



2024 RENISON REPORTS



RENISON
UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE

AFFILIATED WITH THE **UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO**

TERRITORIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

With gratitude, we acknowledge that Renison University College is located on the traditional territory of the Anishinaabeg, Hodinohsyó:ni, and Attawandaran (Neutral) Peoples, which is situated on the Haldimand Tract, land granted to the Six Nations that includes ten kilometres on each side of the Grand River from mouth to source.

Our active work toward reconciliation takes place in all corners of our campus through research, learning, teaching, community building, and outreach.

We are guided by the work of our Anti-Racism and Decolonization Spokescouncil, and the University of Waterloo [Office of Indigenous Relations](#).

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Written, Edited, and Designed by:
Nancy Schnarr, Communications Manager, Renison University College

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Wendy L. Fletcher, President and Vice-Chancellor, Renison University College
Cort Egan, Director, External Relations and Communications, Renison University College
Oindrilla Ghosh, Library & Communications Assistant, Renison University College

Meeting the Moment

With the completion of our new Strategic Plan, Renison stands on the cusp of a new chapter. We have defined our core commitments, our strategic goals and our institutional objectives and priorities. Facing the future boldly, we commit ourselves to rising to the occasion of this new chapter no longer constrained by COVID, but now limited by the systemic and financial challenges posed by the recent actions of both our provincial and federal governments and the economic strains currently affecting not only our university partner, but all publicly funded post-secondary institutions.



Wendy L. Fletcher, Renison President and Vice Chancellor

In the face of our many challenges, we may be tempted to bemoan this present but let us not tarry there too long. Instead let us embrace our rapidly evolving context, in all its complexity, with kind hearts and critical minds. There is always a Way. It will not be the same as former ways but there will be a Way. My three and half decades working in the university sector have taught me this. No matter what rises or falls, there is always a Way. What belongs to us is the work of reinvention and grit determination, as over and over again, we hold the course and in so doing birth tomorrow's Way: from the wisdom of our past and our hope for the future driven forward by our imagination and goodwill. Today's challenges are the crises which frame our *Kairos*: our propitious moment for action and change.

As we let go of the post COVID era, begin a new Strategic Plan and welcome a new President, we frame a new and different future for Renison, I am reminded of the moving words written by poet Amanda Gorman for President Obama's Inauguration:

"Our people diverse and beautiful will emerge,
battered and still beautiful.

When the day comes, we step out of the shade aflame and unafraid, the new dawn blooms, as we free it.

For there was always light.
If only we're brave enough to see it.
If only we're brave enough to be it."



Wendy L. Fletcher
President and Vice-Chancellor
Renison University College

Introduction

The theme of Renison's three-year Strategic Plan is *Meeting the Moment*. This simple phrase has become something of a mantra at Renison over the past six months because, in reality, it is anything but simple.

To *really* meet the moment takes courage, commitment and careful introspection.

We are at a moment in history that is demanding more from its leaders and its institutions.

You can see evidence of Renison meeting the moment in the work of its Reconciliation and Re-storying Steering Committee. A large group of Renison staff, faculty and students met regularly over an 18 month period to question, study, probe and interrogate our College's history, its story, its founding, its roots in the Anglican Church, even its name, and how we carry that past into today and into the future. At the heart of this investigation was a desire to ensure that we are continuing to meet our obligation to our students and community who come to us from all walks of life, all cultures, all faiths or no faith, and that we are providing a safe, welcoming and supportive environment to our entire community, both today and in the future. This work was challenging and required everyone involved to park their own desires and beliefs and embrace the work with an open mind.



You can see evidence of Renison meeting the moment in the work of the recent Strategic Planning project. Recognizing that to bring an equity and diversity lens to this work, we required the help of an external agency that specializes in that field. The final outcome of the three-year strategic plan is significantly better than it would have been without the guidance and direction of equity professionals; recognizing our own limitations required us to meet the moment.

You can also see evidence of Renison meeting the moment in the most recent student awards and funded bursaries that have been added over the past two years. Approximately \$20,000 in new, annual student awards and bursaries that prioritize students who have been historically underrepresented or subject to discrimination. These equity deserving groups include racialized peoples, members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community, students who are differently abled, intersectional individuals and international students.

We are unable to meet the moment without the support and endorsement of our community. You have helped Renison to meet the moment through your generous support of Students First and other initiatives designed to open doors and remove barriers to their academic success and personal growth. Thank you.



Cort Egan, Director, External Relations and Communications
Renison University College



Left to right: Wendy L. Fletcher, Renison President and Vice Chancellor, Ven. Megan Collings-Moore, Archdeacon and former Renison Chaplain, Melanie McKellar, Director of HR and Infrastructure

Reflecting on Renison: a Q&A with Outgoing President and Vice-Chancellor Dr. Wendy L. Fletcher

Since 2014, Dr. Wendy L. Fletcher has held the position of President and Vice-Chancellor at Renison University College. She has provided steadfast leadership including guiding Renison through the global pandemic and one of the most difficult, complex, and challenging periods in our history. After a well-deserved sabbatical, Wendy will return to her teaching responsibilities at Renison and will oversee the newly created Centre for Spirituality and Wisdom Practices. Before she steps away, Cort Egan (Director of External Relations and Communications) asked about her time at the helm of Renison University College.

CE: *You've been president and vice-chancellor of Renison for over a decade and led Renison through some of its most challenging periods, including the recent global pandemic. Looking back, what will stand out for you as your most important achievements?*

WF: For me, creating a more inclusive and equitable community is number one. I don't mean to suggest that Renison was not inclusive

and equitable, but it lacked structure, policy and frameworks around these values. Introducing some structure unfolded in several ways:

Ten years ago, there was no faculty association. Faculty salaries lacked consistency and transparency in how they were administered. Within my first year, we had University of Waterloo conduct a salary analysis of all of our faculty. We introduced the same salary scale as the Faculty of Arts; this meant that most faculty salaries increased in order to align with that scale. This introduced transparency, fairness and equity into faculty compensation. Through this process, we discovered that many of our English for Multilingual Speakers (EMLS) instructors were not recognized as faculty and therefore were not being fairly compensated. We first conducted an external review of their credentials and teaching qualifications, and then we brought those faculty members on as continuing lecturers and ensured that their salaries were consistent with their counterparts at main campus.

Staff salaries were also lacking structure and fell into three main areas:

The English Language Institute (ELI)

This part of the college housed a lot of precarious employment. There was very little job security; most of the instructors were hired as sessionals and had no benefits, job security, or pension plan. We were unable to approach this group in the same way we did with faculty, but we were able to regularize them as ongoing contracts.

