

2023



VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF
WELLINGTON
TE HERENGA WAKA

TE PŪRONGO A TE KURA TANGATA

REPORT ON PHILANTHROPY







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OVERVIEW OF 2023

1,079

donors gave or pledged a total of

\$33.9 million

559 alumni gave **\$14.6 million**

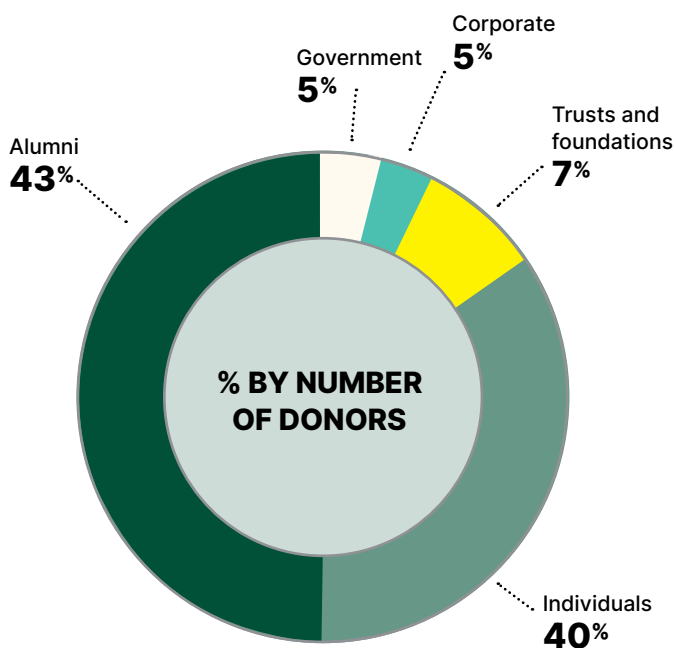
461 members of the Victoria Benefactors' Circle

107 members of the Victoria Legacy Club

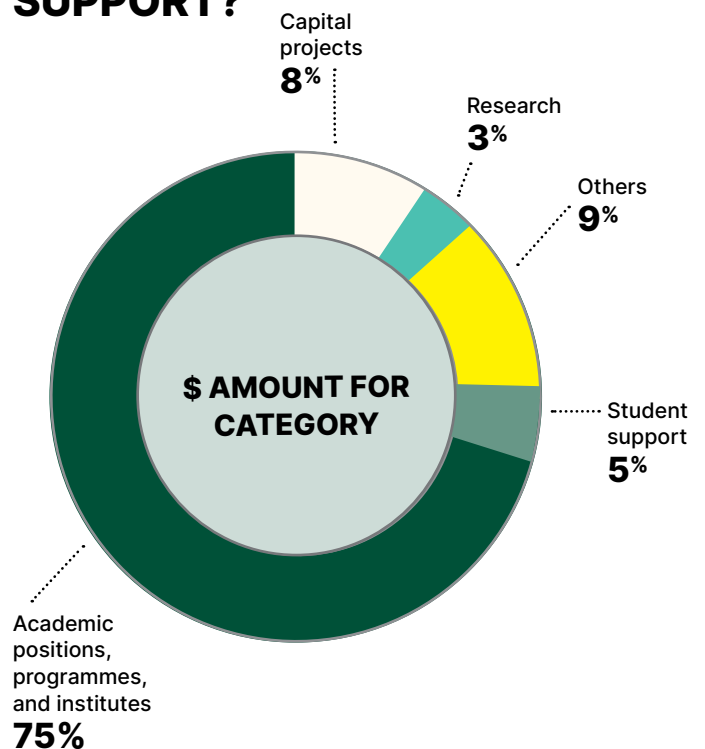
28 new funds were established including **10** new scholarships

17 students were awarded Alumni Appeal Scholarships

WHO ARE OUR DONORS?



WHAT DID OUR DONORS SUPPORT?



REFLECTIONS ON THE YEAR

FROM THE CHAIR

We are very pleased to report a successful year of philanthropy at the University, with the highest amount of funds raised since the Foundation was first established in 1990.

From 1,079 donors, the Foundation received a total of \$33.9 million in 2023, up from \$14.4 million in 2022. Seventy-five percent of these gifts were directed towards supporting academic positions and programmes, enabling extraordinary growth in research capabilities and the expansion of academic disciplines available to students.

Despite another year of global market volatility, the Foundation's careful stewardship enabled it to meet its objective of future-proofing the endowed fund with an inflationary increase of 6 percent, while also providing a return of 4 percent to support all university activities, scholarships, and awards in line with donor wishes.

To all our generous donors, we want to thank you for your commitment to the work of the University, and your belief in the potential of our students and the difference our research makes. In 2023, generous contributions to the Student Hardship Fund and Alumni Appeal Scholarships were higher than ever before, and we are very grateful for the many caring people who wish to support students facing financial hardship and inequity.

