Cover Story

GAME CHANGERS

How people’s actions and choices can have a powerful impact and change lives.

International Students

MAPPING THE WAY

Brandon’s story: an international student devoted to making an impact on blind and visually impaired persons.

Notable Alumni

A LIFELONG MISSION

Dr. Angela Mastronuzzi goes from being an aspiring doctor to specializing in Pediatric Onco-Hematology.
I am pleased to introduce to you the third publication of Università Cattolica’s international magazine, Worldbound.

At Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, we believe in the person. We educate women and men so that everyone can express their full potential. In particular, we provide our students and faculty with the means to develop their voices and ideas in the classrooms and beyond. The aspiring thing is seeing how these different views can come together to impact different communities.

It is this very term “impact” that is the focus of our third edition of Worldbound. As our University mission states, everything we give to each student becomes a resource for our society. In this issue, we are honored to present the great achievements of students, as well as alumni and researchers that have contributed to addressing the challenges of contemporary life, and solving the problems of societies and cultures, both in Italy and internationally.

From Medical Oncology to nonvisual digital auditory maps, harmful traditional practices, as well as international volunteer programs, we cover a wide range of topics to demonstrate different types of impact, even if each story boasts a similar purpose, the power to have an important effect on a community, big or small.

In this issue, we also acknowledge the honorary degree in Economics, received by Mario Draghi, former president of the European Central Bank, and we reveal the names of four new English-taught programs which will begin the next academic year.

Every day, our people strive to understand the world around them, because tomorrow should not be seen as a distant future.

I wish you pleasant reading.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## MESSAGE FROM PROFESSOR COLOMBO

Students and alumni have contributed to addressing the challenges of contemporary life and solving the problems of societies and cultures, both in Italy and internationally.

## COVER STORY

**Game Changers**

How people’s actions and choices can have a powerful impact and change lives.

## MEET THE EXPERTS

**Are higher education institutions ready for 2020?**

What trends have been foreseen for the beginning of this new decade? From online learning shifts to the great debate on globalization, these are just some of the popular themes discussed by our experts.

## STUDENT SUCCESS STORIES

Students who share a common set of values, as they foster change and strive to make a positive impact in different environments.

## NOTABLE ALUMNI

**A Lifelong Mission**

Dr. Angela Mastronuzzi is fighting villains daily to fulfill her lifelong mission to cure young patients as a Pediatric Oncologist, building trust and honesty along the journey.

## RESEARCH

**Empowering with New Knowledge**

Professor Lucia Corno is a step closer to beating harmful gender traditions in Africa, thanks to policy interventions that have been granted by the European Commission.

## INSIDER NEWS

Top achievements include, a compelling honorary degree in Economics, the first English-taught Medicine and Surgery graduates, rankings success, new English-taught programs, International Day report, and an International Relations conference hosted by ASERI.
The choices we make and the decisions we take have a long-lasting impact on our lives, but often these choices also affect the world we live in, the communities we become a part of. Experiences that manifest determination and compassion must be acknowledged. Every day our University witnesses persons making a difference, and we just so happened to identify some of these compelling narratives.
Mia and her team have decided to host a potluck dinner. They cook their favorite recipes from their home countries and bring it over to the local asylum center. As she feasts on the food, she listens to the stories of asylum seekers, how challenging it is to integrate into the new country they reside in, how much they miss the country that is once reigned with peace. Mia shares their laughter and tears, never speaking but holding their hands to get through their stories.

Simona stands beside the volunteer students who check up on the residents with osteopathic problems in the Dominican Republic. She watches as the locals point out the parts where they experience discomfort and turn her gaze to the volunteers who seem to look quizzed. Then, she meddles as she translates from Spanish to English in her clear voice. As soon as she sees a hint of recognition from the volunteers, a nod or a tongue click, she notes their interaction with the locals through gestures and waits for any spoken words.

Sara enters the music room of a disabled center in Sondrio. She takes her seat in the corner and waits as the students usher in. Once they have their musical instruments in hand, they start to play, following the lead of their music teacher. The students, a diverse group, turn to Sara after every musical piece with a beam on their lips. Sara claps hard, showing her support as she watches them vie for her attention.

These narratives are where Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore finds its strength. The University has become a medium where its students, like Mia, Simona, and Sara, along with the professors can foster their abilities until they unravel their potential, all while sculpting them to become a beacon in the communities they are part of. It is part of the University’s mission to open their minds and teach them to become aware, encouraging them to engineer a change in their own ways.

The University knows that aside from a well-planned educational syllabus, students need to free and explore themselves to work out where they want to be in the future. To experience this, a group of Università Cattolica students volunteered abroad (page 24), packing their bags with the mission of the University to carry out.

These narratives are where Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore finds its strength. The University has become a medium where its students, like Mia, Simona, and Sara, along with the professors can foster their abilities until they unravel their potential, all while sculpting them to become a beacon in the communities they are part of. It is part of the University’s mission to open their minds and teach them to become aware, encouraging them to engineer a change in their own ways.

The University knows that aside from a well-planned educational syllabus, students need to free and explore themselves to work out where they want to be in the future. To experience this, a group of Università Cattolica students volunteered abroad (page 24), packing their bags with the mission of the University to carry out.
Tommaso and Martina taught Math, English and recreational classes to young children in Tanzania. It did not take them a lot of time to realize that education is the best tool their students need to help their own families. Every day, they opened their eyes to the words they had never encountered. They witnessed their wonders and satisfied their curiosity in words and numbers until they could remember them without their help.

Ludovica supported Maasai women and children in Tanzania. She dived in without hesitation to help the women sell their handmade crafts so they could keep the earnings for themselves. She followed their suit and doubled her efforts, ignoring the sweat that formed on her forehead or the burn of the scorching heat on her skin. In the end, she gazed at the lines of bracelets to be sold for the locals.

Giorgia and Giulia found their way in a village where young families are considered a norm. They conducted recreational classes to children and teens, doing their best to make their harsh living situation a bit brighter. In the afternoon, they would plug the cable into their smartphones and play a pop song. Then, they would teach children and teens how to dance, letting the beat take their minds off.

Annalisa looked after the children in an orphanage in Madagascar. Her soft spot for children earned her admiration as an elder sister. She wanted them to understand that they could find a new family through her presence and opened herself up to them until they returned the affection. The embraces and kisses were a language of love Annalisa had grown accustomed to.

Ludovica and Alice wiped their forehead from sweat before sitting down beside Don Gerardo, the owner of the plantation farm where they volunteered. They would listen to his stories that range from how he was when he was young to how important the plantation farm is to him, and in each narration, Ludovica and Alice take home new wisdom.

The volunteer students found out that helping is a two-way relationship. They both give and receive. What they then realize is that they took home a kindred spirit in the people they had helped, igniting a motivation in them to continue their contribution to society. Now that they are back, they cannot wait to try it out again in the near future.

YOU DIDN'T COME THIS FAR TO ONLY COME THIS FAR..
The word “contribution” is very familiar to Professor Lucia Corno (page 54). As she enlightens her students on Economic development, she applies what she teaches in her work. Her research project “Harmful Traditions, Women Empowerment, and Development” earned her the European Research Council Starting Grant. It is her guiding light to devise a policy intervention that will hinder the detrimental practices in Sierra Leone. She is determined to run her policy to success, locking down practices such as female genital cutting, child marriages, and breast ironing.

Università Cattolica has a strong belief in one’s determination and dedication to work, and Dr. Angela Mastronuzzi (page 38) is a brainchild of the idea. She is a guardian to young tumor patients, fulfilling her lifelong mission to cure her patients as a Pediatric Oncologist. She does not give false hope to her patients but rather acts to find the best solution to defeat the disease. Her lighthearted nature brings a warm smile to children lying in hospital beds, letting them know that they are in good hands.

Università Cattolica has a strong belief in one’s determination and dedication to work, and Dr. Angela Mastronuzzi (page 38) is a brainchild of the idea. She is a guardian to young tumor patients, fulfilling her lifelong mission to cure her patients as a Pediatric Oncologist. She does not give false hope to her patients but rather acts to find the best solution to defeat the disease. Her lighthearted nature brings a warm smile to children lying in hospital beds, letting them know that they are in good hands.

