

WESTERN SYDNEY
UNIVERSITY



VOLUME 9 ISSUE 2
SUMMER 2017



GradLife

Health, Reimagined

INSIDE

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

Prominent Indigenous Australians, Professor Michael McDaniel and Dr Anita Heiss, reflect on their careers, the power of education and the profound impact of positive role models.

MISSION POSSIBLE

Dr Sameer Dixit reflects on how much can be achieved through education, determination and refusing to take no for an answer.

HEALTHY CHUCKLE: USING LAUGHTER TO IMPROVE LIVES

A bad case of the giggles is good for the mind, body and soul. For one graduate, the effect has been positively life-changing.

IN THIS EDITION

4

MESSAGE FROM
VICE-CHANCELLOR AND PRESIDENT,
PROFESSOR BARNEY GLOVER

5

OK, SO WHAT DO YOU MEAN
'WELLBEING'?

Dr Anthony Brown explores what wellbeing means to him.



6

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

Prominent Indigenous Australians, Professor Michael McDaniel and Dr Anita Heiss, reflect on their careers, the power of education and the profound impact of positive role models.

8

SCHOOL OF MEDICINE CELEBRATES
DECADE OF ACHIEVEMENT



10

PROGRAM LURES DOCTORS BEYOND THE
CITY

Over the past week working at Bathurst Base Hospital, Dr Ross Wilson has delivered babies, treated pneumonia, dealt with two cases of kidney stones and anaesthetised an assault victim.

11

WHERE BRIGHT FUTURES BEGIN



12

MISSION POSSIBLE

Dr Sameer Dixit, Western Sydney University Graduate and Alumni of the Year Award winner, reflects on how much can be achieved through education, determination and refusing to take no for an answer.



14

HEALTHY CHUCKLE: USING LAUGHTER TO
IMPROVE LIVES

A bad case of the giggles is good for the mind, body and soul. For one graduate, the effect has been positively life-changing.



16

CHESTERFIELDS TO COMPUTERS: THE
RISE OF ONLINE MENTAL HEALTH

From apps as effective as anti-depressants to real-time emotional mapping through social media, e-mental health offers life-changing possibilities for the one-in-five Australians who experience mental illness each year.

18

PEOPLE HELPING PEOPLE TO FIGHT
DIABETES

20

DESIGNING A BETTER LIFE

Exploring why good design really can be a matter of life and death.

21

BONDING WITH BUB IN THE DIGITAL AGE



22

SISTERS IN SUN, SURF AND SAND

One Western Sydney University graduate is demonstrating that all women are entitled to the delights of sun, surf and sand, regardless of how they dress.

23

INSPIRATIONAL LEADERS: THE 2017 ALUMNI AWARD WINNERS

26

KOKODA A PATH TO POSITIVE CHANGE



27

MUSIC FOR THE PEOPLE

Trailblazing maestro Sarah-Grace Williams wants all Sydneysiders – not just the privileged few – to experience the magic of orchestral music.



28

ADVENTURER'S WILD RIDE TO THE TOP

Whether he's travelling down the Amazon or building a pioneering company, MBA graduate Steve Crombie is unstoppable in life and business.

30

AWARD HONOURS HUMBLE COMMUNITY HERO

31

STAY CONNECTED

Front Cover Photo: Dr Sameer Dixit, PhD Science and Health, 2005, International Alumni of the Year Award winner, 2017

GradLife Enquiries: Advancement and Alumni, Western Sydney University

GradLife, Locked Bag 1797, Penrith NSW 2751 Australia

Website: westernsydney.edu.au/alumni

Email: alumni@westernsydney.edu.au

Tel: +61 2 9685 9500

Design: Celia Zhao, Western Sydney University

Photography: Sally Tsoutas, Western Sydney University

Journalist: Laura Albulario

Copyright 2017



MESSAGE FROM VICE-CHANCELLOR AND PRESIDENT, PROFESSOR BARNEY GLOVER

In celebration of the 10th anniversary of the School of Medicine, this issue of *GradLife* showcases the discipline, featuring some of the outstanding work that the University and our alumni are doing in this area.

Since its first intake of students in 2007, the School has produced close to 700 medical practitioners. The opening of the Macarthur Clinical School in August shows that we are building on the school's innovative history and creating outstanding opportunities for clinical education, alongside benefitting the Western Sydney community.

The University has more than 44,000 students who are engaged in an expanding range of courses. They look to you, our alumni, when they think about their professional and personal lives after graduation.

Our key mission is to develop the University's growing national and international reputation for teaching, learning and research excellence. Often the best way to do this is to highlight the work of our alumni.

We want to hear your stories, share your successes and learn from your challenges after graduation.

Take Genevieve Nelson, our Alumni Award winner, for example. Her story is a reminder that our graduates are the University's ambassadors to the world, and part of a strong network of global citizens. The work you do is integral to our progress as a vibrant university with local, national and international impact.

Students have always been our focus and are at the centre of everything we do. The University is building technologically-advanced campuses and developing a new curriculum to prepare our students for the future.

This year's launch of the new state-of-the-art Peter Shergold Building, the School of Medicine's 10th anniversary, the opening of the Macarthur Clinical School and the National Protected Vegetable Cropping Centre at Hawkesbury are all part of the bigger plans we have for Western Sydney University.

This issue of *GradLife* keeps you up to date on your fellow graduates' achievements and University news. I encourage you to share your own stories and learnings in future issues.

Professor Barney Glover FTSE
Vice-Chancellor and President





OK, So What Do You Mean 'WELLBEING'?

Dr Anthony Brown, Adjunct Fellow, Men's Health Information and Resource Centre, explores what 'wellbeing' means to him.

This issue of GradLife explores health and wellbeing. No doubt you'll see articles on various topics as you read through. That's because 'wellbeing' means different things to different people.

So, how do we pin down this elusive word? What is wellbeing?

I attended a networking function recently and as an icebreaker exercise we were all asked to write a topic we wanted to talk about on our name tags.

I wrote 'health' and I saw someone write 'wellbeing'. I'd been thinking about writing this article, so I asked him "what does wellbeing mean to you?". For him, wellbeing was about keeping a balance between those things that sustain us and those that deplete us. To him wellbeing was an active, balancing act.

Wellbeing is used by other people to describe alternative and complementary health practices and beliefs.

Wellbeing Expos have become increasingly popular and tend to be a mix of alternative medicine and new age spirituality.

Not surprisingly, there are innumerable ways academics use the word 'wellbeing.'

Scholars with an interest in health tend to use 'wellbeing' to describe positive psychological, physical and social states¹, which is the basis for the positive psychology movement. For them the concept "incorporates a sense of satisfaction, contentment, personal fulfilment and existential calm"².

Yet some philosophers fear that this misses the point.

For example, if we just focus on trying to feel good and achieving positive physiology states we might miss the central purpose of life! To put it simply, if we only focus on 'feeling good' without exploring how to live a life with meaning and purpose, we cannot really achieve true 'wellbeing'³.

All of these definitions create a distinction between health and wellbeing. 'Health' has to do with physical, and perhaps mental, health. While 'Wellbeing' has to do with everything else that is beneficial to one's self.

But is this helpful? Is wellbeing a different thing from health?

Personally, I don't think so.

I agree with Professor John Macdonald, the Director of our Men's Health Information and

Resource Centre, who believes that when we separate health and wellbeing we are creating an artificial distinction. Prof. Macdonald believes health is a dynamic interaction between a person and their environment.

