

Lincoln Legacy Society Newsletter

Lincoln Legacy Society morning tea

Gathering for good

Each year, the Lincoln Legacy Society gathers to welcome new members and share news from the University. After a year's break due to the pandemic, we were pleased to hold a morning tea on campus on 22 April.

Following an Acknowledgement of Country, Professor S Bruce Dowton, Vice-Chancellor, Macquarie University, gave a welcome message and an award ceremony was held for new members Betty Kopetko and Adam Johnston.

Solicitor Adam, who is featured on page 2, spoke to members about his decision to leave a bequest. Having lived with cerebral palsy since birth, his generous gift is hope in action, supporting researchers to progress their work so it can be clinically applied and, as he says, 'people like me can walk.'

It was a moving morning indeed, with Macquarie third-year law and commerce student Taylor McCoy, 2020 recipient of the Jennifer Barton Memorial Law Scholarship, also speaking to members about what the support has meant to her.

A regional student working hard to support herself while studying, Taylor shared that by the end of her first year, she was only just treading water. But for her, the scholarship went beyond simply easing a financial burden.



Paul and Sue Taylor with the recipient of their Jennifer Barton Memorial Law Scholarship, Taylor McCoy.

"It was more than just a floating device. It put fins on my feet, empowering me to find my own success, to swim my own race. I now have the agency to define my future by my passions and goals rather than the pursuit of short-term needs."

'It is my hope that the generosity and dedication in this audience today will continue to empower Macquarie University students to rise above circumstance and push through disadvantage – because we have so much good to give.'

To everyone who attended, who gives so generously or is considering a gift, we thank you. Through your vision and philanthropy, we can continue to invest in Macquarie University's future.

Welcome to the Lincoln Legacy Society, named in honour of Dr John Lincoln and his wife, Joan, who were instrumental in the foundation years of Macquarie University.

Members are invited to attend bespoke events on campus each year and also receive a special commemorative pin in acknowledgement of their legacy gift.

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Member spotlight



PHOTO: STATE LIBRARY OF NSW

Adam Johnston undertakes research for his thesis.

Realising a dream

As a child born in the early 1970s with cerebral palsy, Alumnus Adam Johnston's maternal grandmother had an unwavering dream that one day he would walk.

In her lifetime alone, she had seen the invention of radio and television, a man land on the moon and the development of computers – and fervently believed Adam had been born into precisely the right time in history. A time she believed would have the scientific and technological advancements to help him move freely and without impediment.

A seed had been planted. But, like most great ideas, it took some time to unfurl and materialise into a way forward for Adam, and it was no easy path. As a young man finishing school, he watched as friends passed away from degenerative diseases and remembers thinking, How can this be?

'There was no clear answer; it was just the way things were,' says Adam. 'I just had to accept that I was disabled and make the best of it. But, after multiple orthopaedic procedures to make me more mobile, which in my case didn't work, and a constant rehab program, I began to think, Is this it?'

Then, in 2003, Adam heard a keynote address by the world-famous actor Christopher Reeve, who had been paralysed after an accident, at the then premier Bob Carr's forum on spinal cord injuries and conditions in Sydney. Everything changed.

'I was listening to Reeve and his doctor speak about the new wave of medicine – stem cell technology. That was the point at which I said to myself: I don't have to be a disabled man anymore. I could see a future where I was among the last to experience physical or intellectual disability.'

According to Adam, the real solution now will be a combination of stem cell therapies and the capacity to regenerate body parts. 'This can already be done on a micro level; they can already grow a miniature heart or a tiny lung. The question is, how can we upscale this for humans?

'But we are getting there,' he says; there is cause for hope. 'A lot of diseases like multiple sclerosis and muscular dystrophy – and even cerebral palsy, which has some genetic markers – might be solved by looking at the genes that are either active or recessive. If you can shut those genes off, you can save a whole life of suffering.'

It's something he knows well, so when he made the decision to make a bequest, it was important to him that he trusted the organisation he was investing in. 'I have a long association with Macquarie as a student, and the University has invested in me over the years, for which I am grateful,' he says, referring to his Higher Degree Research (HDR) scholarship.

His PhD, which he is currently working on, challenges the accepted norms and framework for those living with disability by questioning why we are not alleviating the pain and suffering of those with disability and challenging the assumption that disability need occur, or be long term.

So, it was important to Adam that his bequest could be specifically targeted to what he hoped for. 'I wanted the bequest to directly support scientific research for medical intervention, so needed an institution that had longevity and didn't rely on a three-year funding cycle.'

