

# Imagine

“It is a bird’s imagination, not its wings, that determines how high it can fly.”  
Matshona Dhliwayo

Disability Information & Support Newsletter: Issue 1, 2020



Welcome to 'Imagine', Disability Information and Support's newsletter. This is our only edition this year, as we are acutely aware that 2020 has been a year filled with multiple communications. As I write this welcome, it seems somewhat surreal that the end of year is fast approaching and for many this will come with a sigh of relief. COVID-19 has certainly had a significant impact on how we interact with others, go about our daily lives, our work, study and many other aspects of our lives. We are aware that stress and anxiety can have a significant and wide-reaching impact on our mental wellbeing. The team at Disability Information and Support has been working with a number of students who found lockdown challenging and we want to reiterate that it's completely understandable to not feel okay all of the time. In fact, the Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand has developed a fantastic resource

titled "Getting Through Together" <https://www.allright.org.nz/campaigns/getting-through-together>. This has a number of practical tips for looking after yourself and your whanau. Supporting one another is important, so although we are maintaining a physical distance, it's important to remain socially connected. Remember that we are all in this together!

Finally, I would like to take a moment to acknowledge our students, staff and those connected in some way with our service. This has been an unprecedented time, requiring all of us to quickly adapt and change to meet new challenges. I cannot thank everyone enough for their efforts during this time and think we can all be very proud of what we have achieved together.

**Melissa Lethaby**  
MANAGER



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# What's your why? Student driven change

Disability Information and Support recognises the importance of community, volunteering and leadership. We spoke with Maddi Mitchell about the role of the Social Impact Studio for students and those interested in positive social change.

## What is the Social Impact Studio?

The Social Impact Studio is the home to positive student-driven change through volunteering and leadership. We lead with our why in everything we do and are strong believers in the power of the collective good. Students have a unique energy towards making an impact, so we are here to channel that into the Otago community and beyond.

## What is the vision of the Social Impact Studio?

Our vision is to challenge what volunteering looks like so that no matter where your passions lie, what group you belong to or how much time you have, you can make a social impact. We want to keep growing this community and give more students a chance to be part of something bigger.

## What programmes does the Social Impact Studio offer?

The programmes that the Social Impact Studio offer are UniCrew Volunteers, Silverline, Otago Leadership Award, Aspire, Reading Oasis, Garden to Table and Matariki Global Citizenship. So whether you're into restoring the environment, challenging the struggle of mental health, hanging out with kids, championing global citizenship or developing your leadership qualities – we have something for you!

## Tell us a little about your commitment to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

The Sustainable Development Goals lie at the heart of the work we do at the Social Impact Studio. We align each volunteer role and project specifically with a goal and track the hours that go into each of them yearly. We use tracking as a way to create awareness of the goals and help people recognise the collective impact their actions have on a global scale.

## Why should students work towards positive social change? Who benefits?

Giving your time towards social change reaps benefits for you and everyone around you. Volunteering in the community opens the door to meaningful relationships that will give you a strong sense of belonging, exposure to different perspectives and a wider purpose. Taking up leadership positions in the realm of social impact increases your confidence, interpersonal skills and employability, all while working towards the greater good. These benefits play a huge role in improving personal wellbeing and lay a solid foundation for you to thrive. Growing this community of altruistic and diligent people strengthens the wider community and makes the world a much nicer place for everyone to live in. It's a no brainer!

## Can you share some of your successes?

Over the years, the Studio has shared some huge successes. Most recently, however, UniCrew Volunteers received the 'Community Pride Award' from Keep Dunedin Beautiful and Silverline received the 'Youth Health Service Volunteer Award' from the Ministry of Health. We were incredibly humbled to be recognised at both local and national levels. Among our greatest successes are the positive relationships we make with our community, both with students and the wider Dunedin community. Hearing about a student gaining the confidence to see the counsellor after the Silverline Festival or seeing 100 more plants in the ground are when we really feel the depth of our impact.

# What's your why?

## Student driven change

### How can students get involved?

You can sign up with UniCrew Volunteers on our website [unicrewotago.org](http://unicrewotago.org) or for any general Social Impact Studio questions email us at [volunteer@otago.ac.nz](mailto:volunteer@otago.ac.nz).

