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The road to recovery starts here.

# giftsatwork

YOUR RENASCENT FOUNDATION DONOR NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2019

## Transforming Women's Lives, One Step at a Time

A new approach to addiction treatment was launched in Ontario on May 1st, 1981. On that day, Renascent opened its first women's treatment centre on Spadina Road, just south of Heath Street, focusing on a 12-step approach to gender-specific and abstinence-based treatment. From our little home on Spadina Road, known to alumni as "Spadina House", Renascent moved to Downsview Dells Park.

Our final move was to the Munro House, a heritage home on Dundas Street West, nestled in the row of galleries opposite the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO), between Beverley St. and McCaul. In the years since 1981, thousands have passed through our women's centres. Renascent's leadership team at the time understood the importance of providing a safe environment for women because they often face unique issues when it comes to problematic substance use and stigma. Women are often primary caregivers, face more societal challenges due to gender, and are often discriminated against due to age and lifestyle. The number of women seeking treatment from Renascent continues to see an increase year over year.

**According to a 2018 publication released by the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI), the rate of alcohol-related hospitalizations and deaths is increasing faster for women than men. More than 25,000 women were hospitalized for alcohol-related issues between 2016-2017; this was nearly a 3% increase in alcohol hospitalization rate for women over the previous year. By comparison, the increase for men was 0.6% over the same period\*. (CIHI, 2018)**

Renascent's women's centre has occupied the grand house at 356-358 Dundas St. West as Munro Treatment Centre for Women for the past 20 years. The house was built in 1879, and was previously occupied by the



\*Source: <https://www.cihi.ca/en/alcohol-harm-on-the-rise-for-canadian-women>

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Ronald McDonald House. Designed in the late 19th-century in the Gothic Revival style, architectural features throughout the house display a high degree of craftsmanship.

Munro is approximately 11,400 square feet, with a walkout basement. In 2007, Renascent had a dream to replace the inadequate, unsafe, and unwelcoming kitchen with a new commercial kitchen. Today, the kitchen and dining room offer a safe, bright, and functional space for making and serving three healthy meals per day for up to 28 women and counselling staff. A heartbreaking fire in 2008, which destroyed the Munro basement, kick-started the kitchen revitalization project. The project was spearheaded by the generosity of our long-standing donors and community partners, and in 2017, a new kitchen was revealed.

**The Munro house and all our treatment centres continue to seek funding and support for ongoing renovations to make our spaces safe, functional, welcoming, and a comfortable place of healing.**

“Women encounter unique challenges to recovery, and they require a safe place to face these challenges. Higher instances of trauma and abuse, concurrent mental health diagnoses, and financial

strain are the most notable among these challenges. Women are also typically the custodial parent in a single-parent family,” says Cynthia Langill, Registered Psychotherapist and Addiction Counsellor at Munro. Cynthia is working towards becoming an accredited Trauma Counsellor. “It’s often times where you see a woman come through with severe trauma, like you wouldn’t even imagine what they’ve been through. Pimped out, sold at auctions, chained to the back of cargo van... the worst case scenario is what we work with every single day, and I want to be able to learn more about helping women with that trauma be successful in their recovery, and hopefully be able to teach other staff members so they too can be trauma-informed.”

**The rate of women who died from causes linked directly to alcohol has increased by 26% since 2001, compared with a roughly 5% increase over the same period for men. (CIHI, 2018)**

The all-female team of counsellors at Munro know firsthand the importance of gender-specific recovery. Like at all of Renascent’s treatment centres, all the counsellors at Munro have lived experience of addiction and are in long-term recovery themselves. They take pride in Renascent’s mission of having a



client-focused, client-centred approach to treatment. From recognizing concurrent disorders (conditions in which a person experiences both mental illness and a substance abuse disorder), and training staff to be better able and better equipped for working with complex clients, the counsellors report feeling that Renascent's approach has evolved over the years. Counselling staff are always learning, and always updating their skills so that they can help any and all who pass the threshold into Munro. "It's so nice to come to work every day. I want to be here, I'm working on my recovery while helping these women find theirs. I can give them real-life advice, because maybe I've been there, or maybe I know another counsellor who has been there," says one counsellor.

So why Munro? And what sets Munro apart from Renascent's other houses?