The University upholds its pursuit to create a learning environment where everyone is welcome and well-received. It harbors a space that is conducive and provoking. It is one of the reasons why alumnus Brandon Briggs (page 48) chose Università Cattolica for his exchange experience. Besides being well-equipped to his needs, the University supported him in every way it could to further his studies. Taking in all that he learned in his experience abroad, Brandon, a software engineer at Smith-Kettlewell Eye Research Institute, is now bound to devise a nonvisual digital auditory map for those who share his blindness.

To help others might mean to sacrifice a part of oneself to those who need it, but Università Cattolica debunks this. The University compels its students and professors to reflect on their actions to society until they figure out that they have brought home a gift for themselves. Be it a learning experience or a fresh perspective, they welcome a new idea to probe that can propel them to improve the lives of others.

Mia, Simona, and Sara cannot see themselves stopping to help their communities. The student volunteers are on the hunt for another place to visit where they can lend their hands. Professor Lucia Corno seeks to put a stop to harmful practices. Dr. Angela Mastronuzzi brings back the vigor in the children’s lives as she finds medical solutions. Brandon Briggs quivers the balance as he spearheads inclusive breakthrough projects.

To help others might mean to sacrifice a part of oneself to those who need it, but Università Cattolica debunks this. The University compels its students and professors to reflect on their actions to society until they figure out that they have brought home a gift for themselves. Be it a learning experience or a fresh perspective, they welcome a new idea to probe that can propel them to improve the lives of others.

Mia, Simona, and Sara cannot see themselves stopping to help their communities. The student volunteers are on the hunt for another place to visit where they can lend their hands. Professor Lucia Corno seeks to put a stop to harmful practices. Dr. Angela Mastronuzzi brings back the vigor in the children’s lives as she finds medical solutions. Brandon Briggs quivers the balance as he spearheads inclusive breakthrough projects.

This is impact, an impending force that is enough to stir passion and cause change. And Università Cattolica leads everyone in its wing, right through its meaning.
IS HIGHER ED READY FOR 2020?

We asked a pool of higher education experts to wrap up 2019 and give us an insight into what we can expect from the beginning of this new decade. Just how much of the digital learning spectrum is changing and affecting our university classrooms? Are students on track to receiving the preparation they need for the job market? Will student mobility continue to foster a favoring path? We uncover how higher education needs to be imagined for 2020.
I believe that the ultimate purpose of higher education is to make society better and, in turn, to make the world a better place. Looking back, I suppose this idea is what first drew me to pursue a career in higher education roughly 30 years ago. Through my work as a professional in the field of international education, I have come to appreciate that this is a common belief shared by many of my colleagues at institutions of higher learning across the world. Yet, from institution to institution, the means by which this mission is to be achieved varies widely depending on the institution’s perceptions of itself and the needs of its community.

What I love about this question is that it acknowledges that both the institutions and the students have a role to play in making society better. Societies face a myriad of problems at every level. While there are many groups working to solve society’s problems including governmental agencies, NGOs, businesses, and social ventures, I believe institutions are uniquely suited to “produce” both solutions and problem solvers.

Institutions can teach students how to solve problems by imparting subject knowledge, teaching problem-solving strategies and helping students gain proficiency in a number of other important intellectual and practical skills. But to cultivate or encourage a desire in students to help others in society, institutions should employ experiential education methods, which integrate direct experience and guided reflection into the instructional process. The benefits of these methods are multiplied when students are given the opportunity to engage with diverse people, cultures and viewpoints locally and globally, and are exposed to problems and solutions in different contexts.

For years, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore has made international experiential education central to its mission. I’ve seen few other institutions as successful at creating a groundswell of student interest in experiential educational programs and at cultivating strong peer and alumni networks. Università Cattolica ensures a diverse range of students can participate in these programs by providing scholarships and grants and leverages strong partnerships with best-in-class partners and organizations in order to make the widest array of meaningful opportunities available to students.

Cattolica students who participate in international volunteer or internship programs are assigned to locally prioritized projects which aim to address problems impacting local communities. Along the way, students are exposed to diverse cultures and ideas and are given the opportunity to improve important skills such as critical thinking, adaptability, and intercultural communication. Through observation, reflection, application, and articulation of new knowledge, students are encouraged to challenge old perceptions, cultivate new perspectives, and become more capable of contributing solutions to society’s problems in the future.
2020 TRENDS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: WHAT WE’RE ALL UP TO?

Previous higher education trends will continue to develop and have an even further impact in 2020. We can expect universities to be implementing some of the following:

Digital culture. Approaches to building study programs

Online education has become an increasingly valuable option, especially being a part of many degree programs. Here we are talking about blended learning becoming more and more popular in universities worldwide with online and offline approaches used within the same program. Some universities are moving even further towards an online approach offering MicroMasters programs, a series of online graduate level courses. As online versions of master's degree programs, these courses take a deep dive into specific career topics, which can then be recognized and rewarded by employers. Another significant advantage of programs where online tools are used is the cost. This is much more affordable option than a regular program.

Digital fluency

Students will enter labor markets that demand digital skills, and they should be able to connect digital tools to desired outcomes. Universities are integrating modules of developing digital skills, creating a meaningful and effective learning environment.

Competency-based education and personalization of study tracks

The discrepancy between employer needs and employee skills is a driving need for change in universities. In order to understand what the labor market means by “workforce ready,” institutions need to incorporate into their curriculum competency-based programs that prepare graduates with what employers are looking for. It also leads to a personalization of study tracks according to the real needs of a student.

Mapping the student journey

This approach becomes more and more popular within marketing teams; it supports the idea that every student’s interaction with their university is a journey. Potential students might spend several years with our universities. This is why the amount of trust we create with a student is becoming more important. For this reason, all communications sent to students must be consistent across all offices. By doing so we can measure student satisfaction levels and work to meet student needs along every step of the journey.

Finally, it is important to mention that potential students are becoming increasingly agile. With greater access to resources, students are setting more goals and becoming more selective when choosing a study program. Return on investment is a crucial factor. This heavily influences the higher education sector, especially how universities adjust and rethink their strategies and products.

Global Higher Education Capacity

Global higher education spaces in number and quality are growing rapidly; most growth is outside Europe. N. America and the Antipodes—Expanding from about 100m seats globally in 2000 to 350m plus by 2030. Classification of higher education participation fueled by global growth in the middle class is a primary factor. Higher education supply/demand imbalances in some countries and regions, and a growing middle class able to support student mobility will triple those moving cross borders for higher education to as many as 16 million students annually. Models of mobility (short, long, internships, and not-for-credit) will proliferate to meet a more diverse set of mobile students. With increased global high education quality, traditional mobility routes favoring Europe and N. America will diversify. Bottom line: global competition will increase for student and faculty mobility based on cost, convenience, quality and access to cutting-edge opportunity.

Global Research Capacity

High quality cutting edge research will likewise grow and spread globally, already challenging, if not breaking the somewhat near monopoly hold of Europe and North America on cutting-edge knowledge production. Asian research capacity as a proportion of global research will surpass both Europe and the U.S. in a very few years, and Africa and Latin America-based research will expand. A proliferation of sources and support for knowledge creation will encourage formation of cross border research and other forms of inter-institutional partnerships to access cutting-edge ideas on a global scale and to enter the global pathways of cutting edge knowledge.

Globalization

The global spread of ideas, funding and talent will continue...
to push the globalization of both societal challenges and opportunities when it comes to labour markets, economic development, dealing with infectious diseases, environment, education and peace and justice—to name a few. The WWW and ease in travel and unfettered flow of ideas are major factors. Multi-national-corporation dominance shaping the priorities and impact of globalization will have to be softened to address opportunities for all segments of society. Pressure will increase everywhere to advance institutional internationalization in teaching/learning, research/scholarship, and community engagement/problem solving to help avoid the marginalization of large segments of society on a global playing field. Globalization is not going away. It will change in terms of who wields power, makes the rules of global engagement, and who benefits from it. Communicable disease will not stop at borders, sources of global conflict and injustice will not stop at borders, economic, political and opportunities will continue to evolve within a global net.