Anything Silverline related can be found on our Facebook page or email [silverline@otago.ac.nz](mailto:silverline@otago.ac.nz)

For the Otago Leadership Award email [ola@otago.ac.nz](mailto:ola@otago.ac.nz)

### Do students need a specific skill set?

There are some volunteer roles that require specific skills, such as physical abilities, good rapport with children, design skills etc., but generally in the volunteering space if you've got a good attitude and are open to learning new things you can make quite the impact!



Photo credit: Arthur Hon.

# Hands-On Otago – a Taste of University Life

Hands-On Otago takes place over a week during Summer School. Year 12 and 13 students come from all around the country (and sometimes even Australia) to experience the life of an Otago University student first-hand. Throughout high school, it is sometimes difficult to put together a clear picture of what University is actually like, and how it feels to sit in a lecture and participate in practical learning. Hands-On Otago gives students the opportunity to come to Dunedin, live in one of the University's residential colleges (Arana or Studholme) and engage with academics while enjoying full pastoral care.

A dedicated team of "Red Shirts" guide the cohort throughout their week at Otago, joining them in the residential colleges, chatting about their experiences at the University and ensuring that everyone is comfortable and enjoying themselves.

Before arrival in Dunedin, students elect a subject that they are most curious about investigating, and are given a crash course introduction to the subject by Otago academics who are passionate about showing young people the ropes. The subjects available span all divisions throughout the University. These 'research projects' focus on the most hands-on application of these subjects, and students are invited to create news broadcasts, attend the prison escape room, visit Orokonui and more.

Beyond these research projects, students also attend the 'Afternoon Snack' programme, which offers students a chance to experience subjects that they did not select and see what is on offer that they may not have anticipated.

Disability Information and Support offer scholarships that provide a great opportunity for secondary school students with an impairment or disability to attend Hands-on. Each scholarship covers flights, accommodation, meals and programme activities up to \$1500.

Recipients of the Disability Information and Support hands-on scholarships, Thomas, Cassandra and Mia, took the time to share their thoughts on the experience. The students agreed that one of the most valuable experiences of the week was the opportunity to get a taste of University life while living independently. Thomas shared that "the best thing about Hands-on-Otago was it was a unique experience. You can't try University like this anywhere else." The students felt that exploring subjects that they were passionate about was very valuable, and they enjoyed experiencing other subjects, through the afternoon snack project, close up and with guidance from passionate academics. Cassandra shared that "it has definitely inspired my now new career choices. I had a backup but after the course I definitely decided it's something I want to pursue full time, so I will be studying it at university next year!"

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Photo credit: Prajesh Chhanabhai, Schools Liaison Officer.



## Hands-On Otago – a Taste of University Life

Mia says, "I would definitely recommend Hands-On to others. It is a great opportunity to explore life at the University of Otago and to learn more about the subjects available there. For those who are unsure if they would like to continue on to tertiary studies, or those who are still undecided about what to study in Uni, this programme is a great help in deciding. And for those who already know what they want to do after high school, Hands-On will give you an insight on what to expect from that subject in university."

Hands-On Otago is only possible thanks to the coordination and passion of the teams involved. From the Red Shirts to academics, those that facilitate the programme agree there is an undeniable joy in spending time with young people who are passionate about the programme. Seeing them forge connections and develop support networks they can take through to their tertiary studies is incredibly positive. Michael Fox, a returning Red Shirt, told of how gratifying it is to see these young people open up and genuinely find joy in the subjects that they may pursue in the future, and to experience the University as a whole, rather than just as abstract subjects.

Kirsten Gibson, a Criminology PhD student at the University, showed students the realities of Criminology, and assured them that while it is not the CSI or Criminal Minds they had seen on television, there is plenty of interest to be found in the subject. She said it was good to give them the chance to see what the subject is really like. Kirsten was inspired by how engaged and reflective students were, and this was fuelled by a genuine passion for learning.

Benji Ahdar, Events Specialist, who planned this university wide event, said that "if there are any young people out there considering tertiary study, Hands-On Otago is definitely the way to go. Come, have a look, and decide if it is what you want to do. I can guarantee regardless it's an epic week, and it'll brush away any doubts you have about university."

