

# The dKin Difference

Deakin University  
Impact of Your Giving in 2023



[deakin.edu.au](https://deakin.edu.au)



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**Front cover image:** Fatima Yousufi, captain and goalkeeper of Afghanistan's national women's soccer team, Deakin student, and recipient of the donor-funded Student Emergency Assistance Fund (SEAF). Photo by Tran Nguyen.

Deakin University acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of all the unceded lands, skies and waterways on which Deakin students, staff and communities come together. As we learn and teach through virtually and physically constructed places across time, we pay our deep respect to the Ancestors and Elders of Wadawurrung Country, Wurundjeri and Eastern Maar Country and beyond, where our physical campuses are located. We also acknowledge the many First Nations from where students join us online and make vital contributions to our learning communities.



# Welcome from our Vice-Chancellor



Deakin University is known for generating great ideas – translating and applying them to deliver impact. But it is the partnerships we cultivate within our diverse, global community that enable this process and amplify our work to benefit as many people as it can.

Each year when reading *The dKin Difference*, I am struck by the deeply personal stories that are shared, and the connections and legacies that emerge as a result.

Our National Centre for Farmer Health (NCFH) is leading the way to better understand and support the mental health of Australia's farming communities. The Centre is based in Hamilton and was founded thanks to the foresight of the Geoff & Helen Handbury Foundation. Dr Alison Kennedy and her colleagues are embedded in the local community, and their research is responsive to its needs.

**Back on Track is a pilot NCFH project that will see mental health outreach delivered by farmers, for farmers. It is an Australian first, and the echoes of this work will be felt for generations to come.**

Inspired by the kindness and compassion of her late son Mishka, Pamela McIntosh has both co-funded a research position and established scholarships that support Deakin students to undertake mental health first aid training. Each of these students will be empowered to help those within their own communities. When families entrust us to honour the memory of a loved one, as Pamela has, we acknowledge the privilege and responsibility of doing so.

The Neilson family's story is forever linked with Deakin's own history. The late Geoffrey Neilson AM was a highly respected accountant in Geelong who was part of Deakin's interim Council in 1975, and guided the institution for many years, eventually becoming Deputy Chancellor. Deakin conferred an honorary doctorate on Geoffrey in recognition of his immense contributions to the University. Following his passing in 2018, his family has chosen to create two endowed scholarships in his name. Fittingly, these gifts will support talented and hardworking students in our business and commerce programs, in perpetuity.

I was pleased to read about the exciting learning experiences that students in our creative arts programs are undertaking, thanks to the Eric Ormond Baker Charitable Fund. My colleague Professor Simon Tormey, who leads the Faculty of Arts and Education, speaks of the inherent value of these disciplines, and also the challenge of funding small, studio-based practice. With the support of the Fund, our film and television, music, and visual arts students will be better connected to industry, and their work will reach a wider audience.

We are proud to share the stories of the Deakin community and their positive impacts on the world. I hope to hear more about your own journey at one of our upcoming events for donors, alumni and partners.

**Professor Iain Martin**  
Vice-Chancellor



“We are proud to share the stories of the Deakin community and their positive impacts on the world. I hope to hear more about your own journey at one of our upcoming events for donors, alumni and partners.”

– Professor Iain Martin



# 2023: the year in numbers



Deakin scholarship recipients on campus in Warrnambool. Photo by Chloe Jackson.

# \$19,818,666

A record total of new philanthropic funds given, from 638 donors.

# \$7,337,064

Largest gift given by the BHP Group to support the Blue Carbon Lab's 'Leading the charge through nature-based solutions' program.

# \$125,000

Deakin's commitment to regional communities continued with \$125,000 in donations directly supporting students and initiatives in Warrnambool and surrounds.

# \$1,035,062

Philanthropy continued to play a large role in supporting students facing social or financial disadvantage with \$1,035,062 in scholarships distributed.

# \$11,111,566

Endowed scholarships, awards and prizes continue to support students at Deakin with the fund almost doubling to \$11,111,566 thanks to ongoing partnerships with donors.

