



**DONOR IMPACT
REPORT 2019**

Caring for our community and future





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The Yunus Centre at Logan campus

Giving thanks to our wonderful supporters

Hearing about the incredible achievements of our people is one of the great privileges of my role. Creating so much opportunity through education and research is truly inspirational. It's a welcome reminder of what is possible when we strive to create a better future for all.

I'm delighted to share just some of the stories that regularly come across my desk in the latest *Donor Impact Report*. I hope they inspire you as they have inspired me. As the name suggests, the report celebrates the tremendous role philanthropy plays at the University, whether through removing barriers to education, making major investments in sustainability or helping researchers solve some of the greatest challenges of our day.

It is with the deepest gratitude I thank all of you, our valued donors, for your generosity and for sharing our belief in the transformative power of education and research. Thank you for joining us on this remarkable journey.



Professor Carolyn Evans
Vice Chancellor and President





When it comes to having a positive impact, your generosity speaks volumes.

Your generosity in numbers



1000+
donors



32%
alumni donors



900+
active mentors

Inspiring and guiding the next generation of leaders by sharing expertise and life experience.



~\$13 million
in philanthropic income

Thanks to your generosity, we advanced initiatives that support our students, researchers and educators.



82% invested
in research



13% invested
in student support



5% invested
in other services
and resources

Investing in our researchers to better understand our world and improve future outcomes for people and the planet.

Helping our students reach their potential and achieve a brighter future.

Investing in programs and services to support learning and community engagement.

* figures correct at time of printing

A lasting family legacy

A passion for medical research, science and education laid the foundation for what has become a powerful family legacy of philanthropy.

It has been two decades since the late Humphrey Firkins DUniv established The Goda Foundation in loving memory of his wife, Goda.

In that time, the Foundation has flourished, shifting its philanthropic focus from supporting local Gold Coast high school students to higher educational institutions, including Griffith University.

Griffith University's Pro Vice Chancellor (Health) Professor Sheena Reilly said the Foundation's support had been invaluable in helping to advance Alzheimer's disease and dementia research, as well as education.

"The Foundation's very generous PhD scholarships help create pathways for research students to contribute to a body of work attempting to tackle some of the biggest health challenges facing our community," she said.

"Thanks to their generosity, early career researchers have the opportunity to explore potential treatments and cures for Alzheimer's disease, dementia and many other debilitating illnesses."

The Foundation first connected with Griffith about 10 years ago and has maintained a close relationship with the University ever since.

Griffith Health's Professor Allan Cripps AO worked closely with the Foundation at the time and developed a close relationship with Humphrey Firkins.

"Humphrey's desire to help others and his belief in the value of education was powerful. He was totally focused on giving young people the opportunity to reach their potential and make a full contribution to society," Professor Cripps AO said.

Through the Foundation, the University developed educational programs for Queensland school students including Science on the GO! and the Science Experience.

It also initiated the Goda Foundation PhD Scholarships—a program for higher degree research students researching Alzheimer's disease, dementia, genomics, cancer and cardiovascular diseases.

"Humphrey's vision was to develop a body of knowledge in the field of Alzheimer's disease and dementia research that could be used to understand the disease and develop interventions to treat and cure patients. He would have been over the moon if he had lived to see a cure," Professor Cripps AO said.

Working under the ethos that 'education transforms lives,' the Foundation has carried on the legacy of its founder, expanding its network of giving under the leadership of Peter Firkins, one of Humphrey's and Goda's three sons.

Peter Firkins explained the Foundation's focus on medical research, particularly in the area of Alzheimer's disease and dementia, was driven by his mother's illness from Alzheimer's disease.

"During Goda's illness it was very apparent there was a vast amount of research needed to improve knowledge, not only in treatment but also prevention," he said.

"The Foundation hopes research funding will contribute to the improvement of outcomes for people who suffer terribly from the effects of Alzheimer's and related diseases. Without support there is no advancement."

