Working at the Ban Righ Centre – a student’s perspective

by Nilita Sood

The homely brown brick house that one sees while walking down Bader Lane is the Ban Righ Centre. The staff members - Lisa, Gamila and Carole are always there with welcoming smiles, open arms and an ever-ready helping hand attitude. My first encounter with the Centre was in summer 2013, when I went there to apply for the lunch program assistant work-study position. A few weeks later, my journey commenced.

No matter the day or occasion, if the Centre is open, warm homemade soup is offered to every incoming guest and student. Prepared diligently by the work-study students, the soup is an integral part of the identity of the Ban Righ Centre. Just breathing in the delicious fragrance of the soup cooking in the kitchen is enough to bring a smile to everyone’s face. The tradition of making soup began in 1976. At first, it was prepared only when guest speakers came in. But now, it is a daily lunchtime tradition year round. Iris Fryer, one of the current soup chefs, perfectly captures the true essence of the tradition “…nice to come in from the cold to make and share hearty soup”. Every day at lunch, it forms the focal point that brings together women from all walks of life to sit down, chat and share their life experiences.

As the soup chef of the Centre, one spends almost all the time in the kitchen not only meeting amazing people with different backgrounds and experiences, but also forging lifelong friendships with one’s co-workers. In my four terms working with the Centre, I have met amazing women ranging from their 20s all the way to their 80s and also bonded with my fellow work-study students. This year on February 14, I came in to work to find that one of the women students had left a flower as a thank you. This tiny gesture of appreciation still brings a smile to my face even on the hardest days.

Another 2013 work-study student, Mariem Tahra Abdou Ahmed Labeid describes the Centre as “her home away from home where you feel you belong, where you don’t have to be anyone but yourself”.

Above: Iris Fryer, Nilita Sood and Brigette Piazza

I am not alone when I say that working at the Ban Righ Centre is always a highlight of my day! Working here, I have learned countless important historical details about the Ban Righ Centre and Queen’s and how the Centre supports the continuing education of mature women; I have contributed, even if a little, to a cause that matters. All this has enriched my university experience and has enabled me to pass on my knowledge to other students. The best part: I have had the privilege to meet awe-inspiring people from different professions and cultures, share their life experiences and learn important life lessons from them every day. Thank you Ban Righ for providing me such an amazing work and life experience!

Students support emergency bursaries

In the recent AMS student interest fee referendum undergraduate students voted to continue supporting their classmates who experience financial need. One dollar of each student’s fee will be added to our emergency bursary fund; comprising approximately 1/5 of the funds we have available for mature women students each year. Currently, we meet between 1/4 – 1/3 of the financial need identified by mature women students. This ongoing support from the student union tells mature women students that they are valued here at Queen’s. It also helps younger students to experience being a part of a caring community of peers.

Winter gear “free store”

Welcome to the Canadian winter! Thanks to generous donors, international students and those women students who are struggling financially are making good use of our brand new winter gear “free store”. No more worrying about how to face the icy weather. We have received some nearly new warm coats and we are buying a few new items so that all mature women students who need a warm coat or gloves or a hat can choose what suits them.
Faculty Student Mentoring

Mentorship lies behind many success stories for men and women in a variety of fields.

The Ban Righ Centre has been fortunate to have the enthusiastic participation of many female faculty members from a wide cross section of disciplines who join students weekly for a bowl of soup and an informal chat. These opportunities have been valued highly by the students as well as by the faculty themselves. Students have a chance to ask questions about specific disciplines or areas of study, publishing issues, academic standards and career paths. Faculty members have appreciated the caliber of conversation and critical analysis with this group of women students…and we think they enjoy the soup too!

Read the recent article about academics and students who have shared soup: http://www.queensu.ca/gazette/stories/

Student Story

Breaking the Cycle

by Diane Hovey

“Never let fear determine who you are, and never let where you’ve been determine where you are going.”

...Unknown

The quote above is the way I try to live my life. My story is about breaking the cycle. It’s not about being fearless, but moving forward despite the fear.

My past is a sad one full of pain and degradation. I have been to the bottom of the darkest holes of loneliness and despair and I have survived. They say that if you want a better life, then you have to stop digging and put down the
shovel. That only you have the power to change the outcome of your life. And so I did. I put the shovel down. At a young age, my view of myself and my abilities was tainted by abuse and neglect. I learned destructive coping strategies that took me to dark places. I’ve struggled with poverty, substance abuse and mental illness for many years. In 2007, I became a single mother of one and my life changed. I finally found the courage to break the cycle. My desire to give my daughter a better life encouraged me to seek help for my mental illnesses and substance abuse issues. It was because of this, and help from the Ban Righ Center, that I was able to begin my journey at Queen’s University in 2010.

