

# IMPACT *of giving* 2025



Thank you for supporting  
education and research  
at Flinders University

Leading global  
cancer research to  
find answers, page 4.

Dylan Alcott  
Foundation puts passion  
into play, page 6.

Art transforms a  
rural community,  
page 16.

# Thank you

**“The Matthew Flinders Scholarship was a huge help – I cannot thank the donors enough.”**

Chloe Stevens works at ForestrySA and is on the verge of completing her honours degree in Biodiversity and Conservation at Flinders University.

But last year she didn't know if any of this would be possible.

Finding it hard to make ends meet as a student, Chloe hit a particularly difficult roadblock when her old computer needed upgrading so that she could download programs crucial to her studies – but she couldn't afford the costly upgrade.

Chloe knew she couldn't continue her studies without being able to access course content on her laptop and was overwhelmed by the financial pressure.

But thanks to generous donors like you, Chloe received a Matthew Flinders Scholarship, providing the essential funds needed to upgrade her computer and continue her studies.

She is now looking forward to a future doing what she is so passionate about – protecting wildlife.

**Thank you for providing life-changing support for students in financial need through the Matthew Flinders Scholarship.**

[Flinders.edu.au/support](https://flinders.edu.au/support)



## Acknowledgement of Country

Flinders University acknowledges the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands on which its campuses are located. These are the Traditional Lands of the Arrernte, Dagoman, First Nations of the South East, First Peoples of the River Murray and Mallee region, Jawoyn, Kurna, Larrakia, Ngadjuri, Ngarrindjeri, Ramindjeri, Warumungu, Wardaman and Yolngu people. We honour their Elders past, present and emerging.

# A FEARLESS COMMITMENT TO COMMUNITY IMPACT

**As we navigate life's challenges and changes, it's essential to recognise the support that sustains us along the way.**

Reflecting on the difference others have made in my own life, I am reminded of the profound and life-changing impact we can have on those around us.

By supporting education and research at Flinders University, your actions speak to your values, and we are grateful to be partnering with you to change lives and change the world.

Thanks to your continued support, 65 students in financial need have received the Matthew Flinders Scholarship this year – helping to cover essential study and living costs as they earn their degree.

Education is a powerful catalyst for change, and we are pleased that donor support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students continues to grow. Special thanks to Nick Llewellyn-Jones and Jenny Wightman for their incredible dedication to advancing equity and reconciliation through named scholarships. See pages 11 and 14.

Community impact through research is also thriving.

Over the past five years, Flinders has been the fastest-growing research institution in Australia, and we are now ranked eighth in the country for health and medical research – and first in South Australia.

Your contributions to our Early Career Research Seed Funding program and targeted research projects are making an extraordinary difference, including addressing the youth mental health crisis. See page 8.

We are deeply grateful for Catherine Wegener's generosity, which is advancing cancer research, improving diagnosis rates, and offering hope for those suffering from mesothelioma, an asbestos-related cancer. See page 4.

At the heart of Flinders University is a strong sense of community. We support each other to achieve beyond all expectations, empowering our students and researchers to make a lasting impact.

We couldn't do this without you.

Your support drives social change, improved health, innovation and conservation. I am delighted you have chosen to join our fearless commitment to lasting community impact.

**Thank you for your unwavering generosity.**

**Professor Colin J Stirling**  
President and Vice-Chancellor



## What you supported in 2024\*

40.9%	Matthew Flinders Scholarship
12.2%	Medical Education & Research
9.1%	Creative Writing Education
7.4%	Early Career Research
6.3%	Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Scholarships
5.9%	Environmental Research
4.5%	Other Prizes & Scholarships
4.0%	Highest Priority Education & Research
3.5%	Arts Education & Research
2.1%	STEM Education & Research
1.8%	Rural Scholarships
1.3%	Community Wellbeing
1%	Other

\*Based on number of donations per cause.

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The 2025 Impact of Giving report is published by Advancement, Flinders University.

Editor: Lynda Allen  
Writers: Lynda Allen & David Sly  
Design: Sara Barbosa, Flux Visual Communication  
Photography: Brenton Edwards  
Photos supplied: pages 6, 15 & 17  
Cover image: Amber Brock-Fabel, Dr Ben Lohmeyer & Abbey Wilkinson

Printed in South Australia by Flinders Press using soy-based inks on environmentally responsible paper.  
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# Leading global CANCER RESEARCH

## REX ELLIOT WEGENER PHD SCHOLARSHIP

**A new biospecimen database at Flinders University is at the forefront of global mesothelioma cancer research, thanks to an ongoing scholarship created in honour of Rex Wegener.**

Tragically, Australia has one of the highest rates of mesothelioma in the world – an aggressive lung cancer that currently has no cure.

Most of these cases are linked to the exposure of asbestos fibres, a persistent threat in Australia where nearly five million homes contain asbestos building materials.

Rex Wegener, a retired builder, former gymnast and state champion rower, thought he was in excellent health when he was diagnosed with mesothelioma.

His wife, Catherine, recalls the shock and disbelief they experienced upon learning that the cancer was linked to his work-related exposure to asbestos, and that knowledge about the disease was so limited.

**“Rex was an extremely healthy man who regularly played tennis and golf. He never needed to go to the doctor, he never got sick or had headaches, then all of sudden we found out he had cancer - we didn’t even know what mesothelioma meant.”**

“It started with him struggling to breathe, marking the beginning of an awful journey. I naively thought that if I knew more about it, I could help to make Rex better. I was so wrong; the disease was in charge,” says Catherine.