We trust you'll enjoy reading this year's report, which includes a number of impact-driven stories that have been made possible because of your support.

As well as an update on new funds and scholarships that have been established, you'll read about a community-driven fundraising campaign aimed at advancing postgraduate research in multiple sclerosis. You'll hear first-hand from the inaugural cohort of the Ngā Hoe a Kupe Pathfinder Scholarship programme, get a sneak peek into a new mechatronics programme being established, and learn more about a remarkable contribution towards entomological research.

All these activities—and many more—have been supported by those of you whose generosity enables innovation, courage, and change.



On behalf of my fellow trustees, I wish to thank you, our kind and compassionate donors, for your ongoing philanthropic support. Your gifts do not go unnoticed and make a real difference to the people who benefit from them.

Dame Kerry Prendergast, CNZM, DNZM
Chair, Victoria University of Wellington Foundation

FROM THE TUMU WHAKARAE— VICE-CHANCELLOR

When I stepped into my role as Vice-Chancellor of Te Herenga Waka in 2023, I made three core commitments to our university community. The first was to understand and support our staff—both academic and administrative—to create the best campus environment possible. The second was addressing our financial sustainability, and the third was to bolster our distinct position as a world-class educational institution.

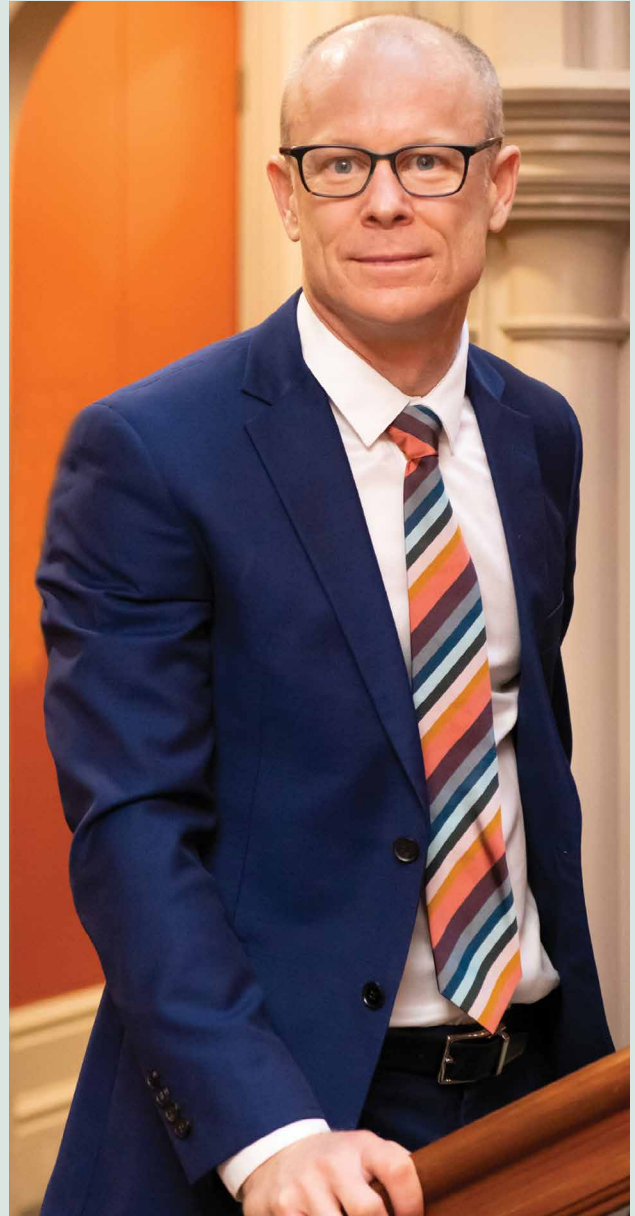
Following the difficult work that was needed to address the significant hole in the University's finances, I am pleased to say the University is now on a much stronger footing. I have been enormously encouraged by the return of people to campus and the turnaround in student numbers. However, the ongoing challenges of systemic underfunding of the sector as a whole mean that we are continuing to work hard to re-energise the University we all love.

Despite our financial challenges—or perhaps because of them—you, our generous donors, really stepped up in remarkable ways. Your support has been instrumental in fostering student success, enabling groundbreaking research, and enhancing community engagement. You played a crucial role in supporting at-risk academic positions and student scholarships and ensuring that our mission continues to thrive. Thank you.

I want to highlight a few areas where donor support has made a real difference, not only to areas of research but also within our communities. Generous funding for our Ngā Hoe a Kupe Pathfinder Scholarship programme was officially greenlit beyond its pilot phase this year. Our initial cohort of students completed their final year of study. This is a milestone that represents not only a personal achievement for these students but also the transformative impact of your generosity.