"It gives a woman the ability to form positive relationships with women, especially [when there is a] women who has come from a background of trauma. Being able to open up to a woman who has been there, literally in the exact same situation, speaks volumes for their recovery. They are not alone, they are loved, they are a part of a community, and they have us here for life," says another counsellor who

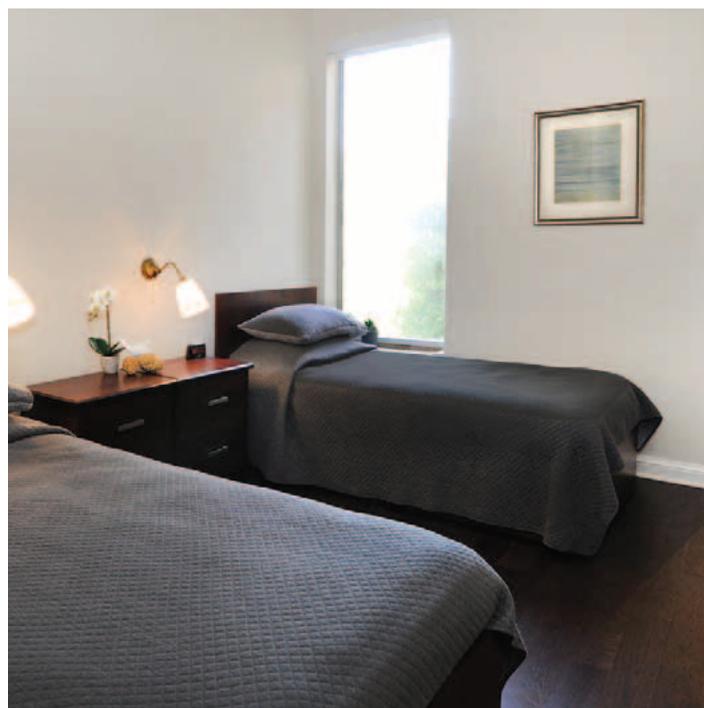
has been with Munro since the mid-2000s.

Counsellors at Munro are dedicated to each client, creating a special and professional bond with them, and with other counsellors. The counselling team feels like one big happy family; they have staff events that help build staff morale and keep everyone connected.

Staff at Munro always put the clients first; they want clients to live in the moment, so they don't have to live in the past; they want them to know they are safe, and that they've stepped into a place of healing, hope, and strength.

It's amazing how much passion, support, and enthusiasm fills the room when the counsellors are in action. They are constantly helping clients book appointments, problem-solve, manage medication, and work through the various issues that can come up in early recovery.

Munro is unique — a home-like environment that provides a safe, person-centred approach to addiction recovery. From the first steps into Munro, you know that you are going to create memories, build healthy relationships with women, and that you have an open space to share and feel safe.



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## A note from our CEO

We raised nearly \$1 million last fiscal year to ensure hundreds of individuals and family members were able to access quality treatment and support in recovering from addiction. These funds are essential and add to the funds received from the provincial government to cover the costs of publicly funded treatment, and to expand upon it.

In the midst of an escalating addiction crisis, and ongoing urgent need for residential addiction treatment, continuing care and family care, we all stepped up again in 2018-19 to ensure that cost is not the barrier to those in desperate need.

During the 2018-2019 fiscal year:

We served **598** men in our Residential Treatment Facilities.

We served **293** women in our Residential Treatment Facilities.

We tackled the long and dangerous waitlist for residential treatment through generous donors who funded **38** Complete Care Treatment Bursaries for people at high risk.

We delivered **527 children, family, and individual** outpatient sessions.

We are addressing one of the most urgent and widespread illnesses impacting youth and young adults in our communities. The vast majority of those we treated, 70%, or 624 people, were under the age of 44. Over one hundred of the people who came through our centres last year were between the ages of 16 and 24.

Thank you for making a difference again this year to so many. **You make all the difference.**

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## The Impact of Rebuilding lives

A group of family, friends, and loved ones gathered on Saturday, July 13th to celebrate the life of Courtney M., a Munro alumni who passed away suddenly and unexpectedly on June 4, 2019, due to cirrhosis of the liver and kidney failure.

Courtney spent time rehab centres in Toronto and Phoenix, Arizona. Courtney always wanted to give back; she felt strongly about people being able to leave a treatment facility with dignity and feeling strong and ready for the next chapter of their lives.

It is not uncommon for those entering or leaving a Renascent treatment centre to arrive with their belongings in a plastic bag, or spilling out of their arms, because our clients are often coming to us from an unstable or temporary living situation. It was Courtney's wish to provide graduates of Munro and other treatment facilities with a purse that they could call their own.

In Courtney's memory, her mother Patricia B. and friend Selina have partnered to lead an initiative called "Purse-Impressions". The aim is to collect purses and essential items for Renascent to give to women who are graduating and heading back out into the world having completed their inpatient treatment stay.

"The goal is to let them know they are not alone, they have value, they are people," says Patricia.