Sadly, Rex passed away in 2017 at the age of 75, just two years after his cancer diagnosis.

In loving memory of her husband, Catherine created the Rex Elliot Wegener PhD Scholarship at Flinders

University in 2020, to advance mesothelioma research and improve outcomes for future sufferers.

Through Catherine’s generous annual donation, so far totalling \$250,000, the research scholarship has supported PhD student Sarita Prabhakaran to develop a much-needed database to collect and analyse mesothelioma cases from around the world.

Working under the guidance of Professor Sonja Klebe at Flinders University, Sarita has established the Asbestos-related diseases and Mesothelioma Biology Research (AMBR) database. The cutting-edge database integrates clinical data and biospecimens from individuals affected by asbestos-related disease.

Sarita explains, “To improve mesothelioma diagnosis, advance our understanding of disease mechanisms and predict treatment options and responses, it’s essential to link larger sets of clinical data and diagnostic information with specimens such as pleural fluid, tissue and blood.”

**“The AMBR database is now at the forefront of global mesothelioma research, supporting researchers worldwide in their quest to improve treatments and care, and ultimately finding a cure.”**

The support of the Rex Elliot Wegener PhD Scholarship has also enabled Sarita to assess the variances in grading of mesothelioma by pathologists across the world.

“The investigation showed that the current grading system for mesothelioma remained robust, but critical tissue and cell features such as nuclear atypia, mitotic counts and necrosis needed more standardised training to improve diagnostic consistency,” says Sarita.

In 2023 Sarita presented further research findings at the World Conference on Lung Cancer in Singapore, along with papers published in the *Pathology* journal and *Journal of Pathology, Microbiology and Immunology*.



Catherine Wegener  
with Sarita Prabhakaran

**“The support from the Rex Elliot Wegener PhD Scholarship has not only progressed my mesothelioma research and established the valuable AMBR database, but has also extended my networks critical to my work.”**

Sarita now works closely with the Asbestos Victims Association of South Australia, which provides support services for mesothelioma patients and their families and raises awareness about the disease.

She also collaborates with the Australian Mesothelioma Registry to analyse the incidence of multiple primary cancers in mesothelioma patients across the country.

Catherine is pleased by the progress made possible through her scholarship support, and its meaningful tribute to her late husband and others who have suffered from asbestos-related cancer.

“Rex was a happy man who had the gift of making people laugh,” says Catherine.

She recalls Rex’s early working life and introduction to asbestos.

He took up an apprenticeship in carpentry and joinery at the age of 17 and was later introduced to asbestos after he moved to Melbourne from Adelaide.

“It was a very popular product and was used a lot in building and construction. In those days it was all hand-sawing, no mask. He had no knowledge of the dangers. It was years later that information filtered through, but the damage had already been done.”

Catherine hopes the scholarship in memory of Rex will help raise awareness about mesothelioma and ultimately lead to breakthroughs in treatment and care.

**“Research is the only way to find answers to this disease – it has already improved treatments that were not available to Rex.”**

“While it’s too late for Rex, it’s not too late for other sufferers. I believe that one day there will be a breakthrough,” says Catherine.

### Improve cancer treatments & outcomes

Support asbestos and silicia dust disease research to provide effective treatments and enable a better quality of life for sufferers. Donate today.



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# PUTTING A PASSION into play

## DYLAN ALCOTT FOUNDATION SCHOLARSHIP

**Support from international tennis champion and Australian of the Year, Dylan Alcott AO, is bringing 19-year-old Michala Baldwin's passion for speech pathology into play.**

From a very young age, speech, language and linguistics have been a strength and passion for Michala.

"I started talking at just five months old, and by four I was reading novels to myself," says Michala.

At school, she learned four languages – Japanese, German, Italian, and Korean – excelling in each.

"I constantly pondered the origins of language, including; how did we learn to use sounds to represent meanings? How did we agree on these meanings? How did our alphabet come to be?"

While Michala's primary school teachers couldn't answer her probing questions, she has since discovered the answers and much more while studying a Bachelor of Speech Pathology at Flinders University.

However, Michala's journey hasn't been easy. Despite her early academic success, she faced significant mental health challenges, including depression and intrusive suicidal thoughts.

**“There were times when it felt impossible to get out of bed, let alone attend university or complete assignments. I thought there was something wrong with me.”**

Michala then received a diagnosis for autism, and with the support of her parents, a psychologist, Disability Services at Flinders University and the Dylan Alcott Foundation she was able to regain control of her life.