You also made a significant impact in areas as varied as entomology, mechatronics, and neurodegenerative diseases such as multiple sclerosis; the latter has seen an unprecedented outpouring of support from the community.

Thank you to Dame Kerry Prendergast, chair of the Victoria University of Wellington Foundation, and our



fellow trustees for their governance, leadership, and support this year. Thank you to our students, alumni, staff, and to you, our supporters, for your unwavering commitment to this institution. This is a wonderful university to be a part of and I look forward to continuing to serve its community.

Professor Nic Smith
Tumu Whakarae—Vice-Chancellor

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON FOUNDATION

Your gifts to the Victoria University of Wellington Foundation are changing lives and transforming communities.

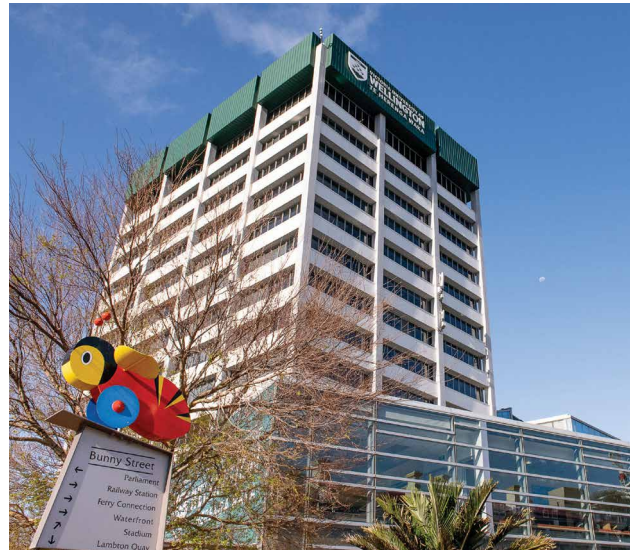
Thanks to your generous support, the Foundation has contributed more than \$90 million to support the University's key priorities through scholarships, prizes, academic positions, and research programmes since its establishment in 1990.

Governed by an independent board of trustees, the Foundation is responsible for managing your donations, investing gifts to the endowment portfolio, and distributing funds in accordance with donor wishes. None of this would be possible without you. Your gift—no matter the size—is making a difference.

RESPONSIBLE INVESTING

The Victoria University of Wellington Foundation has a strong commitment to responsible investment. Our current measures include regular environmental, social, and governance (ESG) and weighted-average carbon intensity reporting by our fund managers and annual submissions to the United Nations Principles for Responsible Investment (UNPRI) to which the Foundation is a signatory. The Foundation's Statement of Investment Performance and Objectives outlines the Foundation's investment beliefs, including our commitment to integrating ESG considerations into the investment portfolio.

By investing in pooled investment funds, the Foundation recognises that its scope to both select and influence the companies is limited. The focus for the board is the appointment of its fund managers and the extent to which the ESG and climate-related policies of managers are aligned with the policies of the Foundation and ongoing monitoring, assessment, and engagement with managers with a goal of continuing improvement and alignment over time. These measures are tracking appropriately in line with these expectations.



UNITED NATIONS PRINCIPLES FOR RESPONSIBLE INVESTMENT

In 2018, the Victoria University of Wellington Foundation was the first Australasian university foundation to become a signatory to the UNPRI, joining more than 4,900 organisations around the world that have committed to these principles. As a signatory, the board of the Foundation pledges to integrate ESG considerations into its investment decisions.

The UNPRI provides an internationally accepted framework for investors such as the Foundation to manage ESG issues in a manner consistent with improving long-term investment returns, focusing on six principles for responsible investment. The Foundation is encouraged by the ongoing improvement in its UNPRI results showing the commitment to meeting and exceeding these principles while enhancing its stewardship of philanthropic donations.

To learn more about the UNPRI, go to www.unpri.org

To learn about the Foundation's investment policies related to ESG and see its Statement of Investment Policy and Objectives, go to www.wgtn.ac.nz/foundation



GIFTING FOR THE FUTURE

The Foundation not only assists the University by supporting the current needs of students, researchers, and academics, but it also strives to ensure a successful and sustainable future for the University and its students through the endowment portfolio. Endowed gifts are carefully invested and managed to ensure resources for the University's priorities for generations to come.

When a donor advises that a donation is to last in perpetuity, the Foundation invests that donation in the endowment portfolio to earn an annual income. That annual income is then used to provide ongoing support to the University's students and projects as per the donor's wishes.