“ I would definitely recommend Hands-On to others. It is a great opportunity to explore life at the University of Otago and to learn more about the subjects available there. ”

### Scholarship information

#### **N G Stewart Scholarship | \$1,500**

One scholarship | Closing date 15 January

<https://www.otago.ac.nz/study/scholarships/database/otago0146531.html>

#### **University of Otago Donna-Rose McKay Entrance Scholarship \$6,000**

Varies | Opening date 1 July, next closing date 5 December

<https://www.otago.ac.nz/study/scholarships/database/otago033024.html>

#### **John F Ward Southland Entrance Scholarship | \$6,000**

Varies | Opening date 1 July, closing date refer to the following website as TBC

<https://www.otago.ac.nz/study/scholarships/database/search/otago713692.html>

# Student Voices – Finding Solutions Together

The 2019 Australian and New Zealand Student Services Association (ANZSSA) conference was held at the University of Otago in December. During the event there was a student panel where participants discussed their experiences as students with a disability or impairment. They spoke candidly about their challenges and the support services in place to assist them in their studies, and provided advice for university staff on how to provide support to students. Furthermore, they highlighted the importance of individualised support and community building with peers as being integral to their success.

## Individualisation of support

The most complex aspect of providing disability support is that 'disability' has never been and will never be a small group of characteristics. There are as many forms of support as there are forms of disability, injury, and people with those disabilities.

The panel of students told their stories of navigating tertiary education and general life with disabilities including autism, spinal injuries and traumatic brain injuries among others. The practicality and usefulness of support services was the focus of catering support to the specific needs of the individual.

Callum spoke of disability support staff providing him with an assessment to determine the nature of his disability and then went on to ensure that he was equipped with technology that could assist in his notetaking, and tutoring to supplement his learning. The university was also able to support Callum in his search for employment, which can have its own barriers when a disability is present. Another student, Bailey, also spoke about how she was offered note-taking early on during her time as a student, which helped her while she adjusted to managing her fatigue from a spinal injury. As she adjusted, she found she no longer needed the notes. Bailey said, "my advice to tertiary staff is to communicate with students. Let them know their rights, and what support you can offer – and that it can be individualised."

For Lucy, she was able to get her education from home when chronic pain and chronic fatigue made attending classes difficult. She came into campus when it was absolutely necessary, but she was supported in her need to stay home. "I would only come to uni when it was essential, so I'd come for labs and things like that, but if it wasn't essential, then it wasn't worth putting my body through that" she said. Sean also had individualised support offered to him. He was able to complete tests from home, and was given extra time and a separate room for exams so he could take breaks and manage the symptoms of his traumatic brain injury, "without this, the final examination would not have been possible for me" he said.

Support services that cater to each and every student in the ways that they need it and work alongside the departments as necessary to ensure that any flexibility can be accommodated, makes all the difference to the individual students.

## Staff responses

The accommodations that individual departments put in place for their students can make a big difference to their education experience. Attitudes, considerations and reactions to disability or impairment play a significant role in the student's life.

Bailey spoke positively of the accessibility of the university, but faced challenges when undertaking Polytechnic placements within the wider Dunedin community. Unable to walk, houses with steps or similar barriers make life more difficult. She says, "Several times I required assistance from the client and supervisor to help me up. This made me feel very uncomfortable and made me feel disabled." This comment shines a spotlight on how disabled people feel the impact of their disability when they are unable to easily navigate a world built for the able-bodied. It is the environment and lack of consideration for their needs that makes navigating the world difficult, not their disability or impairment.

Similarly, Callum was made more uncomfortable by people being condescending towards him when they were made aware that he has autism. He described people trying to lean down towards him and speaking as though he is a child. He also notes how annoying it is to hear "but you don't seem autistic" right after informing staff that he is. The shift in behaviour is frustrating and noticeable, and all Callum and any other student wants is the appropriate support and understanding they require.