Change has always been a hard thing for me, even when it is for the best. Fear is often the culprit of my hesitation and procrastination. My financial situation and low self esteem made coming to university difficult for me. The staff at the Ban Righ helped me overcome these obstacles. They helped fund my first year and provided an environment with kindness and caring every time that I walk through the doors. They help me battle my fears so that I can continue moving forward.

I failed my first year. I wanted to quit. I wanted to give up. I wanted to walk away. The fear was overwhelming. But I came back. An academic advisor suggested that I take a geology class for fun. So I did. I loved it so much, that I decided to work towards a degree in geological sciences. If I did not have the staff at Ban Righ encouraging me through my hardest times, I may never have found the joy I feel today.

And so, with so much help and support, I have found the courage to break the cycle. The journey has been rough. Full of fear, but not regret. Today I am a better person, a better mother, a better student. I keep facing the fear. I don’t beat myself up too badly for the setbacks. I encourage myself to move forward. I’m showing my daughter that fear does not have to disable you, that you can move through it and survive. That surviving it makes you stronger and more courageous.

Today I am full of gratitude and love. And even though life can be stressful at times, I never have to feel the pain of being in that black hole. The Ban Righ stands with me and gives me the strength and support I need to keep moving forward despite the fear. For that, I am truly grateful.

Thank you to all those who help keep the doors of the Ban Righ open. You truly do make a difference.

Responsive care

Sexual harassment, assault, and violence against women have been much in the news of late. It seems appropriate to let our community know how the Ban Righ Centre staff respond to this issue. Women students sometimes disclose to staff members their experiences of sexual harassment, assault, or violence. We ask “what would be helpful to you now?” and “is there anything we can do?” We provide financial emergency resources if they are required; when necessary we facilitate moves into a women’s shelter; and/or we set up appointments with on-campus or community counselors or hospitals, that provide support, and, as appropriate, take further action. Our goal is to try to help the women who are affected so that they have the opportunity to persist in their studies. In my three years at the Ban Righ Centre, I have been profoundly impacted by the strength and determination that women students have shown. I am also enormously grateful to the men and women who support the Centre so that we have the means to intercede when necessary and to provide some essential relief. The issue is a societal problem and our goal here is to do what we can to promote healthy relationships and to be available when women students reach out to us.

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Random Acts of Kindness!

The Centre benefits from the efforts and support of many individuals. Student and BRF board member, Kisa Iqbal invited friends from the “Random Acts of Kindness” organization to come to the Centre and do some deep cleaning in hard to reach corners. The house looks beautiful and we thank Kisa, Cassandra, Kevin and Kaitlyn.
We invite you to save the date for the Ban Righ Centre Annual Spring Celebration at 2:00 p.m. in Wallace Hall on Saturday, May 2, 2015. We will celebrate the determination and strength of students who are aspiring to learn and realizing their goals.

A Day in the County: winery tour

Thank you to everyone who attended. Special thanks to Clark and Laurie Day for arranging a magnificent tour with superb food. They made it a fantastic “A Day in the County!” The proceeds of the tour will support mature women students at Queen’s. The Day’s generosity means we have significant profits to add to our coffers. Thank you Clark and Laurie! Thanks too to Deb Wakeman for being a part of the dinner team, and to Rosehall Run, Keint-He, Huff Estates and Karlo Estates for exceptionally warm welcomes, fabulous wine tastings and great information.

We enjoyed the company of two former Principals William Leggett and Ron Watts with respective spouses Claire and Donna. A fantastic show of support for BRC students! Thank you for joining us.

Elspeth Morgan and Elspeth Christie helped co-organize, and various Ban Righ Foundation board members lent a hand: Kathy Burke, Julie McLachlan and Nathalie Soini. Thanks all of you.

Recent graduate, Jillian Burford-Grinnell, shared her thoughts about what life was like as a mature student. When we arrived at a road block near Tyendinaga, Jillian rightly pointed out that it was fitting to remember that while we were on our way to enjoy a convivial day, there are many families looking for answers on behalf of their loved ones – the missing aboriginal women. The Ban Righ Foundation recognizes the need to keep the spotlight on these women and to work together to make safe communities for all. Thank you all for your support.

In Loving Memory

The Lorraine Chan Memorial Bursary was established with gifts from the friends and family of the late Lorraine Chan, in August 2014.

As a graduate of Queen’s Commerce, Lorraine Chan went on to make the most of this important educational foundation. Upon completion of her CA designation, Lorraine tackled progressively challenging career opportunities in South East Asia and Hong Kong. When she returned home to Calgary, AB, Lorraine joined the firm Conroy Ross Partners, in time becoming partner & CFO; she also served as a Director on the Boards of several organizations which nurture education in her community. As a keen advocate for women in leadership, and providing opportunities to help women recognize their strength, this bursary is being established in accordance with Lorraine’s interests.

The Ban Righ Foundation is grateful to the family and friends of Lorraine Chan for choosing to remember Lorraine in this way, supporting mature women students.

http://banrighcentre.queensu.ca