practice Integration Lead for Family and Children's Services of Waterloo Region. Acknowledging the overrepresentation of Black children and youth in welfare care, she works to assist in empowering, engaging, organizing, and advocating on behalf of Black children, youth and their families involved with the Child Welfare System. This involves serving as a key role in coaching, training and mentoring staff, foster parents and community partners in the area of Anti-black racism, oppression, marginalization and its intersections. This job includes participating in advocacy, policy development, outreach, community

engagement to Black children/youth, and their families, providing support, and linking individuals to identified resources.

Ajirioghene is also the Executive Director of the newly formed Kind Minds Family Wellness (KMFV); a non-profit organization with a Mission to transform personal narratives of Black persons, support and empower them as they navigate systems in order to attain positive Self-actualization and Holistic wellness. The Group is made up of Black professionals; all volunteers and all committed to finding culturally appropriate ways to deliver services for community members with Black identities. The work is practice informed, but research-based. "We find creative ways to help these community members embrace their culture through cooking classes, music, art, dance and poetry. It helps to enhance self-esteem and provide tools to deal with bullying, peer pressure and cancelling. I learned at Renison how personally empowering it was for me to embrace my name and my narrative; I am now helping to give that strength and confidence to others."

"I would bring my lived experience into a project or assignment, which was not necessarily the Canadian lived experience – and it was embraced by my peers and my instructors."

LECTURE SERIES TAKES **ROOT** ONLINE AND GROWS ITS AUDIENCE

What do safe drinking water, Stephen King, Memorial Tattoos and women-led activism all have in common? They are all themes that were explored in Renison's One Sky Over All Community Speaker Series.

In the Fall of 2019, Renison began a partnership with the Waterloo Public Library (WPL) to present regular lectures where faculty of Renison could present their research to community members, increasing the visibility of their research, and introducing it to a broader community of interest.

The lecture series was designed to open up meaningful dialogue. It began as an in-person offering at the WPL main branch with a session hosted by Kelly Laurila on how to engage with Reconciliation in Canada, and a session from Doug Cowan on religious iconography in the work of Stephen King. Both lectures were attended by engaged audience members who demonstrated their enthusiasm with questions and comments throughout.

In March of 2020, a couple of weeks before the third lecture, the global COVID-19 pandemic forced a delay in the series. The series moved online, and continued with Rob Case's discussion of Water Activism and Susan Cadell's examination of Memorial Tattoos. A benefit of moving the series online was that many more people were able to attend; we now had participants from as far away as British Columbia and Hong Kong.



Image: Kelly Laurila explores Reconciliation in Canada in January 21, 2020 at the Waterloo Public Library's Main Branch.



Above: The panelists gather for the Anti-Racism Roundtable on September 1, 2020, held online. Clockwise, from top left: Dr. Kofi Campbell, Dr. Jasmin Zine, Dr. Jean Becker, The Honourable Bardish Chagger, MP, and Dr. Malinda Smith.

Now online and still hosted by WPL, the series was rebranded to better reflect Renison's motto: the One Sky Over All Community Speaker Series. So far, the series has included: a discussion of women-led activism and its challenges during COVID-19 in Arab and Latin American cultures, hosted by Amir Al-Azraki; an Anti-Racism roundtable focused on exploding the barriers to equity and decolonization within our organizations, hosted by Kofi Campbell; and an introduction to the Getaway Families Program, which increases connections between International students and local communities, hosted by Christine Gillies and Bethany Dixon. As with previous sessions, there was engaged participation, in particular during the Anti-Racism roundtable, which had over 400 registrants.

The series has continued in 2021 with Giller-prize winning author Souvankham Thammavongsa, a relationship-focused session 'First Dates to Lifelong Mates' led by SDS Chair Denise Marigold, and a special Black History Month session hosted by the School of Social Work which highlighted the work of York University professor Dr. Wilburn Hayden, who spoke about the omission of historical records of slavery in Canada. Offerings this Spring also included a session on Healing Tattoos, and a book launch focused on the experience of Refugees in Canada.

In addition to having online lectures that are accessible from around the world, with an increased capacity, each session has been recorded so we can continue to share them after the event. With each lecture, more of the wider community becomes connected with Renison and its work, increasing the reach of faculty research and promoting lifelong learning and positive dialogue among our local community.

If you wish to look back at previous events, and see what is coming up in this series, please visit renison.ca/one-sky-wpl

RENISON **EXPANDS** ITS BASE PROGRAMMING



The University of Waterloo (UW) is consistently ranked among the top universities in Canada and has a global reputation for its innovative STEM programming. As a result, UW attracts a large number of international students, many of whom are accepted conditionally, on the provision that they can meet the University's high threshold of English proficiency.

Almost a decade ago, Renison's English Language Institute (ELI) partnered with the University of Waterloo to help close this language gap for its incoming international students through our Bridge to Academic Success in English (BASE) program. Renison's expertise in offering discipline-specific language

training, combined with a highly supportive social support network for its international students, has seen this partnership grow and expand each year.

We are proud to announce that this year, Renison has signed an agreement with the Faculty of Mathematics, which will begin in the summer of 2021. With the signing of Math, Renison now provides all English language pathway provision for the University of Waterloo. The addition of the Faculty of Math to the BASE program will represent approximately 150-300 additional students studying at Renison each year.



According to Keely Cook, an Assistant Director of the ELI, “students in the BASE program are motivated to succeed because they are able to see the relevance of what they are learning to their future program. BASE language training is tailored specifically to the faculty and the program in which the students are studying; as their language skills improve, so too does their motivation to be successful in their studies.” Additionally, Renison provides a “soft landing” for international students due to the outstanding efforts of our Student Experience team. Communication with prospective students begins months before they ever travel to Canada as they are prepared for what to expect when they arrive.

Upon arrival, our student support staff meets with the students and helps them adjust to the University of Waterloo and life in Canada. A series of social and cultural events, educational workshops and fun activities provides opportunities for the students to practice English and develop

new skills in an engaging and interactive way.