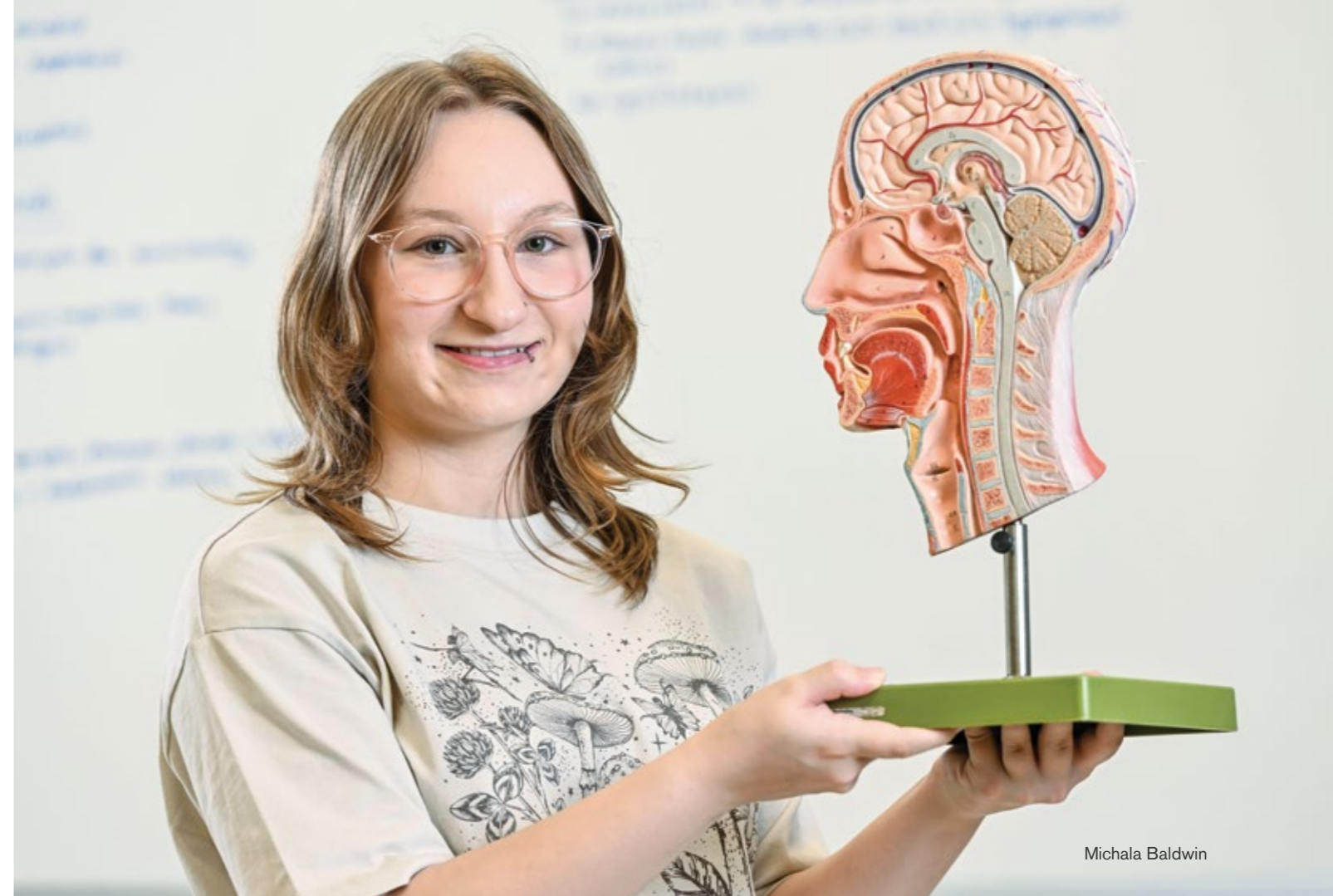


Dylan Alcott AO

Michala is now determined to combine her passion for speech pathology and knowledge on neurodivergence to support others.

**“By becoming a speech pathologist, I want to work alongside people with a disability, their families, and the wider community, to educate others about what autism is and how best to support people like me.”**

Her goal is to create therapy for neurodivergent people that is neuro-affirming and a positive experience, rather than focused on conforming to neurotypical standards.



Michala Baldwin

While managing her mental health and academic demands, Michala also faces financial strain, with the challenges of autism making it impossible for her to work while studying.

"My disability affects my ability to complete daily tasks that others might find simple," says Michala. "The cognitive and social demands of university make it too exhausting to also work to support my study costs."

The Dylan Alcott Foundation has generously donated \$30,000 to support Michala's tuition fees, in addition to \$5,000 from Flinders University to support her day-to-day study costs.

International wheelchair tennis champion Dylan Alcott AO made history in 2021 by securing a Golden Slam – winning all four Grand Slam tournaments and an Olympic gold medal. In 2022 Dylan won the prestigious Australian of the Year Award and an Officer of the Order of Australia medal.

As a tireless advocate for disability awareness, since 2017 he has led the Dylan Alcott Foundation to support real change for Australians living with disability.

"We're committed to helping young Australians with a disability to succeed and achieve their dreams," says Dylan.

"Supporting Michala in her goal of becoming a speech pathologist is just one example of how we can empower young people to create real change."

Michala is deeply grateful for the Dylan Alcott Foundation Scholarship and the life-changing opportunity it provides, including the chance for future independence.

**“The scholarship for my tuition fees will ease my financial burden and significantly reduce my HECS debt.”**

"This will allow me to move out of home sooner and achieve an independence that not all autistic people are fortunate enough to have," says Michala.

The additional support from the University will help Michala achieve a full-time rural placement, covering bills and rent associated with living away from home.

"Words can't express how thankful I am for this support. It has not only helped me personally, but will also have a lasting impact on the people I will help in my future practice as a clinical speech pathologist."

# TACKLING YOUTH LONELINESS

EARLY CAREER RESEARCH SEED FUNDING

Amber Brock-Fabel,  
Dr Ben Lohmeyer and  
Abbey Wilkinson

**While a lack of meaningful connection affects individuals across all age groups, since the COVID-19 pandemic there has been a marked increase in 15 to 24-year-olds experiencing loneliness – causing profound impacts on the physical and mental health of an entire generation.**

“It’s a critical issue in Australia with two in five young people feeling lonely most or all of the time – yet their experiences are almost entirely absent from global research,” says Dr Ben Lohmeyer, Senior Lecturer in Social Policy at Flinders University.