This goes beyond just the interaction between our physical health and the physical environment. These interactions are between the whole person and their physical, mental, social and spiritual environments. They require meaningful connections to other people and include a sense of contributing to and being part of something bigger than ourselves⁴.

MORE INFO:

Men's Health Information and Resource Centre: westernsydney.edu.au/ssh/school_of_science_and_health/research/mens_health

Dr. Anthony Brown

Anthony Brown has been full-time Executive Director of Health Consumers NSW (HCNSW) since April 2014. He is passionate about consumer and carer engagement and was a member of the Steering Committee which helped establish HCNSW in 2012. He is an adjunct fellow for the Men's Health Information and Resource Centre at Western Sydney University, and also worked at the Council for the Ageing before joining HCNSW. His vision is to ensure health providers really listen to and show respect to health consumers, their families and carers.

¹ Huppert, F. A. (2009). Psychological Well-being: Evidence Regarding its Causes and Consequences[†]. *Applied Psychology: Health and Well-Being*, 1(2), 137-164.

² Manderson, L. (2005). Rethinking wellbeing. In L. Manderson (Ed.), *Rethinking wellbeing*. API Network.

³ Vernon, M. (2014). *Wellbeing*. Stocksfield, Acumen.

⁴ Macdonald, J. J. (2005). *Environments for health: A salutogenic approach*. London, Earthscan.



Leading *by* Example

Prominent Indigenous Australians, Professor Michael McDaniel and Dr Anita Heiss, reflect on their careers, the power of education and the profound impact of positive role models.

Call them mentors, guides, elders or good friends, the people we respect and look up to have a transformative effect on our development, our lives and our careers. Western Sydney University graduates, Dr Anita Heiss and Professor Michael McDaniel, found mentors to be instrumental in their journey towards becoming leaders and role models within Australia's Indigenous community.

The pair met more than 20 years ago and have since become close friends, supporting

and learning from each other throughout their careers. Dr Heiss, who completed her PhD at Western in 2001, is a highly acclaimed bestselling author of Indigenous literature, with over 20 books, as well as an accomplished presenter and commentator. Professor McDaniel studied a Bachelor of Arts at Western Sydney University in the late 80s, and has held top positions in Indigenous education departments across the sector.

TURNING-POINTS

Michael: At just age 14, Professor McDaniel left school and spent the next 10 years doing odd jobs, from farm hand to the army. When he saw an ad in the local paper for a bridging course offering entry into Western Sydney University, he decided to give it a shot. By the time he'd reached his second year of university, he was offered a position teaching university-level Indigenous studies, which turned into a full-time role once he graduated. He has since served as Director of Indigenous studies at Macquarie University, Dean of Indigenous Education at Western Sydney University, and is now Pro Vice-Chancellor of Indigenous Leadership and Engagement at UTS.

Anita: Having made a name for herself through a mix of academia, media and publishing, Dr Heiss decided to become a full-time writer in 2003, after recruiting her life coach Geraldine Star who helped her decide on writing as the focus for her career. "It was through having a mentor and life coach that I moved into full-time writing" she says. "My aim is to create work that can engage a broad audience while challenging readers to think about how they view, relate to and engage with Indigenous Australians on a daily basis."

Professor Michael McDaniel,
Bachelor of Arts, 1991

THE POWER OF EDUCATION

Anita: After completing her undergraduate degree in history, Dr Heiss undertook a PhD in media and communications at Western Sydney University. She credits the PhD for much of her success: "It was the best educational decision I have made. The Doctorate was the springboard to what has followed in my career. The research skills developed through study continue to be used in my everyday career 20 years later."

Michael: Born into a working-class family, Professor McDaniel was the first member of his family to study at university. "I always had a feeling that I could do more," he says. "Western Sydney University not only opened

my eyes to my own potential, but really set my life on a different trajectory. I've become an academic and all my children went to university. It has had an intergenerational impact." According to Professor McDaniel, it has been a similar story for almost all the Indigenous students he has worked with throughout his career.

"There's nothing more rewarding than a career in Indigenous education," he says. "I have seen lives and family trajectories change. From someone giving me a chance, it has contributed to the education of thousands of people, and that will continue through the generations. That's the magic of education."

MENTORS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Michael: Professor McDaniel has valued the guidance of senior figures throughout his life, and says the identity of an Indigenous Australian involves learning from elders and passing that knowledge onto younger generations. "We call them aunties, uncles, elders, senior people or cultural leaders – we're genetically and culturally predisposed to look to older people, to have respect for them, and learn from them," he says. "We have a sense that your life is not just your own. You're part of your community's story." In his own position as a leader in Indigenous education, Professor McDaniel takes his responsibility towards younger generations very seriously. "If we close the gap on education, we close all the other gaps," he says. "An educated person can

be more financially secure, have more choices and be in a psychologically better place, with more control over their life."

Anita: While Dr Heiss still relies on the guidance of mentors herself, she is also leading the way for others through her own mentoring of Indigenous students, particularly those with publishing aspirations. "Indigenous people who have had success in various areas of Australian society – education, employment, etc. – are often called upon to be role models and mentors, to work in communities and sectors where there is little support, and often little Indigenous visibility," she says. "The role of mentor is crucial in building up capacity for the area."

How to find a good mentor

GET INVOLVED: Some peak bodies have mentorship programs, or are simply a useful platform for meeting potential mentors. "My writing mentors have been people I have met through professional organisations like the Australian Society of Authors," says award-winning author Dr Anita Heiss. "Look within your sector for key people who you respect and look up to, and see if the peak bodies in your area have mentorship programs."

WATCH AND LEARN: It is possible to have a mentor without them knowing it, according to Indigenous education leader Professor Michael McDaniel. "Sometimes a mentorship is something formalised, but sometimes, it's based on sheer admiration and study from a distance," he says. "Most of my mentors didn't even know they were my mentors – I just learnt from studying them."

PICK AND CHOOSE: You may not find a single person who embodies all the qualities you aspire to, so glean wisdom from various individuals. "It's not as easy as finding a mentor and wanting to be like them," Professor McDaniel says. "There could be a range of people that we aspire to be like and learn from in relation to a varying number of attributes. Sometimes, it's just one particular quality."

Looking for a mentor?

Join our online e-mentoring platform for Alumni and start connecting – westernsydney.edu.au/gradlifementors

Dr Anita Heiss, Doctor of Philosophy
– Communication and Media, 2001

SCHOOL OF MEDICINE Celebrates Decade of Achievement



Western Sydney University's School of Medicine (SOM) may be the new kid on the block compared to Australia's longstanding medical schools, but for Western Sydney residents and the broader medical community, it's hard to imagine the region without it.

TALENT ON TAP

Since its inception just 10 years ago, the SOM has produced close to 700 highly capable medical practitioners. Among them are many specialists in training, as well as 18 Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander doctors, some from as far afield as Darwin. The SOM has become a 'go to' source of expertise and advice among local hospitals, and has earned a solid reputation for its medical research. With research groups in the fields of cancer and pathology, neuroscience, stem cells, mother and baby health, gender and the psychology of illness, among others, it has already become a major player in Australia's research world.