It's all about the long game for Adam, who says his decision to leave a bequest to the University was one that developed over time, with a lot of thought. 'I don't have any children, and I'm not married. I am a disabled man. There comes a time in your life when you ask, What will be my legacy? What will survive me?

'I need to be pragmatic and want to support the next generation of researchers so they can progress their work to a point where it can be clinically applied, and people like me can walk,' he says, with characteristic magnanimity and a complete lack of rancour,

No less, there's the touch of fond regard for those researchers and organisations already on this quest who, for Adam, 'make life worth living' and give him the confidence that while some of his dreams may not be realised, higher ideals are possible.

His selflessness and courage, and dogged determination to dream of a better world, where others might live with more freedom and less pain, is already making the world a better place. He is sure to have made his grandmother proud.

Adam Johnston is leaving a bequest to support research into medical intervention.



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Your impact

The ripple effect

Many have asked, What can I, as just one person, do? As if it requires many to have any real impact in the world. But for those who also ask, What is my legacy? What can I leave behind to make the world a better place? It becomes very clear indeed that there is much one person can do to change the lives of others.

Making a bequest is a very personal decision. It starts with an idea and often relates to something we want others to enjoy or achieve. Perhaps it's a cause or concern close to our hearts. Either way, by leaving a bequest, we can be sure it will happen and change the lives of others for the better.

THINKING AHEAD

Earlier this year, a generous bequest to fund reading scholarships and research was made to the Macquarie University Centre for Reading, a world-class initiative that conducts high-impact research and effective interventions for those facing challenges through the Reading Clinic.

As Clinical Director Associate Professor Saskia Kohnen explains, 'The donor was an English literature graduate of Macquarie University who was passionate about reading, poetry and the written word. She was reading daily until she passed away, with the last book on her bedside a collection of poems by John Keats,

'She wanted to give the gift of reading to someone else and understood the importance of our research-based approach, which ensures the right intervention at the right time.'

Her kind donation will support research as well as scholarships to ensure that children, adolescents and adults who are struggling to read and write can access support through the Reading Clinic.

'Not everyone who needs assistance can afford it,' continues Associate Professor Kohnen, referring to children such as



With support from the Reading Clinic, students such as William no longer feel excluded at school and can join in classes more. 'It's given him hope that he can achieve something,' says his mother, Carolyn.

William (photographed above), who has, in his words, gone from 'lonely and mishroboll' to 'happy and confident' with help from the Reading Clinic.

'Our scholarship program depends on our generous donors, and we – and the families who come to us – are immensely grateful for the kindness of those who support us financially.'

FROM THE HEART

The ripple effect of being able to read and write is profound, changing the life of an individual and everyone around them, too. Children and adolescents become more confident, as do adults, which reduces anxiety and improves educational, emotional and vocational outcomes.

Ruby's daughter Katie was awarded a scholarship to the Reading Clinic, which was made possible through generous bequests and donations. Ruby says, 'I can't thank the donors enough for the opportunities that have opened up for Katie because of the scholarship – it goes further than just improving her abilities at school.

'It has helped us, the adults in her life, understand and cater to her needs, and the attention from the dedicated professionals at the clinic goes a long way to improving Katie's self-worth, boosting her confidence and reducing her fear of failure.

'It gives her the opportunity to try in a safe and comforting environment. It also allows her to feel supported and understood, lowering any feelings she may have of being "dumb".'

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES

Many of us take the ability to read – and the inner world it opens up, not to mention the practicalities it enables – for granted. But for those with a child who struggles with this fundamental skill, it can be a long and challenging road.

Lee, on receipt of a scholarship for her daughter Zara said, 'I haven't stopped crying since your call. This will be life-changing for Zara; I am so very grateful.'

With support from the Reading Clinic, Zara is already making great headway. Lee reports, 'I am seeing a massive difference in her reading and writing, and her confidence and mental health has improved greatly.'

Since attending the Reading Clinic, Zara, who loves to sing, has had the confidence to join the school choir, as reading the lyrics is no longer a barrier. Lee says, 'Zara asks me to google the lyrics to her favourite songs so she can learn the words – she wouldn't have been able to do that if it wasn't for your clinic.

'She has also read at school assemblies and doesn't feel as far behind the other kids as she once did. I recognise she still has a lot of work to go to catch up fully, but I now believe this is possible, watching her improvement over the past six months.'