Kitchen, Housekeeping and Facilities Staff

Much of our kitchen and housekeeping staff had worked and lived in our community for many years but were not employees of Renison; most were employees of outside companies. Through our salary and benefits auditing program, we soon discovered that this group was not earning a living wage, they had no access to benefits or paid sick leave. When it came time to renew our contract with the external companies, we arranged to take on these staff as Renison employees. They now had access to paid sick leave, a pension plan and benefits including tuition assistance for themselves and their family members. This was life-changing for many of these people. I was nearing the end of my first term as president by the time all these

changes were introduced. Now that we had the kitchen, housekeeping and facilities staff on payroll, we wanted to introduce the same consistency, equity and transparency in staff salaries as we had introduced with our faculty salaries. We hired an external consultancy firm to conduct a salary review and audit to introduce the same level of equity, fairness and transparency in staff salaries that we had introduced in faculty salaries. This work included conducting a marketplace study to ensure that our compensation was not only fair internally, but that it was competitive in the labour market. This work took almost another two full years to complete.

Culture and Language Studies Staff

An additional source of inequity resided in the area that is now known as Culture and Language Studies. We had a variety of programs including East Asian Studies, Religious Studies, English, Studies in Islam and a few others that had no departmental home and therefore no dedicated leadership. We grouped them all under the general heading of Culture and Language Studies, introduced a Chair, and created an academic unit that had the same standing within the college as Social Development Studies and the School of Social Work; this gave the group a voice at the table.

All of these projects served to bring us closer together as a College, but we lacked a unifying vision. The Latin term, *sed coelum solum*, had long been connected to the college, but the term was translated a variety of ways including, above us only sky. My approach to the Latin phrase was to open it up to an expression that would maintain the spirit of the original meaning while, at the same time, embrace the spirit that the college had come to represent. *One Sky Over All* was born. This interpretation of the Latin phrase more aptly captures the inclusive beliefs, attitudes and principles that we had worked so hard to introduce. This phrase has become our way of expressing ourselves to the world in terms of our core values.

CE: *How did you help bring all of these elements, and stakeholders, together?*

WF: So much of what we do at Renison is building bridges of understanding; to my mind, that spirit is most epitomized in the work we do with our East

Asian partners. Our work brings us in close partnership with diplomats, consuls general and ambassadors from Korea, mainland China and Japan. Despite the geopolitical differences and tensions that exist between these nations, we are able to work together in harmony and even celebrate music, culture, cuisine and dance through such events as our One Sky Festival, which will be celebrating 30 years in November. It is under our sky that representatives of these three flags come together to celebrate not only their similarities, but their differences. I've also had occasion to travel to the countries that represent our core programmatic interests and to see firsthand what's possible in terms of bridging across geopolitical difference. I am proud of the partnerships that we have solidified and the bridges of understanding and cooperation that we have helped to build.

CE: *It would be difficult to reflect on the past ten years without discussing COVID. What did the pandemic mean for Renison?*

WF: We responded quickly to COVID. We took immediate measures, such as incorporating the Work-Sharing program, that were not popular, but were necessary for the financial health of the institution. Unlike some of the larger universities and colleges, we were operating with very limited margins and a small reserve. We survived the pandemic without dipping into our limited reserve and for that I am proud.

Renison has new challenges to face as we move into 2024. Like all publicly funded institutions, we must contend with the modifications that have been introduced with respect to Bill 124; more importantly, we must continue to work through the chronic underfunding of post-secondary education by the Ontario government. But these are 2024 challenges and we are here to face them because of the action we took to survive the pandemic.

CE: *What's next for you, Wendy?*

WF: After twenty-five years of administration, it's time to return to the work of my heart. I am a teacher, a spiritual leader and an artist. As I lean into my sabbatical, I hope to be invited to engage in some artistic projects and some research projects that really capture my imagination. I'm going to think

deeply into the meaning of this work, not as an administrator, but to live it as a human being in a new way. When I return after my sabbatical, I will oversee our new Centre for Spirituality and Wisdom Practices. This centre will be the reflection of everything I have learned through this life journey. I still have a lot to learn, but the lessons I want life to teach me now are not in relation to administrating, but in relation to understanding and expressing.

CE: *During the pandemic you created an art project in which you created paintings based on colours that employees of Renison chose to represent different periods of the pandemic. Can you comment on that?*

WF: The art project was a way for me to be connected to the members of the Renison family, for them to be connected with each other, and to give us all a common thread to hold onto. The paintings, in a way, became a shared heart in which we could all find ourselves, and all find each other. We have a common heart at Renison; we all care about the work of education and supporting our students in realizing their potential, fulfilling their promise, reaching their goals. We all care deeply about that. I was attempting to find that place where our hearts meet; finding a place that we share in terms of this work of education. On those canvasses, our hearts and our goals became one.



The Colours of Renison
Left - *Renison Resilience*: Created using employee-submitted colours that represented what Renison was experiencing during the early COVID-19 pandemic.
Right Triptych) - *Renison Recovery*: Created in 2022 using employee-submitted colours to represent Renison, with a unifying gold bar at the top of each section.



Saying Farewell to President Wendy L. Fletcher

Before Dr. Fletcher’s term ends in June 2024, we have asked community members to reflect on what her leadership has meant to them, and offered a word to describe her (shown in the word cloud above). We had a huge response; the following is just a small selection of what was submitted, but demonstrates the lasting impact of President Wendy L. Fletcher.

Thank you, Wendy, for your outstanding leadership

CHARMAINE DEAN

“As you prepare to embark on your next journey, I find myself reflecting on the indelible mark you've left on our institution and on each of us personally.

Your tenure as president has been nothing short of visionary, deeply rooted in a genuine care for the human experience that defines our community.

GRANT LEACH

I SEE HER SOUL THROUGH HER SMILE!

Sita

You don't know the extent of the positive impact you have made on the Renison community. Your kind, respectful and positive leadership, has meant a lot to me and to the community.

ANONYMOUS

Your calm, kind and measured leadership is very much appreciated, and you will be missed by the Renison and Waterloo communities.

Jean Becker

Your collaborative and dedicated approach has served both Renison and the University of Waterloo well.

ALLAN STARR

Your energy, excitement, vision, dedication and commitment are contagious.

Scott McLeod

“It has been really important to me to see a woman as our president and see her act as a leader, make difficult decisions, tell people things they don't want to hear, and be her authentic, compassionate self throughout.”

CHRISTINE LOGEL

Thank you for your
stewardship and
leadership of Renison
University College. You
are a delight to work
with!

CATHY NEWELL KELLY

**You are an excellent
leader and your
legacy will continue
for many years to
come.**

Jacinda Reitsma

Thanks so much for your
leadership, and the warmth
and thoughtfulness that you
always shared with those
around you.

JEFF CASELLO

**Thank you, Wendy for
being such a
thoughtful and
committed AFIW
colleague. It has been
a pleasure to work
with and get to know
you.**

Peter Meehan

Sending you all best wishes and many
thanks for being such a thoughtful and
collaborative colleague!

SHEILA AGER

“I am reminded of what Plato said in
Book 5 of his Republic when describing
the Guardians for his ideal state. They
must be strong, brave, and loyal he says.
And, unusual for his times, they could
be male or female. Wendy was this and
more.”

BRIAN HENDLEY

**YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS TO
YOUR ACADEMIC COMMUNITY
AND YOUR EXAMPLE OF
EARNEST, JOYFUL AND
STEADFAST LEADERSHIP ARE
VALUED MORE THAN YOU WILL
EVER KNOW .**

John Abraham

Wendy has always been
incredibly warm and
welcoming, helping me to
feel like part of the team
since day 1.