On the other hand, staff also play an integral role in making students with disability feel supported and valued. It was a tutor that noticed Callum was struggling with equations and suggested he get tested for dyscalculia. Similarly, Lucy was struggling at the start of the first semester at university, and a tutor noticed that she was in need of support, and referred her on to Disability Information and Support where she was able to receive notes and tutoring. Both Lucy and Sean expressed that their department was very helpful and supportive. Lucy said "our department is amazing, and I think that we're really lucky... they are so understanding."

Staff being aware and supportive of students can make a big difference to their experience. Catering education to the student and ensuring that they are in an environment where they can equitably achieve is important to making tertiary study a positive experience.

## Student Voices – Finding Solutions Together

### Connection with others

All of the panellists highlighted the importance of peer support and connection with others. A lack of a peer group who understands what you're going through can make university an isolating and lonely place.

Lucy discussed the loneliness she felt throughout her experience. She was isolated at her hall, unable to attend classes with her peers, and not able to participate in many of the usual scarfie student activities. She found that she couldn't relate to many of her peers, which was intensified by the fact that she was physically isolated within her home for the better part of two years. Even now as a tertiary education student she finds it difficult because she is part time, whereas her peers are full time, and navigate their study differently. She expresses that "communication is key," and that sometimes there is need for help to foster community between people. She said, "connection is the thing that helps to combat the things that we go through, especially loneliness." Sean also emphasised this, by expressing that he found a local support group incredibly helpful in managing his experience with a traumatic brain injury.

Bailey reiterated this through her study. She and others created a report as part of their study to explore the inclusive practices and barriers to the experiences of disabled students in tertiary education institutions. One of the key findings was that a peer support group needed to be created for students with disabilities to meet and share their experiences, "with other people, they can understand, support and help find solutions together."

Even though they have all had struggles, the panellists expressed their appreciation for the support received through the support services available to them. Many of their struggles lay in the department not being flexible enough to accommodate their needs, and indicated that this is something to develop in the future. In Bailey's words: "Each and every person has their own challenges and individual needs. An equitable learning environment is created by considering the needs of students with impairments in all aspects of the learning process."

“ The most complex aspect of providing disability support is that 'disability' has never been and will never be a small group of characteristics. There are as many forms of support as there are forms of disability, injury, and people with those disabilities. ”

# Taking the Stress out of Exams

**Exercise.** You may be thinking that you have no time for exercise, but even a ten minute stroll around the block could help to clear your head.

**Keep hydrated.** Keep a water bottle with you at all times. Try to avoid having too many drinks that contain high levels of caffeine and sugar, these can affect your sleep and lead to an energy crash later in the day.

**Eat well.** Your body needs regular fuel to keep that brain working. Be prepared, if you know you are heading into a full on study week, head to the supermarket and pick up some healthy study snacks. Healthy snack ideas could include fruit, banana chips, pretzels, nuts, carrots, humus, salsa and muesli bars.

**Talk about it.** If you are feeling stressed talk it through with a mate, a family member, or one of the counsellors at Student Health. They may have ideas or helpful strategies and sometimes just talking it out can help lighten the load.

**Try to get a full night's sleep.** Set up a relaxing routine before bed. This will help switch your mind from study-mode to sleep-mode.

**Have a laugh.** Sometimes a good laugh is the best way to unwind. Balance out all that serious studying with a comedy film or stream some comedy festival clips on YouTube.

**Keep it in perspective.** You can only do your best so set realistic goals and be proud that you are doing the best you can. When exams are over try not to dwell on things you may have missed, instead look for the positives.

**Plan for fun.** Start planning your holidays or what you'll do to celebrate when that last exam is completed. It's great to have something to look forward to.

**Have a change of scenery.** Try taking your readings to a café. Dunedin also has beautiful botanical gardens which make a lovely spot to sit and read on a sunny day.



# News Bites

If you are studying in 2020 or beyond you might find the following information useful!

## The Locals Programme

If you will be a first year student in 2021, then the Locals Programme may interest you! The Locals programme is for any University of Otago student who is in their first year of study and living in Dunedin either at home, boarding, renting or flatting. It is designed to create an enjoyable and supportive first year experience for new students who are not living in Residential Colleges. Students are able to access academic, social, sporting and community-based opportunities through the programme. It is a great way to make new friends and find out more about the academic support available to students.

