I first learned about the Ban Righ Centre a few years ago when our folk-pop duo Kris + Dee did a BRC fundraising concert. Through this experience we learned about the vision, staff and students of the BRC and we became avid supporters. But it wasn’t until 2011 as an adjunct professor in the Physical Therapy program that I saw first-hand the positive impact that the BRC has on the academic success and overall campus experience of the mature women students in our program.

As the Ban Righ celebrates 40 years, it’s important to reflect on the secret of its enduring success. Why is it as relevant and vital today as it was in 1974? How has it stayed responsive to the unique needs of students from a constantly changing demographic and social fabric? I believe it is because the BRC continues to provide practical, timely and relevant supports on many levels.

I have always understood these supports in terms of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. Remember from Psych 100 that Maslow was a psychologist who developed a theory of human motivation and potential. He said that human needs exist in a hierarchy from basic (physiological and security needs) to social (the need for love and a sense of belonging) to esteem (the need for achievement, mastery and respect) to the pinnacle need – self-actualization – reaching one’s potential and contributing to humanity. Maslow displayed these needs in a five level pyramid with the more basic needs on the bottom and the higher needs towards the top. He said that only when a lower need is met can a person progress to the next level. I believe the BRC has been successful for 40 years because it meets student needs at each of Maslow’s levels, a practice which continues to translate into academic success for mature women students at Queen’s.

To help me illustrate, I interviewed six Physical Therapy students who are “Ban Righ regulars”.

Basic needs like food and rest are two of the most popular reasons for visiting the BRC. One student said, “I went to the Ban Righ at least 2-3 times a week to enjoy a bowl of homemade soup, bread and tea and settle in a quiet room to gather my thoughts or study in a relaxing environment. That goes a LONG way when you have no time to go home but you want the comforts of home and a positive environment.” Another student said, “It is especially those times when you are stuck on campus for hours, exhausted and hungry that the BRC and staff make a big impact. I remember the middle of our first exam period when we had 8 final exams in 2.5 weeks, and we were all sleep deprived. After our 7th exam we could barely keep our eyes open. A classmate and I walked to the BRC, went into one of the nap rooms, hung a dark blanket over the window, put on pillow cases and pulled another blanket over us. That was definitely the most memorable nap I had in my 2 years at Queen’s.”

Security needs during a personal, financial or academic crisis are met through...
instant access to friendly and non-judgmental advisors and a range of bursaries and also on a daily basis through a welcoming space for all. One student told me, “The BRC was an important place to us throughout our degree as it provided a safe space where everyone is respected.” Another student said, “When we had orientation the first week, the BRC had such an inviting atmosphere. Little did I know it would become a staple place of comfort and a retreat from the stressors of school.”

Social needs are met by providing a comfortable and home-like setting where staff and students provide mutual support and develop community. Each woman’s path to the present is legitimized and celebrated as people get to know each other through casual conversation. One student said, “The staff and students that spend time there are inviting and friendly.” Another agreed, “The friendly faces at Ban Righ were always interested in getting to know us as students as well as people.” A third added, “Ban Righ does well at checking in and asking how things are going. It’s really a home away from home. It’s amazing how a bowl of soup and a room full of smiles can really brighten your day!” Esteem needs from accomplishment and successfully fulfilling academic duties are enabled through the BRC space itself, a retreat which is conducive to concentration and study. “To say the PT program is overwhelming at times would be an understatement and having a quiet place to study away from Botterell Hall and all the stressful energy amongst students has truly been a blessing. The quiet and friendly atmosphere definitely helps take the edge off the workload.”

Maslow would be impressed to see how students can get all their foundational needs met by the BRC as they progress towards self-actualization through the completion of their studies. One proud and grateful student said, “To be honest the Ban Righ will be one of my fondest memories from my time at Queen’s. It is incredible that Queen’s has a place dedicated to supporting women’s return to school by helping them out in any way that they can whether through counselling, financial support or a warm meal and good conversation. I always speak highly of the Ban Righ and when I tell my friends that Queen’s has this gem, they are in awe!”

But what would the journey to the top of the pyramid be without also taking time to enjoy life? The BRC has that covered too. This student shared a favourite memory, “One day we spent the afternoon at Ban Righ eating one of our favourite soups (African Peanut – amazing!), we had complimentary head and neck massages from a Thai Yoga massage therapist, and finally a freshly made cappuccino. It was the best day, even though we were in the thick of final exams.”