There is a very open line of communication between ELI instructors and the Student Experience Team; everyone is fully committed to the success of the students. By conducting regular check-ins with students and providing a fully integrated and gratifying learning and cultural experience, the students know that they are part of a community that really cares for their well-being. The real success of this program can be measured in the hundreds of students who have flourished in their academic programs, and this finding was supported by the recent program review cycle.

The addition of the faculty of Math is a huge milestone for Renison and recognizes the proven success of our ELI programming. We are grateful for all this accomplishment represents to Renison and are confident that we will continue to thrive as a welcoming source of support for our students.

CONVERSACTION ONE YEAR LATER



Above left: Dr. Kofi Campbell at the ConversAction conference. Above right: sticky notes used in an activity during the conference, November 2019

Just over a year ago, in November, 2019, Renison University College and the University of Waterloo hosted ConversAction, an anti-racism conference that attracted over 200 senior administrators and student leaders from almost 25 universities and colleges across Canada. The goal of the Conference was to follow up on the work that began four years earlier at Wilfrid Laurier University's (e)RACE(r) Conference. Dr. Kofi Campbell, Renison's Vice President, Academic and Dean participated in the Laurier conference and spearheaded ConversAction. We sat down with him to discuss the findings of the Conference and next steps.

Can you update us on the status of the ConversAction Conference Report?

The Report is complete and can now be viewed on our website at renison.ca/conversation-report. It was a difficult Report to put together for a number of reasons. Firstly, we have tried very much to capture the spirit, essence and content of the Conference; we have tried to allow the delegates' voices to speak for themselves, without imposing too much editorial control. The Conference was very much a working forum, with break-out rooms, group discussions and panel-style debates. The sheer volume of data that came out of the two-day session was quite extraordinary. While it was rewarding to participate in such expansive and wide-ranging discussions, capturing the content of these conversations in a way that is both accurate and contextually relevant has been difficult. Additional pressures on workload and available resources emerged from the global pandemic and intensified during the height of last summer's Black Lives Matter demonstrations.

What do you consider to be the most important findings to come out of the ConversAction Summit?

There was a really clear consensus that the days of trying to do this work individually, in isolation, are over. There is simply too much work to be done and too many barriers to overcome. There was a really clear recognition among the delegates that we cannot go this alone any longer. These findings were echoed by the mass protests that erupted last summer over the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery and others. These protests

are a demand for collective action. The same is true of the university sector – real change can only come about with the work and support of a sector-wide approach; a sector-wide, anti-racism task force. We need to be building on each other's strengths, buttressing each other's weaknesses, and providing opportunities for conversation, for learning and for shared expertise. This is the role that a sector-wide task force can play.

What are you most proud of with respect to the ConversAction Summit?

I'm really proud of the fact that the energy that was ignited during that two-day summit has continued to grow. I am regularly contacted by institutions or individuals from across Canada expressing interest in the work, asking about future steps, and volunteering their time and support. This is very encouraging. In view of the many starts and stops that this work has undergone over the years, it is hopeful to see this sustained level of interest.

What do you see as the role of universities and colleges in the anti-racism movement?

There is an incredible amount of knowledge and expertise within colleges and universities on matters of racism and anti-racism and equity work in general. Our job is to open minds. Our job is to lead our students and ourselves to new ways of seeing the world; new ways of understanding the world and re-evaluating the things we have taken for granted. Students are largely still forming their ideas and ideologies in university; we have the opportunity to help them to understand the structural realities of racism and the role that they can play in supporting anti-racism efforts. Many students have never really considered the structural realities of racism and how they may be contributing to them and, on the flip side, how they can help to dismantle them.

What role do you see Renison playing in the work of the sector-wide, anti-racism task force.

Renison has an opportunity to play a leadership role. We have a lot of great faculty who have considerable knowledge and experience in conducting equity work. Our proximity to the University of Waterloo provides us with access to additional expertise and resources. As a small institution, we have the benefit of being much more nimble in our responses to work that needs to be accomplished. We are able to pivot and respond to changing priorities much more quickly than larger institutions with additional administrative layers.

How would you describe the current climate on Canadian university campuses with respect to equity and diversity?

The current climate is more hopeful than it has been in a while. Universities are really beginning to pay attention and take real steps towards anti-racism work. At the same time, because these difficult conversations are taking place across Canadian universities, some really troubling stories are surfacing. I would like to acknowledge the heavy lifting that is being done by students on university campuses to keep the momentum going and to force administration to take real action. In particular, I'm thinking of the #Equity4Who at the University of Waterloo and Being Raced at Wilfrid Laurier; in both of these cases, students are holding the school's senior leadership to account, and forcing change to happen.

What is one thing that our readers can do to help support the anti-racism movement?

Reach out to organizations in your communities and on your campuses that are engaged in anti-Black racism work and ask what you can do to offer support. It may just be a matter of helping to amplify their voices. Offer your time; offer your support. Be comfortable in a supporting role.

Anything you wish to add that we haven't covered?

I just want to reiterate the importance of student voices in this space; inviting these voices into the space and believing them; hear their stories and believe what they are saying is true.



15 YEARS ON THE FRONT PORCH: RENISON'S MINISTRY CENTRE



The Renison Ministry Centre has many things in common with a beloved friend or family member's front porch or cozy living room. There you'll find the comfort of a cup of tea or coffee, maybe a cookie or two, and it's often the place where a quick chat can turn into a deep and meaningful conversation.



This year, Renison celebrates 15 years of the Ministry Centre, a staple of student life and the Renison community since 2006. The idea of the Ministry Centre began when Marilyn Malton, Director of Renison's Institute of Ministry, heard the idea of a "front porch church" that could connect the community with a more traditional spiritual space. Though it is a space that connects the Renison community with the programming of Renison's Institute of Ministry, the Ministry Centre has taken on a life of its own as a place to gather, for students, faculty, and community alike.