Created in response to the health workforce shortages in the booming suburbs of Greater Western Sydney, the SOM sees up to 70 per cent of its graduates stay to complete [at least] part of their training in Western Sydney hospitals. "The school came along at a time when we were struggling to meet the health workforce needs in outer metropolitan Sydney," says SOM Dean, Professor Annemarie Hennessy. "Being positioned across both the north-west (at Blacktown/Mt Druitt Clinical School) and south-west (at Macarthur Clinical School and Campbelltown campus), we are in the perfect place to support a new generation of doctors."

AN ADVOCATE FOR WESTERN SYDNEY

Being a local institution, the SOM has made local medical needs a priority. Having started out with a curriculum purchased from other medical education institutions, the school quickly adapted to reflect its own context. "In Greater Western Sydney, we're faced with

thinner resources and a lot of socioeconomic disadvantage," Professor Hennessy says. "The associated impacts on health range from higher rates of diabetes and obesity, to lower access to paediatric surgery."

According to Professor Hennessy, being a relatively new institution enables the SOM to be nimble in its response to a changing medical landscape. "We don't have a lot of baggage with us," she says. "We sprung up as a response to community need and have kept community needs at the fore. Having become a strong player on the Australian medical education landscape, we also contribute to a broader agenda of what medical education should look like in Australia."

BUILDING BRIGHT FUTURES

With Sydney's existing medical schools all located close to the city or eastern suburbs, the SOM has given Western Sydney locals the opportunity to pursue a career in medicine, an opportunity which may not have otherwise existed. "Just having a medical school in their midst has given many people the realisation that the opportunity is there," Professor Hennessy says. "The cost and competition of moving into the city can also be a barrier." Close to 60 per cent of students come from Greater Western Sydney, and there are promising signs that many will remain in the area as they progress in their career. As a kidney specialist at Campbelltown Hospital, Professor Hennessy is heartened every time she receives a referral from a local GP, and recognises them as a former student. "When I see those familiar names, I can't tell you how happy that makes me," she says.

Professor Annemarie Hennessy
Dean, School of Medicine



| Angus McNally, Bachelor of Medicine/
Bachelor of Surgery, 2012

Program Lures Doctors Beyond the City

Over the past week working at Bathurst Base Hospital, Dr Ross Wilson has delivered babies, treated pneumonia, dealt with two cases of kidney stones and anaesthetised an assault victim.

As Director of Rural Health for Western Sydney University's School of Medicine (SOM), Dr Wilson's career demonstrates the varied learning experiences that come with rural and regional practice.

"It certainly keeps you from falling asleep on the job," he says. "You experience the full gamut of general medicine and exercise your skills to the absolute nth degree. You might not have all the fancy machines, but the very collegiate attitude amongst rural practitioners means you're well supported."

The SOM's Rural Clinical Schools Program, run at Bathurst and Lismore, gives students a taste of rural practice during their extended clinical training placements. The program includes a compulsory five-week stint in Indigenous health which is usually undertaken in remote communities.

More than 30 students take part in the rural program each year, with up to a third choosing to continue their internship in a rural setting. The SOM is looking to build on its rural medicine training by developing a postgraduate Masters in Rural Generalism, which aims to draw 15 per cent of future students from rural areas.

While the signs are promising, Dr Wilson is aware of what he's up against. Despite 30 per cent of Australia's population living rurally, they're serviced by only 20 per cent of medical practitioners, and the more remote, the more

this discrepancy shows. "[When] combined with a shortage of practitioners, health problems in rural areas are much greater," Dr Wilson says. "The reality is far from the image of the sun-bronzed Aussie farmer. Rural populations experience much higher rates of cancer, obesity, cardiovascular and respiratory problems; they drink more alcohol and smoke more cigarettes."

Beyond the Government's financial incentives to lure medical graduates away from the city, the Rural Clinical School Program opens students' eyes to the possibilities of rural practice and the associated sea-change, or tree-change, lifestyle. "The carrot system of encouragement hasn't worked well, so we're going with educational encouragement," Dr Wilson says. "The rural lifestyle can't be beat – if it takes more than five-minutes to get to the other side of town, it's because you're lost. Most country towns have every facility you could want, aside from the Opera House."



Dr Ross Wilson and a medical student with a patient at the Sofala Community Clinic, Bathurst



Where Bright Futures Begin

Occupational Therapist, and Western Sydney University Graduate, Anita Collins has built a thriving practice helping children start their journey towards realising their full potential.

For children with disabilities or developmental delays, achieving their full potential in life can start with something as simple as going down a slide by themselves, getting themselves dressed in the morning, or playing a game with their friends.

Seeing every little breakthrough along the way is what motivates Anita Collins, owner of Grace Children's Therapy, in her work as an occupational therapist. "There's a milestone to celebrate every day," she says. "A therapist will come out and say, 'check out this handwriting' or a feeding therapist will say 'this child ate grapes today' – these little things can mean so much, and when you're on this journey with children, you're on a journey with their whole family."

Anita, who graduated with a Bachelor of Applied Science (Occupational Therapy) from Western Sydney University in 2006, launched her Castle Hill practice after becoming aware of a great need for children's therapies. "When my own daughter was going through childcare, preschool and primary school, I saw so many children struggling, falling through the gaps and heard parents saying they didn't know what to do," Anita says. "My ears pricked up and I realised there was a big need not being met."

Since starting as a sole practitioner in 2009, Anita has grown her practice to include six occupational therapists, a nutritionist and support team. Her facility also includes a 'sensory gym', where children can practice new skills or calm down before or after their sessions.

Grace Children's Therapy treats more than 150 children with disabilities and learning disorders, ranging from Autism to Down Syndrome, Fragile X Syndrome and ADHD, every week. "We don't look at the disability, we look at what the child and family want to achieve," Anita says. "We break down the task into really small chunks to identify exactly where the child is struggling within that task, and work on all these areas."

As the children grow and are faced with new challenges and situations in life, they often return to the clinic to get help and Anita has seen firsthand how overcoming one barrier can have a domino effect – "...when children start to feel a sense of achievement, their confidence goes up, their anxiety drops and it impacts on other challenges that they may have avoided because they perceived them as being too hard".

It all makes for an incredibly rewarding vocation for Anita, who initially trained as a massage therapist and then continued her education in occupational therapy. "I've always been interested in health, and since starting OT, I've never looked back. We're teaching children the foundational skills to be functional participants in the community, and to lead full and happy lives."

Anita Collins, Bachelor of Applied Science (Occupational Therapy), 2006
Photo supplied

Anu Ganapathy, Bachelor of Medicine/
Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS)



MISSION POSSIBLE

Dr Sameer M Dixit, Western Sydney University Graduate and International Alumni of the Year Award winner, reflects on how much can be achieved through education, determination and refusing to take no for an answer.

In the decade since he launched his own biomedical research institution, Dr Dixit has worked with the Nepalese government on major disease outbreaks, nurtured a pipeline of talented young researchers and proven that research is both vital and viable in an emerging nation.

A PhD from Western Sydney University was the icing on the cake for Dr Dixit, whose passion for biomedical science led him to travel from Nepal to complete his studies in the US and then Australia. When he returned home in 2005, he instantly landed a role within one of the nation's top universities. "I was introduced to the VC of a Kathmandu University and as soon as he saw my CV he spoke to his team and hired me," Dr Dixit remembers.