Widening Beneficiaries of Globalization. (Civic engagement and internationalization)
A kind of internationalization version 2 will be needed to widen the beneficiaries of global engagement and lesson the burdens on those negatively affected by it. Higher education will have to play a more visible and effective role to help their communities engage globalization in ways beneficial all, not just elites. Higher education internationalization of teaching/learning, research/scholarship and community engagement will grow in importance if students are to be globally competitive, faculty and institutions to be relevant, and communities to benefit from continuing globalization.

Higher Education will have to play a more visible and effective role to help their communities engage globalization in ways beneficial to all, not just elites.

“The whole purpose of education is to turn mirrors into windows.”

Sydney J. Harris

Higher education will have to play a more visible and effective role to help their communities engage globalization in ways beneficial to all, not just elites.

“THE WHOLE PURPOSE OF EDUCATION IS TO TURN MIRRORS INTO WINDOWS”

Sydney J. Harris

How can Higher Education Institutions Encourage their Students to Contribute to the Betterment of Society?

This is a question that universities all over the world are grappling with. There is a growing sense that educators need to take a stance on important social issues and provide students with the practical skills and conceptual tools needed to contribute to positive change. This is having an impact both on what is taught, and on how we teach.

There is an expectation now that the curriculum should be relevant to the contemporary realities of life and work and should address not just the issues of the individual, but also the organization, the profession, communities, and society as a whole. My impression of the student I teach is that they are very keen to learn how they can be a positive force, but are also quite despondent at times about the future. I think the way we need to respond is to connect theory and practice with contemporary challenges that motivate us and movements that inspire us.

In relation to how we teach, we can either bring the social challenges into the classroom or we can take students out into the world. One of the most popular ways to bring issues into our teaching on campus is through problem-based (or project-based) learning. This focuses on teaching students how to acquire and apply knowledge and skills for a particular purpose. This is quite an active process of learning how to problem-solve. There is no point any longer trying to fill students’ heads for years with a static body of knowledge. There is just far too much knowledge available to think that we can know it all, and the body of knowledge is changing way too rapidly to try to keep up. We can’t know now what types of problems we will be tackling or what knowledge will be available in the future.

While problem-based learning inside the classroom is great, experiential learning is often far more transformative. Work placements are becoming a much more common feature of higher education worldwide, and we see in many fields that non-government organizations are holding many students. They are doing work that students see as meaningful and important, and yet they are usually short-staffed and very appreciative of students’ contributions. International internships are highly valued by employers because they show that students are motivated, organized and adaptable.

Study tours are another increasingly important way of showing students worlds that they would not otherwise have access to, and to understand how they might work in places and in roles that they had not previously known.

The hardest question for universities though is not ‘how’ to encourage students to contribute to the betterment of society. There are many ways that universities can encourage students to act. The bigger challenge for universities is to what extent they should try to impose an idea of the ‘good society’ upon students and scholars. Some universities are quite open about their values and promote these to their students – ‘study here because we care about A, B and C’. Others focus on creating a free environment in which students and scholars can express and promote any view they like. One very positive way out of this conundrum is to focus teaching, research and engagement on addressing the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals, which represent a broad consensus about global priorities.

Chris Ziguras

Chris Ziguras is Professor in the School of Global, Urban and Social Studies at RMIT University, and a member of the CHEI Academic Board. His research explores varied aspects of the globalization of education, particularly the ways in which regulatory agencies, markets, education providers and other actors shape cross-border provision of higher education. Chris teaches in RMIT’s international development and public policy programs and plays a leading role in coordinating RMIT’s international partnerships in the social sciences. He was President of the International Education Association of Australia 2015-18 and is a member of the Advisory Board of the Observatory on Borderless Higher Education.
As we connected with our students and alumni, we learned that the drive to making a difference is often based on personal experiences. Making a positive change is what Dr. Angela Mastronuzzi, Brandon Biggs, and our international volunteers strive towards every day in very different communities around the world.
There are no shortcuts to coming face-to-face with a reality that is very different from your own. This diversity is often what leads people to forge positive change. Every year Università Cattolica students set off on a journey into the unknown as part of the International Volunteering and Charity Work Program. Their experiences are priceless as they learn the meaning of impact.
Once the door closes, the timer starts. The volunteer students scurry to take their seats. The chatter of small talk fills the room with the weather, the unfinished assignments, the mishaps they have had on their way to the meeting, what is for lunch, and the countries where they have volunteered.

The camera is set-up to shoot the right angle. Their names and countries where they have volunteered, printed on a piece of paper in bold size 20, are placed on the long wooden table. Two recorders are placed in the middle of the table with a vase of lavender wedged in between. Two clicks to record the audio and the roundtable storytelling begins.

Tommaso clasps his hands and places his elbows on the wooden table. He gazes at the vase, closely watching the sun rays cover its ceramic body. “Everything you do to another person is far greater than what you know,” he says. As he breathes out a sigh, his shoulders drop before he recounts his story in Tanzania.

He steps inside the classroom with a stack of papers in his hands and faces the students sitting in crooked chairs, some with chafed wood while others with a missing leg. The buzz of energy intensifies and the frenzy ignites inside the closed space. Tommaso cannot help but smile as he braces himself for his Mathematics and English classes in a morning packed with running, holiering children.

“Everything you do to another person is far greater than what you know.”

The children do not sit still, but their excitement and curiosity show. The students, aged three to six, burst in joy as he hands out colorful worksheets on numbers and vocabulary. He asks them to pair up to solve the exercises. Without missing a beat, the young students grab their closest classmates and try their best to decode the questions.

He kneels to each pair and watches them closely. For every misspelled or mispronounced word, he writes it down for them or slowly repeats the sound. The students mimic his actions until they nail them. The scorching heat of the summer afternoon does not faze Tommaso. He writes and draws his lessons on the board using colored chalks, and points out at them one by one while asking the students to follow his lead.

The results are a chorus of merry voices and smiles that do not waver. The eagerness of the children to learn paves the way to peek inside what they want to achieve in the future. Tommaso has made it his priority to help the children overcome illiteracy.

Tommaso has made it his priority to help the children overcome illiteracy.

Martina also agrees to busting down illiteracy and fostering knowledge. She adjusts her eyeglasses and describes the materials she brings inside her class. “I had crayons and colored pencils, and a lot of paper. Maybe some colored chalks too, but that’s if we’re going to draw on the blackboard,” she says.

As she steps in the class, she asks the children, aged three to four, to find a partner. She gives each pair pieces of paper that they can use to showcase their creativity. Small fingers pick up crayons and colored pencils and dabble with their imagination until they produce drawings that resonate how they feel.

There’s a picture of a girl wearing a triangular dress, her hair portrayed in bent lines and hard-pressed black pencil with smudges. Another image is a house doused in green to match the grass on the front lawn. Then, there’s a family portrait under a huge tree whose color is just plain brown. No matter what the drawing is, every child raises their artwork to show to Martina, their eyes beaming with pride and joy.

After the activity, she picks up a coloring book and sits down in front of the class. She watches as the children dash to sit before her instead of in their seats, some cross their legs while the others put their chin on the palm of their hand. Everyone is attentive to Martina. It is time for a vocabulary exercise.

She flips the pages of the book until she sees the picture she is looking for. When she turns the book to the children, they burst in craze over the drawing. They keep chanting the same phrase and Martina is puzzled as to what it means. The coordinator who speaks Swahili informs her that they are asking what the picture is. It is a rainbow.

From then, Martina does not solely focus on her art classes, but also in helping the children expand their vocabulary. Before the class ends, she gestures to the children to name the items she will be pointing at. She does not surrender until the children remember and pronounce all the words correctly. Once they all make it to the last word, she starts to clap until the children follow suit. The thundering noise warms Martina’s heart. That plus the children tugging on her clothes, asking her in Swahili to join their games outside the field.

