



## 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.



## MESSAGE FROM PROFESSOR COLOMBO

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.



**Professor Fausto Colombo**  
Rector's Delegate for Institutional  
Branding, Communication and Promotion

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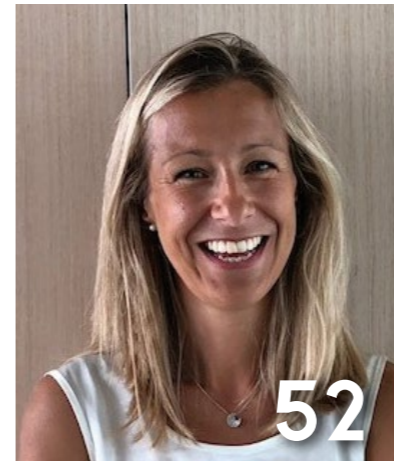
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# GAME CHANGERS

HOW PEOPLE'S ACTIONS AND CHOICES CAN  
HAVE A POWERFUL IMPACT AND CHANGE LIVES.

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.



# CHANGE IN YOUR OWN WAY

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.

## WHERE YOU WANT TO BE IN THE FUTURE





# NEW WISDOM

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.

## DOUBLE THE EFFORT

YOU DIDN'T COME  
THIS FAR  
TO ONLY COME  
THIS FAR..

# DETERMINATION

## RUN YOUR POLICY TO SUCCESS

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.

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.

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.

# THIS IS IMPACT



# 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.



# THOMAS PEDEN



**THOMAS PEDEN** is the Founder and Executive Director of World Endeavors. He began his career in education in 1993 as a teacher and went on to start World Endeavors in 2002. World Endeavors is passionate about providing transformative professional, service, and collaborative experiences rooted in active participation in concrete learning environments. Its goal is to be the catalyst for change which leads participants to engage with the world as more empathetic and energized global citizens. Thomas comes from a long line of practitioners and problem solvers. When he's not working, he's trying out the latest experiential learning method with his two young sons.

## HOW CAN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS ENCOURAGE THEIR STUDENTS TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE BETTERMENT OF SOCIETY?

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 around 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.

# MARTHA JOHNSON



## WHAT MAJOR TRENDS HAVE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS EXPERIENCED IN 2019? AND WHAT TRENDS CAN HIGHER EDUCATION FORESEE IN 2020?

The trend away from students pursuing degrees in the humanities, languages, social sciences, and creative arts continues on most campuses in the United States. This trend reflects shifts in societal attitudes towards the benefit education as less of a pursuit of knowledge, or learning how to learn, but rather the acquisition of skills and competencies for future success. As the cost associated with a university degree has increased exponentially, the question of the "return on investment" for students and families is fair. And yet the studies show that the long-term earning potential for students whose studies focus on critical thinking skills may ultimately surpass those whose education focuses solely on professional skills and certification.

As technologies shift and develop at a pace previously unimaginable, success in the future will require the ability to imagine goods, services, and industries that do not currently exist and to create jobs in professions as they are established. Disruptive technologies, changing paradigms for future industries, and approaches to work require creativity and imagination.

The role of the academy must shift from a mindset of an institution that provides information to an environment that provides students with experiences that challenge their aptitudes and develop their adaptability, flexibility, ability to navigate difference.

The good news is that professional skills and critical thinking are not diametrically opposed and can be acquired simultaneously. Learning abroad is one example of an experiential learning space that can facilitate the development of intercultural and interdisciplinary skills while basing itself in a professional training curriculum. Indeed, as business schools and STEM programs develop opportunities for their students to participate in learning abroad it is these aptitudes beyond technical knowledge or proficiency that they seek to develop. And the reverse is true as well. As the humanities and languages seek to remain relevant, the ability to include skill-based dimensions of their academic programs are often enhanced by the transferable skills students acquire while studying abroad.