Humphrey Firkins DUniv with his three sons John, Peter and Michael



Byron turned personal struggle into positive goal

If ever Byron Johnson needed reminding why he chose a study path aimed at helping others, he need only consider his own example.

It wasn't so long ago that homelessness and associated economic stresses threatened his capacity to continue studying for a Bachelor of Social Work at Griffith University.

However, inspired by the unflagging support of his partner, Cassie, and an unerring belief in what he now regards as 'the journey I was meant to take', Byron remained at university and performed so well he became a recipient of a Griffith Futures Scholarship.

These scholarships are funded through the University's Annual Appeal and Staff Giving Program and support students who are excelling in their degrees despite the challenge of financial or personal disadvantage.

"Yep, I know a bit about financial disadvantage," said Byron, whose ready humour and obvious inner strength are 'go-to' qualities he has often relied on during difficult times.

"At one stage we were homeless. We had two old cars and one of them broke down and the other one was stolen. I worked part-time stocking supermarket shelves and we were just making our way, a day-to-day struggle, knowing that one unexpected expense might send us to the wall.

"Yet through it all, Cassie, was saying I had to keep on with my study at Griffith. There was a goal we were driving towards and even though all around us was collapsing, she never let me lose sight of that goal.

"When I received news of the scholarship, and especially when I discovered it came from donors, including Griffith staff, it was like the dark clouds had lifted. It meant I could really focus on what I believe to be my calling to help people; to lift the dark clouds in the lives of others."

With his Filipino-New Zealand heritage, Byron grew up with spirituality, family and healing as strong social and cultural threads. His approach to social work uses these as a foundation for positive gain, which starts with the individual and extends into the family and community.

"I think healing is in our veins and I want people to know they can call upon me. I want to be a pillar of the community," he said.

Byron admitted to being a latecomer to the realisation of his own potential. He floated through his 20s, lived and worked in rural South Australia for a while, enrolled at TAFE and performed some volunteer work.

"It was all about getting by, not about getting anywhere. Coming to Griffith has been the key to breaking the cycle. Through learning, I've strengthened my communications skills, my empathy and my resolve. I know how I want to work after I graduate."

“Thanks to this scholarship, I am well on the way to fulfilling my potential and applying my experience and qualifications to helping others, whether that relates to difficult times in the moment, or in breaking negative cycles that have prevailed for much longer.”



Byron Johnson



Griffith Film School, Professor Herman Van Eyken and APSLab collaborators

Rolling out the red carpet in the Asia Pacific

Filmmakers have been given the opportunity to explore the global art of storytelling thanks to a unique donor-supported program that nurtures new voices, collaborators and learning.

Working with highly acclaimed filmmakers from Asia and beyond, the Asia Pacific Screen Lab (APSLab) helps to generate a supportive environment of creativity for its international participants.

Based at the Griffith Film School, the largest of its kind in Australia, APSLab has been an incubator for award-winning filmmakers and talent offering workshops, travel, coaching and mentoring.

Head of Griffith Film School, Professor Herman Van Eyken said APSLab helped to elevate the industry through the development of forward-focused filmmakers and owed much of its success to philanthropy.

“While we have had a team of passionate and driven international industry professionals working to ensure this program is a success, we could not have achieved what we have without the generosity of our donors, who share our passion for the industry,” he said.

In its fifth year, APSLab has helped to facilitate film co-production across 70 countries in the Asia-Pacific, accelerating the export of creative screen content and products, and supporting creative entrepreneurs in the industry.

It has also offered artist in resident workshops, on-campus masterclasses featuring international guests and a yearlong industry mentoring program, which concludes with a pitch to industry experts at Griffith Film School.

“The opportunities this has created for our students and filmmakers is priceless, not only does it help advance the region’s filmmakers, but it also brings commercial success, and fosters creative partnerships and opportunities,” Professor Van Eyken said.

“Thank you to all our supporters and donors who have been instrumental in making this program a reality. Our shared vision for the creative development of budding talent in the industry and region has exceeded our expectations and is invaluable to our students and educators at Griffith.”