ANONYMOUS

Renison Launches Strategic Plan to Guide the College's Next Three Years

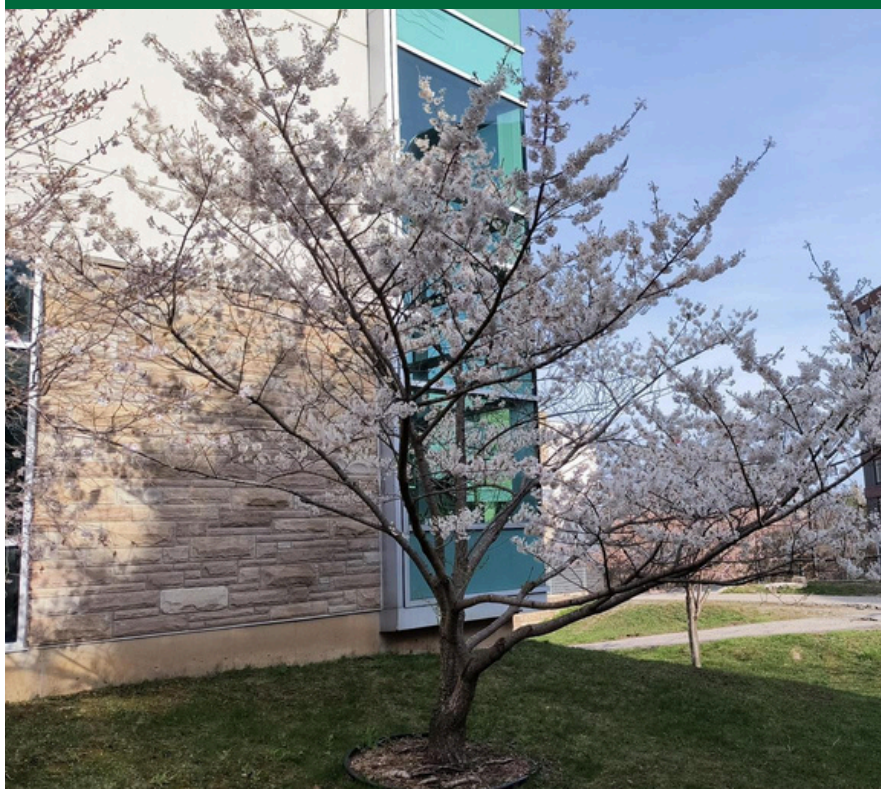
In March, 2024, Renison launched its new Strategic Plan, designed to lead the College through to the end of 2027.

Lead by the Turner Consulting Group, and approached through a lens of equity, diversity, and inclusion, Renison's process in developing this new plan was highly consultative in nature. The process began in October 2023 with the formation of a Steering Committee with representation from each sector of the Renison community including students, faculty, staff, alumni, and donors.

The framework of the Plan was built through a series of focus groups designed to reach all constituency groups. Students, faculty, staff and the Board of Governors each had dedicated focus groups; alumni were invited to attend in person and were also engaged through a variety of online opportunities. As early drafts of the plan were created, all constituency groups were invited to engage in the work and add comments, feedback and recommendations. Several community cafes were also hosted, allowing the entire Renison community to engage in person, or through online forms.

A desire to maintain a student-centred approach to our work is reflected in the Strategic Plan. The first priority itemized in the Plan is to continue to

Below: A Renison Sakura (Cherry Blossom) tree begins to bloom in Spring 2024.



nurture transformative student leaders. This is an area in which Renison students have excelled over the years. Renison students and graduates are committed to making positive contributions to their communities and beyond; committing to continue this tradition and to put measures in place to gauge success was important to the committee.

We agreed on the need to demonstrate the value we place on the diverse backgrounds and perspectives of our students, staff, and faculty. We have committed to cultivate a foundation of Indigenization and inclusion, diversity, and equity that is core to our curriculum, community expectations, policies, and practices. This priority will not only help us to meet the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, but it will also help Renison move toward an environment in which everyone feels welcome, that they belong, and that they are able to contribute their best.

The committee understood that our community is what makes Renison strong. We therefore committed to continuing to foster positive living, learning, and working environments where all members of the Renison community share a sense of belonging and in which they are recognized, valued, and respected.

Ultimately, Renison is a community that fosters learning. We commit to investing in our unique educational programs in order to allow our students to develop the knowledge and skills to contribute positively to an ever-changing world. Renison will continue to recruit, nurture, and retain diverse top-tier employees who are committed to offering adaptive education in rapidly changing local and global contexts.

Our final priority necessarily focuses on institutional sustainability. Like so many colleges and universities in Ontario, Renison is struggling financially and will need to develop creative means to meet our growing needs.

Renison's new Strategic Plan can be found in its entirety online: [2024-2027 Strategic Plan](#), including a downloadable pdf. Updates to the Strategic Plan will begin in January, 2025.

A stitch in time: Two Renison quilters find peace in patchwork.

Quilting is a handicraft with a long history. Some sources suggest it emerged during Medieval times as a quilted garment under armor, but there is evidence that stitching padding and fabric together could date back as far as 3400 BCE! Since the beginnings, quilted items have been practical and beautiful, and provided a focal point for social interaction. Ever heard of a quilting bee? It's a gathering where quilters share skills and techniques, and generally catch up.

It's no wonder why this craft has such longevity. Two members of the Renison community, Brenda Maciel and Julia Williams, have picked up the needle and found peace (or perhaps piece) in patchwork.

For Brenda Maciel, Assistant to the School of Social Work, the call to quilting came during the COVID-19 pandemic. Brenda has a strong creative side; her cricut creations are legendary around Renison, and can be seen hanging through the Social Work hallway and various places on campus. Quilting was another hobby to spend time on amidst bouts of crafting, cross-stitch and sewing, and she pursued it with vigor.

Brenda Maciel works on a quilt at her Kitchen island.



Brenda's first quilt, seen here, was created as a tribute to her mother after she passed, and was gifted to Brenda's father.

The idea for Brenda's first quilt took hold during another project, sewing pyjamas for her child's first term in university residence. She came across a t-shirt quilt and thought, "I want to try that" and so she did! The first quilt was sewn for her Dad after her Mother's passing and the project was, in her own words, "terrifying." After that, Brenda developed her skills by making baby quilts with pre-cut fabric, and started visiting the quilting stores in the area. She was off and running – or more accurately driving - to quilting stores near and far for expertise.

Brenda's mother, left, and grandmother, right, show a quilt that Brenda hopes to recreate. The photo was taken in 1989, and Brenda hadn't seen the quilt before finding the photo.



It's probably no surprise, but Brenda has quilting in her genes. Her grandmother and great aunt were the quilters in the family; Brenda has three quilts from her great aunt, including a quilt given as a wedding present. More recently, Brenda found a photo of her mother and grandmother holding a quilt she'd never seen before. Each block is a different pattern, and she hopes to recreate it in honour of the family quilters. It hasn't been an easy process, however, it's taken time and consultation with her favourite quilt store owner to identify each pattern.