Third-party events are organized by an individual, affiliated group, or organization for the purpose of raising funds on behalf of Renascent. Hosting your own event can be a fun and exciting way to raise money for a cause near and dear to your heart. Your network of friends and family may have never heard of Renascent before!

Some upcoming events that you may want to be a part of include the Renascent Laughs comedy night and the Scotiabank Toronto Waterfront Marathon. You can fundraise online to help us raise money to provide addiction recovery services for those who need them most. Visit us at [renascent.ca/events](http://renascent.ca/events) or call Ryan Kerr at 416-847-6452 to learn more about upcoming events or to host your own event on behalf of Renascent.

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## Food Addiction Program Update

You are not alone. It's estimated that one in 20 Canadians are food addicts. Recent studies show over 40% of people with binge eating disorders are also addicted to certain foods.

Renascent launched the Food Addiction Program, the first of its kind, in 2016 as a pilot program, and then launched it officially in November 2017. As addiction is a chronic condition, avoiding triggering food and acquiring the tools to help identify and prevent relapse is essential. Clients learn how food addiction affects the body, and how to develop and maintain a food plan without feeling deprived or calorie-restricted. Over the last year, Renascent has been working on the development of an outpatient treatment program for Food Addiction. This adds to Renascent's current service offering of residential treatment for Food Addiction, while providing more options for individuals at various stages of their addiction. We will be offering this new outpatient program in the coming year. Contact our Client Care Access & Engagement Centre for more information at 1-866-232-1212.

This September, Dr. Tarman will be leading the second annual Sugar Free September, and inviting you to join her team at this year's annual Scotiabank Toronto Waterfront Marathon. Call Ryan Kerr at 416-847-6452 or email us at [events@renascent.ca](mailto:events@renascent.ca) to register and walk alongside Dr. Tarman, alumni, staff, and friends of Renascent on October 20th, 2019.

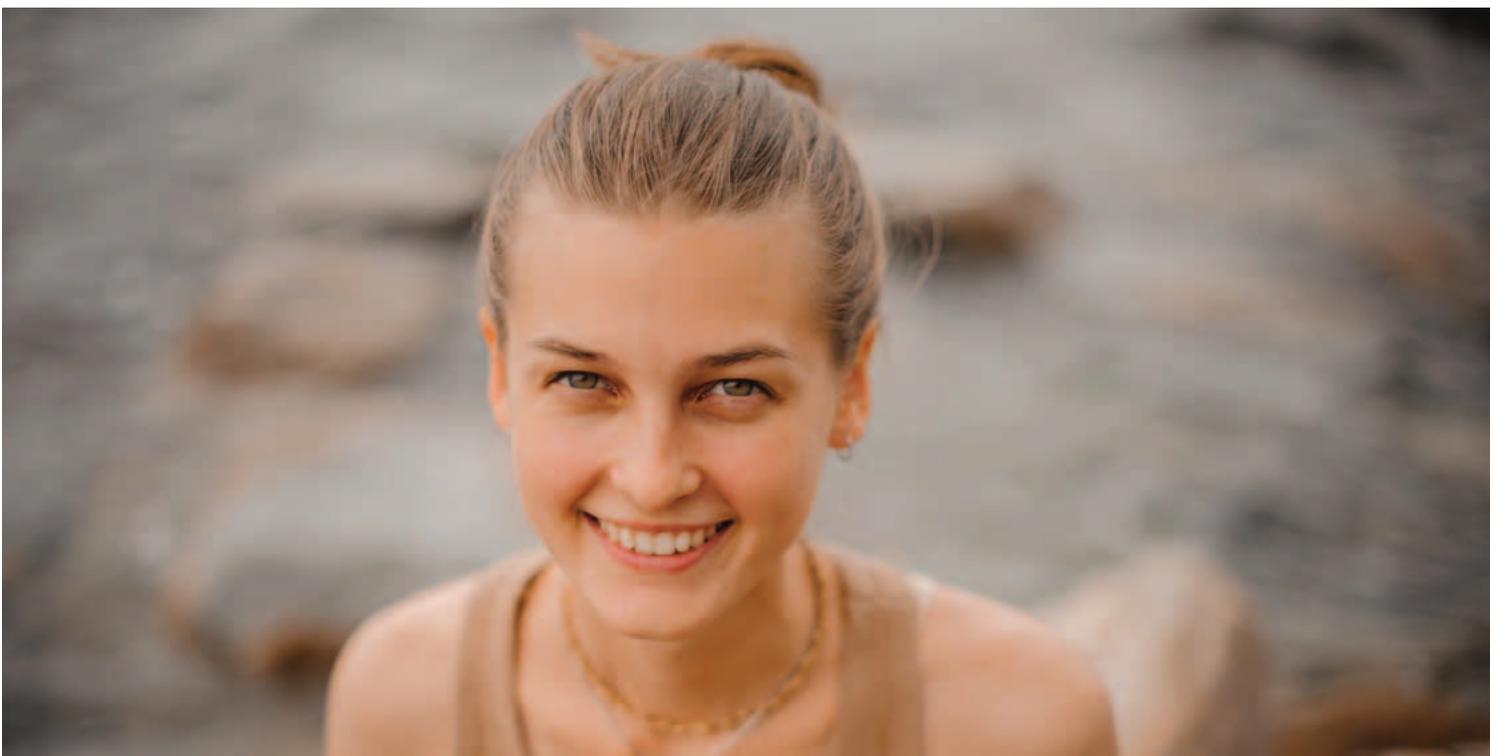
Here is a note from one of our alumni:

I am sending this as a thank you for everything that you have done for me (and with me), everything you have put into my recovery and going above and beyond since my graduation from the house.

My life is getting better day by day and this feeling, for the first time in my life, is not related to my weight, my size or a diet I am following.

I have spent so many years missing out, hiding, isolating, being afraid to see people or participate "until I can eat normally" or "until I lose weight"... I can't thank you enough. I'd say you've given me my life back but it sort of feels like I've been given a new life altogether.

Andrea, January 2018



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## A Note from Ginny

Ginny is a Renascent alumni who spoke at this year's Guardian Angel Luncheon, hosted by Stephen and Arlene Waymire at the Granite Club on Thursday, May 16th. We know not all of you could make it this year, so we wanted to share an excerpt of her speech with you here:



“I grew up within a small town, within a small public school, and within a small home. In my childhood, sometimes I wanted to be just that; small. So small, that eventually I would disappear into the walls, into the floorboards, and into thin air, so that I didn't have to continue to suffer. I experienced a lot of happy moments throughout my childhood, however I also experienced a lot of heartbreaking times and situations that told me I had better grow up real fast, so I could protect myself, because no one else was going to. My childhood was filled with lots of chaos, abuse, and silence, and I do not know which one of these was more terrifying.

My father suffered from concurrent disorders: alcoholism and mental illness. I remember thinking throughout my childhood 'I am never going to drink; I will never be my dad. I will never cause anyone that much pain.'

The problem was though, that I was in a lot of pain myself. I remember searching up ways to kill myself at the age of eight, starving myself at the age of 12, and eventually self-harming at the age of 13. Within each of these behaviours I found some sort of relief; some sort of feeling that told me that everything was going to be okay.

I had my first drink and within that first night I blacked out... After that night I promised my mom that I was never going to drink again... I finished the latter half of my grade 10 semester after that, casually drinking here and there with friends. The thought that I had a problem with alcohol or drugs rarely crossed my mind after that fateful night...

I started to remember some of the abuse that I went through as a child. Shocked, terrified, and unable to handle the memories and thoughts intruding into my mind, I turned to drugs and alcohol increasingly more. Before I knew it, using only on weekends had turned into only using at night, which eventually turned to using as soon as I opened my eyes in the morning. Within four months of using daily I had lost 50 pounds, almost completely dropped out of high school, and was admitted into the psychiatric ward due to a suicide attempt. My life went very downhill, very fast, and alcohol and drugs had fully taken over my life within this short amount of time. The problem was that I did not know alcohol and drugs were the problem... The problem was that I thought that if you went through what I went through and had to experience it every single day, then you would drink like me too. If you were in so much emotional and mental pain like I am, then using drugs and alcohol would become your solution, despite all the bad things you knew could and probably would happen if you continued to do so.

I used to rationalize and justify my way of living by drawing certain lines in the sand that I had not crossed yet. 'I'm not homeless, I've never gotten into any fights, I haven't been kicked out of places, I don't commit crimes to get drugs'... the key word in all of this is yet. I had not done any of these things yet. I learned that "yet" stands for "You're Eligible Too" because after I was discharged from the psychiatric ward the first time, things did not get better. They got a lot worse, and fast.

I started using heavier drugs and stealing from my family in order to support my drug use. I was eventually asked to leave my mom's house and wasn't allowed to come back if I was going to use drugs or self-harm in the house. So I left and couch hopped, slept in the hospital cafeteria, or didn't sleep at all for days until I was even kicked out of the abandoned houses I was using at with other people. I started stealing food and clothes from places in order to survive and crashed at friends' houses where I could. With heavier drug use came violence, robbery, and more crime. And there I was, in the thick of it all, counting money that wasn't mine, breaking into houses that I didn't belong in, and being beaten up and almost stabbed by older men when I did something out of line.