Shifts in education are often presented as a "zero-sum game," but I choose to take a more optimistic approach. Broadening the educational experience of all students to include dimensions designed to develop critical thinking skills while simultaneously enhancing career skills for traditional disciplines can only improve the experience for all students, which certainly should be the central goal of the academy.

Higher education needs to be reimagined. The role and function of the academy in society will continue to develop

**DR MARTHA JOHNSON** is the Assistant Dean for Learning Abroad at the University of Minnesota. She has worked in international education since 1991 for organizations and institutions in the US, Ireland, Australia, and the United Kingdom. Her experience includes on-site program management, program development and marketing, management of a large university education abroad office, and teaching of short-term programs. She holds a PhD from the University of East Anglia (UK). She has presented at numerous international conferences and has authored articles and chapters for publications. She has served in leadership positions for NAFSA, the Global Leadership League, and the Forum on Education Abroad, and currently Chairs the Board for the Fund for Education Abroad.

modes and models that integrate the best of disciplinary knowledge with optimal experiential education pedagogies. Successes in learning abroad outcomes and impacts offer a potential roadmap for how higher education can best design educational programs that go beyond the limits of traditional modes of teaching to create high impact learning across the curriculum.

# OLGA KRYLOVA



**OLGA KRYLOVA** is Head of International Office at the HSE University – St. Petersburg, one of the top universities in Russia. In addition to earning her Master's degree in management of international education, she has participated in a number of programs and workshops covering different aspects of international education and has received practical trainings at international organizations, including an internship with UNESCO. Olga has presented at a number of conferences on a variety of topics such as internationalization, and marketing and recruitment among others. Olga is a Steering group member of the EAIE Expert Community Marketing and Recruitment.

**"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."**

## 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 off-line 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 are partnering with businesses to develop 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.

# JOHN HUDZIK



## WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF HIGHER ED?

It is popular among some in the interest of generating headlines to say that globalization is weakening or coming to an end, and that support for higher education internationalization is diminishing. Globalization is not going away, although perhaps morphing and maturing. The need for higher education international engagement to benefit all students, staff and communities will increase, not decrease. Recent survey and anecdotal data do not suggest rapidly declining funding trends for internationalization. Some key trends shape these viewpoints.

**"GLOBAL COMPETITION WILL INCREASE FOR STUDENT AND FACULTY MOBILITY BASED ON COST, CONVENIENCE, QUALITY AND ACCESS TO CUTTING-EDGE OPPORTUNITY"**

### Global Higher Education Capacity

Global higher education spaces in number and quality are growing rapidly; most growth is outside Europe, N. American and the Antipides—Expanding from about 100m seats globally in 2000 to 350m plus by 2030. Massification 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. Internationalization of the curriculum at home will grow in importance to provide access to global learning for all.

### 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 in-

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ter-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, environmental protection and peace and justice—to name a few. The WWWeb 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 societies. 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 challenges 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 lessen 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 to all, not just elites. Higher education internationalization of teach/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*

# CHRIS ZIGURAS

#### 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 hosting 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



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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.

# STUDENT AND ALUMNI STORIES

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.

go up and  
never stop



# THE GIFT OF GIVING BACK

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.

**4+2** 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, hollering 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.



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. They just will not cut the real experience," Giorgia says. "I saw how they lived every day. Of course, I knew that I could not directly solve the problem

as huge as that so I had to think in another way. Creatively, even. I said, "why not with dancing?" They moved to the beat of the song and for a while, I saw that childlike joy again that I had gotten used to."



"Dancing was not just an act. It was our bridge to form a bond with the children. It was built with time and trust. It was not just offering something to someone, but improving their lives too. It was more than helping and that is important," Giulia says.

Relationships take time to grow and **Annalisa** believes in that. "Sharing molds relationships too," she says. "When I volunteered in Madagascar, the children did not care about material things. They just wanted to share the moments with the other children, with you. As you expose yourself to them, you learn what matters the most and you start to focus on them to nurture them and share them back," Annalisa says.