## Balanced excellence in education and research



Among the top 1% of all universities worldwide<sup>1</sup>



Among the top 1% of researchers worldwide<sup>2</sup>



Best overall undergraduate student experience in Victoria for seven consecutive years<sup>3</sup>



Highest overall satisfaction for undergraduate students in Victoria for 13 consecutive years<sup>4</sup>



1st in the world for Sport Science<sup>5</sup>



9 out of 10 Deakin undergraduates are in full time employment three years after graduation<sup>6</sup>

1 ARWU 2024, QS 2024, THE 2024

2 Highly Cited Researches, Institute for Scientific Information™, Clarivate

3 Student Experience Survey (2016-2022)

4 Graduate Outcomes Survey (2016-2022), Australian Graduate Survey (2010-2015)

5 ShanghaiRanking Global Ranking of Sport Science Schools and Departments 2023

6 Graduate Outcomes Survey Longitudinal 2023, Commonwealth Government



# The freedom found in collective regular giving



While growing up in Geelong, Sanela Osmanovic (BMBS '15 *Deakin*) imagined herself travelling the world as a performing artist. An interaction with a lawyer who was assisting her father with a property contract suddenly changed her career outlook.

These days, Ms Osmanovic is putting her Deakin double degree in law and management to good use, working as a senior associate for a law firm in Melbourne, where she practises business law, specialising in superannuation.

"I enjoy working with my clients, because they really do try to help people understand how they'll be looked after in retirement," Ms Osmanovic says.

"Another thing that some people don't know is that you have insurance in your superannuation, as well. So I often deal with people who become permanently disabled. And they don't realise that they're covered through their superannuation, and they get that money paid out. I really enjoy that – knowing that I work with an industry that is there to help Australians."

Ms Osmanovic remains passionately connected to Deakin through the Regular Giving program, which supports multiple initiatives including the Sanctuary Scholarships for students who are seeking asylum, or from refugee backgrounds.

These scholarships have a personal resonance for Ms Osmanovic, who was born in Bosnia, and fled with her family first to Serbia and then to Hungary during the Yugoslav Wars when she was just two years old. The family stayed in a refugee camp in Hungary for several months, before Australia offered them a path to citizenship. They arrived in Geelong when Ms Osmanovic was four, with the promise of a fresh start.

"It's something I'm very familiar with – being an asylum seeker in Australia – and being able to have opportunities for education. I thought that was really important, and wanted to support the Sanctuary Scholarships," Ms Osmanovic says.

Humanitarian visa holders in Australia are not eligible to receive higher education loans. These scholarships cover 100% of tuition fees, a yearly stipend to help with living expenses, and provide wraparound support including English language courses.

Ms Osmanovic is pleased to receive annual updates from the scholarship recipients, who share how a university education is transforming their lives.

**"The first thing I like about the program is that there's no minimum limit – any contribution makes a difference."**

But the other thing is that you get busier and busier as you advance in your career, and you find that you can't devote as much time to volunteering and things like that," Ms Osmanovic says.

"I think this is a good way, by setting up a monthly direct debit of whatever amount, to know that you're helping out, even if you can't dedicate your time."

The power of collective giving at Deakin has a profound impact, and each Sanctuary Scholarship reveals an extraordinary story of resilience, perseverance, and hope. Fatima Yousufi was the captain of the Afghanistan women's national soccer team. With the help of former Socceroo Craig Foster, Fatima and her teammates fled the country after the Taliban came to power in 2021. She is now free to play the sport she loves in Melbourne, while studying at Deakin.

"When you're becoming a refugee, you're not going to have your past again. You will have new paths in your life and new things will happen. We are having the second chance to be alive," Ms Yousufi says.

To learn more about how you can support transformative Deakin programs through regular giving, [click here](#).