Julia Williams, Chair and Professor in Renison's Culture and Language Studies department, is also an avid quilter. She began quilting as an adult but always liked to create and really enjoyed sewing ever since learning to sew in a school home economics course. From there she practiced on an old Singer sewing machine she received as a gift from her mother when she was just a teenager.

For Julia, too, there was a moment in time when it became obvious that quilting was a good fit for her. She started by taking a quilting course with a friend,

Above: a self-portrait art quilt created by Julia.

creating several quilted blocks and learning techniques and skills before putting everything together. She says that her sewing experience worked in her favour; the stitching came naturally.

Julia favours art quilts, which don't follow a set pattern, but she switches back and forth between creating the large quilts that can be used for beds, and art quilts, which are typically used as wall hangings. According to Julia, art quilts are particularly challenging because of the lack of pattern "you just have to figure out what you want to create." That said, she loves a great pattern and beautiful fabrics and seeing how things come together with a great combination.

The history of quilting and fabrics is a source of inspiration for Julia. She shares that quilts have been used as maps and directional signs based on the design – and they were even used to show the way for those following the underground railway!

Below: Julia's quilt, called "People send flowers when you break your hip" created during recovery following a broken hip



Currently, Julia is working on a quilt made up of fabric from her grandparents' house, which date in and around the 1920s. The fabrics of the time were very different from what is available and fashionable now, and they are also very delicate due to their age. She has learned a lot about fabrics from her travels around the world and has fabrics from Africa, the Middle East and the Netherlands.

Looking at fabrics in new places is one of the things Julia recommends for new quilters – to explore and look around at quilting stores, "you can learn a lot from just looking around!"



Above: a quilt created by Julia called "Tile."

Both Brenda and Julia have great advice for anyone thinking about taking up quilting:

Brenda: Start small; pre-cut fabric might be more expensive but, especially for small projects, it makes learning easy and you'll make fewer mistakes. You can learn a lot from Youtube and find free patterns online. I also recommend waiting to spend a lot of money on a sewing machine until you really know you want to stick with quilting. And finally – shop local and ask questions!

Julia: Go ahead and try it – it's so much fun! Start small, you'll get a lot of satisfaction from creating something yourself. An introductory course is a great way to get started because you'll learn the basics and be able to ask questions.



Above: Brenda's most recent quilt, held by her (right) and colleague Gwen Potter (left). It uses t-shirts from Renison over the years and will be displayed in a location on campus, still to be determined.



Above: a quilt created by Julia called "Flowers."

Faith. Networking. A Universal Language.

Joseph Olubobokun (right) is a Renison Board member and a generous donor to the College. Time and money are both finite and therefore valued possessions. The decision to give both to a single organization is meaningful; Joseph's story is worth sharing.

The road that led Joseph Olubobokun from Lagos, Nigeria to Waterloo, Ontario is long and complex and included lengthy detours in London, England; Tulsa, Oklahoma; Woodstock, Ontario and North Portal, Saskatchewan. Throughout his sojourning, three sign posts were constant companions on Joseph's journey: faith, networking, and a universal language.

Joseph jokes that as an adolescent he found himself between a rock and a hard place; his dad was the rock and his mom was the hard place. Both parents valued education and led by example. Joseph's father was the director of music for the Nigerian Army, a university instructor, a visiting lecturer and, later in life, returned to school to earn a Master of Theology degree and became an ordained Anglican minister. His mom was a schoolteacher for 37 years; she too returned to school to earn a Master's degree, hers in guidance counselling. There was never any doubt that education would play a significant role in Joseph's life, he just wasn't sure what form that education would take.

After four years of boarding school, Joseph first studied Physics at Lagos State University; not a good fit, he earned a degree in Sociology and Anthropology. Unable to find work in his chosen field, Joseph became fascinated with the world of computing. It was the early 1990's and having a grounding in computers became a master key for advancing his career. It



also proved to be a universal language that would serve Joseph well throughout his many travels. As he made his way from Lagos to London, and then to Tulsa, and ultimately Ontario, it was his proficiency with computers and the ability to provide networking and other computing support that served to open doors internationally.

Joseph is a skilled computer networking expert, and that has always served him well professionally, but it's his natural ability to personally network that brought him to the next level. Describing himself as an "uber-extrovert," Joseph finds that after a day working behind a screen, he needs to plug in to a social outlet to recharge his own batteries. Occasionally, he will even drive to the nearest Walmart to be in the company of people. Joseph is a people-magnet; if you need to find him in a crowded room, he'll be the one holding court in a large scrum of people. At every turn, Joseph made friends with someone who would help to open a door or provide a new direction for his future.



Above: Joseph (right) with his wife (left) and son (centre) at his son's graduation from Laurier.

More than anything, it was Joseph's faith that ultimately led him to Renison. Before he was even able to pinpoint Waterloo on a world map, he learned through prayer that Ontario, Canada would be his home. While living in England, shortly after emigrating from Lagos, Joseph returned to the Church in a concerted way. Attending service three times each week, he became the *de facto* youth pastor for the congregation, often guiding and counselling up to 40 teenagers at a time. Most were being raised by single



Joseph (right) with his wife (left.)

moms, and Joseph also became a surrogate dad. When one of these teenage boys died suddenly, Joseph had the unusual and uncomfortable feeling of being entirely out of his depth. “The penny dropped for me,” as he explained, “I needed to understand how to serve God in order to serve my community.” This realization guided Joseph to Tulsa, Oklahoma for two years of dedicated and intense Bible school and personal reflection. It was a connection he made in Tulsa that opened the door to Woodstock via Saskatchewan. The church was always a conduit to the larger community; in Woodstock, Joseph once again found himself serving his community by supporting its youth. Teen pregnancy, truancy and illiteracy were significant issues in a community that had high unemployment and limited prospects. Joseph was now better equipped to serve.

By the time Joseph landed in Waterloo, all signposts were pointing in the same direction. His personal networking and faith connected him to a pastor in Waterloo; his computing expertise landed him a job with BlackBerry. Soon, a member of the congregation who also served on the faculty at Renison, urged Joseph to bring his experience and passion for service to the Renison Board. Joseph found confidence in the community work of Renison through its School of Social Work and Social Development Studies program; he found a place for his faith in Renison’s history with the Anglican Church and commitment to pastoral care of its students; and he found the benefits of our language training programs, such as those found in our English Language Institute, as a key that will unlock doors for newcomers to Canada. Joseph found his home.

Meeting People Where They're At: Breaking down barriers for clients through YouTube

Below: Renison alum Rachael Fowler

You can find anything online. Replacing a sink? Want to get into yoga? Need to know what plants will work in the shade of your backyard? It's all there, right at your fingertips. That's exactly why Renison alum Rachael Fowler wanted to go online for an educational series about therapy. Since graduating, Rachael has been working with a wide variety of clients, including some who are hesitant to try therapy. So she wanted to introduce clients to therapy to prepare for sessions, make the concepts accessible, and get to the heart (or mind) of the matter.