**“Without evidence-based strategies to address loneliness in this age group, effective prevention and support are lacking, especially in school environments.”**

Witnessing the devastating issues connected to youth loneliness, including bullying and violence, Dr Lohmeyer has been tackling this critical issue through a ground-breaking, co-designed research project, supported by donor-funded Early Career Research Seed Funding.

In collaboration with the SA Youth Forum, the research study investigated how young people are impacted by loneliness, identified potential solutions, and developed a proof of concept for future research expansion.

**“The research has already led to significant breakthroughs, and its co-design with young people from SA Youth Forum has proved pivotal to its success.”**

Awarded the 2025 Young Australian of the Year for SA for her youth advocacy work, Amber Brock-Fabel founded the SA Youth Forum in 2021. The Forum’s 2022 annual report highlighted loneliness as a central issue affecting young people in South Australia.

“Loneliness has shaped my generation, especially through the isolation of COVID-19,” says Amber.

For the study, Amber and fellow Forum member Abbey Wilkinson also worked as peer researchers, gathering insights from young people at the Specialised Assistance School for Youth, an independent school in Adelaide dedicated to supporting marginalised and disengaged young people.

Through focus groups and interviews, the school students, aged 15 to 18, were asked to create visual maps of places they felt lonely and were encouraged to share their personal experiences with loneliness.

“Loneliness is often an invisible experience, hidden behind mustered smiles or bedroom doors,” says Abbey.

“The vocabulary we developed in this study offered young people a useful way to classify, unpack and articulate feelings of loneliness.”

**“It was rewarding to see how the research methods we co-designed and our presence as young researchers allowed the participants to talk freely about difficult experiences.”**

Members of the SA Youth Forum also played an essential role in the analysis of the information gathered, enabling deeper, more nuanced understandings into the nature of youth loneliness and providing potential solutions.

Amber explains, “The study uncovered how loneliness is deeply intertwined with space, daily routines, and digital connections. It highlighted the importance of solitude as well as community, the role of music and headphones in shaping emotional landscapes, and the need for places to connect outside of school and home.”

A key recommendation of the study was to create smaller break-out rooms where students can retreat when they feel isolated – a simple yet powerful solution to combat loneliness in school environments.

“While the popularity of large open spaces in schools is designed to foster inclusivity, it’s unintentionally exacerbating feelings of isolation,” says Dr Lohmeyer.

“These large spaces often make students feel exposed and vulnerable, especially when they are alone. It can contribute to bullying and further disconnection.”

The study also highlighted the significant impact youth workers and social workers can make by building meaningful connections with young people to reduce feelings of loneliness, and in providing support to help them build peer connections.

These insights are already sparking discussions about how schools and other institutions can re-design spaces and support systems to foster a greater sense of safety, connection and belonging.

Dr Lohmeyer says the impact of this donor-funded research on the community has been far-reaching, along with providing unexpected personal and professional benefits.

“The study allowed me to collaborate with some amazing young people and establish important research partnerships,” says Dr Lohmeyer.

**“The Seed Funding has provided an invaluable foundation for my career, helping me to gain experience in leveraging media to raise awareness, managing research funds, and producing industry-relevant work.”**

Continuing his collaboration with the SA Youth Forum, Dr Lohmeyer has now secured \$50,000 in funding from the LGA of South Australia, to expand the research into the impact of youth centres on loneliness.

Dr Lohmeyer, Amber and Abbey believe the findings and recommendations of this innovative, co-designed study hold the potential to transform how schools and communities respond to youth loneliness, offering hope for a more connected future for young people across Australia.

“Having the opportunity to develop and deliver a research study alongside academics has set a crucial precedent for how lived experience can be embedded in research to achieve meaningful solutions,” says Amber.

## Transform lives & improve our community

Support our emerging researchers to explore impactful research through Early Career Research Seed Funding. Donate today.

[Flinders.edu.au/donate](https://flinders.edu.au/donate)



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# DRIVING MEANINGFUL CHANGE in business

## NICK LLEWELLYN-JONES INDIGENOUS COMMERCE SCHOLARSHIP

**Braden Littler, a proud member of the Larrakia People in Darwin, is on a path to creating positive change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities – a journey shaped by the Nick Llewellyn-Jones Indigenous Commerce Scholarship.**

A recent graduate of the Bachelor of Business at Flinders University, Braden is eager to leverage his business skills and knowledge to make a lasting impact.

He says, “One of my life aspirations is to support Indigenous communities, helping them thrive in both business and social spheres.”

During his studies, Braden was awarded the \$10,000 Nick Llewellyn-Jones Indigenous Commerce Scholarship, which has put him on a trajectory to achieving his goals.

“The funding allowed me to focus fully on my studies and professional growth without the added pressure of working to support myself,” says Braden.

“I joined the Flinders Business Student Association, where I learned about the importance of collaboration, communication, and relationship-building. It also provided me with the incredible opportunity to meet various companies and industry experts.”

**“Without this support I wouldn't have been able to be as proactive in my studies, or go the extra mile in my self-development and achieve my new role on graduation.”**

Today, Braden is making his mark at Yamagigu Consulting, the largest First Nations consulting firm in Australia. In partnership with international consulting firm Deloitte, Yamagigu Consulting works to support

the self-determination of First Nations communities by connecting their Indigenous expertise with Deloitte's professional services.

Braden is excited about the opportunity to create change, especially on Larrakia land.

**“With my connection to Darwin, I plan to support Indigenous businesses up there to thrive.”**

“I'm particularly interested in how technology can be leveraged in business and applying this to drive meaningful change,” says Braden.