**"When you're becoming a refugee, you're not going to have your past again. You will have new paths in your life and new things will happen. We are having the second chance to be alive."**

– Fatima Yousufi

Fatima Yousufi, captain and goalkeeper of Afghanistan's national women's soccer team, Deakin student, and recipient of the donor funded Student Emergency Assistance Fund (SEAF). Photo by Tran Nguyen.



# Eternal impact

## How endowments shape the future for generations to come

The legacy of the late Geoffrey Neilson AM is intertwined with the history of Deakin University itself.

An exceptional accountant who was raised and educated in Geelong, Mr Neilson was appointed to Deakin's interim Council in 1975. He was part of the decision-making body when it was formally constituted on 1 Jan 1978, and served across various terms, including as Deputy Chancellor, until his retirement in 1998.

The following year, Deakin conferred the honorary degree of Doctor of the University to acknowledge Mr Neilson's distinguished service. Guided by the wise financial management of Mr Neilson and his Council colleagues over many years, Deakin's balance sheet is the picture of health in 2024.

**Funding for endowed scholarships at Deakin almost doubled in 2023, thanks to donor support. The University's Future Fund – reserved for exceptional, step-change opportunities that cannot be covered by operating expenses – has been grown and sensibly managed to ensure Deakin's future for decades to come.**

Today, one of Deakin's two Deputy Chancellors is Carol Boyer-Spooner, who also chairs the University's Investment Committee.

"Deakin has managed the finances of the university extremely well during the difficulty of the COVID-19 pandemic. This period re-emphasised the importance of both philanthropic giving and prudent investment management to allow Deakin flexibility in delivering its potential." Ms Boyer-Spooner says.

Six different committees advise Council on core business including audit and risk, finance and business affairs, and people and culture.

Ms Boyer-Spooner and her colleagues have recently established a new framework which prioritises ethical and sustainable institutional investing. Before returning to Australia and joining the Deakin University Council, Ms Boyer-Spooner had a decorated career in the United Kingdom, where she helped to develop The Catapult Network of technology and innovation centres that spans more than 50 locations.

## A gift that lives on

Endowed gifts create an enduring legacy, with the principal invested in perpetuity. Only a fraction of the investment's earnings are required each year to support the fund's purpose.

Last year, the transformational Damion Drapac Centre for Equity in Health Education and Scholarships for Vocational Doctors were created following the single largest gift in the university's history. The late Dr Damion Drapac was a new graduate when he was killed in a tragic cycling accident. Damion's father Michael established the Centre and Scholarships in his son's memory, to encourage other aspiring doctors for generations to come.

By 2030, there will be 12 Damion Drapac Scholars enrolled in Deakin School of Medicine. Valued at \$60,000, these scholarships will be offered every year, forever.

Thanks to two separate endowments, Mr Neilson's family have also generously provided scholarships in his honour. Reflecting Mr Neilson's successful career as an accountant and adviser, these awards support Deakin students undertaking commerce and business programs.

L-R: Geoff Neilson Prize recipient Sarah Gofton together with Tim Neilson.



Sir Henry Winneke, Governor of Victoria (right) and Chancellor Peter Thwaites (left) unveil a plaque at the Opening Ceremony, 1978.

"My father was one of the group which in the early 1970s lobbied for a university to be established in Geelong. One day he arrived home slightly despondent because politicians or bureaucrats in Melbourne had been sceptical of the value of establishing a university in a provincial town. My mother pointed out that among the "provincial towns" in which universities had been established were Oxford and Cambridge. I think he realised then that what he and the others were seeking wasn't just that a university would exist in Geelong, but that Geelong would be home to a university, which in time would develop into a world-class university.

"The ever-increasing success of Deakin was a source of immense satisfaction to him for the rest of his life. He especially enjoyed meeting winners of prizes and scholarships, and I believe that a strong sustainable endowment fund to reward merit and overcome financial barriers is intrinsic to the vision which he and the other instigators of Deakin had."

The Shirley Anne Everett Award for Excellence is another inspirational endowment story entrusted to Deakin.