APSLab receives funding from the Sun Foundation.

Creating a sustainable future for all

As extreme weather, rising sea levels and shifting landscapes reinforce the realities of living with a changing climate, a team of Griffith scientists are working on the frontline to reduce the global impact.

Taking on such a challenge has been no easy task, requiring the coordination of multiple experts, from micro economists to coastal engineers, marine ecologists, planners and social scientists.

There are also other factors to consider, such as operating in remote areas, engaging with culturally diverse communities and governments, and informing international policies.

Professor Brendan Mackey, director of the Griffith Climate Change Response Program (GCCRP), oversees the research projects tackling climate change, many of which are funded through philanthropy.

“We owe much of our success to our supporters, who have been key partners in our research and work. Without them, we would not have been able to take the lead on many critical projects or implement strategies intended to address the risks to people and nature from environmental degradation and global warming,” he said.

While work on the ground is critical to securing the future of generations to come, much of it would not be possible without the vital support of donors.

“They understand urgent action is needed on climate change and see the value of our work, whether it’s preserving our coastlines and wildlife or stopping the degradation of our forests. Their ongoing support is making a huge difference,” Professor Mackey said.

The GCCRP, is a multi-disciplinary program focused on research into climate change adaptation and mitigation. In its 13 years, it has successfully partnered with local communities, contributed to the growing body of climate research and provided crucial advice to international organisations, including the climate change treaty, Secretariat for the Pacific Regional Environment Program and the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organisation.

“Climate change has become everyone’s business and represents a genuinely existential threat, there is no more important problem. Our research is trying to tackle the challenges it presents, while also having a genuinely integrated, multidisciplinary approach,” Professor Mackey said.

Professor Mackey first joined the program nine years ago, using his expertise in vegetation ecology, forest ecosystems, biodiversity conservation and environmental modelling to help address some of the challenges people are facing in a changing world.

“It has been incredibly rewarding to work with dedicated scientists, professionals, governments and communities and environmental advocates from all over the world. We have positively changed

the lives of others and have shown there is a way forward if we work together and with the environment,” Professor Mackey said.

The GCCRP supports dozens of major research projects, including primary forests (old growth forests) conservation research, working with Pacific Island and coastal urban communities and studying revived humpback whale populations.

“The Earth’s climate has dramatically changed as a result of greenhouse gas emissions from burning fossil fuels for energy and deforestation. Fortunately, it’s not too late and it’s well within our ability to stop greenhouse gas emissions in line with what the science is saying is needed. But we are locked into a certain amount of climate change, with more in the pipeline, and we must also address the real risks these bring,” Professor Mackey said.

“We are so incredibly grateful to the generosity of our donors, who see the potential of our work to instigate real change, right now. We could not do it without them and I want to thank them for supporting us. We all have the power to make a difference.”



Dan Ware and Dr Serena Lee

Fuelled by philanthropy



Surveying tropical primary forests on Tanna Island

Primary forests and climate change

With only 26 percent of the Earth's primary forest cover remaining, a team of Griffith experts are on an urgent mission to save what's left.

Working with partners from all over the world, researchers and scientists are recording and collecting valuable data to educate and inform the public on the importance of preserving these precious ecosystems.

Supported by the evidence, they hope to provide information to better inform decision makers who are in positions to help prevent deforestation and promote sustainable alternatives.

Primary forests are irreplaceable sanctuaries for much of the world's biodiversity, support the livelihoods of indigenous custodians and play a significant role in global climate change by absorbing carbon.



Doing a deep dive on tourism in Vanuatu

Preparing for a rapidly changing climate in the Pacific

EcoAdapt is researching the impacts of climate change on small island nations in the Pacific. The project team, with support from a range of experts and disciplines, works with local communities to strengthen ecosystems that naturally protect and provide important benefits for coastal communities.

Griffith University senior research fellow Dan Ware said they try to balance the needs of the community and what is needed to sustain the natural environment.

“We know climate change will have an impact on our beaches but for our neighbours in the Pacific, climate change means they might not eat that day,” he said.