4+2

8+1
Even Ludovica knows what it feels like when the people you help thank you for what you have done. “I had this recurring thought that what I contributed to the community was sort of expected from me. I did not think of it as a life-changing idea. What caught me off guard was the reception I had. For the people in the Maasai Village in Tanzania, what I did for them was more than what they had asked for,” she says as she folds her hands on her lap.

She is surrounded by earth-tone sand, drought-like branches, and bushes as the backdrop for the rows of straw huts where the locals live. The Maasai locals are dressed in elegant and brightly-lit robes, red being the predominant color. The color stands out in the dimly-lit huts where the sun rays pass through the cracks of the roof.

Ludovica sits on a stool there with the Maasai women. In the middle of the hut lies tiny, multicolored trinkets and thin threads that are cut into the same length. She watches as the elders take a thread and puncture it into the small holes of the trinkets. Bead by bead, the pattern begins to take shape until it is molded into a Maasai signature bracelet, one of the sources of income for the locals.

Ludovica eyes the thorough creation of the bracelets. She picks up her own thread and follows the design. When she is unsure of which one to pick, one of the Maasai elders pinches a bead and closes her hand on Ludovica’s wrist. She helps her insert the thread into the bead before she nods and smiles.

When the batches are done, Ludovica stands around them to admire their raw beauty. The handmade creation is nurtured with care and hard work and she is eager to see them on someone else’s wrists. As she gazes at the bracelets, a Maasai elder, with her back slightly bent and her slow steps, walks up to her and asks for her hand. She then stretches out the bracelet and puts it on Ludovica. Frozen in awe, she breathes out and returns the warm smile the elder gives.

**WHAT I DID FOR THEM WAS MORE THAN WHAT THEY HAD ASKED FOR.**
That genuine smile might be the best gift and Giorgia and Giulia know this by heart. When they see it on the children’s faces, in the Brazilian community where they volunteered, paired up with high-pitched laughter, their weariness drops in an instant. It is replaced with fondness and dedication to see that look and hear that sound again. “Helping builds a relationship on trust. It opens you up until you share a piece of yourself to others. In return, they will take it with gratitude. You and those you help will realize that helping benefits two sides. And sometimes, you gain more than what you give,” they say.

Helping builds a relationship on trust.

Giorgia and Giulia walk to the sports center where a group of children and teens await for them. They stretch their arms and legs, bend their necks to the side, and sway their hips in a circle. They cluster together before a platform made of cement with the village’s emblem engraved on the wall. The pair walks to the stage. Sitting at the edge of it, a boombox rests and the pair plays with the cord and sound checks. Once everything is set up, the song echoes in the sports center as the speaker pads convulse in the loud volume. Giorgia starts to clap while Giulia stretches. After a few seconds, the dance class begins.

You gain more than what you give.

Giorgia and Giulia dance to a pop song. The children try to mirror their movements in a free manner. Some flail their arms like a bird while others smash the steps. Their laughter accompanies the beat, freeing their childlike nature. As the pair continues their steps, they watch the children embrace one of the recreational classes that they have prepared and vows to keep their free spirit going.

You need to be there. You need to live there. Words and pictures are not enough.

As they walk through the halls of the orphanage center, Annalisa watches as the children unveil their bubbly selves to her. They clamor for her attention, tugging the ends of her shirt or just standing a few feet from her with eyes of wonder. When they look at her, there are no questions or doubts that cloud their curiosity. Instead, they express how much they want to spend their time with Annalisa. And she willingly accepts their company. Every day as soon as she wakes up, she hears the commotion. She steps outside of her room and sees the children rush to her, all while their eyes crinkle. She stays with them and attends to what they need. It might be a blanket for a cold evening, a lullaby to put them to sleep, or an ear to listen to their hopes in finding their parents one day.

Sometimes, you do not need to act but to just spend time with and listen to them.
Annalisa has become a family for the children and teens. She is their big sister and superhero who comes to their rescue in times when they need answers for their assignments at school or they question why no one has adopted them. “Sometimes, you do not need to act but to just spend time with and listen to them. I grew fond of their company and did my best to be with them always. Now, I miss it, but that is all right. I often tell myself I will return,” she says.

One does not know how much it touches someone if they just have the time to listen to their stories. When Ludovica and Alice volunteered in Costa Rica, they received more than what they gave in the plantation farm. “When I got home after the trip, I seemed different. Not a whole new person, but there was something new in there. I learned how to value the relationships you have with others and not the material things you share with them. You’ll be surprised how much others will open up to you,” she says.

YOU WILL BE SURPRISED HOW MUCH OTHERS WILL OPEN UP TO YOU.

Inside a lofty estate that sits in the field, lives Don Gerardo. He shows Ludovica and Alice around his plantation farm. The green acres stretch beyond the horizon covered in tall trees, shrubs, various leafy greens, and fruits. The sight seems to touch the white clouds that drape over the field if seen from afar. The breeze takes a hint of humid heat and wraps itself around every person that stays there.

I LEARNED HOW TO VALUE THE RELATIONSHIPS YOU HAVE WITH OTHERS AND NOT THE MATERIAL THINGS YOU SHARE WITH THEM.

Ludovica and Alice wake themselves up from the stupor as Don Gerardo points out where the pair should get the gloves before shearing the vines, the baskets that they can fill with the harvest, and the buckets of fertilizers to feed the crops. The pair tends to the plantation farm, but what they thought would require much manpower ends up being one of the activities they love doing. That and having a sit-down conversation with the owner himself.
Don Gerardo is a storyteller. The young-at-heart owner is an avid fan of unwrapping himself for others to see, a sort of therapy that relates him to his audience. Ludovica and Alice are all ears to all of his stories, but one that they recount the most is why he started his own plantation farm. When he told them that he had suffered heart disease and needed to change his diet lifestyle, it all made sense why the organic farm needed extra care and attention. Ludovica and Alice are more than willing to do just that.

They do not only do that for the owner, but also to those who seek organic products since bio goods are not widely-produced and distributed in the area. Although the pair needs to ensure the health of the plantation, they look forward to spending more of their time with Don Gerardo and his stories, and his laughter to their eagerness speaks that they are welcome to stay, listen, and ponder.

“You slowly learn to appreciate what you have and give value to what you experience, and at the same time, give others the time to realize what their actions mean to others,” Alice says.

When the audio recorder ticks, a second of silence dawns before the volunteers recollect themselves. As they reminisce about their experience, they realize the weight of their own actions as they recount their narratives.

The children in Tanzania who were keen to learn the numbers and words can pronounce and identify them correctly. The locals of the Maasai village have doubled their finished products to boost their income. The children in Brazil can play any music and dance to its beat as they face the hardship of their living conditions. The orphans have found their new family. The owner of a plantation farm finds the company of others a safe haven.

As the volunteers dwell in what they have taken away, they find a renewed spirit in themselves to move forward. They do not want to be contented in their seats as they listen to their professors and take down notes. They want to act in any way they can to elicit joy and gratitude from those they help.

They want to act in any way they can to elicit joy and gratitude from those they help.

A knock on the door interrupts the daze. The volunteers stand to gather their items on the table, putting them back in their bags. As they walk outside the room, they are oblivious that they have left a piece of themselves for others to pick up, encouraging them to embark on an adventure where they can change lives.
Charity Work Program

The University Center for International Solidarity (CeSi) was founded in 2006 to coordinate cooperation and solidarity initiatives implemented by Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore. In order to reach this important goal, CeSi has been active for years in developing international projects and has taken part in a variety of cultural and geographical “outer reach” contexts. Wherever it operates, the Center is engaged in spreading the culture and practice of solidarity through the use of the knowledge and expertise of Università Cattolica. As a mission of the University, the Centre pays special attention to agri-food needs, microfinance, education, communication, and medicine.