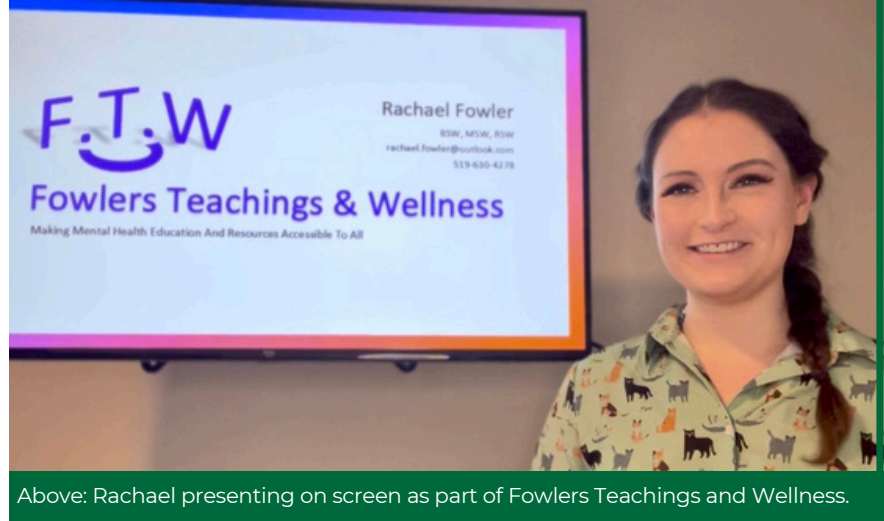


Rachael says she's always been interested in exploring the why of the nervous system. Let's look at it from a science perspective," she says. "What's going on in the body when the nervous system is triggering a response?" It's a perspective that links psychology and physiology, and provides an entry point for clients who may be less comfortable with traditional therapy.

Rachael says that Renison is one of the reasons she has gone down this road. Her studies at Renison began with an undergraduate Social Development Studies (SDS) degree, and continued through a Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) degree and a Master of Social Work (MSW) degree. The content of courses got her interested in trauma and investigating what happens to the body, and equipped her with tools to see things from a variety of different lenses, and "meet people wherever they're at."

The concept of "meeting people where they are at" was the central focus when Rachael began designing her video series. Clients can use the series to ease themselves in, learn and reflect before or after a session, and even save financial resources. "We can expedite the process," explains Rachael. "It takes 6-8 sessions sometimes to get through the foundations, and then we might be at the end of the sessions covered by benefits or EAPs." It can also help families navigate when one or more members are seeking

therapy. “Everyone in the family can be using the same terminology, and understand the tools being used,” Rachael points out. It all stems from the desire to make therapy accessible, and “meet people where they’re at.”



Above: Rachael presenting on screen as part of Fowlers Teachings and Wellness.

The idea for the video series came about just after the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, when therapy and counselling were still largely being conducted online. After a speaking engagement where Rachael described the tools she used in her practice she sat down and created a PowerPoint presentation with all of the things she wished clients knew before walking through the door. Filming on her own at first, Rachael got support from others to complete filming, and had her website designed *pro bono*.

The videos are now out for everyone to see, but Rachael sends them to individual clients. “The biggest success is that family members of some of the teenagers I work with say ‘I finally understand,’” says Rachael. “People have their own understanding of, or experience with, things like anxiety and this helps them all get on the same page.” She also uses the videos to supplement her work with clients, particularly those who may only be able to afford a few sessions.

Since beginning this project, Rachael has launched Fowler’s Teachings and Wellness, continues to do speaking engagements, and has begun to work with athletic organizations to bring a mental health perspective into sports. She’s also the newest co-host of the Social Work Me podcast, which aims to connect social work professionals with tools and resources, and provide a space to have conversations about mental health.

Rachael plans to continue to expand the series to make more and more videos available, knowing that each of these pieces can make a big difference for clients; “each client is a beautifully intricate mosaic,” she explains. “Small shifts can create an entirely different, and equally beautiful picture. My job is to help clients build the life they envision for themselves, piece by piece.”

50 years and 6 months later: Reflections on a Reunion weekend



Above: Participants of the Residence Reunion pose for a group photo in Renison's atrium.

In August 2023, Renison played host to a group of rowdy Renison residents... from the 1970s! This high-energy group brought their school spirit back to where most of them had connected and began lifelong friendships.

Mary Anne Lenio first called Renison in 2019 to talk about a possible reunion of her friends from Renison after a dinner with old friends Conrad So, Mac Dover, and Margrie (Mickey) Wallace. "It all began with Conrad," Mary Anne says with a laugh. "He said we should really do something to get us all together and, after making some calls, he said we've gotta have a reunion. So we did!" Now, 6 months after the fact, we caught up with Mary Anne to get her reflections on the reunion.

The reunion was originally slated to happen in 2020, but was postponed (along with most things) due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2022 they began planning again in earnest, but it would take another year to pull everything together.

“We started with a small core group of organizers,” says Mary Anne. “Conrad was key – he had stayed in touch with everyone!” The small group (with Conrad’s help) enlisted folks from all over Canada, and worked as hard as they could to get in touch with as many people as possible from Renison during the mid-1970s. It wasn’t always easy, some folks had passed away, lived too far to travel, or couldn’t be located.

Even so, more than 50 Renison alumni participated in the weekend, travelling from as far away as Hong Kong and BC! Among the highlights was a special Stone Garden ceremony on the opening evening to connect everyone, reflect, and think of those who couldn’t be there. The Saturday Wind-In Gala was the fan favourite though, with Bill (Bilbo) Stewart presiding as MC. A wonderful meal, good company, and a surprise dance mob completed the evening, which stretched into the night and even continued back at the Delta hotel where most attendees stayed.

After 50 years, it was a great way to reconnect with old friends. “It was like 50 years hadn’t happened,” says Mary Anne. “It’s been really great to connect with people who haven’t been in touch for a long time – we even have a WhatsApp group!”

What advice does Mary Anne have for those considering planning their own Renison reunion? “Do it!” She says. “It will take a good year or two to plan, depending on how long it’s been.” She also recommends starting with a small group to plan with, delegate, and work closely with Renison. “We had a really dedicated group of core planners,” explains Mary Anne. “That, plus the help of the Renison team, made it an amazing weekend.”

Will there be a 60th reunion? “Maybe,” Mary Anne laughs. “If we can all still get there, we might go for it!”



The Reunion committee, left to right: Sam Biggs, Margrie (Mickey) Wallace, Conrad So, Mary Anne Lenio, Mac Dover, and Bill (Bilbo) Stewart.

Addressing Food Insecurity at Renison

By Oindrilla Ghosh, Library and Communications Assistant

Renison community members might notice a new addition to the hallway, tucked into the vestibule beside the Ministry Centre and the outdoor space where students can be found gathering for regular bonfires. In this small space, Renison's Student Wellness and Food Security Committee has made a big impact, with the new Community Fridge and Cupboard.