Her shoes kiss the soft cushions of the earth, imprinting her footsteps on the soil. As she nears the residence where she will volunteer, she can hear the squeals of the children from a distance. She looks at the entrance and a couple of nuns have already been standing by the gates, wearing welcoming smiles as they usher Annalisa into the house to meet the orphans.

### 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.

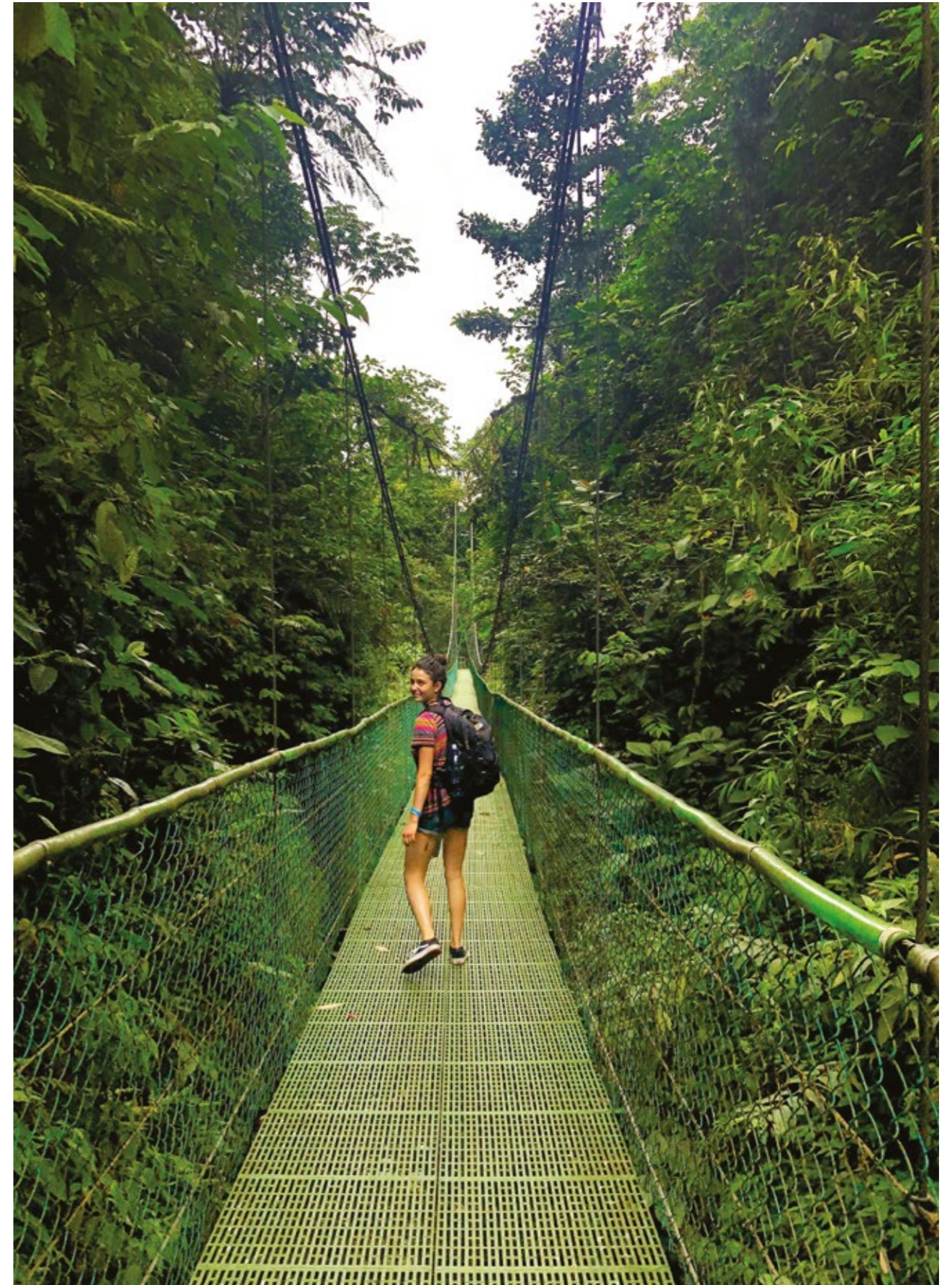
**YOU WILL BE SURPRISED HOW MUCH OTHERS WILL OPEN UP TO YOU.**

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.