Since 2009 the Charity Work Program, established with the support of the Istituto Toniolo di Studi Superiori, has promoted more than 300 scholarships for students of Università Cattolica. Thanks to this program students have the chance to spend three or four weeks abroad living an international volunteering experience in developing countries. The host structures are selected based on existing partnerships with the University. Scholarships cover travel expenses, accommodation, insurance, and visa.

International Volunteering

Since 2015, the International Volunteering Program, in collaboration with World Endeavors, has sent 167 Università Cattolica students with certain interests or skills and a desire to expand their horizons to specific service projects in need of hands-on help. Our volunteer programs are immersive as students live in the communities they serve, meeting local people, learning the language, and discovering local customs and traditions. Embarking on an international volunteering program is a life-changing experience that emboldens participants and inspires them to notice, care, and engage more fully in their world. World Endeavors volunteers support communities in several destinations in Africa, the Americas, Asia, and Oceania. Programs are located in a variety of sites, including urban and rural, economically developed and developing. Each site offers a range of projects focusing on the social and environmental issues that are important to the local community such as teaching and childcare, sports coaching, community development, women’s development, healthcare, environmental conservation and sustainable agriculture, and wildlife conservation. Participating Università Cattolica students are granted scholarships by their home institution.
Blindness is nothing to be afraid of. This is the philosophy that Brandon Biggs has always adopted. He was diagnosed with vision loss as a toddler, while many believe it’s a challenge for his learning and development, Brandon does not. He has traveled many parts of the world, has numerous passions, and is devoted to making an impact for blind and visually impaired persons. Five years ago he undertook an experience which was the turning point, a life-changing experience.
Motivated, hard-working and humble. These are the qualities that stood out following our chat with Brandon Biggs – a former Universal Cattolica exchange student from California State University, East Bay who spent the 2014-2015 Academic Year in our cloisters, hallways and campuses. Videos calling from San Francisco in the US, Brandon lets us get to know him a little better. “Do you want me to give you a brief timeline of where I have been since 2007?” he giggles as we gather our notepads. Currently, he is a software engineer at the Smith-Kettlewell Eye Research Institute and Chief Financial Officer at Sonja Biggs Educational Services. Previously he obtained a master’s degree from the Ontario College of Art and Design University following his university studies in California. Brandon lives with a disability many would find very challenging, though he is legally blind like the global 285 million people with blindness to use to locate themselves both indoors and outdoors. These non-visual maps would be new tools to make many lives easier because what common online maps offer now is not enough information. As he recounts his story, we realize the unique life he’s led, his studies and life choices have brought him to Italy, as well as living in the Netherlands and Malta, beyond those aforementioned in North America. Brandon’s life events help reflect upon the existence of a chain reaction in life whereby the choices one makes today are those that affect yourself and others in the future, and he is also an example that the past prepares you for today’s choices.

“We asked Brandon what the word impact meant to him: “It’s the amount of influence you have on people in a good way. My experience in Italy changed my whole life.”

Brandon’s undergraduate studies were closer to his interests in performing arts but following his exchange program in Cattolica, they became more varied. “The classes weren’t anything like those I had done in my university before.” He undertook his first semester at Cattolica in Fall 2014, where he followed the Italian Language and Culture course, the Italian Cuisine and Language course Lab, Dramaturgy, Business, Economics and Finance courses, and above all, he attended three courses on Entrepreneurship. The semester spent in Milan was memorable for many reasons. He remembers Cattolica International’s readiness to assure that needs. This service aims to achieve inclusivity in schools and impact the academic life of many young people. So, it wants to overcome disadvantages to be overcome and for equal opportunities to become reality. Informally he called himself the “finance person” dealing with all the “nitty-gritty” numbers. “I knew in the back of my head we had to start this business.” Filling such a call to action is a challenging task for many reasons, one, for example, is that there needs to be a clear preparation for it. Indeed, undertaking this after his exchange program he was more prepared about marketing and business strategy: two professional skills needed for carrying out this important task. In fact, he was responsible for hiring, bookkeeping and taxes among other things. The business has been growing since its beginning and he has not only been a key part of its foundation but remains covering an active role. It is a job he’s held full time for a year and part-time since 2017 as a master’s student and now-a-days as an employee at the Smith-Kettlewell Eye Research Institute. Brandon’s present-day dedication to the business reveals his devotion to a considerably meaningful choice he made in his university career. Brandon considered his time in Italy as the occasion to answer a question he asked himself “who am I?” It was the start of a transition period in his life where he achieved self-realization. Describing why he critically developed comes down to the fact of trying new things. “I came in with an open mind […] in order for me to find things I really liked I had to do things I hadn’t done before, and that was very important for me to realize.” At just 22 years of age, while at Cattolica, Brandon’s life experienced a turning point moving away from his passion of performing arts to software engineering, meeting his future wife and realizing what he wanted for his future. What about the impact you are having? “It’s too early to say – but in the design community I am working on something scalable and that hasn’t been done before, and academic journals are impressed. The impact I am looking for, is for blind people to be able to do the same as everyone else, have a purpose when they open Google Maps.”

Brandon’s “goal in life is to not do anything, and that makes him extremely busy.” In fact, there were several email exchanges before we could set a date and time that worked for our interview. His career as a software engineer as brought him far already, more precisely as he was working on his master’s thesis “Designing Accessible Non-Sen- sual Maps” he was hired by the Smith-Kettlewell Eye for tasks like scanning textbooks and documents such that they would be user-friendly for him. Cattolica had the resources and the willingness to take in its first exchange student through the Servizio Integrazione Studenti con Disabilità (Integration Service for Students with Disabilities). In fact, this is what determined his stay in Milano for the Spring 2015 semester, which he had original plans to spend in Germany. The intensive Italian Language and Culture Course he took required him to learn an advanced level of Italian in a few weeks, while overall he explained how determined he was to experience Milano like a local. Additionally, he contacted the Unione Italiana Ciechi and asked for orientation mobility training. Nevertheless, Brandon is now considering to ask for Italian citizenship, which requires studying the language some more.
Research Institute and was able to deliver more projects which have at heart maps for people with blindness made with audio components. Recently, he participated and won at the Innovative Designs for Accessibility (iDeA) 2019 student competition by creating a Nonvisual Digital Auditory Map. Most of his endeavors as a developer are addressed to blind people, because, he says, “blind people are like robots: they need tons of information.” The maps he is creating are an alternative to online maps, though with tactile and audio dimensions that are adapted to people with blindness. More specifically, Brandon and his team of five are developing three apps that will then work together to complement one another; they are: a 3D object annotation one, an indoor-ways map and an auditory map on the web. Foremost, Brandon is seeking to include much detailing, which is often taken for granted in maps adapted for people with blindness. Meanwhile, in creating a map whose target users are so specific, then it is possible to overcome problems that are disregarded — an example would be the presence of construction on the sidewalk, which can be information omitted by the map or a pedestrian giving information. Nevertheless, it is also the restricted target users that makes this a difficult field for businesses to thrive in: in fact, the market he provides for is an underdeveloped one, where there is a high rate of unemployment. Since success is not impossible given his many skills and ambition, he is beginning to give back to his community through his projects, and what he does has far-reaching impact.

His prospects are finalizing an unpublished paper called “Towards Accessible Audio Labeling of 3D Objects” for which he won the Dr. Karshmer Award for Assistive Technology Research for the 2020 CSUN Assistive Technology conference in Los Angeles. Other projects he is working on focus on cross-sensory experiences, using the new technologies of augmented reality, as well as eventually developing a tactile hologram to view in a browser with touch, audio and visual display that make up the map. Finally, Brandon hopes that in the future maps of the kind he’s developing will be available everywhere and to anyone.