After a few years, Dr Dixit was eager to expand the scope of his work beyond the constraints of an established research institute. He joined forces with some of his colleagues and the independent research institute, Centre for Molecular Dynamics Nepal (CMDN), was born. A decade since that brave leap, the

fledgling team of five has expanded to over 60 employees, many researchers among them, who collaborate with the Nepali Government, the World Health Organisation and research institutes across the globe. CMDN is also in discussions with Western Sydney University, and Dr Dixit is keen to establish a student exchange program or research collaboration.

Winning the International Alumni of the Year Award recently gave Dr Dixit cause to reflect on his achievements: "One of the things I'm proudest of is that we have established a health and environmental research unit in a country where research is completely neglected," he says. "In a country where people say there's no money for research, we're doing it. Receiving the award was an honour and a recognition of the daily hardships I face."

The CMDN conducts field and lab-based studies on some of the major infectious diseases in Nepal, from HIV to hepatitis and tuberculosis. The results inform the nation's policies and help the government to prioritise interventions. "If there's a suspicious outbreak in a remote village, our field team can immediately detect it," Dr Dixit says. "One of the biggest barriers to proper treatment is diagnostics. When we had a cholera outbreak in 2009, hundreds of people died because they didn't know what to look for. One of the other areas we focus on is awareness. When education is low, awareness around disease control is low."

Private funding from International research agencies, donors and academic institutions have sustained the CMDN. Beyond improving health outcomes for Nepal, the institution enables its researchers to shape a brighter future for themselves, in a country where such chances are limited. "In a developing country, these kinds of opportunities enable people to rise," Dr Dixit says. "Within two or three years with us, young minds are captured by overseas universities for PhDs and jobs."

For Dr Dixit returning to his homeland was never a question, despite being offered a student migrant visa in Australia. "I want to see Nepal become a destination, not just for its natural beauty, but also for science and research," he says. Since CMDN was launched, Dr Dixit has seen several other non-government research institutions spring up. "For me, this is just the beginning," he says. "There are so many more things our research can do for the country and the globe."

Dr Sameer Dixit, PhD Science and Health, 2005,
International Alumni of the Year Award winner, 2017

Healthy chuckle:

USING LAUGHTER TO IMPROVE LIVES

A case of the giggles is good for the mind, body and soul. For one graduate, the effect has been positively life-changing.

The power of laughter is no joking matter. Just ask Connie Costa, a Western Sydney University Bachelor of Education graduate, and one of Australia's leading laughter wellness facilitators.

Founder of Laugh and Live Well, Connie runs laughter wellness workshops, with sessions targeting health and wellbeing, stress management and team building. It's all about laughter and positivity, rather than jokes, and the concept is supported by a growing pool of research linking laughter to stress release, pain management and immunity. "Laughter reduces levels of the stress hormone cortisol, and promotes feel-good hormones," Connie says. "These endorphins are natural painkillers, they improve mood and when you're feeling good, it has a ripple-effect, from increased energy to greater productivity."

The premise behind laughter therapies is simple: stimulate laughter and you stimulate the positive chemistry that comes with it. "When you're happy, you may smile and laugh but there's a two-way link between mind and body," Connie says. "By smiling, clapping and laughing you can create more joyful feelings."

A former primary school teacher, Connie's life took a less than funny turn when she sustained a workplace injury. A year later, when it still hadn't healed, she was stuck in a cycle of pain and anxiety. "The physical condition was making me anxious, and the anxiety was interfering with my body's ability to heal," Connie says. "It occurred to me, if this is what stress does for pain, what would laughter do? I saw it as the natural opposite." Connie signed up for a laughter yoga class – a series of

clapping, breathing and laughter exercises. "I walked away smiling and feeling much lighter," she says. "I realised how powerful laughter is in terms of healing, and I wanted to get involved."

Connie launched her business in 2014 and has since become Australia's first Laughter Wellness Trainer. She has shared the power of laughter with groups nationally and internationally. Whether she's opening a conference for a big bank, helping stressed-out HSC students or leading the Bondi Beach Laughter Club on Saturday mornings, Connie says the positive vibe among participants is palpable. "When you laugh you feel good, and it's wonderful to be in an environment where you're sharing that with people."

GET THE GIGGLES

Tips on tapping into your natural cheer, from Laughter Wellness Trainer Connie Costa.

- Smile. When you smile, you see more smiles, because people tend to smile back. Hold your head up. An open body posture helps to boost your mood.
- Join a group. Laughing is contagious and easier to achieve with others.

→ Don't hold back. Whilst you'll get some benefit from a giggle, it takes 10-15 minutes to experience more of the benefits of laughter, which is easy to achieve through a laughter wellness session.

→ Practice. The more you laugh, the easier it becomes. When laughter is your natural response, you'll tend to see the lighter side of frustrating situations.

More: laughandlivewell.com



Connie Costa, Bachelor
of Education, 2006



CHESTERFIELDS *to* COMPUTERS:

THE RISE OF ONLINE MENTAL HEALTH

From apps as effective as anti-depressants, to real-time emotional mapping through social media, e-mental health offers life-changing possibilities for the one-in-five Australians who experience mental illness each year.

Chris Rule, Bachelor of Health Science (Personal Development, Health and Physical Education), 2006

Reclining on a psychologist's couch may be Hollywood's favourite depiction of therapy, but the rise of e-mental health is seeing many sufferers of mental illness trade chesterfields for computers. Less than half of Australians with mental health concerns seek treatment, according to Black Dog Institute figures, making the broad accessibility of online treatment a veritable game-changer.

Chris Rule, Western Sydney University Health Science graduate, manages the Black Dog Institute's e-health programs. He says organisations like his replace the oft-unreliable 'Dr Google' with evidence-based mental health interventions which break down the barriers between patient and effective treatment. "Online tools give us the potential to reduce the access issues that a lot of Australians face," he says. "People in rural and regional areas have limited, if any, access to psychologists and psychiatrists."

Another major obstacle is the stigma attached to seeking help. "Being able to access help in your own time and space, without having to share any information with others, can be an important first step," says Chris. "This is especially useful for early intervention. People are drawn to the internet for resources around health, so e-mental health programs can be their first-line support."

Beyond being a stepping stone to other treatments, Chris says online health interventions can be effective on their own, and in some cases are superior to face-to-face therapies. "Through e-mental health, we can

remove human error and deliver consistent, quality programs that are in line with best practice," he says. For mild to moderate depression, stress and anxiety, Black Dog Institute research suggests that some online programs are proven to be as effective as taking antidepressant pills. One example is the 'myCompass' online self-help tool, which has received more than 30,000 registrations since it was launched in 2012. Using cognitive behavioural therapy, interpersonal psychotherapy, problem-solving therapy and positive psychology, the tool provides strategies that can be used in everyday life. It also has a tracking feature to help individuals understand the triggers behind their mental illness.

An initiative still in its infancy is the 'We Feel' project. The project is a result of the collaboration between the Black Dog Institute, Amazon and CSIRO and investigates the links between language used in social media, and public mental health trends. "If there is a correlation, and we can map public health trends in real time using things like Twitter, we have the potential to be so much more responsive in our public health policies," Chris says. "Currently, public health policies are informed by data that can be up to five years old."

Such programs are just the tip of the iceberg, according to Chris. "The online space is still very much untapped and there are so many other ways it can be used to assist in mental health treatment," he says. "If we can use e-mental health to break into that large percentage of people who don't seek help for mental illness, the benefits would be immense."

People Helping People to Fight Diabetes

Diabetes, with its rapidly growing numbers of affected people from all backgrounds and across all countries, is said to be the greatest epidemic of our time.