Donors often choose to create an endowed fund, and we acknowledge this commitment by naming the fund in honour of the donor or a family member. Four new endowed funds were established in 2023. They are the:

- Dr Aola Richards Entomology Fund
- David Eade Piano Scholarship
- Ruth and Rodger Hopkins PhD Scholarship in Accounting and Financial Governance
- Tony Holmes Fellowship and Prizes in Early Childhood Education.

By making an endowed gift, you are investing in the future of our students, teaching, and research. The Foundation's audited financial statements are available on the website at www.wgtn.ac.nz/foundation

CREATING A LEGACY FOR THE FUTURE

Once you have made provision for your loved ones, a gift in your will can be the perfect way to have a lasting effect, without impacting on your current financial needs. We are immensely grateful for every gift we receive, whether it is a specific sum or a percentage of whatever is left once you have thought about those close to you.

When you create a legacy, you continue to be part of Te Herenga Waka—Victoria University of Wellington far into the future. Like legacy donor Dr Aola Richards, whose story you can read on the next page, you can help students unlock their full potential.

If you would like to have a confidential talk about leaving a gift in your will, contact Rosalene Fogel at rosalene.fogel@vuw.ac.nz or +64 4 463 6030.



HIGHLIGHTS OF 2023

UNVEILING NATURE'S SECRETS

In 2023, the School of Biological Sciences received a transformational \$13.5 million gift from the late Dr Aola Richards, a trailblazing scientist and academic renowned for her identification of the native wētā species.

Her gift, the largest in the University's history, is intended to support postgraduate and postdoctoral research in entomology, reflecting her lifelong dedication to the field.

Head of the School of Biological Sciences Associate Professor Janet Pitman says the School is extremely honoured by the generous bequest, which signifies Dr Richards's unwavering belief in the University's capacity to conduct groundbreaking entomological research.

"The biological and economic impacts of introduced pests, as well as the changing climate, on the wide range of insects in Aotearoa New Zealand has never been more important," Associate Professor Pitman says.

"Dr Richards's support will enable the continued development of experts within Aotearoa to help safeguard and conserve the diversity of our insect populations.

"Her gift will also be used for the benefit of New Zealand's primary production, including the role that insects play through food production, soil health, and biocontrol."

Dr Richards, who attended Samuel Marsden Collegiate School in Wellington followed by Victoria College of the University of New Zealand (now Te Herenga Waka—Victoria University of Wellington), experienced a lifetime of extraordinary firsts, including being the first woman in New Zealand to gain a PhD in Biological Science and the first person to rear giant wētā from eggs.

She is largely responsible for identifying the various native wētā species and made a major contribution to the taxonomy of New Zealand and Australian cave crickets and cave wētā, with a cave wētā species—*Miotopus richardsae*—named for her in 2018.

She is also remembered for making a name for herself from a young age when, as a student researcher, she spent seven weeks underground at Waitomo—alone and in the dark—to deepen her understanding of her subject matter.

"The wētā hate light. I worked with a torch, switching it on only for short periods so as not to disturb them," Dr Richards said.

"However, if they were occupied with what they were doing, they did not seem to notice the light."



Dr Aola Richards with Giant Wētā, New Zealand, by Steve Rumsey, gelatin silver print. Image courtesy of the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa (E.006714).

Her caving adventures continued when she moved to Australia to teach in the School of Biological Sciences at the University of New South Wales. She was one of the pioneers of Australian speleology and, alongside Ted Lane, founded and edited the journal *Helictite* devoted to the study of caves and caving in Australasia.

Vice-Chancellor Professor Nic Smith says Dr Richards's legacy ensures a lasting impact on future generations of students and will make a significant difference to the University's research capacity.

"Dr Richards's gift will play a pivotal role in our ability to conduct impactful research and to support development of our emerging researchers.

"Students at Te Herenga Waka will have the opportunity to play a key role in addressing the pressing challenges posed by introduced pests and a changing climate in Aotearoa New Zealand."



From left to right: Shekyna Lolouta, Maepa Saolotoga, Shaniyah Munroe, Ivy Beck, and Dianna Revell

What's it like to be the first in your whānau to graduate from university? For five hard-working Te Herenga Waka—Victoria University of Wellington students, it's the opportunity of a lifetime.

As the giddy whirl of graduation gowns and well-deserved celebrations begins to die down, there's often one question on the mind of every new graduate: What's next?

Many will enthusiastically set their sights on the bright futures ahead of them without looking back at the late-night study sessions and jam-packed schedules that characterised their uni days. But for a small cohort of students, graduation is just as much a time to reflect on the legacy they've left behind as it is an opportunity to step forward.