Renison has provided spiritual services to its community since its inception. Originally the Chaplain lived at Renison in an apartment and was in charge of the residence facilities. It wasn't until 2001 when the role was separated from the Director of Student Life and Residence.



The Chaplain has also provided Sunday services at Renison, first taking place in a student lounge and then a small chapel space prior to the building of St. Bede's Chapel in 1992. St. Bede's Chapel has since been home to a small membership, with worship becoming more student-focused over the years. The Chapel has been used for funerals and weddings of those associated with Renison or the wider campus, as well as a space for vigils, meditation groups, and QiGong exercises.

The idea of the Ministry Centre coincided with the building of Renison's Academic Centre and the arrival of a new Chaplain, Megan Collings-Moore. In the first weeks, Marilyn and Megan recount the rush to find furniture, wandering the halls of Renison and pulling together pieces of comfortable furniture that would create the cozy space they had envisioned. For much of the last 15 years, the Ministry Centre has been central for discussion groups, casual coffee breaks, and many celebrations. These gatherings, sometimes planned and sometimes spontaneous, have been the lifeblood of the Ministry Centre for the last 15 years. "it's been transformative for us," says Marilyn. "In the hearing and listening and the sharing of stories, we simply don't remain the same."

The Ministry Centre is not only a place for those who follow the Christian faith, but for people of all faiths, and even those who may have had reservations about religion. Chaplain Megan says that the Ministry Centre "really became a place where lots of people who had been really hurt by religious institutions could come in and do some exploration. Maybe faith could be affirming, maybe faith could be inclusive, maybe faith could be something that helped redeem their lives."

Both Marilyn Malton and Megan Collings-Moore will celebrate their retirements this year and they will be deeply missed. Though their physical presence will not be on campus daily, their legacy will continue in all of the future gatherings in Renison's Ministry Centre.

If you would like to send a note to Megan or Marilyn, we have set up an online message board for each of them. Follow the links below to add your message.

Megan: renison.ca/congratulations-megan
Marilyn: renison.ca/congratulations-marilyn



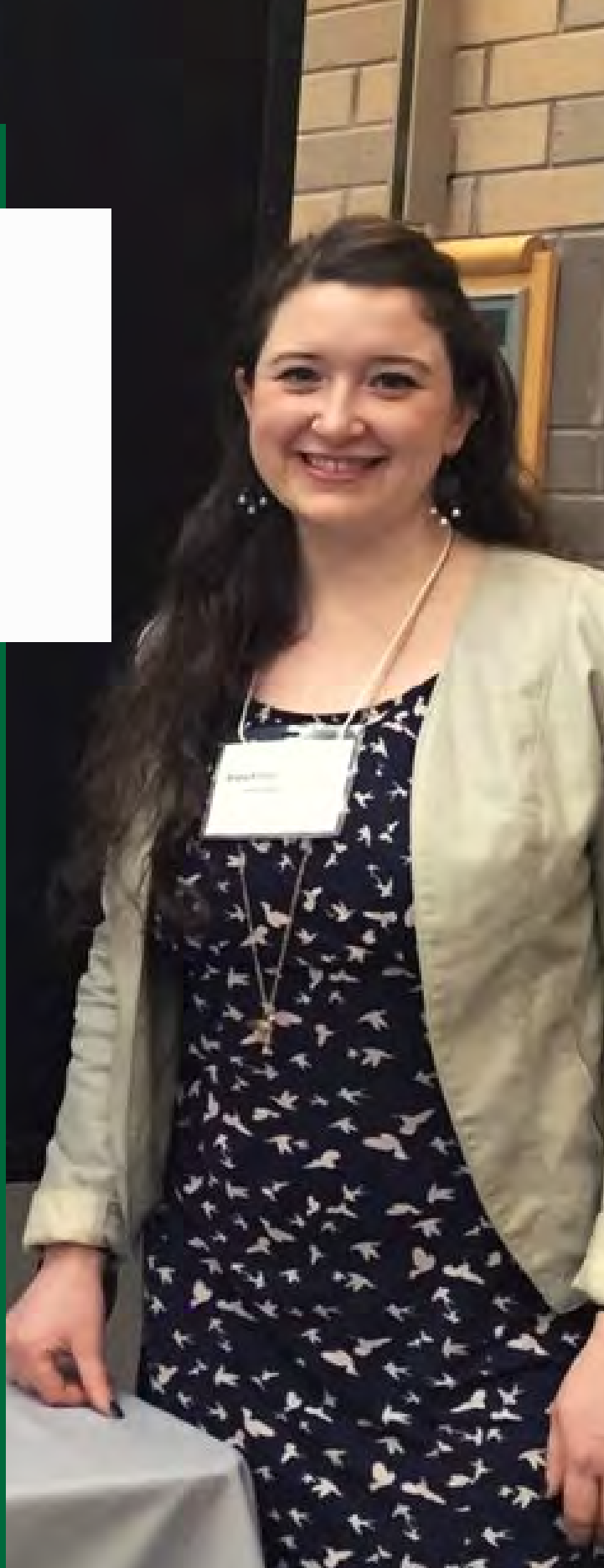
"BREATHE, PLAN, AND GET MOVING"

Social Work in the Time of COVID-19

It's no secret that Renison alumni make a difference. Our alumni often choose helping professions such as Social Work, no surprise since Social Development Studies and the School of Social Work have their home at Renison. This past year has placed increased pressure on our alumni working with members of the public, including Rebekah Churchyard, a Renison SDS ('13) and BSW ('14) alumna.

Rebekah began her journey at Renison as an SDS student, and quickly found that her passion lay in Social Work, particularly in work with older adults. After graduating with a BSW, Rebekah went on to complete a Master's of Social Work specializing in Gerontology at the University of Toronto, one step closer to her dream of working with older adults.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic gripped communities across the globe, Rebekah had moved back to the area and began working with the Region of Waterloo as a Social Planning Associate. It was a departure from her focus on gerontology, and she found herself working on early development projects for kids, research, and macro-level projects. She kept up her work as a psychotherapist with volunteer work, and planned to learn as much as she could while keeping gerontology in her sights.