Whales in a changing climate

Growing whale populations in the aftermath of long-term exploitation in the whaling industry has given researchers the opportunity to explore the role whales play in sustaining healthy oceans.

Griffith researchers are studying the impacts of climate change on recovering humpback whale populations in the Southern Hemisphere including their migration, feeding and breeding.

The Griffith Climate Change Response Program receives funding from a private charitable trust.

Scholarships help students imagine a better future

‘Happy to do his share,’ Griffith donor and philanthropist, Dr Soheil Abedian DUniv, believes generosity is not about money, it is about heart.

Dr Abedian embraces every opportunity to connect with those he has helped, moved by their stories and interested in their thoughts on some of the world’s biggest challenges, from climate change to homelessness.

He is also happy to share his story too, talking about his passion for architecture, his insights into building a prestige property empire on the Gold Coast and his early beginnings in Iran where he was born.

“Everyone has a story to tell based on their upbringing, condition of living and environment, but they share something in common too, their ability to move from crisis to victory. We can learn from each other’s stories,” he said.

A successful businessman and architect, Dr Abedian, credits his own success to his father’s dedication to ensure he and his four siblings received a university education in Austria. He has been an ardent supporter of education ever since, with his personal philanthropic support commencing in early 2000 and later through the establishment of the Abedian Foundation.

“I’m personally a by-product of a free education and genuinely believe we can achieve world peace and harmony if people are given access to a proper education, which is why the Abedian Foundation has moved to support Griffith University,” he said.

Dr Abedian and his wife Anne are long-term supporters of Griffith University with a focus on helping talented students experiencing adversity through life-changing scholarships.

“I believe, like my father, that access to education contributes to the betterment of society,” he said.

In 2016, the Abedians launched the Abedian Foundation Griffith Futures Scholarships Program at Griffith University, committing to the creation of 360 student scholarships. He said he felt compelled to do more when hearing from students struggling to make ends meet while pursuing a degree.

“When we meet with students, we learn about their stories, sacrifices and determination to get a degree and a job. Every person’s story is empowering because they are changing their life and by doing so, creating a better future for the next generation,” he said.

At the program launch, Dr Abedian met with students, Bec Silman and Angus Burkitt, and heard first-hand how a scholarship changed their lives—Bec had been supporting her father and younger brother since her mother’s death and Angus desperately needed hip surgery.

So moved by their stories, Dr Abedian offered additional financial assistance to those students shocking everyone on the day.

“It’s hard to put into words how it feels when I see the smiles on these kids’ faces, it’s priceless. I genuinely wish them all the best and hope they become agents of change,” he said.

Dr Abedian’s philanthropy goes far beyond the boundaries of Griffith University extending into health, research and social equity.

Last year, the Gold Coast City Council awarded Dr Abedian the keys to the city for his charitable works in the community. He was also awarded the Queensland Community Foundation Higher Education Philanthropist of the Year in 2018.

“I believe professional education is important to the advancement of society but so is a moral education. How we practice every day the virtues of becoming more compassionate, loving, generous and understanding,” he said.

“Maybe our efforts offer a small glimpse of light and can be an inspiration for others to do the same.”



Abedian Foundation Griffith Futures Scholarship recipients met with the Abedians at a special thank you event last year

Friendship circle creates a musical gift

Like many Queensland Conservatorium graduates, Sam, 21, is looking to the future, and as an aspiring professional violinist, dreams of playing for one of the great symphony orchestras.

The inaugural recipient of The Arts Asset Giving Circle scholarship, established through a group of friends, Sam can confidently pursue a career in music after graduation.

“It is a big deal, I have never received something like this before. This scholarship is going to do so much for me and students like me who are here by the skin of their teeth,” she said.

A gifted musician, Sam started learning to play the violin at the age of eight, dedicating countless hours to fine tuning her craft. Her mother had first encouraged Sam to learn the piano, but Sam soon took up the violin after watching her brother play.