Many of those who need to inject insulin, require the skills to relate the amount to be injected to the ambient glucose levels, carbohydrates and other foods eaten, and physical activity.

All need to manage their weight, often in the face of medications which can lead to weight gain and other side effects.

There is an ongoing need for monitoring: by themselves in terms of finger prick glucose levels, foot safety and often even blood pressure and by their clinical team in terms of blood and urine tests, blood pressure, and examinations

of the back of the eye and damage to the skin, blood vessels and nerves in the foot.

Increasingly, we understand that there is an emotional toll to be paid for this daily and weekly grind, with the continuing knowledge that the risk of complications (such as blindness, amputation, kidney failure, heart attacks and strokes and more) can be reduced but not removed.

We also know that healthcare professionals can advise what is needed but not necessarily know how best to fit these regular activities into day-to-day life; even if they did, their availability is limited to perhaps 4-10 hours per year.

There is now growing evidence that others with diabetes can help provide emotional support and give tips on how to fit these activities into busy lives.

This diabetes peer support has been around for a long time, with the first patient organisation founded in 1934 by H G Wells, and with such organisations now present in all countries around the world.

Recent studies have shown that when those facilitating diabetes peer support are carefully trained and supported, diabetes peer support can be associated with improvements in glucose and blood pressure 'control' and in a range of aspects of mental health.

A study from Hong Kong showed that those distressed by their diabetes (high 'Diabetes Distress'), were less likely to be admitted to hospital with such structured diabetes peer support.



We have now shown with a similar approach in rural England that diabetes peer support is associated with less acute hospitalisation and saves money.

The costs of training and supporting diabetes peer support is low (less than \$20 per person per annum which is less than most diabetes medications), and in several studies, peer support facilitators can help those finding it particularly difficult to access health services.

Linking with health services, structured training, careful support and quality assurance are crucial aspects and need appropriate organisational design.

Western Sydney University researchers are now developing this approach in local communities. This is real community action and people helping people. Perhaps such approaches can also provide benefits beyond the diabetes epidemic.

Professor David Simmons is a global leader in diabetes research. He joined Western Sydney University's School of Medicine in 2015 and also as an endocrinologist at Campbelltown Hospital. Professor Simmons was previously the lead diabetes consultant at the Institute of Metabolic Science and Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust in the United

Kingdom. Between 2003-2007 he was the inaugural Professor of Medicine at the University of Auckland Waikato Clinical School, New Zealand. At the University of Melbourne from 1998-2002 Professor Simmons was the Foundation Chair in Rural Health. During this time he established a clinical school and a range of undergraduate, postgraduate and research activities relating to rural and Indigenous health. Professor Simmons has published over 230 refereed journal articles and 50 other publications including book chapters.

Where TALENT Shines

ResMed Senior Global Product Manager, Brendan Woolsey, began his career with the company as an intern, following a work placement during his degree. He's one of several Western Sydney University graduates to have landed a role with the medical device developer, and there's a lot more potential in the pipeline.

Third year Bachelor of Industrial Design student, Katie Oates, recently completed a work placement with ResMed, and says the three-week experience was eye opening. "It made me realise how relevant our coursework is to the industry, and how broad the job opportunities in industrial design can be," she says. "Whether it's a household item or a lifesaving product, everything needs to go through a thought process of how it's designed and made. If it's not done well, it can have a huge impact on your efficiency and your comfort level. If it's a life-saving device, good design really is a matter of life or death."

Designing a Better Life

The profound impact of good industrial design is particularly poignant when it comes to medical devices. This is something Western Sydney University graduate Brendan Woolsey holds top of mind with his work as a Senior Global Product Manager with ResMed. Since completing a Bachelor of Industrial Design in 2010, Brendan has gone on to lead a team which brings revolutionary sleep apnoea treatment masks to the market, helping millions of patients across the world.

Sleep apnoea affects 26 per cent of the Australian adult population and involves regular pauses in breathing during sleep, causing sufferers to wake up hundreds of times every night, putting a strain on their cardiovascular system and increasing the risk of diabetes, heart attack, stroke and depression. ResMed's CPAP machines, which deliver continuous pressurised air via a mask to keep the airway open, are life-changing for many of their users.

Brendan describes his team's role as being "the voice of the market". "We work with marketing teams all around the world to understand [their] customer and patient needs and translate these into marketing requirements," he says. "We then go on the journey with some of the world's best medical product development teams, based in Sydney, to design, develop and then commercialise the product."

The fundamentals Brendan draws upon in his daily work all trace back to his Western Sydney University degree. "A great product is a design that aligns with a business's strategic direction, meets a specific market need, provides additional value over any competition and shows great return on investment," he says. "Western's industrial design degree touches on all these areas."

Brendan Woolsey, Bachelor of Industrial Design, 2010
Photo supplied

Bonding with Bub

IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Humpty Dumpty and Incy-Wincy risk becoming endangered species, according to one Western Sydney University PhD graduate, who fears modern parents have lost touch with the tradition of singing to their babies.

Forget fancy toys and educational apps. For the best start in life, babies' most powerful tool comes from parents' sensitive, loving interactions says Dr Wendy Vlismas whose PhD research explored the benefits of a music and movement program on mother-infant interactions.

The study involved over 100 mothers and their babies, aged between two and six months and investigated the effects of the program's songs, rhymes and dance for playtime and relaxation. Wendy says the results were clear, "Over 5 weeks the use of music and movement enhanced the mother-infant relationship, shown by an increase of mothers' attachment to their infant and the affectionate exchanges between

the mothers and infants. Further results showing the strength of encouraging mothers' musical interactions was that of their 'baby talk' (Infant-Directed Speech). The mothers' speech characteristics associated with attracting their babies' attention and conveying affection increased. Without music and movement (control groups), all these results decreased."

Wendy's PhD, undertaken at The MARCS Institute, was completed in 2007, making her findings increasingly salient today. She says that within this time research has continued to emphasise the crucial need for parents' interactions with their babies as the key to development. Yet the growing intrusion of technological devices into modern lives makes for parenting distractions.

"The need for tech connection takes 'time and space' in the daily lives of parents. What they read, what they believe and what they share becomes a distraction and often a collaboration of poor information," says Wendy. She also expresses her concern for parents 'outsourcing':

using iPads and phones for babies' learning and entertainment. To date, no research has shown these devices are key learning tools for the development of babies.

Following her long career in early childhood education, Dr Vlismas' PhD expanded on her years of experience, reinforcing that early parent-infant interactions and the environment set up for infant exploration impacts on their future development. Since completing her studies, she has also launched a website, bondwithbaby.com, offering common-sense parenting advice with a focus on songs, rhymes and lullabies.

The overall message is to ditch the iPad, forget what's on Facebook and favour face-to-face time with baby - this includes fun with singing a nursery-rhyme or two! "Positive parenting interactions strengthen the bonds with baby and builds parenting confidence," Wendy says. "This bond is the foundation for every baby's development."



Dr Wendy Vlismas,
Doctor of Philosophy (Psychology)
Photo supplied

BABY STEPS

Early childhood expert and WSU PhD graduate, Dr Wendy Vlismas, shares her strategies to maximise baby-parent bonding and minimise distractions.

LOOK FOR THEIR CUES: "Babies are ready to communicate and socialise from the moment they're born. Using language, singing, touch and facial expressions, make your connection and they'll react to your warmth. Slow down, look into their eyes, and the parent-baby intimacy begins."