Karan Dawson was moved to memorialise her late mother, Shirley, who worked tirelessly as a nurse, despite the many obstacles placed in her path. At the time of Shirley's final exams in the 1960s, nurses were not allowed to be married. Shirley paused her career to start her family, but returned eight years (and four children) later to complete her training.

The award established in Shirley's honour is awarded to a third-year Bachelor of Nursing

student who has consistently demonstrated the qualities of compassion, empathy, and clinical skill.

"I'm really lucky to have been able to meet the recipients of the award every year," Ms Dawson says.

**"It's a lovely moment. It's just a joy to see what a difference it's meant to these nurses."**

**[Meet Karan and hear her story.](#)**

To learn more about endowments at Deakin, [click here.](#)



L-R: Karan Dawson together with Shirley Anne Everett Award for Excellence recipient Natasha McMahon.



# Healing the mind

Navigating the importance of mental health together



“We loved the remoteness, the clean black skies of the Kimberley. And the fact that you could see a million stars.”

– Pamela McIntosh



When Pamela McIntosh (BA '99 Deakin) is asked to describe her beloved son, Mishka, she shares an illuminating story from his childhood.

“He did things like pick the first snow drops when he got off the bus, and bring them home. He was a very gentle, caring person, and that was how he was, all his life.”

In Mishka's memory, Pamela co-funded a research position and established the McIntosh Mental Health First Aid Scholarship, which empowers Deakin students to look out for others.

Mishka grew up on a farm in Warrion, north of Colac. His main schooling was at Alvie Consolidated and Colac High School, before studying information technology. In the mid-90s, Mishka was a passenger involved in a serious car accident. He sustained multiple fractures, lacerations, and suffered severe head injuries.

“As his body healed, his mind didn't, and he suffered post-traumatic stress disorder. This is commonly understood now, but nobody realised what it was at the time,” Pamela explains.

Mishka returned home to Warrion, and slowly began his long rehabilitation with the help of Barwon Health. It was there that a nurse observed Mishka's compassionate nature, and he was offered employment as a carer consultant – working alongside others dealing with mental health challenges of their own.

A teacher by training, Pamela was inspired to follow her son into healthcare, and the pair worked at Barwon Health across two decades.

Informed by her personal and professional experiences, Pamela set out to educate others on the importance of mental health – speaking at conferences and advocating for change.

Mishka's hero was physicist Professor Brian Cox; he also adored *Dr Who* and the song *Starry Starry Night*.

“When my husband died 13 years ago, Mishka sort of took over. My husband and I travelled a lot, and we had always wanted to do the west coast of Australia and Darwin. And so that's what Mishka and I set out to do. We loved the remoteness, the clean black skies of the Kimberley. And the fact that you could see a million stars.”

Sadly, several years ago, Mishka's health deteriorated, and he was admitted to hospital – a harrowing two-and-a-half month ordeal from which he did not recover.

“His doctors wrote a page of comments about what an amazing patient he was,” Pamela recalls.

“How gentle, how funny, how absorbed he was in the science of his treatment, and how he never complained. It was just magical, and that is my boy.”

To honour Mishka's mental health advocacy, two important initiatives have been established at Deakin: the McIntosh Mental Health First Aid Training Scholarships, and a new research assistant role for the **Community and Research Network (CARN)**.

CARN connects health professionals, researchers, and those with lived experience, seeking to promote good health and wellbeing for the community of the Greater Geelong region. Mishka and Pamela participated in multiple projects conducted by Professor Olivia Dean, who leads a novel therapies program through CARN and Deakin's **Institute for Mental and Physical Health and Clinical Translation (IMPACT)**.

Professor Olivia Dean shares “Mishka's legacy is continued through Pamela's generosity. His dedication to embedding lived expertise to improve treatment and recovery in people's mental illness journey will live on through this Gift. Quoting one of Mishka's favourite songs, “You were only waiting for this moment to arise” (The Beatles).

Deakin University student, Marie, is among the first two cohorts who have completed their mental health first aid training, supported by the scholarship program.