Then, in March 2020, the world shifted, and Rebekah was redeployed into other departments that needed support. She worked as a resource support person at a warming centre in downtown Kitchener for the Region's homeless. Though the space was designed as a space for this vulnerable population to go, get warm, and access resources, it was complicated by the arrival of COVID-19. Those who are homeless, or who are at risk for homelessness, are often sick or at risk for other diseases, and as such were particularly vulnerable to the new virus. When talking about this situation, Rebekah made it clear that while this was unlike anything the Region had faced in recent history, everyone was working around the clock to make things happen, saying "I've never seen people work so hard."

Soon after, Rebekah was redeployed again to Sunnyside Home— which supports another vulnerable population. Initially, she provided virtual psychotherapy support to staff. Information and engagement was crucial, and Rebekah says that work-related stress was the primary concern for most staff members.



In July 2020 she shifted again to working with supportive housing tenants and then to the Community Alzheimer's Program, working with community care partners. Rebekah spoke with many clients and their family members, providing clarification about pandemic measures, information about testing and, more recently, vaccination procedures.

In addition, Rebekah has been working as a part-time mental health professional with a company called Dialogue that is based in Montreal, which has been a significant hotspot for the pandemic throughout. For this work, she speaks with front-line workers which, though very rewarding, has also been very challenging. Rebekah says that to ensure her ability to support front-line workers, she needed to pay particular attention to her own self-care.

Self-care and planning have been Rebekah's keys to success this year. Self-care, says Rebekah, is not just for individuals, but for the community as a whole. "Breathe, plan, and get moving" she says when I ask for her final thoughts. She acknowledges that we can't control everything and we don't always know what's next, but we can plan as much as possible for what might happen!

More change is coming for Rebekah, as she begins a new position working with older adults as Care Coordinator in Specialized Geriatric Services with the Local Health Integration Network. We wish her all the best and hope this is the beginning of a wonderful new chapter!



OUR HONOUREES SETTING RENISON APART

What sets Renison University College apart from other universities and colleges is its people. While this statement may seem obvious, or even clichéd, it is truly emblematic of what students, faculty and staff most regularly cite as what they love most about Renison: its people. As an institution, we are honoured that so many caring and dedicated individuals have given their time, energy and expertise to creating the story that is Renison. Each year, we aim to recognize a handful of those individuals who have contributed significantly to Renison, or the University of Waterloo, or our broader community, including the Anglican faith, and have done so without any expectation or agenda beyond making Renison a better place to work, study, research or live.

Senior Fellow:

Members of the regular faculty of Renison University College, the University of Waterloo, and its other federated and affiliated institutions, are eligible to receive the designation of Senior Fellow of Renison University College. The nominee must have made a substantial and noteworthy contribution to Renison University College, to his or her field, and/or to the community at large.



Dr. Ellen Sue Mesbur (2014)

From 2002-2012, Dr. Ellen Sue Mesbur served as Professor and Director of the School of Social Work at Renison, a formative decade in the School's history. Dr. Mesbur initiated a part-time Bachelor of Social Work program in a blended learning format, and she was a key architect in creating Renison's online MSW program, with a focus on health, for part-time and full-time studies. Among her many legacies is a unique 10 module Field Instructor Training Program, that created a pedagogical foundation for emerging supervisors. In 2008, Dr. Mesbur was awarded a Lifetime Membership by the Ontario Association of Social Workers (OASW); in 2012 she was recognized by the Canadian Association for Social Work Education (CASWE) and was the International Honoree of the International Association for Social Work with Groups (IASWG). In 2019 Dr. Mesbur received the Province of Ontario Volunteer Service Award for 10 years of service to the Ontario Association of Social Workers; she is Professor Emerita of Ryerson University.

Honorary Senior Fellow:

The Honorary Senior Fellowship is Renison University College's equivalent to honorary doctorates awarded by degree-granting universities. It is granted to persons who have distinguished themselves in the wider community through their contributions to one or more of the following: Renison, the University of Waterloo, the Anglican Church, the wider community of Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, or the world, and may have some affinity with the College. This honour may also be granted to persons who have served as volunteers for the College.

Archbishop Anne Germond (2019)

Archbishop Germond led a successful and growing ministry in her parish, Church of the Ascension, in Sudbury for nearly two decades. She led international relationships with communities in South Africa, and supported fundraising initiatives to improve the lives and health of those communities. She partnered with local organizations to provide meals and friendship to members of the Sudbury community. The Diocese of Algoma has a strong First Nations presence and her ministry seeks to empower and walk alongside indigenous communities. She is a leader in the reconciliation work that is needed to happen in this post-colonial era as we move forward seeking healing and peace. She is also a strong, gentle spirit with a personal commitment to equity, with a worldview which reflects the commitments and ethos of Renison.



Honorary Member:

Honorary Membership is normally granted to members of the staff of Renison University College, the University of Waterloo, or the other Affiliated and Federated Institutions of Waterloo. The nominee must have made noteworthy contributions to Renison over an extended period of time during his or her employment at the College, the University of Waterloo, or the other university/colleges on campus.



Ron Champion (2018)

Ron Champion's 15-year history at Renison University College left a meaningful and lasting legacy, particularly in the area of international studies, which remains a key focus for Renison's academic and professional education mission. In addition to being a highly regarded language instructor, Ron founded and managed the Renison International Office (RIO). In this capacity, Ron developed and implemented successful language and professional development programs for a variety of audiences ranging from incoming first-year students to seasoned university professors. RIO has continued to grow throughout the years and creates meaningful international opportunities for students from abroad to come to Renison, and for Renison students to go abroad. Ron was also instrumental in developing custom programming at Renison and building lasting relationships with Chinese and Japanese academic partners; he is a proud ambassador of the Renison name.

Distinguished Alumnus/Alumna:

The designation of Distinguished Alumnus or Alumna is granted to persons who, having graduated from academic programs administered by the College OR lived in residence at Renison for two terms within one academic year, have pursued and gained notable recognition in a subsequent career.