From all of us in the Physical Therapy program who helped to write this article, congratulations Ban Righ for 40 years of meeting every need from soup to self-actualization!
Kris Abbott of Making Waves worked with some of the Ban Righ Centre founders, donors and friends, and with current students to produce a fantastic Ban Righ Centre audio history which we aired at the Spring Reunion Celebration. You can hear it again on our website: http://banrighcentre.queensu.ca/spring-reunion-celebration-2014/ The Ban Righ Centre is grateful for this record which will be preserved in the Queen’s Archives, and which we hope will continue to inspire women to develop skills and reach their goals.

Book Launch
Join Us...Tuesday November 18th (4:00-5:00 p.m.)
Loss, Memory and Writing Beyond the Ending—launch of Elizabeth Greene's poetry collection Understories.
Elizabeth Greene, Poet
In her third collection of poetry, Understories, Elizabeth Greene explores the themes of loss and memory. Jeanette Lynes says of Understories: "A layered, compelling collection that maps genealogies and tenuous, emerging flocks of selves. At once lyric and storied, Greene's poems celebrate discovering community and living a poetic life with the cards we are dealt." Short reading, with discussion to follow.

Maureen’s Room

Maureen Ewan was a counsellor and study skills tutor at the Ban Righ Centre in the early days of the Centre’s existence. Maureen saw first-hand how women who returned to formal education sometimes need a little extra support. Sitting in the snug office at the northeast corner of the 2nd floor she worked away diligently, meeting with students and making a difference. In 2014, Maureen has found a new way to help: she decided to create a bursary for mature women students and an endowment to support the programs and services of the Centre. These two gifts will help meet the needs of women returning to formal education and they will strengthen the Centre’s sustainability. The little office will henceforward be known as “Maureen’s Room” just as it was informally known back in the ’70s. Students using Maureen’s Room might even feel the warmth of her bright blue eyes watching them as they work, cheering them on, giving them strength. We thank Maureen for sharing her knowledge, skills, and energy, and for her tremendous generosity.

Welcome to the new members* of the Ban Righ Foundation Board 2014-15

Gamila Abdalla
Margaret Bell
Kathy Burke
Nancy Butler
Pascale Champagne
Erin Clow*
Deborah Collins*
Valencia Gaspard
Kisa Iqbal*
Dinah Jansen*
Julie McLachlan*
Carole Morrison
Andrea Phillipson
Nathalie Soini*
Bethany Stinson
Lisa Webb
Susan Wilcox

Each year we ask women from the community to sit on the Ban Righ Foundation board of directors. We then fill their inboxes with information and requests. They generously share their skills and talents all in support of mature women students. At the end of their terms we say goodbye knowing that our paths will cross less frequently but that each woman has made the Centre a little stronger. We’d like to thank Carol Ann Budd, Lynn Davidson, Jillian Burford-Grinnell, Karen Knight, Draha Lafferty and Belinda Young.
Thank you to the Elizabeth Cottage Board of Directors for creating, in memory of Louisa Fowler, an endowment to support Ban Righ Centre programs and activities. The Elizabeth Cottage was incorporated as a retirement home for “aged indigent Protestant women” in 1947. A Gothic Revival villa, the building known as Elizabeth Cottage was designed and built between 1841-1843 by local architect Edward Horsey as his own residence. Almost a century later, in 1954, Edward and Jane Horsey’s granddaughter, Miss Louisa Fowler, one of the original incorporators of The Elizabeth Cottage, left the property to be used as a retirement home by the charitable corporation. The Elizabeth Cottage ceased operations as a retirement home in 2013 and sold the real property in 2014. The Board of Directors of The Elizabeth Cottage, to honour the spirit of Louisa Fowler’s wishes, has made this gift to the Ban Righ Centre. The Fund will help sustain the Ban Righ Centre, which has served mature women students since 1974, and is in keeping with the original Elizabeth Cottage mandate.

Distance and Online Education

The Ban Righ Centre has launched a series of webpages geared to women who are working on their studies from home. Our goal is to help women to access various services, including Queen’s study resources, and even an online chat forum where alumnae and current students can connect to foster online the same community spirit we have in-house.

Thank you to the George H. Stedman Estate for helping us to upgrade technology and furnishings. The Ban Righ Centre is up-to-date and ready to meet the needs of incoming students.

Thank you to the F. K. Morrow Foundation for supporting the services and activities of the Ban Righ Centre by supporting our programs and services.

Visit our website: http://banrighcentre.queensu.ca