Attending university wasn't on the cards for Ivy Beck, Shekyna Lolouta, Shaniyah Munroe, Dianna Revell, and Maepa Saolotoga. Financial hardship, family obligations, and limited support throughout secondary school placed obstacle after obstacle in their paths to obtaining a degree. In 2020, the trailblazing Ngā Hoe a Kupe Pathfinder Scholarship programme was established to alleviate those barriers so rangatahi from underserved communities could pursue their academic dreams.

In addition to covering full tuition, first-year housing, and course materials, the scholarship provides a one-week prep programme before the students' first year to ensure a smooth transition into uni life. After three years of hard mahi, the flagship cohort of Kupe scholars completed their final year in 2023.

Supporting future school leavers

While each recipient pursued different degrees and extracurricular activities, the common thread that bound this cohort together was a desire to use their academic accomplishments to serve the generation coming up behind them.

"I majored in Criminology with the hope of helping our young Pasifika and Māori students," says Kupe scholar Dianna Revell. "I attended a low-decile school and I would see quite a lot of violence and crime on a daily basis. Finding a way to contribute to my community to help lower those statistics is a passion project of mine."

Dianna isn't alone in her dreams of making secondary school a safer, more supportive environment for students in underserved areas. Kupe scholar Shekyna Lolouta made an impact on the lives of young learners even before completing her degree.

"I've been working as a teacher-and-attendances assistant at my old high school, Naenae College," says Shekyna. "It's such a great way to give back and give those kids the help that I wish I'd had. I want to support them and encourage them to know that they can do anything if they put their mind to it."

Apart from working with secondary students, several of this year's Kupe graduates became residential advisers (RAs) during their time at Te Herenga Waka to support first-year students coming to live at university halls of residence.

"I found my passion for working with the community, especially with youth, during an internship with the Ministry for Pacific Peoples," explains Kupe scholar Maepa Saolotoga. "In my second year, I decided to become an RA to help guide the Māori and Pasifika students. I liked being in a position where I could help younger people get on the right path and give them hope."

Navigating tough times together

While these young women often focused on creating communities for others, they reflected on how crucial it was to have their own support network to cheer them on through the highs and lows of university life.

“What stood out for me over the past three years is the relationships I built with so many amazing people who helped me throughout my journey,” says Shekyna. “Coming to uni was a culture shock, and I didn’t start off with the confidence I have now. The future I have in front of me is because of all the support I had throughout my time here.”

Culture shock wasn’t the only challenge the Kupe scholars faced. Imposter syndrome, isolation, difficult classes, and family losses provided plenty of challenges for each of the recipients to navigate.

“My father was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer halfway through my first year,” Dianna says. “It was hard to keep up with my studies as well as caring for my family and making sure we were up to date with my dad’s bills and doctor appointments. I contemplated giving up a few times, but opportunities like this scholarship don’t come around every day. I was quite stubborn to not let this degree go, even when my dad passed away last May. I kept pushing because I knew I’d be the first in my family to graduate.”

Recipients of Ngā Hoe a Kupe Pathfinder Scholarships in 2023, from left, Mannfred Sofara, Abdirizak Mohamed, George Dalton, and Xavier-Aj Asiata.



Discovering who you are

The inaugural Kupe cohort say this life-changing opportunity deepened their sense of who they are outside an academic institution.

“I majored in Pacific Studies and Samoan Studies, and those courses made me realise how important it is to know your identity,” says Maepa. “I thought I knew so much about my culture since I came from the islands, but as I did my papers, I realised there was so much I didn’t know.”

Several other Kupe scholars echoed the sentiment that their perception of their own identity had shifted during their studies.

“I know that for the majority of us islanders, we always doubt ourselves and we feel like university is not for us,” says Shekyna. “Financial problems are always a top issue for us Pasifika and Māori students, but I hope more students can use the scholarship to change their life and change that mindset.”

We are so proud of everything these talented rangatahi have accomplished and the foundations they’ve laid down that pave the way for future generations of students. Since the programme launched in 2021, the generosity and investment of our supporters has meant we’ve been able to grow the number of partnering schools and are thrilled to announce that the programme will continue beyond the pilot phase.

Special thanks to the Hoku Foundation and the alumni community of Saint Bernard’s College whose support has made a significant difference to the lives of our deserving students.



Professor Lydia Wevers

SCHOLARSHIP HONOURS A LIFE AND LEGACY

When Professor Lydia Wevers, ONZM died in 2021, Aotearoa New Zealand lost one of its foremost public intellectuals.

Professor Wevers was director of the University's Stout Research Centre for New Zealand Studies from 2001 to 2017 and an internationally renowned literary historian, teacher, critic, writer, and scholar. She is credited with reinvigorating the Centre and turning it into the recognised hub for Aotearoa New Zealand-focused research it is today.

To ensure her work and legacy continue into the future, her family and friends began raising funds to establish an endowed scholarship in her name, and the inaugural recipient, Nikki Wright, was announced in 2023.