Having two talented violinists in the family was probably more than Sam’s parents had bargained for, with her brother studying at the Royal Danish Academy in Copenhagen in Denmark and Sam at the Queensland Conservatorium.

“It’s very expensive, my parents have done so much for us and have been very supportive,” she said.

Between music lessons, multiple violins and ongoing maintenance costs, Sam was fortunate to stave off the further expense of a new violin at the standard required for university.

On loan from the University’s Instrument Bank, Sam has been playing the Victor Licciardi Violin, which was generously donated.

Sam returned the violin after her last recital at Griffith, forming part of an ongoing legacy that ensures future generations of young violinists have access to quality instruments.

“It is such a beautiful instrument and has helped me so much, I will be sad to see it go but it’s for the best because it is in the spirit of how it was given and will go on to help other students,” she said.

The savings she has scraped together from part-time work and the scholarship will most likely go towards buying her ‘forever’ violin.

“I’m so grateful for the support. The money has helped me plan and imagine myself doing things I didn’t think I would be able to do before. It makes such a big difference to a person like me, it means I can look at further study or buy a violin, which would be the biggest deal for me right now,” she said.

Sam recalls meeting the scholarship donors after performing the Korngold Violin Concerto with the Conservatorium Symphony Orchestra.

“They were all so lovely and supportive. It was nice they got to see me play and put a face to the person on the paper,” she said.

Dr Sheena Burnell first floated the idea of creating the scholarship by forming a giving circle. Collectively, their combined resources enabled them to establish the scholarship.

“The people who ended up chipping in were people I just happened to be chatting with at work, and they were like, ‘I want to be in on that,’ it was really wonderful. We wouldn’t necessarily all meet each other socially but this scholarship brought us together. It just seemed like a good idea and has been really fun,” she said.

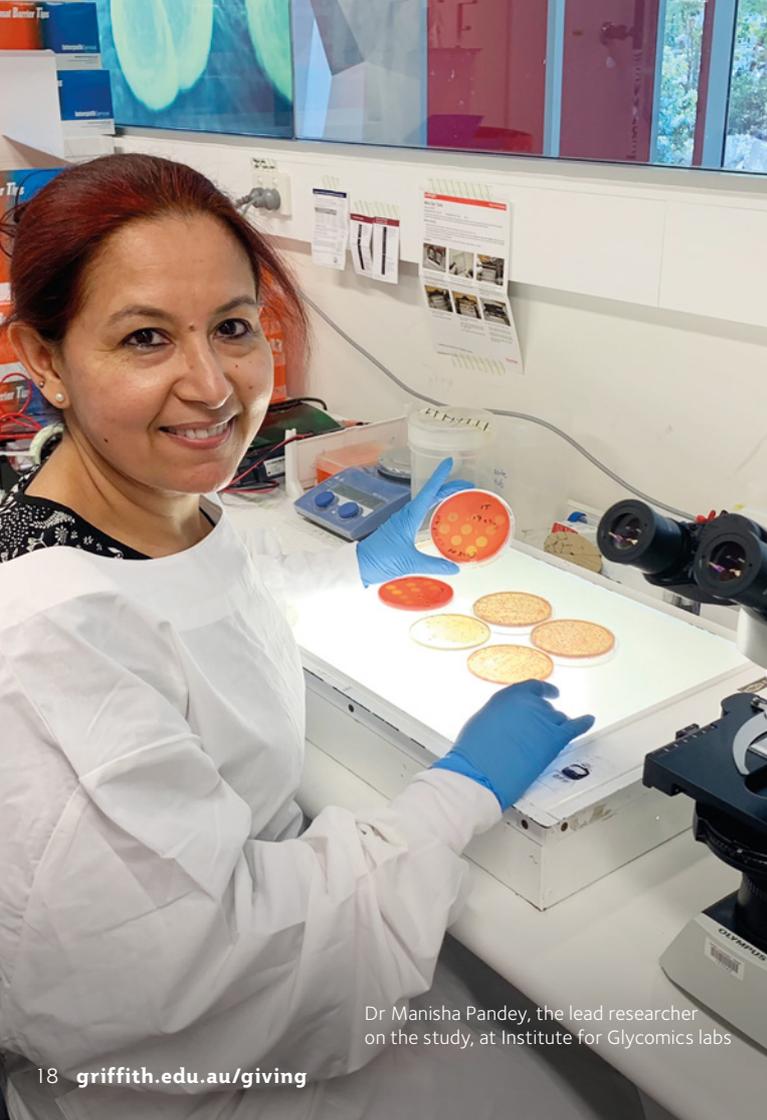
Dr Burnell has been a music lover for many years and wanted to do more to support the arts culture in Brisbane.