For more information, and to register for Locals 2019, please click on the following link [otago.ac.nz/locals/index.html](https://otago.ac.nz/locals/index.html) .

## Student Learning Development (SLD)

The SLD provides academic support to all students studying at the University. This support is free and confidential and available to both undergraduate and postgraduate students. Comprehensive information is available on their website at [slc.otago.ac.nz/](https://slc.otago.ac.nz/) and includes details about their workshops, PASS programme (Peer Assisted Study Sessions), Peer Writing support groups and Conversational English groups. Students are also able to check out the SLD calendar to see which events and workshops are coming up.

## Student Health

Student Health consists of a team of qualified professionals who provide high quality health care to students at the University of Otago. A comprehensive range of primary health care services, including doctor, nurse, mental health and well-being and psychiatry appointments are available to students. For additional information about these services you can check out their website at [otago.ac.nz/studenthealth](https://otago.ac.nz/studenthealth). Student Health can also be contacted on 0800 479 821.

## Otago University Students Association's Student Support Centre

The Student Support Centre at OUSA provides a free and confidential service designed to assist students who are experiencing issues that are impacting on their studies. You can find out more information about the support they provide by visiting their website at [ousa.org.nz/support](https://ousa.org.nz/support) or contacting them at 479 5449.

## Healthy Campus Recreation magazine

The Healthy Campus Recreation magazine is a fantastic resource. It includes information on the 50 plus courses, competitions and activities available to students each semester. Check out the following link to view a copy of the magazine. [otago.ac.nz/recreation/about/magazine/index.html](https://otago.ac.nz/recreation/about/magazine/index.html)





# Paid Internship

## What?

- Up to 12 weeks paid internship
- Professional and personal development
- Gallup Strength Assessment
- Mentoring throughout placement

## Who?

### To be eligible you:

- Are living with an access need or disability
- Are in either penultimate or final year of tertiary study or have completed your study in the last 12 months
- Are a New Zealand Citizen or Resident
- Are not in receipt of ACC payments

## Contact us:

Sarah@beaccessible.org.nz  
Aimee@beaccessible.org.nz

[www.beaccessible.org.nz](http://www.beaccessible.org.nz)



# Workshops

## DIVERSITY WEEK – Disability Information and Support Sponsored Workshops

OUSA organise Diversity Week which is an annual campaign aimed at raising awareness and visibility of diverse identities and issues on campus. Disability Information and Support are proud to support Diversity Week and have sponsored two workshops. We encourage you to attend, as numbers are limited please register your interest by emailing [disabilities@otago.ac.nz](mailto:disabilities@otago.ac.nz).

### Workshop 1

FRIDAY 11 SEPTEMBER

9.30am – 12.30pm

Or

1.30pm – 4.30pm

\*Limited to 20 participants per session.

#### Discussing Personal Information about a Disability or Health Condition with Employers and Other Support Networks

- How much information should you disclose about your disability or health condition to an employer or training provider?
- Do they need to know at all?
- Should this information be included in a covering letter, curriculum vitae or application form?
- Should you tell people in an interview, or wait until you start?

This is a set of key questions that many people ask themselves, especially when they are applying for a job, are in employment or considering training.

Many are often afraid to disclose this personal information because they are not sure how this information will be used or viewed.

However there are things we can do to make this a more positive experience.

#### This workshop discusses:

1. The advantages and disadvantages of disclosing this information.
2. A framework to reduce the risk of other people making negative assumptions if you provide this information.
3. The safeguards for providing this personal information in the Privacy Act.

During the workshop you will be given the opportunity to discuss how people with different conditions can disclose this information. You will also have the opportunity to create a positive disclosure statement that can be used in a covering letter, curriculum vitae, application or interview.

Registrations to [disabilities@otago.ac.nz](mailto:disabilities@otago.ac.nz)

Free of charge

### Grant Cleland

Our Facilitator

Grant was Chief Executive of Workbridge for nearly 10 years. Grant has re-established Creative Solutions, his company he started in 1997. Grant provides disability-related advice and support for private, state and NGO organisations, people with disabilities and health conditions, their whanau and support networks.

With a physical impairment from birth and over thirty years' experience working in the disability field, Grant has both extensive lived and professional experience and can share many ideas, stories and experiences. This is particularly in employment, transition and tertiary education for disabled people.