Donating \$20,000 to create the scholarship, Flinders law graduate Nick Llewellyn-Jones is Principal and Head of the Native Title, Resources and Renewable Energy team at Norman Waterhouse Lawyers.

An enthusiastic advocate for Indigenous business advancement, Nick designed the scholarship to address a critical gap in business knowledge that can support self-determination for Indigenous communities.

“I hope that by focusing on the importance of business awareness, more Indigenous students feel comfortable taking a leading role in the business world and spreading financial and commercial literacy more broadly,” says Nick.

In his professional life, Nick has made outstanding contributions to improving access to justice for First Nations groups, particularly the Barngarla People, in commercial negotiation and self-determination.

“About 60 per cent of Australia's mineral industry and much of our new renewable energy industry operates on native title land, with about 30 new commercial Indigenous Land Use Agreements negotiated each year for large commercial projects,” says Nick.



Nick Llewellyn-Jones with Braden Littler

**“Indigenous communities often lack the business knowledge or financial expertise to negotiate effective deals with the large international companies who are reaping the benefits.”**

“It's not a fair playing field and we need to start tackling this issue. The scholarship is one way that will help to do this,” says Nick.

The scholarship is part of a broader strategy that Nick and his colleagues at Norman Waterhouse are implementing to expand Indigenous business knowledge and acumen.

“Through my law firm, we want to help facilitate a generation of business awareness in Indigenous Australians and, more specifically, native title holders,” says Nick.

This includes re-writing part of the Indigenous Law course within the Flinders Law degree to cover native title negotiations and the real-world issues currently facing native title law.

They also have plans to establish a Certificate IV in Registered Native Title Body Corporate Management, and to work with the First Nations Clean Energy Network to run masterclasses on renewable energy negotiations.

“We are also developing a short animation to expand financial literacy for Indigenous business leaders and communities,” says Nick.

With Braden now working towards increasing business capacity for Indigenous communities, it's evident that these initiatives are already making a positive impact.

“I'm now fortunate to be in a position where, with determination and effort, I believe I can achieve great things,” Braden says confidently.

**“I want to be a force for good, using every opportunity to contribute to the betterment of society. It may sound clichéd, but it's truly what drives me.”**

Inspired by the life-changing effects of the scholarship and its potential to create long-term change, Nick wants to see the scholarship continue with the support of the broader business community.

“With just 20 businesses contributing \$10,000 each, we could create an endowed scholarship that supports an Indigenous commerce student at Flinders each year, in perpetuity,” says Nick.

“It would be great to see the change that comes from this.”

### Create a fairer playing field

Support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to advance their business skills through the Indigenous Business Scholarship.

### Contact

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Thank you to our many donors who wish to remain anonymous & to those who have made a bequest in their Will.

\*The Donor Honour Roll recognises those who donated to Flinders University between 1 January & 31 December 2024. ^Donor has since passed away.

# DRIVING RECONCILIATION

VALERIE FISHER  
INDIGENOUS FEMALE  
SCHOLARSHIP



Jenny Wightman has long been a powerful advocate for reconciliation. She drives the Sophia Reconciliation Group's community funding for the Sophia Indigenous Scholarship – one of Flinders University's longest running scholarships.

Now, 84-year-old Jenny wants to build on the achievements of the scholarship and has left a donation in her Will to support students through the Valerie Fisher Indigenous Female Scholarship.

Jenny says she felt compelled to do more for reconciliation and as a legacy in memory of her late partner Valerie Fisher, a former primary school principal who had a keen regard for Indigenous knowledge and communities.

**“We have so much to learn from Aboriginal people and so much to understand about their struggles to fit in with our imposed culture.”**

“They have wisdoms that our culture hasn't even glimpsed. Val realised this. She was such an inspiring woman,” says Jenny.

In the 1950s Valerie emerged from a tough working-class upbringing in inner-city Melbourne to become junior swimming champion of Victoria at the age of 14.

This achievement, alongside part-time study at Melbourne University, led to her becoming a Physical Education teacher. She later produced several teaching manuals for movement education and was rapidly promoted within the Victorian Education Department.

Jenny says, “Val became principal at a primary school which was in a very bad way, and with hard work over several years, she totally turned it around.”

Jenny met Valerie (four years her senior) when she became her lecturer at La Trobe University during Valerie's further studies in humanities.

They later became partners and together began a journey of discovery into the wisdom of First Nations people.

In 1979, Valerie was diagnosed with brain cancer.

“After treatment the cancer was ‘cured’, but Val had sustained brain damage from the radiation and was summarily dismissed, with a pension, from the Education Department,” says Jenny.

“Across the next five years, we bought several acres of bush and when I could take time off from La Trobe, we worked on it and planned to set up as self-sustainable a life as we could manage.”

**“Then the cancer returned and I cared for Val for about six months at home until she died.”**

Today, inspired by Valerie's experiences in underprivileged communities and in her cherished memory, Jenny's focus is on supporting the next generation of female Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to experience a prosperous and inclusive future.

“I want to help equip Indigenous students, especially women, with the skills they need to give full expression to their own Indigenous knowledge, and together we can work at repairing our world,” says Jenny.

**“So many suffer from poverty and prejudice resulting from our ignorance. I hope to redress the balance a little through my bequest to support a scholarship.”**

Jenny's passion for driving reconciliation by supporting education was ignited when she returned to her home city of Adelaide after Valerie's passing to study nursing at Flinders.