“I think philanthropy is a measure of a society. I’ve always been a great believer in a society that helps others,” she said.

“If you have means, you should share it around. For me, a vital and vibrant arts scene is really important for an intelligent thriving society.”



Sam Chiu



Dr Manisha Pandey, the lead researcher on the study, at Institute for Glycomics labs

New discovery amplifies the impact of novel vaccine

Philanthropy has helped accelerate research into streptococcus leading scientists to exciting new discoveries in stroke and toxic shock prevention and treatments.

In collaboration with its research partners, Griffith University's Institute for Glycomics has advanced the development of a vaccine for streptococcus (Strep A), an infection linked to rheumatic heart disease (RHD) and RHD-related stroke, and streptococcal toxic shock syndrome.

A significant funding boost to streptococcus research at the Institute, helped progress clinical trials of two vaccine candidates, with one toxicology study in the first trial confirming the vaccine is safe to be tested on humans and a second vaccine trial underway.

Program lead and laboratory head Professor Michael Good AO said his lab had been working on streptococcus for the best part of 30 years because it's a major illness for which there is no vaccine.

“This research requires significant funding and we are very grateful for the funding we have received,” he said.

“Our research has the potential to save people’s lives but without our donors we would not be where we are today. On behalf of myself, the team, our partners and the many people who may one day benefit from the work we are doing here, I thank you.”

If successful, the research could lead to a simple childhood vaccine dramatically reducing RHD-related strokes, but also has the potential to treat and prevent toxic shock caused by invasive streptococcal disease.

“Streptococcal toxic shock syndrome is an acute condition like meningococcus—if you get exposed to the organism you can be dead within a matter of days or less. So, we’re hopeful what we’ve discovered can help save lives,” Professor Good said.

While streptococcus (Strep A) is the same bacteria group that causes common and non-life-threatening ailments such as school sores and tonsillitis, about one in 100 cases can develop into streptococcal toxic shock syndrome.

“We were able to show our vaccine can prevent and induce antibodies that can treat this deadly disease,” Professor Good said.



Professor Good AO and Dr Pandey with Institute for Glycomics research team

In their search for a cure, researchers will soon be looking to move the vaccine to human clinical trials, something that would not have been possible without ongoing donor support.

Institute for Glycomics research into Strep A infection receives funding from the National Health and Medical Research Council, ATMC, National Foundation for Medical Research and Innovation, Heart Foundation, Lowitja Institute and the Snow Foundation.

Return on investment

A journey of giving has already begun for Griffith Business School (GBS) alumnus, Denis Vukovac, eager to invest in the next generation of business leaders a year after graduating.

The ink was still drying on Denis's last exam when he put up his hand to become a Student Investment Fund (The Fund) Foundation Member, pledging \$10,000 toward the program.

"I've seen first-hand the impact giving back can have on your community and know how much it can change people's lives. It's a powerful thing and I would like to start that journey," he said.

Denis was nine years old when his parents passed away leaving him and his siblings orphans, and his 21-year-old sister the family's legal guardian. A scholarship to attend St Joseph's Nudgee College gave Denis the opportunity he needed to focus on his schooling.

"It put me through school and gave me the benefit of a really good education. The doors that opened for me were huge, I truly am grateful for the opportunities," he said.

Denis had often thought about how he wanted to 'pay it forward' and was talking to Griffith's Professor of Finance, Robert Bianchi, about an idea to start a not-for-profit investment fund.