Janet Menard (2018)

A 1975 Alumna of Renison University College and the University of Waterloo, Janet Menard (nee Steele) was appointed Deputy Minister of Children, Community and Social Services and Deputy Minister Responsible for Women's Issues in June 2018. She previously served as Deputy Minister of Community and Social Services, responsible also for Poverty Reduction, bringing with her more than 30 years of experience in the field of human services. Janet was named the Commissioner of Human Services at Peel in 2009 following leadership roles in Social Services and Housing. There, she led the integration of human services and childcare transformation to align with full-day kindergarten. Janet has participated on numerous community boards, including mental health, supportive housing, legal clinics and community planning, as well as the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA) and the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association. She also co-chaired both newcomer and poverty reduction coalitions in Peel and is the 2018 recipient of OMSSA's Champion of Human Services Award. Like so many of our alumni, Janet successfully applied what she learned at Renison into serving a broader community.



Asnake Meshesha Dabala (2019)

Asnake Dabala began his time at Renison University College in 2011, shortly after coming to Canada from Ethiopia as a refugee with his family. He graduated as Valedictorian with a Social Development Studies degree in 2013, followed by a Bachelor of Social Work in 2014, both from Renison. Asnake went on to complete his Master of Social Work degree at Wilfrid Laurier University in 2015. In addition to his studies, he worked as a Residential Support Worker, Community Support Coordinator, Peer Support Group Facilitator, and Teaching Assistant. Asnake has been working with the YWCA of Waterloo in Supportive housing since his arrival in Canada, and is now the Programming Coordinator. He also sits on the Board of Directors for The Working Centre and has recently joined Renison's Board of Governors. His contributions to Renison and to the broader Kitchener / Waterloo community are myriad.

As a valued member of the Renison family, your input is valued for any of the above Honours. Is there a graduate of Renison that you feel should be recognized for their work? Are there local community members who advance and live the values of Renison and our motto, One Sky Over All, who you feel should be celebrated for their accomplishments? Please let us know: renison.alumni@uwaterloo.ca

Additional Awards include: 1) **Founder**, which has only been granted to those whose names appear on the incorporating Letters Patent of the College. This honour is no longer granted; 2) **The Teaching Excellence Award**, which is nominated by students, peers and supported by the President; 3) **Chancellor and President Emeritus**, which may be granted at the Board's discretion for significant and noteworthy service to the College; and 4) **Professor Emeritus** which is granted to members of the regular faculty of the College automatically upon retirement, regardless of rank, and continue for life.

EFAS: MORE THAN AN ENGLISH CLASS

They say that necessity is the mother of invention, but a good love of sport can also be a strong source for ingenuity. When Faraj Lagum (pictured right) was attending in junior high in his home country of Libya, he was unable to watch his favourite teams compete on the soccer pitch because their TV antenna was unable to pick up foreign television networks. Undeterred, a young Faraj built and installed his own television antenna and, presto! The moment the beautiful game appeared on his black and white television in clear definition, Faraj's dream of one day becoming a dentist had ended and he had taken his first steps on his journey to earn a PhD in systems and computer engineering.



At the University of Benghazi, Faraj would earn his Bachelor of Science, majoring in Electrical and Electronics Engineering and carry on to earn his Master's in the same discipline, both with distinction. A good friend of Faraj moved from Libya a few years earlier to attend the University of Waterloo and told him about the EFAS (English For Academic Success) program, and how it gave him the tools to communicate effectively in writing at the university level. Faraj was dubious. While his classes in Libya were in both Arabic and English, he had never written an academic paper in English. On a scale of 1 to 10, he would have ranked himself a 1. "My English writing skill was very weak before EFAS; I could barely write simple emails. Within three months, I was writing excellent papers in English, and now rank my writing ability as 10/10."

Today, Faraj is a post-doctoral scholar conducting artificial intelligence research at Carlton University in Ottawa. Interestingly, his path to artificial intelligence was not dissimilar to his path to systems engineering. "What attracted me to AI was the curiosity to understand how people could build a smart machine that can outpace human intelligence in performing some tasks. As a wireless communication engineer, I knew I possessed the mathematical and programming skills required for AI. I applied what I knew to building myself a smart antenna*; it worked, and I never looked back."

Faraj's research at Carlton could soon be used to help to identify future outbreaks or global pandemics, allowing public health authorities to get in front of a contagion before it spreads too far. Analysing social media data and conducting "sentiment analysis," Faraj and his research team were able to determine that news of the spreading COVID pandemic in nursing homes was being discussed on social media posts several days before it was picked up by traditional media; similarly, sentiments related to shortages of paper towels, toilet paper and certain food items were spiking on social media before these shortages were so widespread that shelves were emptied and rations were implemented by stores. The technology also has application for supply chain management systems.

When Faraj is outside of his AI lab, you will most likely find him watching a game of soccer or enjoying a game of chess.

"I CANNOT BELIEVE STRANGERS WOULD DO THIS FOR ME!"

The impact of the Maple Leaf Fund

"I cannot believe that total strangers would do this for me." These were the tearful words of Dana Alsabbah (right) when she met Barbara Schumacher and Carrol Hicks to thank them for their support through Renison's Refugee Fund. Dana was close to graduation as a pharmacist in Syria when air strikes destroyed her village, her university and her plans for the future. Arriving in Canada with limited English, no academic transcripts and little more than the clothes on her back, Dana felt hopeless.

The Maple Leaf Fund (formerly known as the Refugee Fund) was established by life-partners Barbara Schumacher and Carrol Hicks to provide needed financial support for students who have been displaced from their homes due to civil war and wish to resume their education, but need their English language skills improved in order to succeed at university. The Maple Leaf Fund covers Residence fees, books and other necessary expenses; how it came to be established is a lesson in what it means to lend a hand.