“Nursing was a new departure for me. For 17 years I had lectured in the English Department at La Trobe University, but after I helped nurse Val for the six years of her brain cancer treatment, I wanted a different kind of engagement with the community.”

After graduating, Jenny worked in private palliative care and at the Julia Farr Centre, caring for women with permanent injury or disease.

For the past 28 years she has also run the Women Writing About Themselves course at the Sophia Women's Community Centre.

“I find that the intimacy of working with women to discover and value their achievements through their own accounts of their lives to be so rewarding,” says Jenny.



Jenny Wightman and Valerie Fisher, London 1970s

Having been active in university life as both a teacher and a student, Jenny understands the benefits that come from supporting emerging student talent, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

She believes that empowering students through education holds the key to an improved society.

Jenny's bequest to create the Valerie Fisher Indigenous Female Scholarship will serve as a wonderful memorial to Valerie's interest in the welfare of female Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

**“The scholarship reflects our joint passion to address the general disadvantage facing many women in our society.”**

“And it is all the more important to support Indigenous female students, giving them the opportunity to use their talents and develop their careers in our current world,” says Jenny.

## Create a lasting impact

Include a bequest in your Will to support students or research at Flinders University.

## Contact

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# TRANSFORMING A COMMUNITY through art

## CYBEC FOUNDATION

**Art has transformed the mental and physical health of a rural community, thanks to a pioneering partnership between Flinders University and The Pinnaroo Project, supported by Cybec Foundation.**

Australia's rural communities are under enormous strain, with high unemployment rates, a dependence on primary industries impacted by climate change, and poor access to quality education and healthcare services.

The remote town of Pinnaroo, located on South Australia's eastern border, has felt each of these challenges acutely.

Recently, the town lost one of its two general practitioners, leaving just one doctor to serve the region's 1,200 residents and two hospitals, situated 50 kilometres apart.

Compounding the issue and the need for urgent support, a 2020 community survey revealed that nearly one-third of Pinnaroo's residents suffered mild-to-severe symptoms of depression.

Believing the benefits of art held some of the answers, the local Mallee Arts Group approached Flinders University's Professor Robyn Clark to lead a first-of-its-kind study to discover whether introducing more art and culture into people's lives could improve the mental health and wellbeing of the Pinnaroo community.

"There is scientific evidence that art can positively impact health, from lowering blood pressure to encouraging healthier habits and improved diet," says Professor Clark who leads Acute Care and Cardiovascular Research at Flinders University's Caring Futures Institute.

**"We wanted to see if art could improve the health of a whole community."**

With a \$60,000 donation from Cybec Foundation, along with government grants, The Pinnaroo Project kicked off in 2021 and included more than 120 local arts workshops and events across three years.

"We are delighted to be a part of this innovative project that carries at its core the message that the arts and related activities bring significant health benefits," says Cybec Foundation Director David Middleton.

**"Cybec Foundation's mission is to foster a better and fairer society, and we're thrilled to see this vision realised through this meaningful arts engagement initiative."**

Alongside new opportunities to engage in arts activities, project participants underwent annual clinical health screenings and were surveyed by Professor Clark and cardiovascular researcher Sara Noonan about their health and lifestyle.

The unique study was co-designed with the local community, led by Julie Wallis and Deb Colwill, and included more than a third of Pinnaroo's population – a remarkable level of volunteer involvement.

"The activities created a platform for people to meet and connect outside the traditional rural pastimes of local sport or the pub," says Julie.

"We have seen the engagement of isolated individuals, some of whom have been local residents for many years."



Deb Cowell, Professor Robyn Clark, Morrison Polkinghorn, Julie Wallis, Linda Park

Health screenings took place in schools, workplaces, service and sporting clubs, with keen support from the local Men's Shed – alongside expert talks on various health issues.

Local men, who might not typically engage in the arts, enthusiastically participated in creative projects from welding decorative flowers to making lanterns, installing ceramic artworks around the Soldiers' Memorial, and painting public murals throughout the town.

"Seeing these country men engage with artistic projects like welding flowers was incredibly rewarding. It shifted their mindset and opened them up to trying new things," says Professor Clark.

Studying the impacts of art on health across a whole community was new – and the results are impressive.

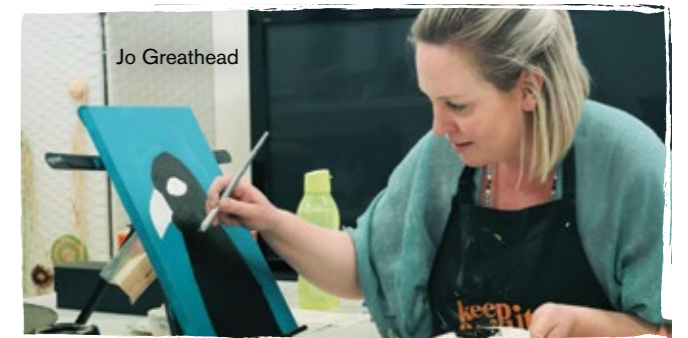
By the end of the three-year study, over 90 percent of The Pinnaroo Project participants – many of whom had never engaged with the arts before – reported significant benefits from the activities, such as reduced stress, improved social connections and new skills.

Participants reported a ten percent decrease in experiencing any depression, with a further ten percent reduction in those experiencing moderate to severe depression. The number of smokers also decreased, from 15 percent to seven percent of the population.

**"Our results showed that the overall health of the whole Pinnaroo community improved during the evaluation period."**

Professor Clark says, "The benefits of art and community engagement on health and wellbeing are clear."