"It turned out Professor Bianchi had been working on a similar idea for the past couple of years, which was about to become a real thing and they were looking for donors. I put my hand up straight away, as it was a great way to get involved," he said.

The Fund gives eligible students the opportunity to invest in socially responsible ASX listed companies, with all fund dividends reinvested into GBS student scholarships.

Denis was one of the first students to benefit from the real-world educational opportunities The Fund offers its students. He was also the recipient of the Karl Morris Scholarship—named after scholarship donor and fellow alumnus Karl Morris AO—giving him much-needed help when he was juggling full-time work and study.

As a mature age student, Denis, had to take every opportunity to cram, making time to study on long-haul flights and in departure lounges, while traveling for work. Unfortunately, he ended up in hospital in the last year of his degree and recalls asking for his laptop moments after waking up from major surgery.

"The nurses thought I was crazy but I told them I have to do this," he said.

The flexibility of online study and the 'second to none' support he received from Griffith were some of the many factors helping him to get through his Bachelor of Commerce degree.

“Griffith has quite innovative education tools and infrastructure, like the Margaret Mittelheuser Trading Room and Bloomberg Terminals, along with the University’s ability to bring in mentors and subject matter experts. It adds a lot of value to GBS and the finance curriculum,” he said.

Denis plans to return the favour to other students like him, who have the passion and drive to succeed and pursue a university education but need a little help to get them through.

“It’s all worthwhile. You get as much back when you give to others and sometimes a lot more. It’s very satisfying to do this and to be in a position to do so,” he said.

Not one to sit on his laurels, he is already thinking about other ways to give back.

“Giving is not just financial, it’s about your time too. I was very fortunate to have some fantastic mentors and I would like to be able to offer the same to other students,” he said.

“The impact you can have on others is something I have seen through my own eyes, it’s a powerful thing and I want to start that journey.”



Denis Vukovac with Professor Carolyn Evans, Vice Chancellor and President



Scholarships honour healthcare pioneer

A lifetime dedicated to First Peoples' healthcare has continued through a dedicated nursing scholarship, ensuring future generations feel the positive impact of the woman it honours.

Helping Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nursing students to graduate, the Aunty Pamela Mam Indigenous Nursing Scholarship has created educational pathways and First Peoples healthcare professionals in Queensland.

Professor Roianne West, Dean (First Peoples Health) said the scholarship was a way to continue the work and legacy of its namesake, Aunty Pamela, who sadly passed away earlier this year.

"There's so many different layers to what we're attempting to do by honouring Aunty Pam's story," Professor West said.

“Through a scholarship we’ve got a legacy, we’ve got a story, we’ve got eldership, we’ve got Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and culture, all being brought together. It is a really positive way for us to continue her work.”

Aunty Pamela Mam DUniv was a First Peoples’ Elder and descendent of the KuKu Yalanji Peoples in the Cooktown area, whose passion for nursing in her youth culminated in a 60-year career devoted to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ health care and education.

“These scholarships provide opportunities for our young people to get a degree and pursue a healthcare career. It helps alleviate financial stress and allows students to focus on their studies,” Professor West said.

“Through these scholarships we are providing opportunities to educate and train the next generation of First Peoples healthcare workers in our community, ensuring Aunty Pamela’s work lives on.”

As her career progressed, Aunty Pamela focused on the urgent health care needs of Australia’s First Peoples playing a key role in the opening of Brisbane’s Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Community Health Service (ATSICHS)—a not-for-profit delivering comprehensive healthcare services to communities in Brisbane and Logan.

“ATSICHS have been supporters of the scholarship program from the beginning. We are very fortunate to have their support and will continue to work with them to ensure we are providing our students with a world-class healthcare education,” Professor West said.

“Together, we are helping to create a new generation of healthcare professionals in our community, which is why we value this partnership and will work hard to ensure it continues to flourish and grow well into the future.”

Thank you for making a real difference.

Development and Alumni Office

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