Barbara Schumacher is a physician who began her career at the University of Waterloo in 1976. Active in the Anglican Church since birth, Barbara was familiar with Renison; her parents would attend church-related events hosted by Renison, such as Saturday Breakfasts with the Bishop and 53rd Weekends*. When Barbara became UW's Medical

*53rd Weekend is a spiritual retreat for those who spend 52 weeks of the year serving their parish churches.





Above: Carrol Hicks (left) and Barbara Schumacher (right), who established what is now the Maple Leaf Fund

Director of Health Services, this connection with Renison was strengthened; she helped train the Dons on safe-sex information for residents, and sat on an advisory committee for international students, chaired by former Renison Principal, Gail Cuthbert Brandt.

Through these interactions, Barbara and Carrol learned that Renison's English Language Institute provided world-class language training designed specifically for students who need to improve their academic English in order to meet Canadian university admission requirements. They also discovered that Renison had successfully created a strong network of international students who had built a community of support for each other. Students from around the world would spend weekends and evenings travelling together, attending sporting events, playing games, studying, sharing meals and building a sense of community.

When our Federal Government announced its intention to bring 33,000 Syrian families into Canada, Barbara and Carrol knew immediately how they could help. By creating the Maple Leaf Fund, Barbara and Carrol were giving these families the tools they would need to create their

own paths to success. "This is not a hand-out; it's a hand up," said Carrol. "As Canadians, we are very fortunate. We have the privilege of having been born into a wealthy, peaceful country that, for the most part, respects the democratic process and the peaceful transfer of power. We felt the need to create a supportive environment that would provide these new Canadians with an opportunity to succeed; all we're doing is helping to remove barriers, the rest is up to them."

After completing her English language training at Renison, Dana graduated from the University of Waterloo's School of Pharmacy, is now married and has become a Canadian citizen.

The Maple Leaf Fund

To date, almost **\$70,000** in scholarships has been paid to 18 Canadian newcomers; the value of the scholarships has ranged from \$500 to over \$5,000.

If you're interested in supporting the Maple Leaf Fund, visit:
renison.ca/maple-leaf-fund

SMALL GESTURES, BIG OUTCOMES

Terry Weatherhead learned early in life that small acts of kindness can have lasting memories. Terry's mom, Irene, was a social worker who graduated from Renison University College in 1977. Terry recently established a student bursary in her mom's name that will help support students with financial need. Terry's mom has given to others throughout her life; now retired and living with dementia in assisted living, Terry wanted her mom's good work to carry on. Here is a little bit of Irene's story:

Irene did not have an easy life. She grew up in a small farming community just outside of Hanover, Ontario at the tail end of the Depression. Her family was part of the Pennsylvania Dutch migration of the turn of the century, and they eked out a humble livelihood selling head cheese and other produce door-to-door and at local markets. Without hydro or indoor plumbing, life on the farm was burdensome. When tragedy struck, and one of Irene's two brothers died young, the family transformed its sorrow into comfort by welcoming children who had been displaced as orphans during the Second World War.

Not unusual for the time, Irene was not expected to go beyond middle-school. In her early twenties, she was working long shifts at the Hosiery Mill in Hanover. Through thrift and hard work, she saved enough money to fund her high school diploma and then her secretarial certificate by correspondence.



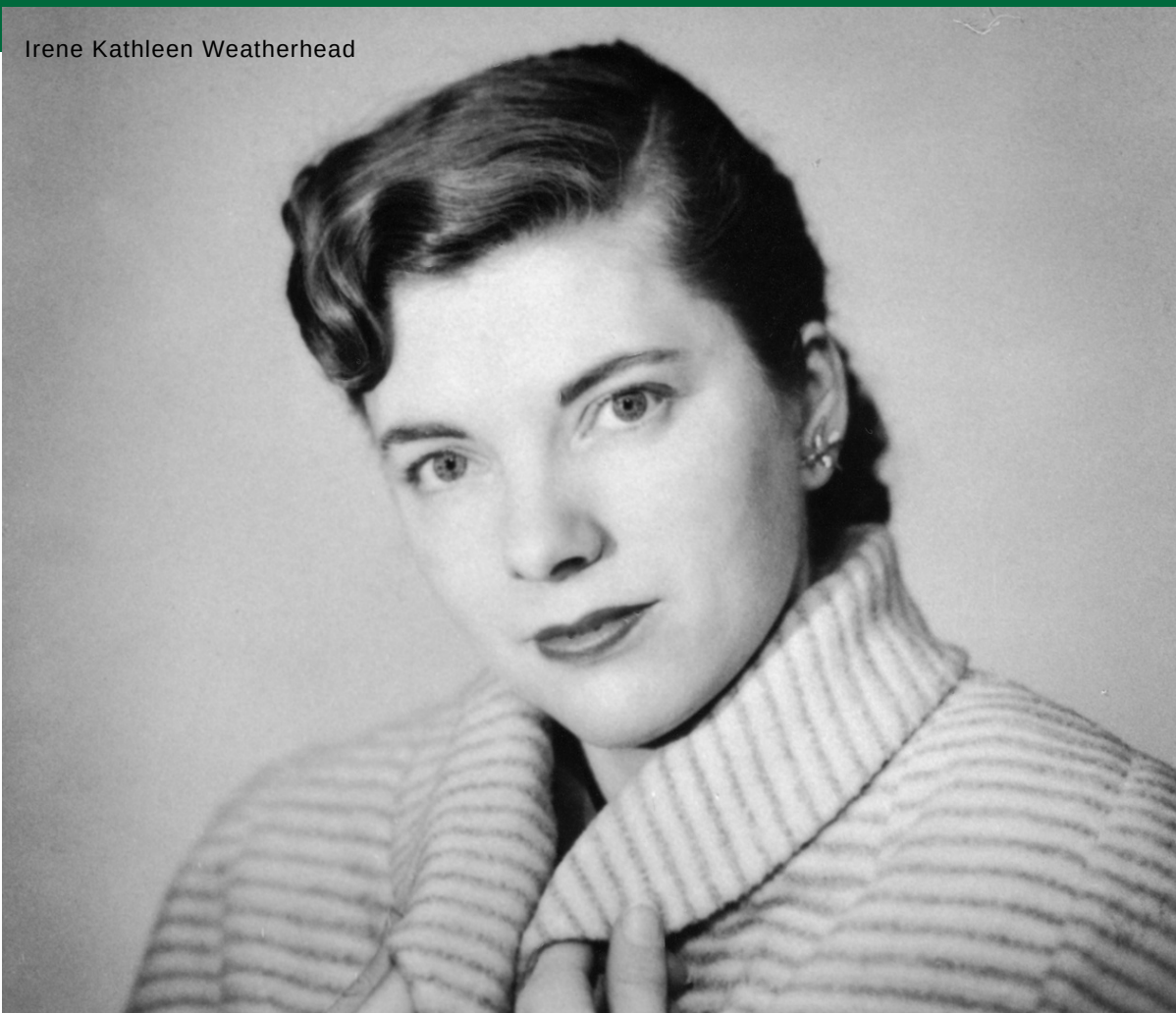
Terry Weatherhead held by her mother, Irene Kathleen Weatherhead, in a family photo.