"It is a give-and-take, two-way relationship. What you share with them and vice-versa matters. You slowly learn to ap-

preciate 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.

**YOU SLOWLY LEARN TO APPRECIATE WHAT YOU HAVE AND GIVE VALUE TO WHAT YOU EXPERIENCE.**

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.

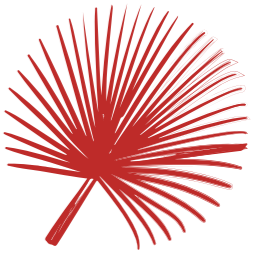


As the volunteers dwell in what they have taken away, they find a renewed spirit in themselves to move forward. They do not want to be contented in their seats as they listen to their professors and take down notes. They want to act in any way they can to elicit joy and gratitude from those they help.

**THEY WANT TO ACT IN ANY WAY THEY CAN TO ELICIT JOY AND GRATITUDE FROM THOSE THEY HELP.**

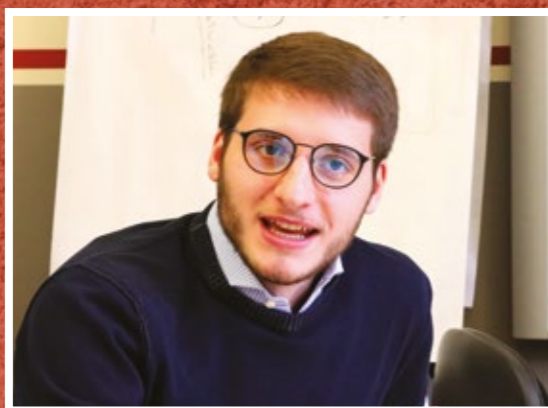
A knock on the door interrupts the daze. The volunteers stand to gather their items on the table, putting them back in their bags. As they walk outside the room, they are oblivious that they have left a piece of themselves for others to pick up, encouraging them to embark on an adventure where they can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

**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.**

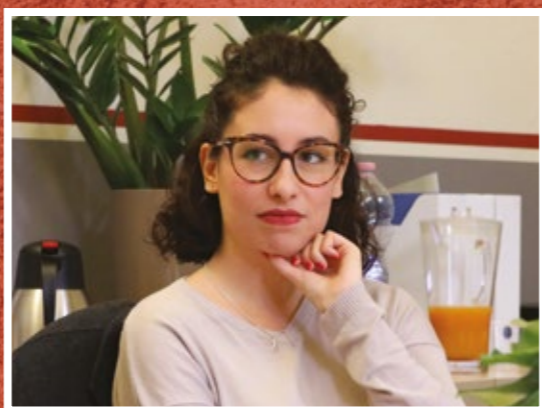




TOMMASO



LUDOVICA



MARTINA



GIORGIA



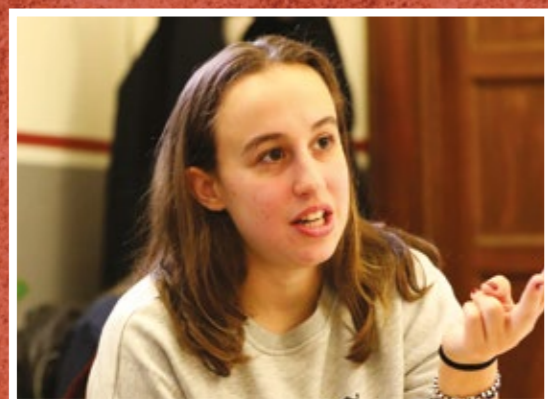
GIULIA



ANNALISA



LUDOVICA



ALICE



### 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 child-care, 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.