GIVE IT TIME: "Some people think they should bond with their baby instantly and if this doesn't happen, there's something

wrong. That's not true. Bonding is a process involving babies and parents learning about each other. It takes time."

LIVE IN THE MOMENT: "Photos are lovely but think about how many you really need. Enjoy the moment with your child, rather than obsessively taking photos of them."

GET BACK TO BASICS: "You aren't a bad parent for not taking your baby to the latest Wiggles concert. The best thing you can give them is YOU. It's about one-on-one time."

More: bondwithbaby.com

Sisters in Sun, Surf & sand

One Western Sydney University graduate is demonstrating that all women are entitled to the delights of sun, surf and sand, regardless of how they dress.



Yusra Metwally is a Muslim woman who wears a hijab. She's also a Western Sydney University Law graduate, a Policy Officer with the NSW Ministry of Health, an ocean swim competitor and budding triathlete. In life and in the water, Yusra refuses to be boxed in by preconceptions, and this has caused a ripple-effect through her women's swimming group, Swim Sisters. Formerly known as the Burkini Babes, the group encourages women to challenge fears and stereotypes through challenging themselves in the water.

Now encompassing more than 30 members, the group formed after last year's 'burkini ban' announcement in France. "I saw an image of a policeman making a woman remove her hijab at the beach and thought it went completely against the concept of liberty," Yusra says. The Chester Hill resident sent out a late-night Facebook call to action, and had quickly mustered several like-minded women.

What started as a political reaction has become a sisterhood of Muslim and non-Muslim women, some who wear hijabs, others who don't. Bonded by friendship and fitness goals, they unite for regular early morning training sessions at local pools and beaches around Sydney, from the Eastern Suburbs to the Northern Beaches.

For some of the burkini-wearing members, joining Swim Sisters gave them confidence to get back into the water. "Some of the women were strong swimmers growing up, but because of the debate about banning the burkini, they no-longer felt comfortable to swim in public spaces and stopped swimming."

Overcoming social divisions has been another positive side effect. "Water is a great leveller," Yusra says. "As visibly Muslim women, participating in ocean swim events allows people to connect and engage [with] Muslim women in a way they previously haven't. Nobody is thinking about our differences during an event, we're all just thinking about getting through the challenge and battling the same waves."

Along with the swimming events, Swim Sisters has teamed up with various groups to offer Western Sydney women swimming lessons and ocean swim training "We're creating a culture of learning how to swim," Yusra says. "Teaching women to swim means their families will learn to swim."

Yusra is now back at Western Sydney University completing a Bachelor of Business (Economics) alongside her full-time job and swim training commitments. "Being back at university as a mature-aged student helps me to apply my learnings at an organisational level, with community projects I am involved with," Yusra says. Wherever it will ultimately lead she's unsure, but her vision is clear. "Whatever I do, I want it to make a difference and create positive change."

INSPIRATIONAL LEADERS: THE 2017 ALUMNI AWARD WINNERS

Through their success in serving the community and breaking new ground in business, this year's Western Sydney University Alumni Award winners all demonstrate the potent combination of passion and education.



ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER COMMUNITY IMPACT

Dr Anita Heiss

PhD Communication and Media, 2001

Winning an alumni award is another feather in this incredibly accomplished author and media commentator's cap. Dr Heiss has written 20 bestselling books, received Premier's Awards in both New South Wales and Victoria for history and literature, won five *Deadly Awards* and was named as one of Bulletin Magazine's Smart 100 Australians. Highlighting the realities of contemporary life for Aboriginal Australians, Dr Heiss' work has featured in 17 anthologies and was shortlisted for a Human Rights Award. Dr Heiss' commitment to reconciliation, combined with her compelling, charismatic style, makes her a powerful voice for Indigenous Australians.



BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONAL LEADERSHIP

Matthew Batten

Bachelor of Visual Arts, 1993

Matthew's Midas touch as a creative director has seen him scoop advertising awards at renowned ad agency Saatchi & Saatchi, and resurrect the Sydney and London offices of international ad agency, Wunderman, making him one of the network's five highest-ranked creative leaders in the world. He has been named Digital Media Creative of the Year in the APAC region, was listed in Creative Magazine's 'Power 20', and chosen for the prestigious Cannes Lions jury in 2011. Matthew is now the National Executive Creative Director for independent creative agency, Edge, and is also an accomplished filmmaker, having won first prizes at film festivals around the world.



COMMUNITY CHAMPION

Ruth Morrison

Master of Education, 1991

After decades serving the community as a teacher, Ruth continues her service as a dedicated volunteer. Secretary of the Rotary Club of Narellan, Ruth has headed fundraising balls which have donated more than \$10 million to community organisations, research and education over the past 16 years. Ruth has been a passionate supporter of the Western Sydney University School of Medicine since its inception, leading Rotary Narellan to support annual scholarships and MS research totaling close to \$500,000. As treasurer of Camden Country Quilters Guild, Ruth furthers her philanthropic work by donating quilts to hospitals and charity drives.



HAWKESBURY ALUMNI

Carmel Hourigan

Bachelor of Business, Land Economics, 1992

One of just 10 females in a class of 140 when she graduated, Carmel has become one of the sharpest business minds in the nation. As Head of Property for AMP Capital Investors Ltd, she has developed a portfolio of property assets worth more than \$23 billion in less than two years. During a career spanning more than two decades, Carmel has held senior positions at GTP Group, Lendlease, Challenger Financial Services Group, CBA, Stockland Group, Colonial First State, JLL and Raine&Horne Commercial. In every case, she has achieved spectacular results. Currently serving as Vice-President of the Property Council of Australia, Carmel has been instrumental in programs aimed at attracting more women to the industry.



INTERNATIONAL ALUMNI

Dr Sameer Dixit

PhD Science and Health, 2005

Dr Dixit founded Nepal's first independent medical research institute, driven by a mission to design more effective responses to the infectious diseases taking a toll on his homeland's population. In a decade, the Center for Molecular Dynamics Nepal (CMDN) has become the region's leading provider of biomedical research and testing, and the Nepali Government's 'go to' source. In his role as Founding Director of Research, Dr Dixit briefs government health officials on anything from preparing for a Zika outbreak to developing policies regarding hepatitis and HIV treatments.



CHANCELLOR'S LEADERSHIP

Sarah-Grace Williams

Bachelor of Art, Music, Major Orchestral and Choral Conducting, First Class Honours, 2000

Recently hailed as one of the 10 best female conductors in the world by Limelight Magazine, Sarah-Grace has conducted orchestras in St Petersburg and Siberia, but is dedicated to contributing to music in Australia. Among her greatest achievements, Sarah-Grace received the Churchill Fellowship in 2010 and established the Metropolitan Orchestra (TMO), as founding artistic director and conductor. TMO's community outreach makes orchestral music broadly accessible, with performances for families, newly arrived migrants and refugees. It also provides valuable performance opportunities for up-and-coming musicians. A Maestra on the rise, Sarah-Grace is blazing a trail for female conductors, young musicians and the high arts in Australia.



INNOVATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Dr Trung Qui Ly

Bachelor of Business, Hospitality, 1994

Vietnam's answer to Colonel Sanders, Dr Ly is the mastermind behind restaurant empire Pho24. Since its launch in 2003, the chain has expanded to 60 outlets across Asia and Australia and become Vietnam's second-largest fast-food chain. As developing nations embrace the Western world's calorie-laden fast foods, Pho24 provides a fresh, healthy alternative. A speaker and bestselling author, Dr Ly is committed to teaching and inspiring the next generation of business leaders and pioneers. He has helped design a new hospitality unit at Western Sydney University, and lectures in hospitality in both Australia and Vietnam.



Photo supplied


YOUNG ALUMNI

Luke Martin

Bachelor of Design, Visual Communications, 2007

Luke's career has taken him from Western Sydney's Emu Plains to California's Silicon Valley, where he is a Creative Director for Facebook. Three years ago, the 30-year-old was one of the first creatives to join Facebook's new in-house agency, The Factory, and has since become a senior figure leading a team of more than 40.

Nominations will again be open in 2018 for the next Western Sydney University Alumni Awards, so be sure to keep an eye out at westernsydney.edu.au/alumniawards



Kokoda a path to positive change

Trekking Kokoda is often described as a life-changing experience. Western Sydney University Psychology graduate, Dr Genevieve Nelson, couldn't have imagined just how immense that change would be.

After trekking Kokoda in 2000, Dr Genevieve Nelson was inspired to create the Kokoda Track Foundation, an independent charity that has not only changed the direction of her own life, but that of countless Papua New Guineans. As founding director and CEO, Genevieve has contributed to training 1,500 teachers and keeping more than 60,000 children in school. Working in 12 provinces across Papua New Guinea, the Kokoda Track Foundation has also built schools and health care centres, empowering locals with tools and training.

This philanthropic journey started during Genevieve's undergraduate studies at Western Sydney University, where she won a leadership scholarship which included trekking Kokoda. "I remember sitting on mountaintop at 2am in the pouring rain thinking, 'my future is here. This place will be part of me for the rest of my life'," she says. With the support of Western Sydney University, Genevieve returned to do her Masters and Doctorate studies in Papua New Guinea, during which time she established the foundation. The foundation started in 2003 with a scholarship program, but within six years had become a holistic aid and development organisation. "We couldn't run a scholarship program in isolation as there were often no schools, no resources, no teachers, or teachers who weren't properly trained," Genevieve says.

The wealth disparity between Australia and Papua New Guinea, our nearest neighbour, is the greatest of all neighbouring countries in the world, according to the UN's Human Development Index. Papua New Guinea has the lowest health status of all countries in the

Pacific region and similarly low educational outcomes. According to Genevieve, it's not just our proximity that should compel Australians to help the people of Papua New Guinea, but also the spirit of friendship forged at Kokoda 75 years ago. "Our diggers have always spoken with such respect and admiration for the Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels, and many are adamant that they wouldn't have been able to turn the Japanese forces around if it wasn't for them," she says.

The goodwill of Australians who walk the Kokoda track is a major source of donations and volunteers for the Kokoda Track Foundation. "People walk in the footsteps of the diggers, and end up having an extraordinary experience with the locals," Genevieve says. Despite getting support from the Australian and Papua New Guinea governments two years ago, the foundation is still heavily reliant on philanthropy. Working with limited finances is one of its many challenges; another is navigating one of the most geographically diverse places on the planet and its 850 distinct language groups. But this hasn't quelled Genevieve's enthusiasm. "We want to be present in all 22 provinces, continue investing in high-quality education and healthcare, and train thousands more teachers until there are no more school-aged children out of school," Genevieve says. "With a bit of creativity, combined with the passion and strength of our partners on the ground, we can do so much more to make a difference."

Dr Genevieve Nelson, Bachelor of Psychology (Honours), 2004 and Doctor of Philosophy (Psychology), 2008

More: ktf.ngo

Music for the People

Trailblazing maestra Sarah-Grace Williams wants all Sydneysiders – not just the privileged few – to experience the magic of orchestral music.

Orchestral concerts may typically be the domain of wealthy seniors in tuxedos and pearls, but when The Metropolitan Orchestra (TMO) plays, you're just as likely to see newly arrived refugees, toddlers and cash-strapped students in the crowd. The brainchild of world-renowned conductor and Western Sydney University music graduate Sarah-Grace Williams, the orchestra tackles the elitism associated with orchestral music by producing concerts that are affordable (tickets range from \$15 to \$55), friendly, and often in accessible suburban venues. In a city where there's little middle ground between community orchestras and the elite Sydney Symphony Orchestra, TMO provides valuable performance and development opportunities for up-and-coming musicians.

Born and raised in Penrith and a self-professed 'proud westie', Sarah-Grace says orchestral music has the power to speak to all humans, and believes everyone should be able to enjoy a premium concert experience. "We know how amazing and soul-enriching the music is," she says. TMO's family concert series, which works in partnership with St Vincent De Paul's SPARK program, invites the audience to recline on cushions while a full orchestra plays tunes from *Frozen*, *Star Wars* and *Superman*. Musicians dress as film characters and mingle with the audience, allowing children to play their instruments. The orchestra also performs for newly arrived refugee families in Liverpool and Fairfield, working with a translator to incorporate Arabic into the commentary. "It's equally special for the audience and the musicians," Sarah-Grace says. "These are people who have never seen an orchestral performance, let alone believed they could ever go to one. You see their faces light up."

Born as a noble mission in 2009, TMO's inclusive approach is also self-sustaining. "Once our seniors pass on, that's it," says Sarah-Grace. "If we don't build our audience today, there's no future for classical music."

Along with its Sydney concerts, TMO plays on cruise ships and under the stars in vineyards. A recent addition to its program is *Feast for the Senses* – a musical performance designed to complement a three-course meal, with matching wines. "Lots of people are into food and wine, but they might not go to see an orchestra," says Sarah-Grace. "This enables us to reach another demographic."

It's not just her audiences that are atypical. Sarah-Grace is about as far from the stereotype of a tyrannical grey-haired maestra as it gets. After completing a Bachelor of Arts in Music, and First Class Honours in Conducting at Western Sydney University, she began her conducting career at the age of 20. In the 20 years since, she has been hailed as one of the world's 10 best female conductors and has worked with famed orchestras and conductors across Europe. Despite her pre-eminence, Sarah-Grace welcomes feedback from her musicians, and isn't above dressing as Elsa from *Frozen* to conduct for a crowd of toddlers. "I'm the captain of the team, but it's just one job – all the musicians, and audience members, have a role," she says. "Tyrannical dictators don't get the best results." In her concerts, unseasoned audience members needn't worry about stuffy conventions; they're welcome to dress however they like and to clap whenever they feel moved to do so. "It doesn't bug me if people clap at the wrong time," Sarah-Grace says. "If a piece has been going for 20 minutes and you think it's awesome, go ahead and clap. In our concerts, there are people in tuxedos and people in jeans and T-shirts. We don't tell people how to enjoy their music."

Despite its hefty mission and equally sizeable performance schedule, TMO's day-to-day operations are primarily handled by team of two; Sarah-Grace as Artistic Director and Chief Conductor, and her husband, Bevan Rigato, a Western Sydney University business graduate, as Managing Director. Sarah-Grace's

achievements recently earned her the 2017 Chancellor's Leadership Award, the highest honour in the Western Sydney University Alumni Awards, and it was so unexpected that she didn't have a speech prepared. "Running your own orchestra is insane and you never come up for air," she says. "The award made me stop and think, actually, we're performing to sold-out audiences and we must be doing something right. I believe in what we're doing and feel like we have made a great impact. We are changing the musical landscape in Sydney."