Irene met her future husband at a local dance in Hanover; a charismatic and handsome Air Force officer. Irene thought he was too good to be true. She was right. Not long into their marriage Irene learned that her husband had a dark side. Enduring what today we would recognize as undiagnosed Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), he turned to self-medication and suffered greatly from substance abuse. The family spent years living with his unpredictable mood swings and dangerous outbursts. Irene struggled to make things work and keep the family together. She encouraged him to seek the counselling that she could not provide. Eventually, the safety and well-being of the children became too grave a concern. Irene cashed in a life insurance policy and moved her small family to Kitchener where her sister and brother-in-law lived and provided additional emotional and financial support. Irene's secretarial skills now paid off; she worked in a typing pool downtown Kitchener full time and eventually completed her degree at Renison.

As a social worker, Irene specialized in working with people who found themselves caught up in the criminal justice system as a result of substance abuse. She knew first-hand that there was a complex story and a real person behind these criminal records. She used her life experience and her new academic training to help others become their better selves.

Terry reflected on her mom's selflessness. "I remember as a teenager, I wanted this lovely little barrette that was all the fashion at the time. We were very, very poor in those days, but mom always found a way to make me feel special. Thinking back, she probably decided not to have lunch a couple of days, but she found a way to buy me that barrette. It seems like such a little thing, but it meant the world to me at the time. I want my mom to know what all those little sacrifices still mean to me."

Irene Kathleen Weatherhead



THE KDE HUB: SUPPORTING CHILD AND YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH PROMOTION

Part of Renison's mission is to contribute positively to a diverse and complex world, and make a positive difference in the lives of those within our local and global communities— true to the motto 'One Sky Over All.' One of the ways that this extended reach can be seen is in the work of the KDE Hub, which supports research projects across Canada to benefit the mental health of children and youth in ways that respect the importance of culture, equity, and social justice.

The Knowledge, Development, and Exchange (KDE) Hub has been hosted by Renison since July 2019. Part of the Public Agency of Canada's Mental Health Promotion Innovation Fund (MHP-IF), the Hub supports research across Canada focused on reducing risk factors and improving protective factors – at individual, community, and structural levels - for mental health among diverse groups of children and youth. Currently the Hub supports 20 projects, which are also funded by the MHP-IF. The Hub also serves a broader, emerging mental health promotion community in Canada.

The funded projects range in scope, from supporting families of transgender children and young adults, to nurturing the development and wellbeing of refugee children and families, creating a Nunavut-led wellness hub, to using arts to develop coping skills and explore cultural identity for youth in the Northwest Territories. Some of the projects are new, while others build upon existing initiatives. The overarching goal of each, though, is to make a difference and have a positive impact on the mental health of children and youth, families, caregivers, and communities.



Image: The Hub's first-annual symposium, held online in January 2021.

The Hub recently held its first-annual symposium in late January 2021. The event was originally envisioned as an in-person event but was instead held fully online. Each of the funded projects was represented along with others who share their interests; the event hosted over 120 participants from 7 time zones and 11 Canadian provinces and territories. Participants explored the people and places of the MHP-IF, the positioning or niche of the program for child and youth mental health promotion in Canada, the influence of the pandemic, and the potential to make a difference in the lives of Canadians.

The two-and-a-half-day event included synchronous and asynchronous sessions, 3 panels, 27 small group break outs, 30 contributors, and the use of a variety of interactive software. Renison is looking forward to seeing what is next up for the Hub, and how each of the projects and the systems that support mental health promotion in Canada will flourish with the Hub's support. Renison is proud to be a partner of this wonderful initiative. To learn more about the KDE Hub, visit kdehub.ca.

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One of the many sessions at the symposium shared some preliminary findings of a Hub led Pandemic Adaptations Study. The purpose of this study is to understand the processes and experiences of the funded projects as they adapt to the COVID 19 Pandemic. On a larger scale, the goal of the study is to contribute knowledge about how the pandemic has impacted mental health promotion, those delivering programs and services, children and youth themselves, and the field of mental health promotion.

The pandemic caused many of the projects to re think their activities and adapt, and even take a step back to re assess. Teams found innovative ways to keep offering programs, albeit in a new format as a shift to online programming became necessary. Some of the pitfalls of online engagement, such as Zoom fatigue, challenges with creating personal connection, difficulty

IMPACT

with language and cultural translations, were noted by participants. There were upsides, however, including an expanded reach and increased technological tools that could address some of the pre existing barriers.

Another upside of the pandemic is that it has prompted open and honest conversation about mental health, both on an individual and systemic scale. Conversations around mental health and wellbeing are important to remove stigma that is often associated with mental health and can be an important step to helping mental health come out of the shadows.

Preliminary study findings signal some rich learning. The Hub and Renison will keep sharing findings as they are available, in pursuit of our mission to make a positive difference in our local, national, and global communities.

