Helping the next generation

Medical research is often the first thing people think of when they consider making a charitable donation or leaving a legacy in their Will. Many are motivated by personal experiences with illness and disease; others make a bequest in the name of a loved one. The stories behind three legacies we have received for the Sheffield Institute of Translational Neuroscience (SITraN) help to illustrate the many reasons people have for making bequests.

SITraN, which was officially opened by Her Majesty The Queen, accompanied by His Royal Highness The Duke of Edinburgh, in November 2010, is an international centre of excellence for research into neurodegenerative disease. The £18 million facility, led by Professor Pamela Shaw, focuses on the development and clinical trialling of new therapies for motor neurone disease (MND) and related neurodegenerative conditions based on rational targets of proven preclinical effectiveness. Their multidisciplinary approach also provides a vibrant education and training environment for medical and neuroscience students from the UK and overseas.

Mildred Richardson left £250,000 in memory of her husband, Norman Richardson, to the programme of research into MND directed by Professor Shaw. A former Mayor of Durham, Mr Richardson was a successful businessman in the travel and tourism industries. He was an MND sufferer who knew Professor Shaw when she was Professor of Neurological Medicine at the University of Newcastle. Mrs Richardson remembered Professor Shaw and traced her to Sheffield, contacting her in 2001 when she was writing her Will to ask if a bequest would be useful for MND research.

A graduate of the University, Vivien Jones (BEd Education 1978) also left a legacy of £10,000 for MND research. “We hadn’t been in direct touch with Mrs Jones,” said David Meadows, Development Officer for Legacies and Individual Giving. “Her executors chose to give a legacy to the University as she was one of our graduates and SITraN is doing such valuable research into motor neurone disease.”

Chris Harries, who was passionate about MND research following his diagnosis in 2005, discovered SITraN via the internet. He was very keen to show his support as he desperately wanted to beat the disease. He ran a waste management consultancy and was well known within the environmental industry. He was also a dedicated beekeeper – with 35 hives. His wife Caroline said, “Losing the ability to use his hands was a devastating blow to such a practical person and having to give up beekeeping broke his heart. But he kept his spirits up and fought every step of the way. Watching his son grow gave him much pleasure.” Sadly, Chris lost his fight in 2011. He left a £50,000 legacy to SITraN.

In response to receiving these legacies, Professor Shaw said, “MND is a truly devastating disease for both sufferers and their families for which presently there is no cure. Our team at SITraN are tremendously grateful to the families for the kind donation of these three legacies, which together provide a considerable investment into our research programmes.

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Welcome to the latest issue of our Legacy newsletter and thank you for your continued interest in the University of Sheffield. I am delighted that so many of our alumni, staff and friends want to ensure that today’s students have the same opportunities they experienced here. It is a mark of the affection which many of you have for this University that the number of people who have now confirmed that they have chosen to leave a gift in their Will has risen to 550. We work closely with our known benefactors to ensure that we can fully comply with their wishes – and it is a pleasure to share a selection of successful outcomes in this newsletter.

Miles Stevenson
Director of Alumni & Donor Relations

Creating opportunities
The time you spent at the University included new experiences and opportunities – many of which will have influenced your subsequent career and personal life. For an increasing number of students, however, making the move from school to higher education can be a struggle because of their financial or personal circumstances. This University is committed to the idea of inclusivity – attracting the brightest and best students regardless of their background.

You can help us now – by making a donation to the Alumni Fund
The Alumni Fund supports projects that most directly affect our students’ University experience, helping them to achieve their full potential. We distribute Alumni Fund Scholarships, enhance student facilities, and provide Alumni Foundation grants to student clubs and societies.

Please visit www.sheffield.ac.uk/alumni/support/fund for details of how you can make a difference today.

Legal skills make a difference
Students from the School of Law are encouraged to use their legal skills to give something back to their local community. This pro bono activity focuses on the student-led Innocence Project and the Freelaw Legal Clinic. The Innocence Project involves students in the investigation of alleged miscarriages of justice. Freelaw is a legal advice service for members of the public. When we received an unrestricted legacy of £2,000 from the estate of John Powell (LLB Law 1948), it was decided to channel these funds to his old department and to the pro bono projects.

Steve Drake, the Legal Clinic Manager, said, “The generous legacy by John Powell has allowed us to continue to provide free legal advice to people in Sheffield and give our student volunteers the opportunity to attend training sessions and conferences around the country.”

Dr Claire McGourley, Senior Lecturer in Law, added, “With the reduction in Legal Aid available to the most vulnerable in society, this kind of work is invaluable and also gives the students a sense of civic responsibility whilst learning. Without this donation, both projects would have struggled financially in 2011–12.”

10 years on: the impact of a legacy

Dr Marjorie Shaw Bursaries continue to be distributed each year, ensuring that Dr Shaw’s positive influence is still appreciated by our French students.

Recent recipients include India Woof, who has used her scholarship to help fund her MA tuition fees and her living expenses. She said, “Knowing that the department believed in me enough to give me such a prestigious award, gifted by such an outstanding donor, has allowed me to explore the academic areas which really interest me – consumerism and waste in French contemporary art.”