STRIKE A CHORD

The Metropolitan Orchestra is a not-for-profit registered charity that aims to make great music accessible for all. It relies on sponsorship and is always on the lookout for like-minded individuals and corporations to join them with financial or other forms of support.

More: metorchestra.com.au

Sarah-Grace Williams, Bachelor of Arts, Music, Major Orchestral and Choral Conducting, First Class Honours, 2000

ADVENTURER'S Wild Ride TO THE TOP

Whether he's travelling down the Amazon or building a pioneering company, MBA graduate Steve Crombie is unstoppable in life and business.

Joining the circus at age 17 was the first sign of the unpredictable life in store for Steve Crombie. Indeed, the circus stint was merely how Steve earned money before the real adventures began. Inspired by National Geographic magazines, Steve launched his first survival-oriented challenge in Thailand, venturing home to Australia via land and sea. This was just a warm-up for a trip down the Amazon in a homemade canoe, and a two-year, 90,000km global odyssey from Antarctica to the Arctic, mostly by motorbike.

Steve has parlayed his travelling obsession into a lucrative career as an author, entrepreneur and keynote speaker. He has written 12 documentaries for Lonely Planet, Discovery Channel and BBC, and attracted millions of hits and sponsorship deals through a website which documents his travels. From telling his own compelling story, Steve has gone on to help businesses and other organisations do the same. His business, Totem, is now one of the nation's leading consultancies for social media and video strategies.

What he didn't learn from the school of life, Steve gained through education. Between epic journeys, he returned to Australia to study IT, graphic design, change management and finance, before consolidating it with a Masters of Business Administration (MBA) at Western Sydney University in 2004.

"My MBA gave me a comprehension of how to leverage my skill sets to do something that I loved," Steve says. "It helped me with managing the book, documentary and brand deals that sustained my existence on the road, and with launching my own company without financial backing or partners."

When facing the challenges of the corporate world, Steve derives confidence from the most unlikely of experiences. "I like it when shit hits the fan," he says. Surviving a motorbike ride through an arctic storm, dodging bullets in South America and battling exotic diseases are just some examples. "I once contracted dengue fever on a remote island in Indonesia, spent a week in an infectious diseases unit in Darwin, then got straight on a bike and rode 6,000km off-road to Sydney via the Simpson Desert," Steve says. "Doing these things taught me that the only limitations are in our minds. I've applied this notion to business and been very successful because of it."

Steve is now preparing to put Totem on hiatus and spend six months travelling, planning his next adventure. He plans to be operating a digital business in the US or China within a year, but the details will depend on where the road takes him. "I'm going on an adventure to expand my knowledge, improve what I do, and come back bigger and stronger," Steve says. "There will definitely be a lot of craziness, too."



IN *a* NUTSHELL

ADVENTURER AND DIGITAL ENTREPRENEUR
STEVE CROMBIE ON THE VALUE OF VIDEO
CONTENT:

“A picture tells 1,000 words, but a video tells 6 million. 92 per cent of all internet use will be video-related by 2019.”

ON AN ADVENTUROUS LIFE:

“Adventure is everywhere – you can find adventure in going down to buy coffee. It’s a matter of being willing to be different and try something you’re passionate about.”

ON SUCCESS:

“Do something you truly enjoy and you’re very likely to be successful.”

Steve Crombie, Masters of Business
Administration, 2004



Award honours humble COMMUNITY HERO

Among Western Sydney University's many community supporters, Ruth Morrison is one big-hearted standout.

Behind Western Sydney University's School of Medicine is an army of philanthropists, funding many of its scholarships and research projects.

Leading the charge in the Macarthur community is Ruth Morrison, Secretary of the Rotary Club of Narellan and a Western Sydney University graduate. Through Ruth's leadership, Rotary has helped 10 scholarship recipients throughout their medical degree. It has also provided annual funding towards molecular research for the past five years, with research particularly focused on MS.

Ruth's community work, which has been ongoing since the inception of the School of Medicine, led her to receive this year's Western Sydney U Community Champion Award. "It was a bit embarrassing to get up on stage, but it was wonderful to receive the award, and to be involved with the university," she says. "The people I have met from the School of Medicine are so passionate about their work. When you visit campus, it's lovely to look around and see people from so many backgrounds blending together. It's a truly multicultural university."

A Casula local, Ruth completed a Master of Teaching at the Bankstown campus in 1991 and has been involved in Rotary since the 70s. Now retired from teaching, Ruth redirects all her energy into community work. She organises an annual Rotary Ball, rallying local businesses for their donations, and directs a large proportion of the funds to Western Sydney U. On Saturdays she's either at Narellan Town Centre leading the Weekly Wheel fundraising drive, or stitching quilts with the Camden Country Quilters Guild, where she serves as Treasurer. The group's lovingly crafted quilts are often donated to hospitals and local charity raffles.

Ruth is on the selection panel for Rotary's School of Medicine scholarship, and says it's a privilege to meet the applicants and follow their careers. "It's amazing seeing them going through the course each year and how much they mature and grow up," she says. Being from the Macarthur region is among the scholarship criteria, but character is key. "We look for academic excellence and the kind of personalities that would make good doctors," Ruth says.

With no plans to wind down her philanthropic efforts any time soon, Ruth is buoyed by the tight-knit group of locals she works with. "It's a really great bunch of people and I've made some lovely friendships," she says.

Ruth Morrison,
Master of Education, 1991



GRADLIFE BUSINESS DIRECTORY

Join our online business
directory today to advertise to
over 175,000 alumni

We are launching an online network for our alumni to share business details and connect with the Western Sydney University alumni community. The free business directory provides you with endless possibilities to build your networks and customer base in Western Sydney and across the globe.

Connect your business with fellow alumni today, visit
[WESTERNSYDNEY.EDU.AU/GRADLIFEBUSINESSDIRECTORY](https://westernsydney.edu.au/gradlifebusinessdirectory)

STAY CONNECTED

Update your details, join chapters and stay connected online at westernsydney.edu.au/stayconnected

GRADLIFE MEMBERSHIP

Join the GradLife Membership program to gain access to benefits exclusive to our alumni. To find out more, visit westernsydney.edu.au/gradlife

SOCIAL MEDIA

Keep up to date with us on our social media channels



facebook.com/westsydu alumni



twitter.com/westsydu alumni



westernsydney.edu.au/alumniLinkedIn



GradLife Mentoring

A NEW ONLINE E-MENTORING PLATFORM FOR ALUMNI

Connecting leaders of today with the trailblazers of tomorrow.

From studying in Sydney's West to building your networks all over the world, mentoring is a great way to increase your connections globally and enhance your career-driven experiences.

The GradLife Mentoring program is designed to support the sharing of skills and foster an environment that encourages mentoring relationships amongst our alumni and students.

MENTORS

- Share your experience and expertise
- Develop your skills as a mentor
- Build relationships and shape the next generation of industry leaders
- Reconnect with your university

MENTEES

- Engagement with fellow alumni and industry leaders
- Learn from industry professionals and leaders
- Gain valuable insight and expertise within your industry
- Start to build your professional networks

Connect with your fellow alumni for mentoring and professional development opportunities today.



Find out more or sign up today at westernsydney.edu.au/gradlifementors



[WESTERNSYDNEY.EDU.AU](https://westernsydney.edu.au)