



George Brown College Retirees' Association



The 2021 winner of the George Brown Retirees' Association has been awarded to Charmaine Flowers, a remarkable fifty-five-year-old student in the Dental Administration Program.

The two primary criteria for winning the Retirees' Association scholarship are overcoming adversity and giving back to the community while at the same time maintaining a solid academic standing. This year's recipient has met these criteria and then some!

In 1975, Charmaine and her siblings immigrated to Canada with her grandmother, an excellent cook. In reminiscing about her days in Jamaica, Charmaine spoke fondly of her grandfather, who farmed goats and cows and she recalls having not one or two, but nine dogs. Although growing up in poverty, Charmaine was brought up to take care of

others and to show respect. Even as a child, cultural differences in this regard were striking to her. For example, Charmaine describes how in Jamaica people look out for each other, ensuring that children have sufficient food and clothing and how they demonstrate regard for older people.

And, as we all know, considerable stereotyping and prejudice exists. Age, gender, colour, physical ability, poverty, mental illness, are some of the stigmas that are central to discrimination. Being a female immigrant, of colour, and a single mother battling poverty, Charmaine has struggled with depression and experiences of discrimination. Further, COVID has exasperated all these adversities, especially economic stability. For example, the jobs Charmaine held prior to COVID are gone, and the opportunity to find employment has become ever more difficult.

Charmaine identifies children, the elderly, and animals as her three passions. These three passions coupled with her personal experience with poverty and the stigmas mentioned above may have created the foundation for her resilience and determination to provide a better life for her own children. She

has wanted them to be free, to live a better life. As a single mother to six children, she worked two, sometimes three, jobs at a time in order to provide economic, emotional and social support for her family. Valuing education, she also took a variety of educational programs and obtained several certificates which have led to slightly better paying jobs.

Presently, her children are establishing their own lives. Her daughter, who has graduated from the Dental Office Administration Program with honours is presently enrolled in the Dental Hygiene program at George Brown College. One son has obtained a law degree and is employed by the TTC. Two sons, one who worked for the Toronto Blue Jays and another who has coached Canada's junior soccer team have both experienced job loss due to COVID. Charmaine's youngest son is currently in his final year of electrical engineering at GBC. Two have married and purchased their own home; two have moved into their own apartments; and two remain living with her.

Much to Charmaine's delight and providing an outlet for one of her passions, her children have given her four grandchildren that she can love and spoil with "Grandma's rules". All children have assisted their mother with a variety of volunteer work. Looking forward, Charmaine and her daughter would like to provide free dental hygiene education and service to people in needy communities. How they can accomplish this goal isn't yet quite clear, but they continue to work on it. But first things first: Charmaine has two courses to complete this summer for her certificate and is looking for work that will help her build her future.