Best of all, her mum says, 'Zara loves coming to the clinic and says she smiles so much her face hurts when she is there!'

Could you wish for a greater ripple effect from one kind deed?

Thanks to generous bequests and donations, the Macquarie University Centre for Reading is changing lives one student at a time through scholarships and pioneering research.



Research highlights

Leading the way

Humans are inherently social beings. We crave connection, and our physical and emotional wellbeing is sustained by interacting with others. It's no surprise, then, that limiting these interactions has a significant impact on our quality of life, not least as a result of repeated lockdowns, changing restrictions and imposed physical distancing.

The social changes that the pandemic has brought about has provided a unique opportunity to understand and therefore enhance life satisfaction, especially as we age. And it has also brought with it some surprises as well – according to Professor Viviana Wuthrich, Director of Macquarie's Centre for Ageing, Cognition and Wellbeing.

OLDER AND WISER

As a group, those over 65 have rightly been a focus throughout the pandemic because of their vulnerability to the effects of COVID-19. Aged care centres went into high alert, restricting access, and grandparents everywhere missed seeing their grandchildren face to face.

But it's not all doom and gloom. 'Research findings are demonstrating that the over 65s have been more resilient during the pandemic,' says Professor Wuthrich.

It's good news, supported by recent research conducted by Macquarie psychologists who have measured the mental, social and physical wellbeing impacts of COVID-19 on older adults. 'While many reported low mood and worry, it's not as severe as might be expected and, in many cases, older adults were coping well,' says Professor Wuthrich.

These findings are supported by another study that followed people who had been successfully treated for anxiety or depression disorders by Macquarie University. As Professor Wuthrich explains, 'We thought they would be more vulnerable during the pandemic, but most were doing well.'

'We didn't see the expected relapse rates, and people were sustaining good mental health despite the challenges.'



AGEING SECRETS

So what is the secret to this level of resilience in the over 65s? 'We found that living with someone else, rather than living alone, was protective,' notes Professor Wuthrich.

Indeed, connection is key: 'Those who were maintaining contact with their grandchildren, whether via phone or videoconferencing, or in some cases face to face, had better mental health too,' she says.

The use of technology is definitely a protective factor, with those maintaining social contact and a wider interest in the world in this way found to experience better emotional wellbeing overall.

Moreover, a strong body of research suggests older people are faring better than the young during the pandemic. 'As people get older, they are more satisfied with their life, partly due to a shift in what they think is important.'

'They also become better at adapting and accepting adverse situations,' explains Professor Wuthrich. 'Part of this is the ability to draw on previous life experience and the knowledge they have got through difficult situations before.'

As challenging as a one-in-a-hundred-year event may be, it would seem the take-home message from those older and wiser would be that we will get through this – and there is as much to learn from the over 65s as there is to learn about them.

RECENT FINDINGS

Macquarie University's Centre for Ageing, Cognition and Wellbeing and the Centre for Emotional Health in the Department of Psychology continue to investigate the drivers for ageing well and how we might enhance quality of life for over 65s.

The recent paper 'Necessary but not sufficient: Examination of the satisfaction of online social contact in older adults during COVID-19' by Professor Wuthrich and her colleagues – Jessamine Chen PhD, Diana Matovic PhD and Ronald M Rapee PhD – confirmed that during lockdown, 'Older adults readily picked up technology to maintain engagement with social activities, and most continued to participate in modified formats.'

It was found that those who did so were both more satisfied and connected with the groups they were part of, experiencing higher psychological health. The results also showed that 'online participation was not as beneficial as adapted face-to-face formats [such as reduced numbers] ... and efforts are needed to assist older adults maintain social contact during the pandemic and re-engage them when restrictions ease.'

Ensuring those over 65 maintain social connections, which is central to overall quality of life, is the subject of another paper from the two centres. In 'Barriers and facilitators to social participation in older adults: A systematic literature review', Professor Wuthrich, together with Braedon G Townsend and Jessamine Chen PhD, found that while 'social participation and motivation can be facilitated at the individual level with therapy/intervention programs, it is within the power of small local systems (eg local councils) to also meet the needs of their community and foster systemic change.'

If, as Mahatma Gandhi said, 'the true measure of any society can be found in how it treats its most vulnerable members', the pandemic has provided a unique opportunity for us to understand how we can do this best.

If you would like to have a confidential discussion about leaving a gift in your will, please contact the Philanthropy Office.

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