# MAPPING THE WAY

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.

# HAVE YOU EVER ASKED YOURSELF WHO AM I?

Accessibility means blind and visually impaired persons can access the same information from a system to gain the same benefits as everyone else. Brandon and his team are working to develop and test assistive technology for blind and visually impaired persons that are enabled by computer vision and other sensor technologies. Though as we learned, there is more to Brandon: a visually impaired designer, full-stack developer, and entrepreneur, whose goal is to create tools to make education as inclusive and user-friendly as possible.

**M**otivated, hard-working and humble. These are the qualities that stood out following our chat with Brandon Biggs – a former Università Cattolica exchange student from California State University, East Bay who spent the 2014/2015 Academic Year in our cloisters, hallways and campuses. Video 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 2014?” 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 who have a vision impairment or blindness. It can be said that Brandon’s current occupation reflects his high consideration for the blind community. He dedicates his time towards creating web-based applications for 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 were nothing 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 assuring his studies were continuing well and available to take care of any issue that rose, above all Cattolica was prepared to welcome a student with low vision/

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.

## His time in Italy was the start of a transition period in his life where he achieved SELF-REALIZATION.

The courses he attended as an exchange student influenced his decision to help his mother launch Sonja Biggs Educational Service in the autumn of 2015. It is a business promoting education for children and youth who are blind and/or deaf-blind, and it does so by providing tools and services to schools such that they can cater to these special needs. This service aims to achieve inclusivity in schools and impact the academic life of many young people. So, it wants 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.” Fulfilling 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 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, book-keeping 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



Brandon Biggs, at the Innovative Designs for Accessibility (IDeA)

-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 to 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 engineering as brought him far already, more precisely as he was working on his master’s thesis “Designing Accessible Nonvisual Maps” he was hired by the Smith-Kettlewell Eye



Brandon Biggs, first to the right

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

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.



# 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.**

**D**r. 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 suctions 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 ensures that the families understand what their young children endure.**

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.

**"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 nestles 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 drying 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."

## **Dr. Mastronuzzi never loses faith that her young patients will put up a fight against cancer and soon recover.**

Dr. Mastronuzzi adjusts her seat, places her elbows on the armchairs, and clasps her fingers as she opens up on how she tells her patients and their families about their conditions. Most of the time, she first speaks to the parents in private. She gives out information about the illness, and the possible complications and cures. She guides the parents on which interventions their children should undergo and the chances that these will help the disease dissipate.

She is confident that the first meeting with the parents is never enough. "It's always too much for them," she says. "They cannot believe that their child has such an illness. They cannot process all the information at once. Their first reaction is 'you can't be talking about my son or daughter.' Often, they only absorb 30% of what I tell them."

She must shed some ray 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."**

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.

If they are in their teenage years, she drops the metaphors and starts to use layman's terms to match her professional tone. She explains the current stage that they are in, what potential steps they are about to embark on to shrink its size and the positivity that everything will work out well. She does not promise anything, but proves to them she does her best to "make sure it will not reappear."

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 Policlinico 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 Greccio, 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 strolled 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 Policlinico 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 practice where she hoists 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 joyous 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.

## Non-profit organization called HEAL that supports neuro-oncological research and its potential development.

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 gripped 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 find 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 antidote 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 doctor-patient relationship. Often, her patients are her family too.

She has a fair share of melancholic and joyful stories, but for every moment she feels the strain of her job, Dr. Mastronuzzi thinks of those who have passed away. She refuels her engine with such thought to serve as a memory that the war never stops. She is still miles away, yet so close to preventing young people from any overbearing sufferings. She has been in the ups-and-downs of the medical life for years now. She may not remember every single incident she has had, but she knows that the passing memory delivers a moral she cannot pass up to take in and ponder on. Dr. Mastronuzzi never backs down without putting up a brave fight. Challenges might impede her steps, but she dis-

misses the bruises and stands up to continue. She reveals that sometimes she needs a breather before bouncing back in the field and the best person to help and support her is Matteo, her husband.