The Community Fridge and Cupboard was brought to fruition after noticing that when WUSA (Waterloo Undergraduate Student Association) Food Support Services would drop off excess food at Renison, and it was distributed for free, the number of students and community members taking the food was high. With the rise of known food insecurity across campus, the Committee discussed the possibility of extending the idea into a community fridge and cupboard. They consulted reports that addressed food security issues during the pandemic and spoke to students who self-identified as being in need. Food insecurity is often an invisible problem, which is why the Community Fridge and Cupboard can help to address food insecurity while protecting anonymity.

To understand how the WUSA Food Support System works and how it could be implemented at Renison, the committee met with WUSA on the University of Waterloo's main campus, got a tour of the facility, and gathered details on how their systems work. WUSA Food Support runs like a food bank; their support takes a direct approach as they provide food hampers to individuals. Students can receive up to four food

The new fridge and cupboard at Renison, stocked with foodstuffs and other essentials for the Renison community.



hampers and one hygiene hamper per month. Their support does not end there, the WUSA Food Support service also hosts multiple food lockers across campus accompanied by a fridge containing fresh produce.

While the WUSA Food Support Service provides ample support to the campus community, it is restricted to Waterloo students. With the implementation of the community fridge and cupboard, Renison aims to provide support to not just students but also members of the Waterloo and Renison community. After visiting the lockers and fridges on the main campus, Food Services Manager Tim Farley and Renison Chaplain Scott McLeod realized the potential positive impact that a community fridge and cupboard could have on the community, especially since there were none across the creek from Ring Road at any of the University Colleges.

After fixing up an old fridge, the Student Wellness Food Security Committee found the perfect home for it alongside a spare cupboard at Renison. With a partnership between the Renison Student Wellness Food Security Committee and WUSA Food Support Service the fridge and cupboard run entirely on donations. In the beginning, the fridge was only open at limited hours to gauge the engagement and ensure that the food was reaching those who needed it. It took time for the word to get around and the food used. There are often periods when the food is not accessed, making it difficult to quantify the impact on the community. “Sometimes we don’t know if food is still there because folks have enough to eat, or if they don’t know about the resource” comments Farley. “We are doing what we can to make sure the food reaches those who need it.”

While the committee has done so much to support the community, they believe that more work needs to be done. The next steps include spreading the word and increasing access to the Fridge and Cupboard. The fridge and cupboard are now open and accessible 24 hours every day. The goal of this initiative is to ensure that everyone is fed and to accomplish this, the committee requests feedback; email the [Student Wellness Food Security Committee](#) with questions, concerns, and suggestions. If someone has something to donate, contact [Tim Farley](#) or [Scott McLeod](#).

If you would like to donate fresh dry goods, please drop them off at the Ministry Centre. Check out the fridge and cupboard across from the Lusi Wong Library and beside the Ministry Centre at Renison University College.



Link-ing Students Together

If you've been in the halls of Renison over the last few months, you may have noticed a new lounge space in the location previously occupied by the Renison Registrar Office. This space, which had originally been slated for a student lounge before being used as an office, was ideal because of its central location and proximity to the student-run Moose Tracks Connection desk. The hallway is known as "The Link" because it links the area of Renison where Social Development Studies and the School of Social Work reside, to the Great Hall, Library, Chapel and classroom spaces. The Link Lounge, together with Moose Tracks, means that the Link is now largely student space, easily accessible and on the main level of Renison. We spoke with Ryan Connell, Assistant Director of Student Experience and Housing (SEAH) at Renison, about the new lounge.

The idea for a new student lounge came from a couple of places, but the main driver was after the group Racialized Students of Renison (RSOR) hosted a panel in February 2023. At that event, a desire was expressed for a space where racialized students could come together and connect in a safe and supportive way. This led to conversations about how Renison can better support equity-deserving groups and subsequent data gathering to identify student groups and their needs.

Once the lounge space had been established, it was ready for students at the beginning of the 2023 Fall term. Lots of work was still to be done, but

before any other steps were taken, Ryan and his team wanted to get student input. They began by focusing on specific student groups that exist at Renison that need targeted support: Black, Indigenous, and Racialized students, 2SLGBTQ+ students, Neurodivergent students, International students, and Mature students. The goal was to ensure that supports exist within Renison for these groups, that there are safe physical spaces, and opportunities for those same students to connect. Six consultation sessions with over 30 students were facilitated by SEAH with the help of Dr. Christine Logel for sessions focused on Black, Racialized and Indigenous students, as well as neurodivergent students. All but one session focused on the needs of a specific group, with a final session for all students. Those sessions were followed by a survey, and overall about 70 students participated in the consultation.

The feedback was overall positive; students view Renison as a friendly and welcoming space. Some students however, particularly those who identify as part of the aforementioned groups, can feel isolated and are looking for ways to connect with students like themselves. There were concrete suggestions offered, like more support in residence for 2SLGBTQ+ students, especially with roommate matching. And there was feedback that identified some gaps in student communication for things like scholarships and bursaries for mature students.

How does this all relate back to the lounge space? The feedback also includes the types of retrofits students would like to see in the lounge – comfortable and moveable furniture, home-like atmosphere, less fluorescent lighting, and generally making it more cozy and inviting. The space will also be used to facilitate programming, like the Queer and Cozy gatherings and the Mature Student Coffee Chats. In the Fall of 2024 two Bachelor of Social Work Students, as part of their practicum placement, will help organize and run the events, and act as a bridge between students and SEAH staff to create intentional and effective spaces of belonging and inclusion.

Changes are coming to the Link Lounge, informed by all of the collected feedback, as part of SEAH's newly-released [Road Map for Student Belonging](#). The lounge space is just one area that has been identified as important for overall student belonging, and will be one more place for students to feel at home at Renison.

“Be strong in your heart and know what you need to do” Life as an International Student at Renison

By Oindrilla Ghosh, Library and Communications Assistant



Leo, centre wearing a lanyard with a thumbs up, stands with his instructors and a classmate at the end of year celebration for iEFAS.

Studying abroad can be very daunting for some, but not for Renison resident Leo. Leo’s story at Renison started when he enrolled in the Joint Academic Program. He began during the pandemic and started his journey at Renison through virtual classes. The Joint Academic Program allows students to complete their studies in two different countries, combining the best of both educational systems. To hear more about his story, we sat down with Leo and discussed his experiences at Renison!

Leo decided to study at the University of Waterloo for the remaining two years of his undergraduate degree. Upon arriving to Waterloo, Leo enrolled in the Intensive English for academic success (iEFAS) program at Renison. iEFAS is offered to international students to help them meet the English language requirements set by the University of Waterloo. Whilst studying in the iEFAS program, Leo also applied for residence at Renison and decided that it would be convenient for him to attend classes while living on campus.

Leo lived in Renison for two years and his love for the Renison community is obvious. Leo says that after a hard day of grueling classes and work,

when he returns to Renison he can escape from the stress that comes with being an undergraduate student: “Renison is separate from the tough study life at the University.” Watching other students enjoy the activities hosted at Renison reminds him also to take a well-deserved break and enjoy life. When asked what he enjoys the most about Renison, Leo enthused about his love for karaoke events, he especially enjoys singing the song “Viva La Vida” by Coldplay because the message of the song really resonates with him. “Just like the song says, everybody has peak times and low points, that’s life”, says Leo.