And the longer-term impacts are even more remarkable.



Earlier this year – five years after the project launch – Professor Clark visited Pinnaroo and reports that a new resilience has emerged in the town.

"While sadly there have been suicides in nearby communities as a result of the drought, Pinnaroo has not been impacted," says Professor Clark.

She also notes that Pinnaroo's Skylight country mental health support program has closed.

"The boost to the community's mental health has been so great that they no longer need the government service.

"We weren't expecting these ripple effects – it's such an incredible outcome and with philanthropic support we will be able to see the project implemented in other rural towns."

### The Pinnaroo Project

Learn how the arts are continuing to make a difference to the Pinnaroo community and how your community can get involved.

[Thepinnaroo.com.au](http://Thepinnaroo.com.au)

# LEAVING HOME To achieve a dream

## RURAL SCHOLARSHIP

**Madeline Hansen has a passion for food and a dream to work in nutrition, but growing up in the country she faced challenges to achieving her goal.**

As a teenager, Madeline experienced health issues that influenced what she could eat.

"I've always been interested in how food affects our health, and when I faced my own challenges with food intolerances, it sparked a desire to study nutrition and dietetics," she explains.

Growing up on a farm in the mid-north of South Australia, Madeline knew she would eventually leave her parents and two brothers to pursue her studies in Adelaide. On finishing high school in Gladstone, she was delighted to be accepted into the Bachelor Nutrition and Dietetics at Flinders University.

However, she wasn't prepared for how challenging it would be to live away from her family or how she would manage the financial burden of living independently in a city with high costs.

**“Moving two and a half hours from home, by myself, to study was tough.”**

"I was the first child in my family to attend university, so it was all very new, which made the transition even more difficult," says Madeline.

Thankfully, the Rural Scholarship – funded by Flinders University alumni, staff and community members – has been a lifeline for Madeline, easing her financial stress and improving her mental health.

"The funding helped to cover rent and bills in Adelaide, so that I could study my degree at Flinders," says Madeline.

"The financial support helped me to relax, which improved my mental health quite a lot."

Madeline is keen to let the donors to the Rural Scholarship know that their support has been vital in helping her work towards her dream of a career in nutrition.

**“Thank you so much for providing this money to rural students like me. It is beyond appreciated and makes such a big difference.”**

"Rural students often face extra challenges and costs in moving away from home, so I'm incredibly grateful for the generosity of those who make this scholarship possible."

Now in the Honours year of her degree, Madeline is gaining hands-on experience through a six-month series of work placements, to prepare for her future career.

Currently on placement in the Nutrition department at the Women's and Children's Hospital, she supports pregnant women with gestational diabetes, children with Type 1 diabetes, and patients recovering from cancer or dealing with eating disorders.

"The hospital environment is fast-paced, and we see a wide range of health conditions," says Madeline.

"It's very rewarding to be able to provide nutritional advice for each unique situation."



### Empower rural students to achieve

Support rural students like Madeline to access a university degree and achieve their career dreams through the Rural Scholarship. Donate today.



Scan to donate

# REUNITING CARGOES on the centre stage

## SOUTHEAST ASIAN CERAMICS COLLECTION

**Thanks to donor generosity, the public has enjoyed rare access to items from Flinders University's remarkable archaeology research project to identify the origins of more than 2,300 Southeast Asian ceramic objects, dating back as far as 1,000 years.**

A donation from Douglas Gautier AM, CEO and Artistic Director of Adelaide Festival Centre, and Deputy Chancellor of Flinders University, has helped bring this remarkable collection to the public.

*Reuniting Cargoes: Underwater Cultural Heritage from the Maritime Silk and Spice Route* was held in Adelaide Festival Centre's Festival Theatre Galleries from October 2024 to January 2025 as part of OzAsia Festival.

"It's an extraordinary collection, offering an invaluable window into the deep historical connections between Australia and Asia," says Douglas.

**“This collection speaks to the trade and cultural influences that spanned the entire Asian continent.”**

The exhibition represents a portion of ceramics from the vast collection donated to Flinders in 2022 by Michael Abbott AO KC, with support from Alastair Hunter OAM to fund the research into tracing the provenance of the items and ultimately return them to their homelands.

Led by Associate Professor Martin Polkinghorne, the long-term research project involves a dedicated team of the University's archaeologists, working in collaboration with Indonesian government authorities and researchers.

Two years into the investigation, the research has already uncovered fascinating stories of trade within Southeast Asia from the 9th to 19th centuries.

"I strongly believe in the significance of this work and the bond it fosters between Australia and Indonesia," says Douglas.

The idea for the exhibition emerged from discussions between Douglas, Michael and Associate Professor Polkinghorne, aiming to make this important archaeological project accessible to the public.

"While the investigations will take several years to complete, I was eager to highlight the ceramics now and offer a glimpse into their fascinating stories," says Douglas.

**“I really wanted the public to see and experience the incredible history behind these items, not just have them locked away in storage.”**

The exhibition, facilitated by Adelaide Festival Centre's Exhibitions and Collections team, featured ceramics made in China, Vietnam, Thailand and Myanmar, which were traded with Indonesia over many centuries in exchange for spices, aromatic woods and resins, and rare forest products.

Associate Professor Polkinghorne says, "Indonesia was not only a key destination for these ceramics but also served as a crucial trading hub, facilitating their distribution across Southeast Asia and beyond."

The collection on display included ceramics recovered from shipwrecks on the Indonesian coast, some still encrusted with shells and marine growth.