Cathie Wright used part of her scholarship to travel to Beaune- de-Venise as a member of the department’s drama group; they performed Molière’s Le Malade Imaginaire. Cathie is also studying for an MA, focusing on French feminism and gender studies. She said, “I am eternally grateful for the kind donation from Dr Shaw as it has taken me one step closer to a career in academia.”
Remembering an outstanding academic

Professor Sean Spence, a member of staff in Academic Clinical Psychiatry from 2000, sadly died in 2010. The University established The Sean A Spence Memorial Prize in recognition of his passion for teaching and his contribution to the field of psychiatry, nationally and internationally—he was the first person to use brain-imaging techniques to identify the brain activity for deception and lying.

This annual prize is available to MB ChB students who are intercalating on the BMedSci in Medicine and specifically taking the Psychiatry component; it is awarded to the student with the highest mark in the BMedSci viva and dissertation. The prize was made possible through the generous support of staff, alumni and friends of the University.

A step closer to a cure for deafness

A team led by Dr Marcelo Rivolta in the Department of Biomedical Sciences have developed a method of producing human cochlear sensory cells that can now be used to develop new drugs and treatments, and to study the function of genes.

The team have also proved that human stem cells could be used to repair the damaged ear—a step on the road to fixing the cause of auditory neuropathy, where transmission of signals from the inner ear to the brain is impaired. The research is funded by the Medical Research Council and Action on Hearing Loss, and generous donations are also allowing the team to continue their investigations.

An unrestricted legacy of £1,506 from the estate of Henry Fell, a Sheffield resident who was deaf and received treatment at the Royal Hallamshire Hospital, has enabled the purchase of an automated cell counter.

Dr Rivolta explained, “The protocols that are used to generate auditory cells from stem cells are very sensitive to the number of cells transferred into a culture dish. To maximise efficiency and yields, an automated counter delivers a highly accurate sample. In this difficult time, when funding is limited, the support of individual benefactors has an unprecedented impact.”

An unexpected gift

The Department of Geography received a very generous legacy of £225,574 from the estate of Margaret Sheard in 2011. As far as we are aware, Mrs Sheard’s only link with the University of Sheffield was that her cousin, Ronald Stancey, was a Fuel Technology student in the 1930s. He lived in Harley, near Wentworth, and the endowment, set up in perpetuity and managed by the University, has allowed us to create the Harley Travelling Scholarships, which the department will award to between five and 10 students each year. Each scholarship is worth approximately £500, with a limit of £1,500 in special circumstances.

The Harley Travelling Scholars for 2012 included Charlotte Dalton and Jack van Cooten. Charlotte was able to carry out her dissertation research into women’s understanding of malaria symptoms and preventative measures—in the Kamusuza District of south west Uganda. She said, “The scholarship not only lifted a great weight off my shoulders in terms of raising the finances for my trip, but it also allowed me to further my interests in international development.”

Jack travelled to Ghana to explore how globalisation and the world music market impacts on local musicians. He commented, “I am so grateful to be a part of a university and a course that gives me the freedom to study the things I am passionate about. The scholarship funded my travel and accommodation in Ghana. Thank you so much for this opportunity.”
Golden summer

We are very proud of the contribution made by our students, staff and alumni to this year's Olympics and Paralympics. Highlights included Jessica Ennis (BSc Psychology 2007, Hon LitD 2010) winning gold in the heptathlon, with three personal bests and a British record of 6,995 points. On 30 November 2012, she took part in a special event at Sheffield City Hall to help raise funds for the University's Elite Sports Performance Scheme, of which she is patron, and the Children's Hospital and the charity Taste. An Evening with Jessica Ennis gave the audience the chance to hear her incredible success story, including her triumph this summer.

A worldwide television audience of billions witnessed the flowering of the Olympic Park during London 2012. The five million visitors to the Olympic Games and the Paralympics shared in the magical experience of 80,000 square metres of colourful meadows, designed by two professors from the University's Department of Landscape. James Hitchmough and Nigel Dunnett are the leading exponents of perennial meadows in the UK. The Olympic Park is now being developed as the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, a green space for the local communities in East London. Visit www.sport-sheffield.com for details of sport and fitness at the University.

A very personal decision

It takes a special person to plan a gift for an unknown future – someone who wants to leave a positive legacy for those who might follow in their footsteps. A legacy gift is the most significant donation a person ever makes. It is a way to continue to make a positive influence on progress and change, remember a life well lived, or commemorate a loved one.

We welcome the opportunity to work with our benefactors, to ensure that their gift is used as they intended. The University is constantly evolving – departments merge, courses develop, buildings re-allocated – so we may be able to advise you on the best use of your gift, which can also be helpful for your executors. Or you may wish to make an unrestricted gift, allowing your University to spend funds where they are most needed.

David Meadows, Development Officer for Legacies and Individual Giving, explained, “It is a real pleasure to be able to thank people now for the gift they have planned. There are several benefits to becoming a member of the Heritage Circle – for donors who include a future gift in their Will, including the annual luncheon in Firth Hall, when we invite speakers to tell our guests about the latest research breakthroughs at the University.”

Please contact David by calling 0114 222 1073 or email d.meadows@sheffield.ac.uk.

We have a section on our website devoted to leaving a gift in your Will: www.sheffield.ac.uk/alumni/support/wills.

Legacy10

The Legacy10 website (www.legacy10.com) – an independent campaign with the aim of encouraging charitable giving in the UK – includes a calculator which illustrates how Inheritance Tax will affect an estate making a donation against no donation. For more information, please ask your solicitor or visit www.legacy10.com.

David Meadows has qualified with a Certificate in Charity Legacy Administration this year, and is a member of the Institute of Legacy Management.