“I am truly grateful to the McIntosh family for their generous scholarship. This opportunity has been transformative, not only for my personal growth, but also in enhancing my ability to support my peers at university, especially international students navigating the complexities of adapting to a new environment.

“Your support has not only touched my life, but also the lives of countless others who will benefit from the enhanced understanding I can now offer. Thank you to the McIntosh family for their kindness and belief in the importance of mental health education.”

To learn more about IMPACT, [click here](#).



# Harvesting hope

Farmer, watching her Canola grow.  
Photo by Jennifer Hawkes.



“There’s good evidence that behavioural activation works to reduce the symptoms of depression, just as effectively as medication.”

– Dr Alison Kennedy



## Putting farmer's mental health Back on Track

It’s an incredibly sobering statistic – every 10 days, an Australian farmer dies by suicide. Compounding this, access to mental health professionals for farmers reduces with increasing remoteness.

Australia relies on farmers to stock the nation’s supermarket shelves and power our exports, but much more needs to be done to support their mental health. That’s where a unique research centre at Deakin University is making a real difference.

Founded thanks to the visionary support of the Geoff & Helen Handbury Foundation, the **National Centre for Farmer Health (NCFH)** is operated in close partnership with Western District Health Service, and is based in the agricultural hub of Hamilton, 300km west of Melbourne.

A new, targeted mental health program, **Back on Track**, is currently in the community consultation phase after two years of deep engagement with Victorian farmers who co-designed it. Back on Track utilises behavioural activation therapy, and is a peer-to-peer program administered by members of the farming community. It is the first such intervention to be trialled in Australia.

Dr Alison Kennedy (GCertHELT ‘20 *Deakin*) is Director of the NCFH, and leads Back on Track. Research results she co-published in 2014 confronted the shocking silence that surrounded farmer suicide in Australia at the time.

“My work since publishing has been driven by addressing a lot of the underpinning factors, and looking at ways that we can prevent those risks.”

Dr Kennedy’s research mission has a deeply personal dimension – she lost her niece to suicide, which inspired her to complete her PhD on this topic and has continued to shape her work since then.

Back on Track is anchored in the mutual trust and respect of its participants, with behavioural activation chosen as the therapeutic modality because its principles can be quickly learned and applied in a practical way.

“There’s good evidence that behavioural activation works to reduce the symptoms of depression, just as effectively as medication,” Dr Kennedy explains.

“It’s about people being able to monitor and understand their mood, and relating it to the activities that they’re doing at the time. Once they have an understanding of this connection, then they work to actively schedule activities into their day that bring them a sense of achievement or pleasure.”

Funding received from the Gardiner Foundation has allowed Back on Track to focus on three different communities located in Corangamite, Towong and Wellington Shire. The feasibility trial cohort is small – nine peer workers, and 40 community members experiencing low mood or depression. Dr Kennedy hopes that new funding can be sourced to allow a national implementation trial to follow.

The health profile of Australians living in rural areas is systematically worse compared to those living in major cities. Life expectancy is lower in Outer Regional and Remote Victoria than in Metropolitan Melbourne. In Greater Melbourne, Life Expectancy is 84.4 years, while in Outer Regional and Remote areas of Victoria it is 81.8. This life expectancy difference also manifests in a greater disease burden for residents in rural areas.

“I have tried to have conversations and to drive an agenda towards really understanding and addressing the situational factors that contribute to that risk of suicide,” Dr Kennedy says.



Another NCFH project driven by community need is **AgriSafe** which has enabled free one-on-one preventative health assessments tailored to the needs of farmers since 2010. Specially trained AgriSafe nurses engage with farmers in their own local community.

**“It would be fantastic to have some support to be able to do a full-scale AgriSafe rollout across Victoria,” Dr Kennedy says.**

“We’ve already been able to demonstrate that the service saves the health system money and, we’ve got a growing number of partnerships to support this project - including the Victorian Alliance of Rural and Regional Community Health, comprising 11 distinct services across the state. We need additional funds to be able to do the background work to scale **AgriSafe** to the level we’d like. It’s a shovel-ready, fantastic program, but we just need a bit of a kickstart.”