The impact I am looking for, is for blind people to be able to do the same as everyone else, have a purpose when they open Google Maps.
A LIFELONG MISSION

“Fairy tales do not tell children the dragons exist. Children already know that dragons exist. Fairy tales tell children the dragons can be killed.” G. K. Chesterton

From stories with battles and triumphs, Dr. Angela Mastronuzzi is fighting villains daily. Her compassion and empathy are unwavering for the heroes that become part of her family. The Università Cattolica alumna details how she endeavored from being an aspiring doctor to specializing in Pediatric Onco-Hematology.
Dr. Angela Mastronuzzi dons tattered purple sneakers with neon green laces, ribboned to perfection, a pair of worn-out blue jeans, and a light blue top that accentuates the shade of her office’s color. She slides her chair backward, stands up and announces her warm greeting with a smile. She pushes her comfy chair adjacent to the desk until it lands in front of the white cabinet doused in red on the edges. On top of the wardrobe lies a yarn-made smiling angel, holding out a heart. It mirrors the image of Dr. Mastronuzzi who, before sitting down on the chair, puts on her doctor’s coat that shows her engraved name alongside the hospital’s emblem.

Dr. Mastronuzzi’s lifelong mission is to defeat the tumors that eat up the nervous system. Every day, she wakes up and does not bid her time on what clothes to wear or what breakfast to eat. Her wired focus centers on how to break the good news that the tumor’s size has reduced or, on the contrary, how to deliver bad news. Since she specializes in Pediatric Onco-Hematology, she ensures that the families understand what their young children endure.

Before nurturing the lives of young brain-cancer patients, Dr. Mastronuzzi studied Medicine and Surgery at Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore. In 1996, her anxiety increased as she braced herself for the entrance exam. She saw it as an opportunity whereby if she had failed, it may have been difficult to search for a fallback. She did not let her excitement get stomped on by around 2,000 other aspirants competing for limited spots. She redirected her mindset to secure her place in the six-year undergraduate degree.

Her earnest hard work paid off when she later found out that she passed the entrance exam at Cattolica as well as at another university in Rome. Dr. Mastronuzzi wanted to tumble with excitement, but at the same time had second thoughts due to financial reasons. Although her family sustains their income from their small, family-owned bar, the monthly allowance just would not cut to pay her fees with ease.

The following day after she received the good news, she went to their family bar to eat her breakfast. Unspoken thoughts clouded her mind on how to share the news to her parents, reflecting on whether she would be ready to take such a huge leap at the expense of what their means could afford. The cups and saucers clunk and mashed as people chattered, oblivious to her deep-seated thinking in the corner of the bar.

She took a deep breath, walked up to her parents, and told them she got in. The joy that burst from their smiles were priceless, but the worry Dr. Mastronuzzi still had could almost dampen the vibrant tone in the room. Her parents, driven with determination, by all means, caught her by surprise when the following day they showed her a piece of paper. Her father served her usual favorite, a cup of cappuccino and a croissant, together with the enrollment receipt beside the saucer. She looked at it and gasped as she read the words “paid” on top of the paper.

“She ensures that the families understand what their young children endure.”

“It has always been your dream. Do it. We are going to manage the rest. We are going to do it.”

“I still feel overwhelmed. I remember asking my father why he did it even though we both knew about the huge fee differences between the two universities. I did not know how to cope with that and I began to worry again. My father stopped me right there and told me, ‘It has always been your dream. Do it. We are going to manage the rest. We are going to do it.”’ Dr. Mastronuzzi shares.

Right off the bat, she took on a new responsibility as she stood by the sacrifices her family had made to catapult her to where she is today. On her way to the fruitful endeavors, she soaked up unpaid internships, saga for financial stability, and her father battling a tumor. Throughout these events, her family served as the backbone who shaped her abstract goal into its most concrete form.

The worries that plagued her mind were kept hidden in a trunk as she reveled in her time as a university student. The relationships she founded helped build her career. She was surprised that the loose acquaintances that she had made paved the way to open more opportunities for her in the medical field. Today, it is common for Dr. Mastronuzzi to pair up with her former classmates to write medical breakthroughs for scientific journals, a kind of setting that she did not expect she would make.

“As I grow older, I find out that what I thought were superficial relationships should not be taken at their face value. The ripe age has shown me how to value the connections I make, helping me rediscover the way I bond. It is no longer just for work, but it touches on the human side of the relationship. I do not feel as if I work with them, but we are sort of a whole family brought together by a common ground which is to create better lives for our people,” she says, sharing that her best friend, who is a former classmate of hers, even became one of her bridesmaids during her wedding.
Dr. Mastronuzzi has harvested the effort she poured into her ambition. She istes her oath as a Pediatric Oncologist for Ospedale Bambino Gesù in Rome, working her wonders and miracles in conjuring medical solutions to children who need them. Specializing in Pediatric Oncology had not always been her first choice. During her first year in high school, her father was diagnosed with lymphoma, the same year her younger brother undertook a heart surgery. Her young age at that period did not stop her to figure out that she needed to step in. After she revised her notes at school, she would close her books to help in their family-owned bar. She would take in the house chores while her mother stayed with her father in the hospital. She would even open the bar early to serve their regular customers who wondered what time she would be at school.

Dr. Mastronuzzi slowly became impatient for her father’s return. She walked up to her mother who was quietly crying off the cups and saucers in the rack. She asked her whether her father was confined in a general or specialized hospital. “Your father is in an oncological hospital!” her mother responded coldly.

The word sounded foreign to Dr. Mastronuzzi. She went to her bedroom, opened a dictionary to look up the word, and sat frozen as she read its definition. She strode back to her mother to tell her she knew now the depth of her father’s sickness. Her mother turned to her and as her lips quivered, she began to talk about her husband’s state, unwrapping her stories from the medical findings to cures. Determined to know more about it, her father’s condition played a big role in why she studied the science of oncology in her last year of high school.

On the other hand, Dr. Mastronuzzi has a number of volunteering experiences with children. At a particular time during her fourth year of medical studies at the university, she joined a trip to Lourdes and met the patients of the Pediatric Oncologist ward. As she walked around the place, she understood what the specialization meant. She saw a room of hospital beds with drips injected into the children’s veins, in contrast to their still vibrant energy as they warmly smiled to her presence.

In the same year, she requested to participate in a volunteering program at the ward, but the resident psychologist did not recommend her to do so. She was attuned to what happened to her father that the psychologist thought it might have affected her strongly. Yet Dr. Mastronuzzi dismissed the remarks. She volunteered in the ward until she could not see herself stopping and decided to take her specialization in Pediatric Oncology.

Her practice is attuned to the disciplines she has fostered throughout her quest. For her, becoming a doctor is not a one-size-fits-all spectrum where one strictly follows what they have learned by the book. Versatility is a trait to keep an eye on in the medical field. “Anyone with good memory skills can read a book and digest what’s written there, but being a doctor is not only having the right information. It is also having the ability to communicate well with their patients, to gain new perspectives from others, and to show respect to their work, patients, families, and colleagues, regardless of nationality, age, or color of the skin.”

She must shed some say of hope to the parents. Cases vary from time to time, but Dr. Mastronuzzi never loses faith that her young patients will put up a fight against cancer and soon recover. After analyzing the results and conducting more tests, she proceeds with an in-depth look at the cancer. This time, she needs the presence of her patients.

“The relationship I build with them is from trust and honesty.”

The relationship she builds with her patients is from trust and honesty.

She knocks on the door before she slides it, entering the antiseptic-scented room. In there, she notes the age of the patient. If they are young, she talks around the illness until she forms a bond with them. She sits on the bed and asks them about their day, sits on the chair and talks about the toys they play with, or just stands beside them to have a conversation about their favorite food. She makes them feel at ease, shredding all kinds of fear that might linger from seeing a white doctor’s coat. Then, she does not tell them what they have, but rather she describes it through storytelling, creating fictional villains, the symbol of the tumor, to defeat in no time.

Yet for all her patients, she is transparent when they ask her. “I do not tell them that they have cancer, no matter what their age is. You will never hear that from me. But if they ask me the same question, then I will say ‘yes’,” she says. “The relationship I build with them is from trust and honesty. Those are the foundations. I always try to underline the positive aspect, to look on the bright side of the situation. There might only be a 5% chance for them to survive, but it is still 5%. It is not a zero.”