Douglas Gautier AM

Flinders researchers have been able to identify which kilns were used to fire the ceramics and are making significant progress on which trading ships they were transported.

**“The research is building a detailed narrative of the Maritime Silk and Spice Trade Route, the greatest trade route in the world at that time.”**

*Reuniting Cargoes* exhibition was presented via storyboards to explain the historical links between pieces, and LED screens displaying bespoke digital visualisations of ancient boats that would have carried these ceramics.

Flinders University has a longstanding partnership with Indonesia that dates back to the 1970s with the establishment of Indonesian studies and language programs, and the creation of the Pendopo at the Bedford Park campus in 1990.

Douglas' connection with Asia extends back to his early role as a producer for BBC television and radio in the late 1970s, when he was sent to Hong Kong to research Chinese performance culture.

It was then that his passion for Asian performing arts was ignited – a passion he has maintained throughout his arts career, exemplified by his founding of OzAsia Festival in 2007, now a major cultural event.

"Given Adelaide Festival Centre's strong track record in fostering Asian cultural engagement, exhibitions like this are an essential part of reinforcing our connections with Asia," says Douglas.

**“It also showcases Flinders University's strong standing and significance in the field of archaeology.”**

As the research continues to uncover new insights, Douglas is already planning for future exhibitions.

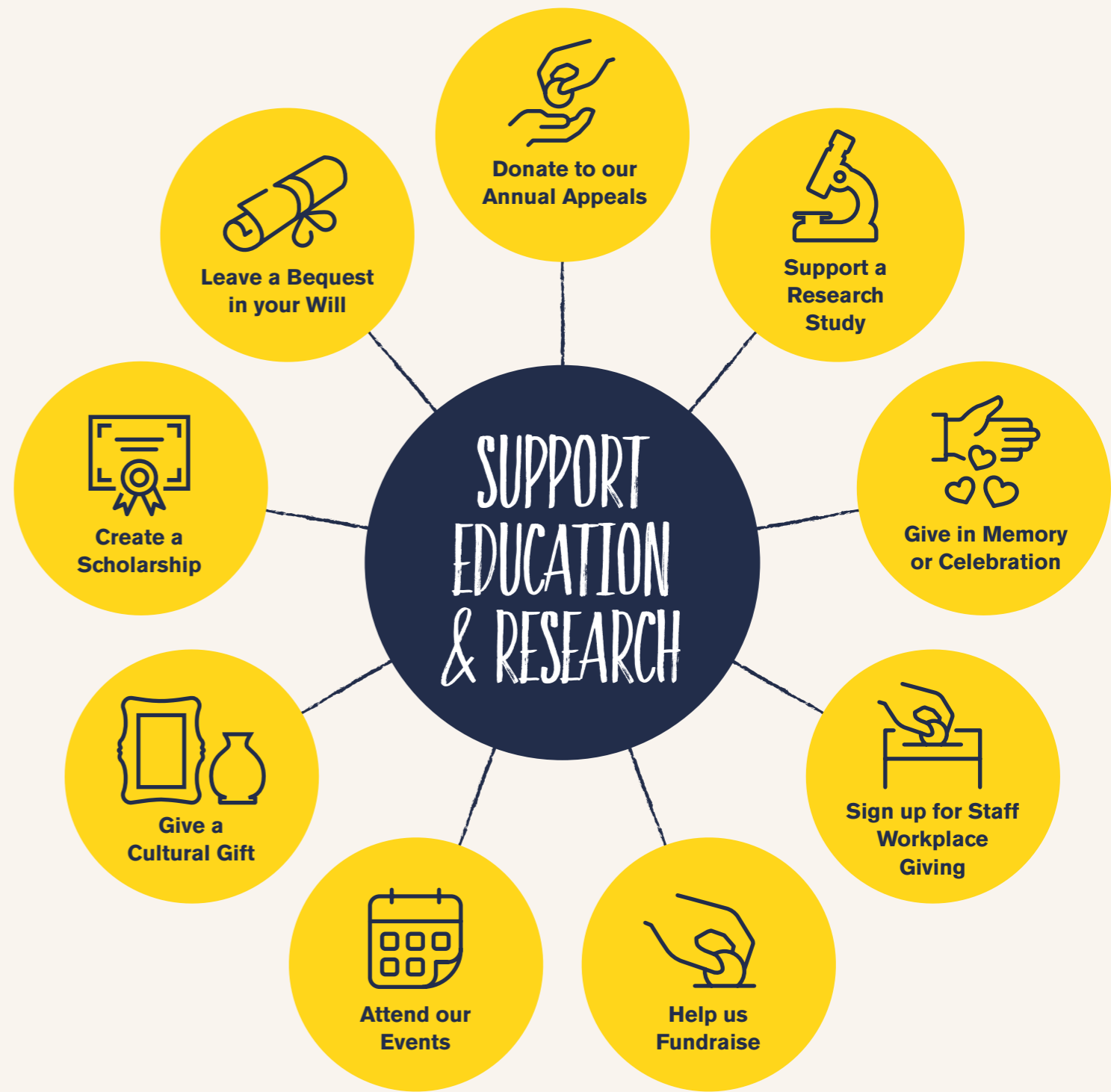
"This exhibition has provided a great starting point for telling the story of these ceramics, but I hope this is just the first in a series that will highlight different aspects of the collection to the public," says Douglas.

"Sharing the history of these works will continue to deepen our understanding of the intricate web of trade and cultural exchange that shaped the region for centuries."

IMPACT OF GIVING DONOR AFTERNOON TEA



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