[farmerhealth.org.au](http://farmerhealth.org.au)

## Early intervention is key

With more than three quarters of those surveyed starting work on farms before they turn 15, secondary school students are the focus of the **Gear Up for Ag** program.

NCFH teams deliver these four-hour workshops within schools, focusing on the connection between farm hazards and the impact on health outcomes.

Students are engaged through demonstrations and interactive activities to build their understanding of common hazards, promote health and wellbeing, and empower them to improve their farm safety practices.

The team at the NCFH have now extended the reach of their secondary student farm safety program by developing Shifting Gears — a series of engaging videos and teacher resources, to encourage classroom conversations and empower the next generation of farmers to change the way farming is done.

NCFH’s most popular resource is its **Managing Stress on the Farm** booklet, with more than 60,000 copies distributed.

To learn more about NCFH, [click here](#).



Dirt runs through my veins.  
Photo by Kathryn Potempski.



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# A constellation of creative ventures

Deakin virtual production studio.



A single artwork, screenplay or musical instrument can transform your understanding of the world, and your place in it.

This belief unites the constellation of creative ventures within **Deakin's Faculty of Arts and Education** that will be nurtured thanks to the vision of the Eric Ormond Baker Charitable Fund.

Among the supported initiatives are a regional travelling exhibition of Wiradjuri artist Ronald Elliot Bull and scholarships for Deakin students to complete virtual production work-integrated learning internships.

The Eric Ormond Baker Charitable Fund is managed by Eric's nephew, Graeme Baker. Mr Baker says the Fund's investments are highly targeted, and seek to provide seed funding for promising projects that might otherwise be overlooked.

"This strategy not only helps in bringing innovative and potentially transformative projects to life, but also in challenging and expanding the criteria through which funding decisions are traditionally made," Mr Baker says.

**"By supporting projects that are on the fringe of receiving financial backing, we aim to foster a more inclusive and diverse ecosystem of funded initiatives."**

Professor Simon Tormey held senior positions at world-leading universities in Sydney and Bristol, before taking up the role of Executive Dean Arts and Education in August last year. On an early visit to the university, Professor Tormey witnessed the Deakin difference firsthand.

"The taxi driver who took me from the airport to Deakin was a Deakin University student, a Somali man who said: 'I love Deakin University. I live close by, but I do everything online. I have eight children and three jobs, and the only way I can really access university is the period between midnight and 2:00 am when there's peace and quiet in my house and we've got all the materials available.'

"That was a real light bulb moment. Here's someone who has fled as a refugee with a big family, has great ambition for himself and his children, and is finding a little bit of time to access materials that only Deakin could provide."

Professor Tormey, who was the first in his family to attend university, is inspired by the rich interdisciplinary connections within a faculty fizzing with big ideas. He is also conscious of the resourcing required to support creative arts teaching.

"The pressure on the creative arts in particular is very considerable, and not just at Deakin, because we are encouraged to think in very instrumental and pragmatic ways about what students should be doing," Professor Tormey says.

"Disciplines like film and animation, performing arts, virtual production and graphic design – these are energy intensive. We need large spaces to work in. We need small classes so that people get proper instruction. We need opportunities for those students to go out and to practise their particular skill out in the community and so on."

The multi-faceted gift from the Eric Ormond Baker Charitable Fund will provide funding from this year until 2029, directly supporting student learning opportunities, and community engagement programs across the breadth of the arts.

Dr Fiona Phillips is a lecturer in the School of Education who mentors the next generation of music teachers. The funds will enable the purchase of new instruments that Deakin students will use for rehearsals and ensembles, and to accompany children in schools.

**"Deakin University could be a lighthouse for regional music education in the future with the right resourcing," Dr Phillips says.**

**"Every child, every day, everywhere should have access to quality music education."**

Access to visual art is also vital. The late Ronald Elliot Bull was born at Lake Tyers Mission Station in 1942. Bull's artistic talent was evident at an early age, and he studied the landscapes of leading artists including J. M. W. Turner, Arthur Streeton and Hans Heysen.