She has lived up to this pledge for years. A memory that stands out for her goes back during her residency at Poli-clinico Gemelli. She had a patient named Simona who felt severely ill. She was admitted into the intensive care unit, unconscious and numb. One day, Dr. Mastronuzzi helped organize a Franciscan pilgrimage to a small village in Grecchio, Italy. She and the team agreed to have a potluck setting, each would bring a meal to feast on.
She braved to bake a cake even if desserts were not her forte. While she kneaded the dough, she thought of Simona and her parents who stroiled in and out of the hospital, anxiously waiting for her to gain consciousness. She decided to double the amount of dough she was kneading to bake an extra cake for the family. The day before the pilgrimage, she headed to Polyclinico Gemelli to give the family her small gift.

She clicked the elevator button and when it opened, Francesca, a fellow medical student and one of her dearest friends today, stood there with a small packet in her hands. The elevator ride led them to the 10th floor where the intensive care unit was located. Dr. Mastronuzzi turned to Francesca and asked where she was headed. They were both going in the same room, but for different patients.

Inside the blue-covered room, two hospital beds were rolled side-by-side. Lying in the other bed was a young boy who had leukemia and Francesca hoped her box of cake could brighten up the morning for him and his family, even just for a while. As for Dr. Mastronuzzi, she handed her homemade cake to Simona’s family whose worn-out expressions shifted into a small smile.

The more she dwells into her medical routine, the more she falls in love with it.

On the day of the pilgrimage, Dr. Mastronuzzi attended the mass but felt strange. It was neither sad nor painful, but she felt disconnected. Although she could not understand the reason, she embraced the sensation. The feeling stuck with her until the following day when she wanted to meet Simona’s parents. While she was on her way to the intensive care unit, she met Simona’s parents in the hallway. She noticed the worn out look on the family’s faces. As tears brimmed in their eyes, it was enough for Dr. Mastronuzzi to learn that Simona had passed away.

Dr. Mastronuzzi pauses and looks at the floor before she drops the name “Gaia”, one of her young patients. She was smart, amazing, festive, and, above all, a fighter. She evoked these characters in the middle of her crippling stage, defeating the monster that would slowly creep inside her life. Little did she know, their relationship would come to a sudden end.

Dr. Mastronuzzi usually turns off her phone at home as part of her routine where she holds a boundary between her private and medical life. Yet at 3 am on December 23, 2015, she forgot to turn it off. She knew something was wrong, but she did not know what until her phone rang. It was a call from Gaia’s mother, Serena. Bathed in anxiety, she told Dr. Mastronuzzi that Gaia had been experiencing extreme and painful headaches and they could not understand the reason since she had been all bubbly and joyful that morning when she gave the doctor a Christmas present.

Serena quietly sobbed over the phone, breaking the doctor’s heart to hear a mother’s grief. She called an ambulance to tell them the emergency and dropped the call as soon as the ambulance arrived. She put her phone on the coffee table, watching it closely and waiting for the screen to flicker. At 6 am, her phone rang and the doctor rushed to press the call button. She clutched her phone as she heard that Gaia gave up her last fight for life.

A week later, Gaia’s parents wanted to meet Dr. Mastronuzzi. She was slightly hesitant, but it was all forgotten when she saw them sitting patiently in the cafe. She slipped the tissue that sat on the table as Gaia’s parents told her that they could not understand how a family could lose their child. What they understood was that doctors could still save the children’s lives.

Gaia’s parents believe that medical research will help the doctors. It can be the key to findings a much more effective cure for particular diseases. To put forward this mission, they then established their non-profit organization called HEAL that supports neuro-oncological research and its potential development. The parents personally asked Dr. Mastronuzzi to steer the medical and research team behind the association which the doctor gladly took on.

From every emotional struggle to every drop of antide training success, Dr. Mastronuzzi cannot see herself in any other profession, aside from being a Pediatric Oncologist. She does not believe that as time goes by, one will get used to the job they are in, it is the opposite in her case. The more she dwells into her medical routine, the more she falls in love with it. The burning passion that she carries jumps beyond a loop. He is sort of a philosopher who keeps me on my feet and helps me direct my path to where I want it to. I think it is safe to say that Matteo is my salvation.”

Dr. Mastronuzzi never backs down without putting up a brave fight.

“Sometimes she needs a breather before bouncing back in the field and the best person to help and support her is Matteo, her husband.

A knock on the door interrupts the reminiscing look of her expression. She stands up and walks outside, already gromed to visit one of her patients. She sticks her hands in the pockets of her lab coat and stops before a blue door glazed with colored animal drawings. She looks at some of the images, noting that some colors are mixed while others swerved beyond the designated lines of the shapes. She slightly shakes her head and chuckles.

As she slides the door open, her voice booms with a “ciao!” The young patient quickly absorbs her energy, transforming the once frowning lips into a full-blown smile. Dr. Angela Mastronuzzi steps inside as she bears that signature warm smile that she upholds, forging a sense of thought that her presence is enough to soothe uncertainties and fears.

Her presence is enough to soothe uncertainties and fears.
Cultural traditions are powerful but what happens when these traditions affect the health and integrity of individuals? Harmful traditional practices occur in many different forms and have received global attention due to their severe and negative impacts. We take a further look into the research undertaken by Assistant Professor of Economics at Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Lucia Como.
RESEARCH

FIGHTING HARMFUL TRADITIONS

In a quest to improve the wellbeing of young women and girls by reducing the impacts of harmful traditional practices, Professor Lucia Corno and her team of researchers are coming up with policies to raise awareness of the dangers of such forms of violence, which amongst many African societies have been accepted as long-standing cultural practices, despite the major medical implications.

Attached to the cabinet is a photo of two young women. The woman on the right has her arm around the other. Both of them beam at the camera as the flash ascends, creating a penumbra in the backdrop. Next to the photo is a monochromatic map of Africa, printed on A4-sized paper. A few feet away from the cabinet sits Professor Lucia Corno, the owner of the photo and the map. Although at first, they do not make sense, a sit-down talk with her will tell enough story of the story: one is a reminder of her passion while the other is a source of inspiration.

Professor Lucia Corno wants to beat harmful traditions. She serves as a reminder of the detrimental practices, including female genital cutting, child marriages, and breast ironing, experienced by a number of women across the globe. She points out an example where in the Cameroonian culture, mothers iron the breast of their female children with hot stone to try to avoid unwarranted male attention before marriage. Unnerving as it sounds, Professor Lucia Corno rests her elbow on the armchair as she burrows deeper into the practice of the coordination theory. “The idea is that the mothers cut their daughter because everyone thinks that it is important to do so,” she says. To prevent the exclusion from the community they are part of, the families feel compelled to go along with the tradition regardless of its side effects.

Professor Lucia Corno is concerned with the variable. If observation and outcome, there is no correlation between the coordination failure and female genital cutting, and that it may be driven by another factor such as identity and culture, then the policy intervention she and her team have developed fails short. It might not deter the practice since it has grown from the roots of culture. Yet she is positive that the policy implication will alter, at least how the community perceives the practice.

Jumping into her next project, Professor Lucia Corno seeks to answer the research question on policy intervention. It highlights Sierra Leone where secret societies are embedded in their culture. There is an exclusive pass for these “Bondo” and as an initiation ritual for young women to join, they need to undergo intensive training. They spend four weeks in the forest, mastering the craft of being a good mother and wife. They learn how to sing a lullaby to help their future children fall asleep, to cook meals to feed their hungry families, and to bring up their children who will follow their footsteps. At the end of their training, they must undergo female genital cutting, a symbol of honorable dismissal.

They duck to go inside the makeshift tents. The young women by the mists of the horizon, clasped by the rulers on both arms to prevent them from flailing. The wails ascend as soon as their skin gets torn with unsterilized tools. It results in unsanitary health diseases with extreme cases such as excessive bleeding that leaves the young women dead. From the data gathered, Professor Lucia Corno says that the prevalence of female genital cutting has risen to 89%, a depiction that alludes to the coordination failure and female genital cutting, and that its name. The women must be virgins and not pregnant before embarking on the journey, two criteria that boost the price value of the women in the trade market.