When thinking back to his first few months at Renison while he was enrolled in the iEFAS program, Leo says that the experience was invaluable. He made lifelong friends and memories in Canada, and it has helped him to push out of his comfort zone. What’s his advice to future iEFAS and international students? “Don’t be afraid to make mistakes and talk to as many people as possible, they will be your first social circle here.”

The English Language institute (ELI) at Renison runs the iEFAS program, which is designed to help international students transition to university in Canada. As part of its programming, the ELI organizes many excursions and trips for their students. Leo’s fondest memory at Renison is from a trip organized by the ELI, where he went to Canada’s Wonderland. Coincidentally the trip was on his birthday, and he had a wonderful time celebrating his 20th birthday and enjoying life in Canada.

Besides the wonderful memories, Leo was able to advance his English grammar skills, thanks to the iEFAS program and apply them in other facets of his academic career. The iEFAS program also gave him an opportunity to meet in person the Renison professors he had online classes with during the Joint Academic Program program. When asked what advice he would give to potential international students, Leo encouraged them to remember their goals and have a clear plan in mind – “Be strong in your heart and know what you need to do.”

Leo is currently on track to continue his studies with a master’s degree, and intends to continue his studies and pursue a PhD. We wish him all the best in achieving his future goals!

Let's go to Japan: Bringing Home to Renison

By Oindrilla Ghosh, Library and Communications Assistant

While working for the international institute at Tohoku University in Japan, Yoshi developed an interest in studying abroad. After researching about international academic programs, Yoshi was drawn to study in Canada because of the country's emphasis on multiculturalism and diversity. In the fall of 2022, Yoshi embarked on his international academic journey at Renison and enrolled in the General English at Renison

Yoshi, centre holding the certificate and folder, stands with instructors and classmates during the GEAR end-of-term celebration.



program (GEAR) to improve his English and presentation skills and learn about the academic environment in Canada. Having loved his experience so much in GEAR, Yoshi decided to return a year later to take part in a one-year Arts exchange at the University of Waterloo, working towards a Sociology degree. When asked why he chose Renison, Yoshi said it was because Renison offers much more than just an English program, there are also unique experiences and events offered, which adds more to the study experience.

While enrolled in the GEAR program, Yoshi found himself becoming increasingly more confident in his English-speaking skills. He explored the exchange program at the University of Waterloo and decided to complete a full academic term to continue his education in Canada. A pivotal part of Yoshi's decision to continue his education here was because of his experiences in the GEAR program; the positive feedback from his mentors motivated him to continue to do better.

During his time in GEAR, Yoshi became deeply involved with the Renison community and has participated in, and hosted, many events at the

college. During that time, Yoshi booked a one-on-one meeting with Ryan Connell (Assistant Director, Student Experience and Housing) and started discussing his previous experiences hosting events and cultural workshops for international students at the Tohoku University in Sendai. Ryan suggested that Yoshi host a similar event at Renison, highlighting Japanese culture, as there are many who are interested in learning about Japan and who want to connect with Japanese students. Yoshi found the idea to be extremely exciting and got to work! Yoshi hosted an extremely successful and popular event called “Let’s go to Japan.” Yoshi expressed how fulfilling it was to share his culture and language with those interested in learning about them. The “Let’s go to Japan” event continues to be a popular offering of the ELI, and has prompted similar events, conducted both in-person and online.

Yoshi is quick to express his enthusiasm about the multicultural community at Renison: “we can talk and share about our own cultures with each other!” Living at Renison has offered Yoshi opportunities to speak with and meet people who all come from different and culturally diverse backgrounds. Yoshi has been able to connect with international students from other countries and finds comfort in a group of friends who have all had similar experiences whilst living abroad. Yoshi says, “Since we are away from our families back home, we are like family to each other in Canada.”

When asked to describe Renison in one word, Yoshi chose ‘family,’ “Renison is kind of like a big family”. He went on to say that everyone at Renison genuinely cares for one another and that interconnectedness is an integral part of what makes Renison so special.



Yoshi, centre with hands raised, helps to host a “Let’s go to Japan” event at Renison.

In the future, Yoshi is interested in working at the international institute in a University in Japan, to help international students in Japan. He wants to create a supportive environment for those students similar to the supportive community he has had at Renison. “I want to help international students feel like home in Japan” says Yoshi.

Gaining an International Perspective: From Waterloo to Japan

After several years of limited travel, eight University of Waterloo students were able to participate in the Kakehashi Project, a week-long exchange program through Japan's Friendship Ties Programs, overseen by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. The students spent their Reading week, February 17-25, 2024 in Japan, exploring the cities of Tokyo and Aichi. Their trip was followed by a special exchange day at Waterloo when Renison hosted six Japanese students in early March. The project is designed to build mutual understanding and friendship between Canadian and Japanese students with engaging, and often transformative, intercultural experiences.

Among these students was Denise (pictured above), a Renison Social Development Studies (SDS) student who first learned of the opportunity from a listing in the SDS newsletter. She had previously participated in the Conversation Partner Program and had been paired with a Japanese student. "She always said that I should visit," says Denise. "This was a great way for me to visit her home country." Shortly after being accepted, Denise messaged her friend right away and planned to connect overseas during the exchange.

Over nine days, the exchange students experienced cutting-edge technologies at the Toyota Commemorative Museum of Industry and Technology, Panasonic Center Tokyo, and teamLAB★, and learned about

Denise stands near a Japanese-style building during her trip to Japan.



history, tradition, arts, and architecture while exploring the University of Tokyo Museum, Azabudai Hills, Harajuku, Asakusa (an older district of Tokyo), and visiting Nagoya Castle. During the visit to Chukyo University, the students were also invited to a traditional tea ceremony at a nearby temple.

“It was the best trip of my life,” gushed Denise. “I haven’t travelled a lot but meeting with new people and seeing how they interact with each other and with visitors was really interesting.” Another highlight for Denise was spending time with her host family, which included their 16 year old daughter and her friend. “We just had one big sleepover, and then in the morning we went to an arcade and took photos,” describes Denise. “We just had fun together.”

It's the human connections that resonated most with Denise during her travels. “We’re all the same, yet we’re different,” she says with a smile. Learning about a new culture has given her a new perspective, which she knows can be applied in so many ways. She’s also having fun sharing her experience with others. “I live rurally,” she explains. “A lot of folks in the community haven’t had the opportunity to travel or have many intercultural experiences, so I get to give them a bit of an introduction.”

When asked what she would say to someone who is considering going on a similar exchange, Denise encourages them to go ahead and apply, even if they’re a bit unsure. “Just see what happens,” she says. “This is a great opportunity, there is more to gain than to lose!”

Renison extends sincere gratitude to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan (MOFA) for this exchange opportunity, as well as the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada (APFC) and the Japan International Cooperation Center (JICE) for meticulous program delivery. Program implementation at Waterloo was conducted by Waterloo International, the Renison International Office, and the Culture and Language Studies department.