Grant's experience in the tertiary sector includes:

- **Being a Disabled Student at Lincoln, Canterbury, Otago and Massey Universities**
- **Project Leader, Development of the Kia Ōrite Achieving Equity: New Zealand Code of Practice**  
This Code of Practice and Auditing Tool has been widely used by polytechnics, universities, colleges of education and wānanga to assist them to support disabled students and those with an injury or illness.
- **Manager of Disability Support Services, Lincoln University**  
Services offering support for students with disabilities and health conditions. Manager of 40 staff and working with 160 students, including those with mental illness.
- **President and Member, ACHIEVE Network, National Executive Committee**  
ACHIEVE is a national network established to ensure equal opportunity and access to post-secondary education and training for people with impairments.
- **Previous Training at Ara , Otago University, Christchurch College of Education, etc**

Grant is married to Nicky, is dad to 17-year old twin boys and his interests include playing guitar and mono-skiing.



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## Workshops

### Workshop 2

TUESDAY 8 SEPTEMBER  
2pm – 5pm

#### Creating an Inclusive Environment: disability awareness

##### Overview

This interactive workshop is a great place to learn and reflect about what you know about disability, and how you came to know it. We look at what implications this can have and how you can support inclusive environments.

##### Contents

By the end of this course you should be able to:

- Understand barriers that can face people within our working environment
- Discuss two models of disability and understand how these might affect the way we view disability
- Think of some practical ways in which you can make your environment more inclusive

Registrations to [disabilities@otago.ac.nz](mailto:disabilities@otago.ac.nz)  
Free of charge

# IMPORTANT DATES

## ALTERNATIVE EXAMINATION ARRANGEMENTS

Deadline for applications  
7 September

## DIVERSITY WEEK

6 to 11 September

## MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS WEEK

21 to 27 September

## SEMESTER TWO EXAMS

14 October to 7 November

## DI&S's website

If you are interested in reading more about the experiences of other students at Otago, have a look at the profiles on our website.

[otago.ac.nz/disabilities/index.html](https://otago.ac.nz/disabilities/index.html)

DI&S provides learning support, advice, advocacy and information to students who have a disability, impairment, injury or medical condition that affects their study, usually for a period of four weeks or more. Please look at our website for information about the services we provide.

[otago.ac.nz/disabilities/services/index.html](https://otago.ac.nz/disabilities/services/index.html)

In addition, our website allows you to provide confidential feedback on our service – just click on the following link.

[otago.ac.nz/disabilities/questions/feedback/index.html](https://otago.ac.nz/disabilities/questions/feedback/index.html)

## Contact Details

Please contact us directly if you have any enquiries.

Disability Information and Support  
University of Otago  
PO Box 56  
Dunedin 9054  
New Zealand

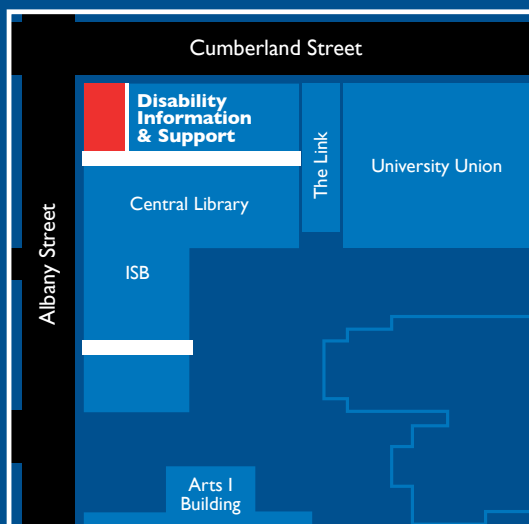
Tel: 03 479 8235

or 0800 80 80 98

Email: [disabilities@otago.ac.nz](mailto:disabilities@otago.ac.nz)

Web: [otago.ac.nz/disabilities](http://otago.ac.nz/disabilities)

Office Hours: Monday – Friday 8.30am – 5.00pm



Our physical address is:  
Disability Information & Support  
West Lane  
Information Services Building  
Cnr Cumberland and Albany Streets  
Dunedin