One price to pay before the journey is the excision and sewing of the external female private parts to prevent sexual intercourse. The impending wonder why such practice persists is Professor Lucia Corno to test whether the intervention practice originated or has intensified with the slave trade. She collects data from women who are infiltrated today and ancestors who belonged to the trade. Using the methods of economics, she compares the data and backs it up with analysis to get her answers.

It refers to female genital cutting and its persistence. Professor Lucia Corno reds her elbow on the armchair as she burrows deeper into the practice of the coordination theory. “The idea is that the mothers cut their daughter because everyone thinks that it is important to do so,” she says. To prevent the exclusion from the community they are part of, the families feel compelled to go along with the tradition regardless of its side effects.

Professor Lucia Corno is concerned with the variable. If observation and outcome, there is no correlation between the coordination failure and female genital cutting, and that it may be driven by another factor such as identity and culture, then the policy intervention she and her team have developed fails short. It might not deter the practice since it has grown from the roots of culture. Yet she is positive that the policy implication will alter, at least how the community perceives the practice.

Jumping into her next project, Professor Lucia Corno seeks to answer the research question on policy intervention. It highlights Sierra Leone where secret societies are embedded in their culture. There is an exclusive pass for these “Bondo” and as an initiation ritual for young women to join, they need to undergo intensive training. They spend four weeks in the forest, mastering the craft of being a good mother and wife. They learn how to sing a lullaby to help their future children fall asleep, to cook meals to feed their hungry families, and to bring up their children who will follow their footsteps. At the end of their training, they must undergo female genital cutting, a symbol of honorable dismissal.

They duck to go inside the makeshift tents. The young women by the mists of the horizon, clasped by the rulers on both arms to prevent them from flailing. The wails ascend as soon as their skin gets torn with unsterilized tools. It results in unsanitary health diseases with extreme cases such as excessive bleeding that leaves the young women dead. From the data gathered, Professor Lucia Corno says that the prevalence of female genital cutting has risen to 89%, a depiction that almost everyone carries out the practice.

To think of an intervention policy strikes up as a challenge, but is not impossible. Professor Lucia Corno has run a randomized controlled trial in partnership with the Amazonian Initiative Movement (AIM), a non-governmental organization (NGO) founded by the former Minister of Health Department, Rugiatu Turay, whose goal is to eradicate the practice of female genital cutting in Sierra Leone.

Thanks to the funding of the European Commission, the policy intervention has been launched. The research team together with Professor Lucia Corno and Rugiatu Turay has been allocated one-hundred and fifty villages in Sierra Leone for the five-month trial. Fifty villages act as a focus group that receives abundant information on the harmful effects of

"WHAT I HAVE LEARNED IS THAT THEORIES ARE DIFFERENT FROM PRACTICES. IT IS WHEN YOU ARE THERE. TALKING TO PEOPLE, UNDERSTANDING THE CULTURE AND GETTING HANDS-ON EXPERIENCES THAT YOU CAN INTERPRET YOUR RESEARCH"

Rugiatu has put forward her proposal of “Bondo without Cutting” in a nutshell, young women can still enter the secret societies and have the training, but without the female genital cutting. In this way, the culture is kept intact without any health suffering and a rising death number.

Lucia collaborates with the World Bank and local NGOs to evaluate the effectiveness of projects in poor countries through randomized control trials.

Lucia Corno is assistant professor of Economics at Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore and Executive Director of the Laboratory for Effective Antipoverty Policies (LEAP). After receiving her PhD in Economics from Bocconi University, she moved to London where she was post-doctoral fellow at University College London and assistant professor at Queen Mary University. She is currently affiliated at the Institute of Fiscal Studies (IFS), at the European Development Network (EUDN), at the Centre for Globalization Research (CCGR) and at Fondazione Rodolfo de Benedetti (FRDB). Her research is in development economics with a focus on understanding the role of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, social norms and ethnic diversity. Lucia collaborates with the World Bank and local NGOs to evaluate the effectiveness of projects in poor countries through randomized control trials.
female genital cutting while another fifty is a vault for data gathering, receiving no information at all about the dangers of cutting. Every month, NGO representatives visit the communities and interview the residents for updates. Former cutters who denounced the act of female genital cutting are part of the representatives who conduct the trial.

In January 2020, Professor Lucia Corno and her team will conduct a non-invasive gynecological visit to young women aged between seven to fifteen. She is hopeful that the villages who have broadened their awareness of female genital cutting will rise to the surface and gradually extirpate the practice, displaying the efficiency of the policy intervention.

Professor Lucia Corno visited Sierra Leone in November. Her head slightly tilts and a smile dawns on her lips as she retells a touching story. Dressed in a plain white shirt and chino pants, she was walking around the room, doing her usual visits and talking to the women when another came up to her. She was a former cutter. She told me, “Lucia, after the intervention, I decided not to cut anymore. I just want to be a good grandmother to my granddaughters,” she says.

A remark like this prompts Professor Lucia Corno to go further. She is fixated at the harmful traditions in the six other research projects she is involved in. In one research, she is bound to answer whether there is a connection between breastfeeding and female genital cutting in Sierra Leone where politicians pay families, about $200, to cut their daughters in exchange for votes. In another project, she is bound to answer whether there is a connection between breastfeeding and female genital cutting in Cameroon. From the neo-collected data, the percentage of mothers who breastfeed their newborns in the first 24 hours is 60%, a declining rate where breastfeeding might be the only source of nutrition in the country.

If the research topic is not challenging enough to demand Professor Lucia Corno’s efforts and time, she does not pay attention to it. “I take on topics that are quite challenging for me to solve. What I have learned is that theories are different from practices. It is when you are there, talking to people, understanding the culture, and getting hands-on experiences that you can interpret your research,” she says. Tom from the pages of her own experience, she deems impact as a change in people’s perception and behavior. “Only when people change the way they behave, in the way they perceive a tradition from brand new eyes, after the policy interventions I have carried out can I then say that I have made an impact. With my research today, I can say that I have,” she says. And she is determined to continue in the future.

“ONLY WHEN PEOPLE CHANGE THE WAY THEY BEHAVE, IN THE WAY THEY PERCEIVE A TRADITION FROM BRAND NEW EYES. AFTER THE POLICY INTERVENTIONS I HAVE CARRIED OUT CAN I THEN SAY THAT I HAVE MADE AN IMPACT”
NEW PROGRAMS

From the 2020/2021 academic year, Università Cattolica will offer four new programs taught entirely in English. The two undergraduate programs include: Psychology and Communication Management, whilst the two graduate programs are Food Processing and The Art and Industry of Narration. If you want to learn more about admission procedures, requirements, and campus life, visit http://international.unicatt.it.

INTERNATIONAL DAYS

Università Cattolica held the fall edition of International Day this past November, presenting to its domestic students the different options for an experience abroad: international internships, international volunteering, linguistic certifications, summer programs and many more. Over 30 partners were present, including Boston University, University of California Berkeley, WorldEndeavors, and the London School of Economics, just to name a few, and they met almost 4,200 students across all campuses.

ASERI

On November 15, ASERI, Cattolica’s Post Graduate School of Economics and International Relations, organized the conference: “International Relations at 100: The Liberal World Order and Beyond.” Many experts took part in the conference, including Prof. Michael Cox, Director of LSE IDEAS and Professor of International Relations, London School of Economics and Political Science; Prof. John Ikenberry, Professor of Politics and International Affairs, Princeton University; Prof. Matthew Evangelista, President White Professor of History and Political Science and Chair of the Department of Government at Cornell University; Prof. Marina Calculli, Lecturer in Middle East Politics, Leiden University; Prof. Joseph Greco, Professor of Political Science, Duke University.
Dear Colleague & Friends,

Meet Università Cattolica Staff at the upcoming NAFSA 2020 Annual Conference. Stop by our booth and collect your invitation for a special Milanese Aperitivo in St. Louis.

We look forward to meeting you!