Taking a practice-based arts approach to her Master's research project, Nikki intends to examine our urban coexistence with life-giving insect pollinators, including Aotearoa's native bees, butterflies, moths, and flies.

The main focus of her research involves storytelling through blogs, interviews, photography, and drawing in addition to piloting community-led plantings of native 'pollinator pathways' on berms and public green spaces.

"The work asks what happens when we slow down, as we did during the COVID-19 lockdowns, and begin to notice and engage with our insect neighbours in ways that are different to those we are used to," says Nikki.

She credits the Wevers family and the Stout Trust for enabling her to pursue an exciting cross-disciplinary arts and science Master's research project.

"I am hugely grateful to Lydia's family, friends, colleagues, and the Stout Trust. After working as a journalist in conservation for many years, I'm so excited they've made it possible for me to take my learning to a higher level and continue to develop and adapt arts-science approaches for important environmental work."

An enormous thank you to everyone who has donated to the Lydia Wevers Scholarship in New Zealand Studies.

Your gifts not only support future students but also pay tribute to a brilliant teacher, supervisor, and mentor—one who dedicated her life to understanding what shaped and is shaping this country.

The Lydia Wevers Scholarship in New Zealand Studies is hosted by the Stout Research Centre and will be offered annually to a postgraduate student from any discipline whose research relates to New Zealand society, history, and culture.



Girls* on Ice participants. Images by Rebekah Parsons-King.

BREAKING THE ICE CEILING



In 2023, 10 young women from around Aotearoa were selected to participate in an inaugural Girls* on Ice expedition to Mount Ruapehu, thanks to the generous support of donors—in particular Beverley McCombs, the Antarctic Science Platform, the International Association of Cryospheric Sciences, Mountain Adventure, the National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research, and the United States Embassy.

Targeting girls*—cisgender girls and transgender, agender, nonbinary, intersex, and genderqueer youth—aged 15 to 16, the tuition-free programme is hosted by Te Puna Pātiotio—Antarctic Research Centre and is part of the global Inspiring Girls* Expeditions. These expeditions inspire young women to pursue their passion for science and the outdoors, demonstrating they can succeed in traditionally male-dominated fields.

Participants on the 10-day expedition learnt the science of snow and glaciers, got involved in hands-on fieldwork, used art to observe the landscape, and got a glimpse into the daily life of a scientist, including a call to Scott Base in Antarctica.

Upon returning to Wellington, the girls shared their research findings with whānau, friends, and University staff. They recounted stories of being pushed out of their comfort zones, feeling empowered, and having their interest in science nurtured.

“I really enjoyed learning about so many different things in such a vast range of areas and it really confirmed that I want to pursue a career in environmental sciences,” shared one of the participants.

“The expedition made me appreciate my life and where I live a lot more. Meeting girls with so many different backgrounds was really eye-opening and I found it so cool that we bonded despite our differences. It taught me that I can be a good leader if I set my mind to it,” said another.

Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) Professor Margaret Hyland, who oversees the Antarctic Research Centre, emphasised the significance of such programmes in providing a platform for increased diversity in science.

“These programmes give young women an opportunity to succeed, break down barriers, and inspire future generations. We all have a commitment to continue empowering young women, foster diversity, and improve accessibility for girls in the field sciences in Aotearoa.”

Originating in the United States in 1999, Girls* on Ice has expanded globally, reaching Canada, Europe, Asia, and now Aotearoa. Thanks to the generous contributions from the donors mentioned earlier, the programme persists in breaking down barriers for girls in science education, empowering them to emerge as future leaders in scientific fields.



The Kumutoto Stream at Salamanca Road.

The Kumutoto Stream will see daylight again, thanks to a generous gift to the Living Pā project in 2023.

For nearly 60 years, the stream has remained hidden, having been the first in Wellington to be culverted underground in 1866. This common engineering practice of the time trapped native fish and eels, diminished habitats for various bird and insect species, and erased trails and pathways that once intersected with the stream.

Now, thanks to the generosity of our alumni and donor community, the development of a rill—a shallow channel that sits at the entrance of the marae ātea (forecourt)—will allow about 25 metres of the stream to re-emerge into view and help restore a healthy relationship with the natural water flows of the stream.

The project

The Living Pā is our opportunity to build on the strong base of our whareniui (carved house) built more than 33 years ago.

On the face of it, the Living Pā project is the redevelopment of 42 to 50 Kelburn Parade—the five villas in front of Te Tumu Herenga Waka marae. However, the project’s vision is much greater than bricks and mortar. It is a proposal to transform the way we realise our culture and values by drawing together mātauranga Māori and sustainability practices.

Today, as you walk past Kelburn Parade, you’ll witness the Living Pā project in full swing. The redevelopment of our marae precinct is infused with vibrant energy, focused on connecting the past to inform our future.