Founders' Day 2024 - Celebrating our History

Originally scheduled to take place in January each year, Renison's Founders' Day celebration has evolved throughout the past sixty years to better meet the needs of our community. Founders' Day has traditionally fallen on January 14, in alignment with the College's Charter Day (January 14, 1959). An argument could be made, however, for October 16, which was the official opening date of Renison's original two-storey, seven room house at 193 Albert Street.

In recent years, the Founders' Day celebration has been held in May in order to avoid the unpredictable weather patterns that can often accompany our winter months. At the outset of the pandemic, Renison introduced a hybrid version of this storied celebration. The online option was introduced as a health precaution, but it afforded the additional benefit of allowing alumni and friends from far and wide to attend. Due to its popularity, we have continued this tradition. This year's event will be held on Wednesday, May 22 from 7:00 to 9:00 pm; the formal portion of the event, including the conferring of honours, will be accessible online beginning at 7:00 pm EST. You will also find an online auction with a variety of items available for bid, with all proceeds going to student scholarships, awards and bursaries.

See all of the event and auction details by visiting the [Founders' Day webpage](#). We hope that you'll be able to join us either in person, or online.

One of the traditions of Founders' Day that has not changed is the bestowing of Renison honours on members of our community. This year we have an incredible line up of honorees:

The original Renison location, a house on Albert St. near the University of Waterloo



Distinguished Alumni 2024

Distinguished Alumni awards are 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.

This honour has become very difficult to designate in recent years, owing to the incredible achievements of our alumni. This year, the committee decided on two award recipients due to the depth of the nominations.

Nauroz Tanya (right) is an internationally recognized composer who arrived in Canada from Kurdistan in 2010 as a Refugee with \$200 to his name. Nauroz is the epitome of the strength of the human spirit and is an incredible testament to the quality of education and English Language training provided through Renison's English Language Institute. After completing his English language training at Renison, Nauroz went on to earn a Master's degree and is currently working on his doctorate.

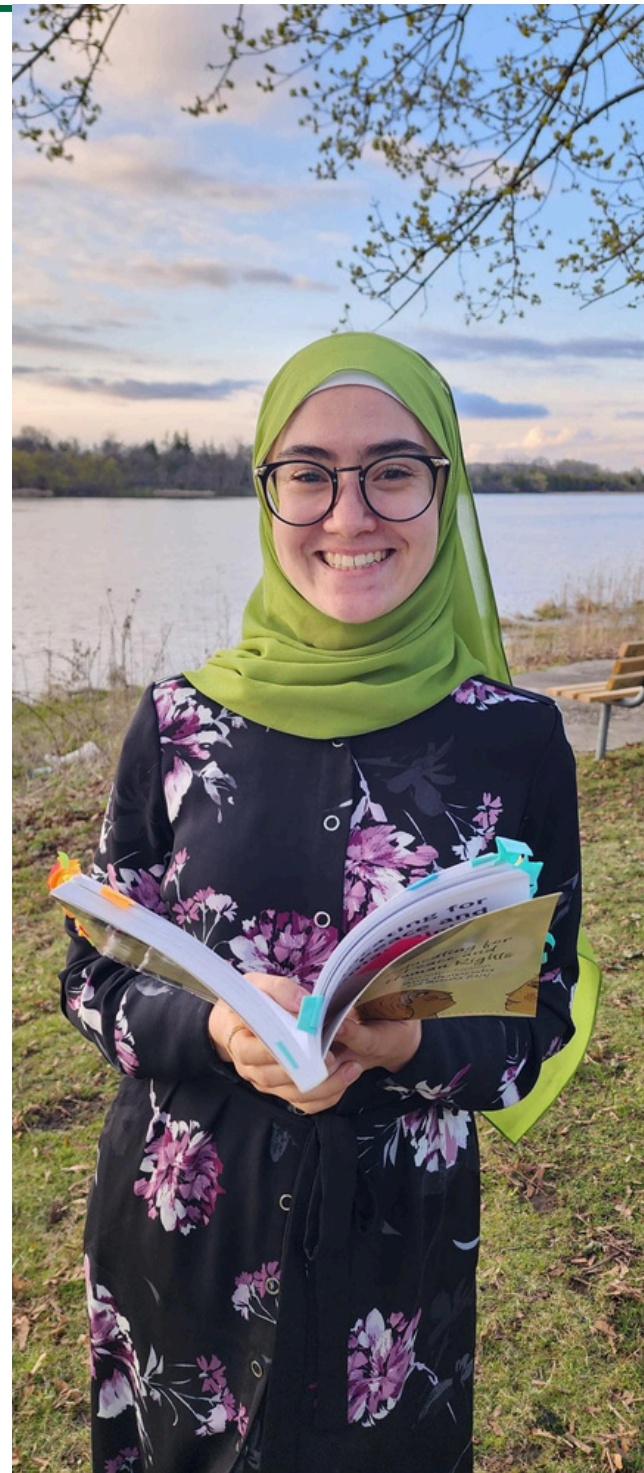


Ajirioghene Evi (left) graduated from Renison's SDS and BSW programs and went on to earn her Master of Social Work from Western University. Ajirioghene gives generously of herself to the broader K/W community, both through her professional activities and through her volunteer services. She is the Executive Director of Kind Minds Family Wellness (KMFV), a non-profit organization in K/W committed to Afrocentric / culturally grounded counseling, education, employment, and research advocacy that addresses anti-Black racism and systemic oppression; she is an independent consultant for the Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children; she is a community engagement analyst for the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies; and a part-time faculty member at Wilfrid Laurier University. She also works as a field instructor for Renison, helping to shape and mentor our future graduates.

Young Alumni 2024

The Young Alumni designation recognizes recent graduates of Renison University College who, having graduated from academic programs and/or Community and Professional Education (CAPE) programs or courses administered by the College within the past 10 years, or having lived in residence at the College for at least two terms within the past ten years, have made significant contributions to their field, either through academic achievement or service to the community.

Aurra Startup (right) is a first-generation university student who overcame many obstacles to find her place in Renison's Social Development Studies program where she excelled in her studies and stood out to many of her faculty, and SDS staff members, as a caring and compassionate individual who lives the values of Renison. Since graduating from Renison, she successfully completed her Master's degree at Wilfrid Laurier in Social Justice and Community Engagement. Now a Ph.D. student at York University, Aurra works as a paid research assistant examining restorative justice and anti-racism in schools.



Honorary Senior Fellow 2024

Renison's equivalent to an honorary doctorate degree is the designation of Honorary Senior Fellow. Granted to individuals who have distinguished themselves in the wider community through significant contributions to Renison, the University of Waterloo, the Anglican Church, and / or the wider K/W community or the world.

We are so pleased to announce that the recipient of this distinction is **John Neufeld**, (right) the Executive Director of the

House of Friendship since 2009. House of Friendship is a Waterloo Region-based nonprofit organization that provides food, housing, addiction treatment and neighbourhood support to individuals and families within Waterloo region. John graduated from Renison's Social Development Studies program in 1996 and went on to earn his MSW from University of Toronto and his MBA from Wilfrid Laurier University.

John and the House of Friendship continue to play a significant role in the life of Renison by offering placement opportunities for 4 to 5 Renison students per year; a practice which has been in place for well over twenty years.





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