RENISON FACES COVID-19



The COVID-19 global pandemic has affected all aspects of our world, and created a new normal in which Renison has had to adapt. Each area of Renison has demonstrated resilience and innovation as the organization continues to move through this unprecedented time in history.

Though there have been many changes throughout the year, here is a snapshot of what Renison has been like during the pandemic.

2020

January 2020: A virus causing respiratory symptoms is identified.

March 3: the first case of COVID-19 is detected in Waterloo Region.

March 11: COVID-19 is declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organization.

March 13: Classes across Waterloo campus are suspended and subsequently transitioned to online delivery. All on-campus activities are suspended.

March 16: All employees who are able, begin working remotely.

March 17: State of Emergency is declared by the government of Ontario. Access to Renison is restricted to all but student residents and essential staff.

March 20: Most residents leave Renison residence facilities. Those unable to find alternate accommodation remain in residence.

March 24: Renison closes to students, faculty, and staff with the exception of remaining residents and essential staff.

April 14: Student Urgent Needs (SUN) Bursary is earmarked for COVID-19 related financial challenges for students.

April 23: Renison employee sews and delivers over 50 fabric masks for students and staff still working on campus.

April 28: Renison's Community and Professional Education Spring courses are moved online.

May 1: Takeaway orders begin to be offered from Food Services for Renison community members.

May 11 – Spring term begins one week later than originally scheduled. All degree courses will be delivered remotely.

May 22: Renison announces all Fall term courses will be delivered online.

June 15: Renison decides not to open its residence for the Fall term.

June 17: Renison celebrates its first online Convocation.

September 9: Student support staff start holding "Walk and Talk" sessions for students every Wednesday to provide physically-distant connection points.

October 8: Renison announces that Winter term classes will be delivered fully online.

October 31: Renison's Wellness Committee plans staff Hallowe'en activities online.

November 11: A new Staff Emergency Fund is created to help Renison employees facing financial hardship due to the pandemic.

December: Renison celebrates a second online Convocation

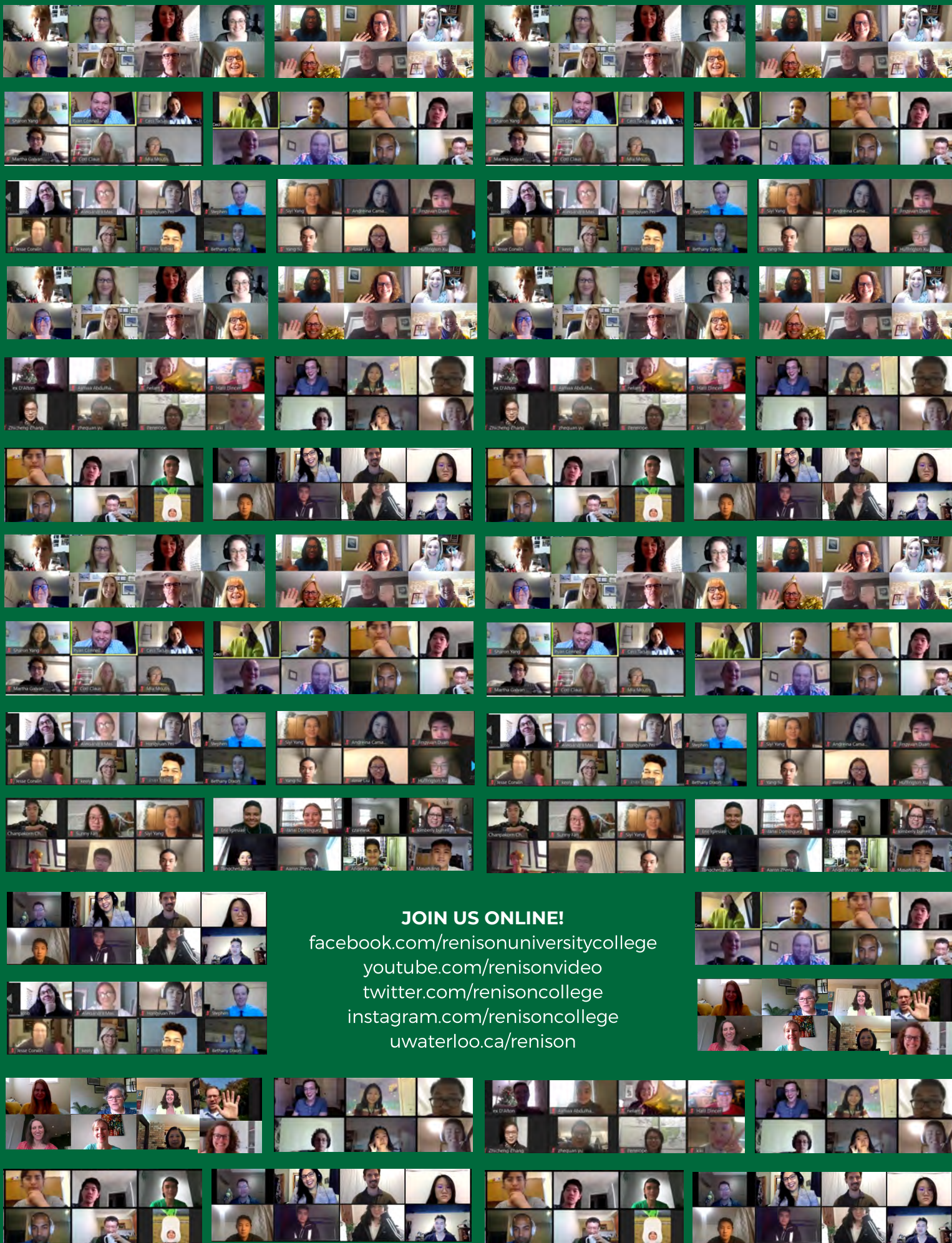
2021

January 11: Winter term starts online.

March 10: Zoom vigil held by Renison's Chaplain to mourn the victims of COVID-19

September: Planned re-opening of residence.





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