With the southern retaining wall and foundation piles complete, the timber superstructure rising, large tanks for an underground wastewater treatment in place, and a new bus stop with a living roof installed, the project is visibly progressing.

Due to open in December 2024, the Living Pā will serve as a hub where people are empowered to work, teach, and learn sustainably in a building that meets the most rigorous environmental standards in the world, the Living Building Challenge principles.

The revitalised stream, brought back to life through the dedicated support of our donors, will foster a thriving habitat for whitebait species kōaro, tuna, and the very rare kōkopu, illustrating the powerful impact of collective philanthropy on ecological restoration.

“Responsive to Māori dreams, the Pā will stand as proof of Māori beliefs, values, and passions, and guide many thousands of people to reconnect to their whakapapa (relationship) with nature.”

Professor Rawinia Higgins (Tūhoe)
Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Māori and Engagement)

**He pā mataora,
he pā kaiao, he pā anamata**
**A thriving community,
a living lab, a bright future**





Dorothy Spotswood and Sir Mark Dunajtschik

AN ENGINEERING GAME-CHANGER

In 2023, the Faculty of Engineering at Te Herenga Waka—Victoria University of Wellington received a \$10 million gift from distinguished philanthropist and eminent Wellingtonian Sir Mark Dunajtschik, KNZM.

Over the next six years, the University plans to establish two new programmes, Construction Management and Mechatronics, both of which will host a Chair named after Sir Mark.

Vice-Chancellor Professor Nic Smith says Sir Mark's gift will be transformational.

“We live in a world where technology has a significant influence on manufacturing and robotics and impacts the very way we live. As we continue to see technology and design becoming increasingly democratised, this gesture will enable us to introduce a programme that will be truly valuable for our students.

“This is the right direction for us and I'm sure it'll open up many opportunities for meaningful collaborations across New Zealand.”

Any new engineering programmes would be subject to standard regulatory approval.

Recognised as the 2017 Wellingtonian of the Year for his \$53 million donation to the Wellington Children's Hospital, Sir Mark and his business and life partner Dorothy Spotswood have contributed to many education, health, and sporting organisations. This includes a \$2 million gift in 2016 to establish the Mark Dunajtschik Chair of Sustainable Energy Systems at the University, with extensive work being done with iwi through that initiative to transform energy generation and usage in Aotearoa.

Sir Mark was knighted as part of the 2023 New Year Honours.

“Engineering gave me my start in life, and I want to give others the opportunity to utilise their knowledge and skills in engineering to have the chance to live and work in different countries around the world,” he says.

Director of new programme development Professor Dale Carnegie says the Faculty has been fortunate to enjoy a long association with Sir Mark.

“This gift is a game-changer for us, enabling us to diversify into new areas and develop the next generation of engineering graduates, equipped to address some of the crucial issues Aotearoa New Zealand will face in the future.”



From left to right, Mia, Jenny, and Amanda Hargreaves

When Jenny Hargreaves was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis (MS or wharanga uwhi iaia), her greatest fear was not being able to raise her daughters the way she wanted to. In 2023, nearly 50 years later, she teamed up with the University's MS research team to launch CHALLENGE MS—a fundraising campaign focused on fighting MS by supporting life-changing research taking place at Te Herenga Waka—Victoria University of Wellington. But first, she shared her story, in the hope that she can inspire others.

The road wound through the pass smooth and glittering. On one side, a sheer drop to the Remutaka valley below. On the other, dense native bush. The year was 1981, and Amanda Hargreaves—who was on her way home with her mother, Jenny—was about to learn something only two other people had ever known.

Jenny was living with MS, a condition that damages the central nervous system and can cause symptoms of weakness, fatigue, pain, vision problems, and paralysis.

The first signs

Unexplained episodes of MS first appeared in her late twenties and had been affecting Jenny for years—blurry vision, loss of balance, pins and needles, you name it. But just as she'd begin to question it, her symptoms would start to fade.

"It started with the numbness. It comes and it goes. It did that constantly in the early days. But each time it would take something with it."

People living with MS can have many symptoms, which can be variable and unpredictable. No two people will experience exactly the same symptoms, and these symptoms can be a one-off occurrence, can come and go, or change in severity over time.

It took a long time for Jenny to face the likelihood that her symptoms were those she'd seen before. Her mother had been diagnosed with MS in her fifties. As Amanda will tell you, "Mum's fiercely independent." But, eventually, they were occurring frequently enough that she could no longer ignore the need for advice.

Begrudgingly meeting with a neurologist, Jenny was in shock when he confirmed that everything she had been feeling was real. There was a reason she felt increasingly less balanced, a reason she was struggling to hold heavy objects, to feel sensations in her hands and feet. He diagnosed her with MS and explained that it damages the myelin sheath—the protective covering that surrounds nerve fibres—and disrupts the communication between the brain and the rest of the body.