Bull was often compared to the famed Arrernte artist Albert Namatjira, but his work was not included in institutional collections. *Air, Ground, Gums and Country: the lost paintings of Ronald E Bull* will allow a long overdue appraisal of his work and legacy. Funds received will allow the exhibition to travel throughout Victoria in 2024 and 2025.

**Tour our incredible Virtual Production Studio with recent Film, TV and Animation graduate Jasmine.**



# Wisdom passed on



## Elevating Australian Indigenous Knowledge in motherhood's first 1,000 days

Every PhD student experiences their own lightbulb moment. For Fiona Mitchell, it occurred during the literature review process.

"There was very minimal information about what resources and support are available for Aboriginal families regarding introduction to solid foods" Fiona explains.

**"There's a lot of information about breastfeeding. But minimal information regarding what healthy eating would be for bubs who are six months to two years."**

Fiona, a Mununjali woman of the Bundjalung nation, began her doctorate at Deakin in 2022 to explore how nutritional advice is provided to Aboriginal mothers as they support their babies during their first 1,000 days. Her research is conducted in partnership with the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO), which has a state-wide network of 33 Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs).

Fiona's project has been supported by a scholarship from the Marquill Foundation, allowing her to travel and engage participants from across ACCOs – Shepparton, Gippsland, Warrnambool, and elsewhere.

With a background in psychology and counselling, Fiona originally joined Deakin's human resources team, leading Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recruitment. One day, an opportunity came across her desk that changed her own path.

A colleague from the [Global Centre for Preventive Health and Nutrition \(GLOBE\)](#) asked Fiona if she could help engage Indigenous students who were interested in applying for a PhD scholarship as part of a research project based at the [Institute for Physical Activity and Nutrition \(IPAN\)](#).

Encouraged by the opportunity, Fiona began to consider her own career goals and enrolled in a Graduate Diploma of Indigenous Research offered through the NIKERI Institute. After earning a high distinction average, she felt ready to transition to a doctorate.

Fiona is passionate about ensuring that Australian Indigenous knowledge is studied and recorded, so that its insights can shape policy and guidelines at home and abroad.

"There's very limited information out there. When I did the literature review, I could only find a couple of papers where they had used traditional ways for birthing – so rolling bub in ash and then the smoking ceremony.

"We've got a lot of different Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations across Australia, and each nation do things differently."

The Marquill Foundation funding has allowed Fiona to deeply engage with the network of Victorian Aboriginal health centres, and realise her research vision.

"A lot of Aboriginal mature-aged students will think twice about doing a PhD in the first place, because well, who's going to pay for the bills?"

**"I'm very thankful for the scholarship, because it has enabled me to get out and do the research and have that peace of mind that I can come back home and I've got a roof over my head. Without that there, I really would be questioning – would I have been able to do it?"**

The Marquill Foundation created the scholarship to recognise the value of real-world experience to informing applied nutrition research.

"It is often more challenging financially and otherwise to embark on a PhD at a later stage of life when a student is likely to have more commitments than someone who is embarking on a PhD directly after finishing an undergraduate program. These PhD candidates bring their experience from other walks of life and work experience."

Fiona will continue her community engagement and data gathering throughout the year, with a view to finalise her thesis in 2025. Ideas for future research, driven by a desire to inform government policy and positively impact community care are already forming illuminated by that lightbulb moment at the beginning of her PhD.

**"Let's get the evidence out there so that care can be better."**



Fiona Mitchell, PhD scholarship recipient, School of Exercise and Nutrition Sciences. Photo by Chloe Jackson.



If you would like more information about giving through Deakin, please contact the Deakin Development team at:

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T +61 3 9244 5150

W [deakin.edu.au/giving-to-deakin](https://deakin.edu.au/giving-to-deakin)

**deakin.edu.au**

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