By Michael Onesi
Photographs by Brendan George Ko
A promising student should be able to study at Queen’s and not have financial barriers limit their potential. So, in 2019, Queen’s announced a transformative opportunity – the Promise Scholars program – to help increase access among qualified Kingston-area students with financial need who are first in their family to attend university.

The fall of 2020 marked the inaugural class of the first five Promise Scholars. Each scholar received comprehensive financial support to cover costs of tuition each year, as well as accommodation in residence in first year and a living allowance in upper years. Designed in partnership with local school boards, the program allows scholars to graduate without student-loan debt, and connects them to advisers who provide guidance on academics, financial planning, and career preparation to help them thrive. A summer internship program is another key component of the program.

Trinity Allen, a Faculty of Arts and Science student and a member of the first cohort of Promise Scholars, says the program is a great resource for anyone who feels they may not be able to afford a university education.

“The impact that Promise Scholars has had on my life is more than I can put into words,” says Ms. Allen. “I’m the first person in my family to attend university, and Queen’s has connected me with resources for everything from academics to mental health to make sure I’m set up for success.”

Queen’s has a history of graduates who go on to make a difference in the world. The Promise Scholars program is our opportunity to support first-generation students in participating fully in university life as they pursue their dreams.

The Times Higher Education (THE) Impact Rankings has ranked Queen’s first in North America and fifth in the world when looking at advancing the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the United Nations in 2015. The 2021 rankings examined more than 1,200 post-secondary institutions from 94 countries and focused on categories such as gender equality, clean water, and sanitation.

“At Queen’s we believe our community – our people – will help solve the world’s most significant and urgent challenges through our intellectual curiosity, passion to achieve, and commitment to collaboration,” Patrick Deane, Principal and Vice-Chancellor, said when the rankings were released. “We are humbled to be recognized in this way for the impact we’re having in our local and global communities, but we recognize how much still needs to be done. We are, however, pleased to know we are on the right track, and have our eyes set even more firmly on the future.”

Queen’s submitted more than 600 examples of how it is advancing the United Nations SDGs and trying to be a leader in global development. Here are a few ways the university is making a difference, both on campus and around the world.
Queen’s submitted more than 600 examples of how it is advancing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to be a leader in global development. Among the evidence provided were details about programs that support clean water and sanitation, zero poverty, zero hunger, sustainable cities and communities, life on land – all areas where Queen’s was judged to have excelled.

BWRC Interim Director Professor Kent Novakowski feels access to safe drinking water should get the same public attention as global warming and climate change. “If you happen to be one of the people who have poor access to good water, the issue is very high on your priority list. If you look across the country, we have boil-water advisories in various jurisdictions on a continuing basis, particularly with First Nations communities,” says Prof. Novakowski. “Safe drinking water is a basic human right and there are many locations around the world where that is not true.”

BWRC researchers are involved in many projects – some of which go beyond drinking water. Two professors are now studying sewage water to help protect Canadians during the pandemic. They received funding to develop ways to detect levels of COVID-19 in wastewater. Studies have shown the virus appears in people’s stool even before symptoms begin. Tracking levels of COVID-19 in sewage waste can predict upcoming outbreaks and gives health officials extra time to prepare.

Sustainable Development Goal:
Zero Hunger
Queen’s Initiative: The Tea Room

The Tea Room, in Beamish-Munro Hall, has always been an environmentally friendly and socially conscious café. That was the vision of Michelle Romanow (Sc’07, MBA’08) – now a successful entrepreneur and star of CBC TV’s Drag’ems’ Den – when she launched the café in 2006. So when a student buys a coffee or tea from the Tea Room, it is about more than a caffeine boost. They are helping make the world a better place.

The Tea Room is often an early adopter of environmental policy, going carbon neutral in 2014. While the Tea Room is known for its green policies, manager Thomas Mulvihill (Sc’23), wants people to know it is socially conscious as well. Having a certified fair trade food policy – which means students know the farmers in developing countries who picked the coffee beans were paid a livable wage and not exploited – has been a part of the Tea Room since it first opened 15 years ago.

“The Tea Room’s goal is to bring awareness to the fact that it’s possible to pay workers fair wages through fair trade policies, while also remaining a fiscally sustainable business,” says Mr. Mulvihill. “We are seeking equity throughout the world and fair trade really does help contribute to sustainable development.”

tackle the world’s water-related problems through innovation, technology, and research.

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Clarinetist David Gazaille works for the Isabel Bader Centre for the Performing Arts, which, along with the Agnes Etherington Art Centre, was part of the support for the Sustainable Cities and Communities Sustainable Development Goal.

The transformative power of art can inform, heal, challenge viewpoints, and foster change. To inspire as many people as possible and help shape communities, the Agnes Etherington Art Centre and the Isabel Bader Centre for the Performing Arts have programs that make art accessible to people in Kingston and around the world. Agnes has free admission, providing welcoming access to exhibitions, programs, and collections for diverse audiences to experience the transformative power of art. Agnes’s programs and residencies foster community well-being.

The Isabel attracts top artists around the world to its stage, and turned to technology in 2020 to solve the COVID-19 problem of hosting concerts without crowds. It streamed high-fidelity concerts and the Bader and Overton Canadian Cello Competition to more than 83,000 viewers from as far away as Australia.

Isabel Director Tricia Baldwin says art is a wonderful avenue to change the culture of a community in terms of equity, diversity, inclusion, and Indigenization. “Artists are great storytellers and when you are walking in someone else’s footsteps, you are creating understanding and compassion,” Ms. Baldwin says. “We can’t change without dialogue and I think both Agnes and the Isabel have provided space for that dialogue.”

From pollination gardens that protect bee populations from predators, to compostable cups, the Tea Room became a zero-consumer-waste café in 2011 when it switched to products that are recyclable or compostable, to rooftop gardens on several buildings, Queen’s has many examples of sustainability efforts that are making a difference.

Sustainable Development Goal:
Sustainable Cities and Communities
Queen’s initiative: Agnes Etherington Art Centre and Isabel Bader Centre for the Performing Arts

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Sustainable Development Goal:
Life on Land
Queen’s initiative: Forest School at Bader International Study Centre

Guy Lucas grew up with a love of nature. His father taught him how to forage for mushrooms and identify what plants are edible. So when Mr. Lucas started working as the gardens and grounds manager at the Bader International Study Centre, he created Forest School, a program for local schoolchildren to teach them how to respect and enjoy their natural surroundings. “I am trying to recreate aspects of my childhood for these kids,” says Mr. Lucas, who launched the program with the help of Helen Stringfellow and Penny Hotchklin, local teachers who have a love of education and the outdoors. “I found that really exciting and I wanted to bring that to other people.”

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It’s hard to find a classroom more beautiful and inspiring than the BISC. Forest School sees kids go wild on 300 acres of gardens, woodlands, and marshes around Herstmonceux Castle. Activities include building a fire, making a shelter, team-building games, and creating art using natural resources like plants and leaves. Games and projects are designed to boost students’ self-confidence, improve problem-solving skills, and foster respect for the natural world. “We want them to find joy in nature and bring that into their everyday life, whether they get involved in an outdoors career or they can just enjoy aspects of nature as they grow older,” says Mr. Lucas. “Most schools just have a playfield, they don’t have meadows and forest, so I’m happy we are able to offer this opportunity.”

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