Proceeding to tell her that there was no cure, the neurologist shared that she would likely experience a steady decline in mobility and cognitive function. He warned her that her quality of life would be severely impacted and that there was little hope for a full recovery.

This was not what she wanted to hear.

"The thing that hit me most was the resounding thought 'how dare you tell me my future?'"

Living with MS

Following the initial shock of her diagnosis, Jenny literally got back on her horse, quickly deciding this condition would not define her.

"I didn't tell a living soul except my husband."

She was determined to continue doing the things she loved and to live by the mentality of 'mind over matter'.

And for a very long time, this was enough.

Until it wasn't.

"It wasn't until I lost the sight in my right eye that the neurologist said, 'you now have to believe that you have MS.'

"It really took a very long time for me to accept. For years, nobody knew. Then all of a sudden, I started to limp. I couldn't control it. I couldn't stop it. It was then that people began to see that something was going on."

Jenny decided to first tell Amanda, who to this day recalls thinking her mum was just a little clumsy.

"I did notice she would drop a lot of crockery. Back then, it wasn't something you could see. At first, I could only see it in relation to myself. My burning question was 'what about me; am I going to get it?', not really knowing what it was."

Soon after, Rebecca, Jenny's youngest daughter, was also told the news.

"I remember asking Mum why she would always take her left leg out of the stirrup on our way home from farm rides.

"She didn't have the best balance but was extremely brave. I admired her so much. She just loved being out on her horse high up in the hills."

The next generations

It's been 48 years since Jenny was diagnosed and her daughters have grown and had their own children. Although she has become less mobile, Jenny continues to be able to drive herself wherever she needs to go, she rides a bike, does Pilates and tai chi, and walks with the assistance of a walker.

"A healthy diet, regular exercise, and a strong sense of faith are what get me through."

Mia, her 12-year-old granddaughter, smiles and shares how they like to go to the movies together.

"It can be a bit of a mission; we have to call ahead and find a place where there's access to get upstairs. But we find a way to make sure to not miss out."

Considering what her grandmother may need from her in the future, Mia speaks with a maturity beyond her years.

"I just know I want to support Nanny as much as I possibly can. I love her very much and she means a lot to me."

The Multiple Sclerosis Society of New Zealand describes MS as a non-hereditary disorder, albeit with an increased risk in close family members that is not well understood. Knowing this, Mia embodies the example set by her grandmother. "I like to think: live the best life you can, while you can."

Coming out and helping others

Currently, more than 4,100 people are living with MS in Aotearoa New Zealand. We don't know exactly what causes MS. We do know we need more research to help us understand MS better so we can find ways to treat it and even prevent it.

Jenny had a very small circle of people who'd known her struggles and supported her on her journey. Often spoken about among her closest family members as her 'dirty little secret', she decided 2023 was going to be different.

Jenny and her family shared her story far and wide. Together with the University's world-renowned MS research team, they launched CHALLENGE MS—a fundraising campaign focused on fighting MS by supporting life-changing research taking place at Te Herenga Waka.

The campaign was made up of four teams, each raising money for the cause from their own communities. Teams were led by Jenny, Amanda, Mia, and Dr Georgia Lenihan-Geels, who led a group from the University's School of Biological Sciences, Team Koiora.

Thanks to many generous community donors, the teams that took part raised \$12,000. Combined with the New Zealand Multiple Sclerosis Research Trust's incredible pledge of \$20,000, a new MS Research Master's Scholarship, valued at \$32,000, will begin in 2025.

This student will work in Professor Anne La Flamme's lab to improve the lives of people living with MS.

"Charitable giving allows us to advance in new ways, to follow a new idea, and to have the rare freedom to do so," says Professor La Flamme. "These extraordinary gifts will allow us to employ a Master's student who can advance our treatments and understanding of MS in ways that enable us to improve lives."

At an event celebrating the success of the campaign, Professor La Flamme thanked the Hargreaves family for their vision and commitment to the campaign, and for recognising the urgent need for greater research capability into MS in Aotearoa New Zealand.



CHALLENGE MS teams celebrating their success.

NEW SCHOLARSHIPS IN 2023

- David Eade Piano Scholarship
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- Emergency Cost of Living Scholarships
- Entain NZ Scholarship for Women in Mathematics, Engineering and Technology
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- TEAM IM NZ Scholarships for Māori
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- Whakaeke Poneke—MinterEllisonRuddWatts First in Whānau Scholarship





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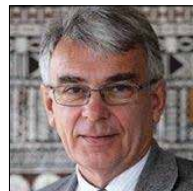
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