I started selling my body for drugs to anyone that was around that would want to, and near the end of it, not many people did. I weighed 95lbs, had cut my whole body, even my face, while in psychosis from drugs, had dreadlocks from not brushing my hair, and gingivitis from not brushing my teeth for roughly two years. I was admitted into the psychiatric unit a couple more times after incidents in which I would come home, destroy my mom's house and her property, which then led her to calling the police on me. I had tried to stop using and drinking, I really had, but something would happen, life would happen, and I'd be off again. My whole being was telling me not to do this, or to just have a couple drinks, but I'd always end up drinking a 40 ounce and doing meth or blacking out and coming to on the side of the road.

And here's the thing. We don't choose this life. I didn't choose to be sitting in a crack house with lice, bedbugs, and no shoes on. I did not want to end up the way I did, and I don't think anyone does. Because at our core, we are all human beings who all want the same things. Love. Happiness. Prosperity. To belong. Because despite the dark places our addiction brings us and the harm we cause to our loved ones, we are all just hurting deeply inside. It's so easy to villainize addiction because of the historical perspective society held that denotes addiction to some sort of moral defectiveness. I beg of you to challenge this ideation with compassion.

Because you can't heal something with hate, because we shouldn't be asking why the addiction, but rather, why the pain.

You, [Renascent's] Guardian Angels, have done just that. You have allowed us to heal with compassion and your generosity and your love. Thank you to my Guardian Angels who so graciously gave me the gift of being able to go to treatment at Renascent... I have been given the gift of a new life, and that is something I hope to be able to repay each day by continuing to be clean and sober and live a different way today. I hope that individuals that come after me have the same opportunity that I have been given: the gift of being able to start over. The gift of being able to live a new life. A gift of being able to have a chance."

Today, Ginny is a college graduate and will be attending university in September. Over her summer break, she is working at the Munro Centre as a counsellor.

 Please include this with your donation 

## Donation Form

Donor Name \_\_\_\_\_

I'd like to make a gift of impact today: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

I'd like to make a monthly gift of impact: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

My cheque payable to "Renascent Foundation" is enclosed.

Please charge my credit card to the above amount.

VISA

MASTERCARD

AMEX

Card Number \_\_\_\_\_ Expiry \_\_\_\_\_

Name on Card \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_



Renascent®

*The road to recovery starts here.*

**Thank you for your support!**

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## This too shall pass By Christina Selvaggio

**HOPE.** What does hope mean for you?

**Hang On, Pain Ends?** Or maybe **Hold On, Peace Exists?** Or maybe you have one of your own?

Women living with a substance use disorder may not always be able to see the light at the end of the tunnel; achieving the long-term goal of a healthy future of recovery may seem far away. As I sat in on a group counselling session, held on a sunny summer day in the park closest to Munro, I saw 17 powerful women come together in a semi-circle to embrace life, sunshine, and their surroundings, marking the earth with their first steps towards life-long recovery. After a counsellor (and Renascent alumni) read a powerful passage, we reflected on recovery in the future, and what that could look like, and how each of the women in the circle looked to the future of their own recovery. Some finally found a connection with their higher power, where the words of the Big Book finally made sense. I'm not going to lie: meditating in downtown Toronto on a busy Friday morning was difficult, even for the seasoned meditator. There were sounds of the newly opened splash pad, kids laughing, dogs barking, and Toronto buzzing; focusing on self in the moment and in the present was challenging. But what this counsellor said next was something that I will take forward with me. She challenged everyone in the group to use the distraction as ones they may face in life, obstacles that may veer them away from their recovery whether on day 29 or day 501. She said:

**“Tune out the noise. It’s easy to focus when there is silence, it’s not so easy to focus when there is noise around us, so consider these sounds, these distractions, things that may challenge your recovery in the now, and in the future. Think of a mantra, one that you can use to bring yourself back to your meditation... ‘I am grateful, I am worthy, This too shall pass.’”**

I encourage you to do the same. Reflect on your own personal journey of recovery. What were some of your challenges, some of your distractions, what did you fear in early recovery that you’ve overcome in your current recovery? What piece of advice do you have for women, men, or families on their own voyage of recovery? We want to hear from you! Share your mantra, your thoughts, and your positive message with us at [philanthropy@renascent.ca](mailto:philanthropy@renascent.ca) or on our message board at [renascent.ca/fifty](https://renascent.ca/fifty).