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

"When you speak to him about one problem, he gives you a thousand answers," Dr. Mastronuzzi says. "He opens a lot of possibilities to open my mind and not let it get stuck in 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."

A knock on the door interrupts the reminiscing look of her expression. She stands up and walks outside, already groomed 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.



# EMPOWERING *with new* KNOWLEDGE



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 Corno.

# 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 is unfazed and does not shy away. Instead, she does the opposite and delves deeper into the issues of such traditions.

In her European Research Council Grant-winning research entitled "Harmful Tradition Women Empowerment and Development," she has had two research questions to ponder: why do harmful gender traditions persist despite medical literature outcomes stating their dangers, and whether it is possible to come up with an intervention on such practices. She is backed up by her pool of research-

ers as they collectively come up with policies to change these harmful norms. Her primary focus is on Africa, splitting a part of her time to visit the location first-hand and to test whether the policies they have come up with will work or not.

A methodology coined as Randomized Controlled Trial has fueled Professor Lucia Corno's research. It tests the theory in the field to see the depth of the efficacy of a policy. "I believe that testing the theory to see whether it works or not is the only way we drive the policy implication. This is crucial to Economical Development," she says.

The research question that plays on Professor Lucia Corno's mind is on the persistence of harmful traditions, especially the female genital cutting, which dates back to the history of slavery. She has been in the process of collecting data on the number of slaves across the four slave routes that characterized Africa from the 1400s to the 1900s. She stands up, cutting her sentence halfway, and looks for a whiteboard marker. When she finds it, she pulls the cap and stands beside the printed African map taped on the cabinet, alongside the picture of her two daughters.

She encircles the route and explains how it is a passage to the Atlantic Ocean. In this particular route, the women who are hauled on the boat to America mainly work in cotton plantations. While the women in the west are labor workers, the women who pass the Red Sea to the Middle East are destined to be concubines in the Middle

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 pushes Professor Lucia Corno to test whether the infibulation practice originated or has intensified with the slave trade. She collects data from women who are infibulated 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 back to female genital cutting and its persistence. 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 by 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 falls 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 lay down on the thin cushion, grappled by the elders 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 there is a prevalence number of 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, Rugiātu Turay, whose goal is to eradicate the practice of female genital cutting in Sierra Leone.



**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 (CGR) 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.

Rugiātu 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.

**"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"**

Thanks to the funding of the European Commission, the policy intervention has been launched. The research team together with Professor Lucia Corno and Rugiātu 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

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 renounced 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 evict 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 don't want to do it 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 wants to find out the depth of the impact of climate change on child marriages. In Africa, there is a practice known as "bride price" where the groom's family pays the bride's family a compensation as women in families are considered assets.

The main source of income in some parts of the continent comes from agriculture. During the drought season, residents are gravely affected and face the loss of financial income. To bridge the inevitable drop in income, families sell their daughters for a price. Most of the time, the daughters are handed over even before the age of eighteen. Professor Lucia Corno is also on the hunt to learn the re-

lationship between elections 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 breast ironing 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. Torn 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"**



## ACHIEVEMENTS

# INSIDER NEWS

New partnerships, double degree agreements, project funding, and university rankings are just some of the news making headlines in Cattolica.



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## MARIO DRAGHI

Mario Draghi, former President of the European Central Bank was awarded an honorary degree in Economics on October 11, 2019, by Franco Anelli, the Rector of Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, and Domenico Bodega, the Dean of the Faculty of Economics. In his acceptance speech, he pointed out that knowledge, courage, and humility are the key factors that make the choices and decisions of a good policymaker.

## MEDICINE AND SURGERY

The first group of students from the Medicine and Surgery program taught entirely in English graduated in July 2019. The graduation day was introduced by Luca Richeldi, President of the degree course in Medicine and Surgery, followed by speeches by the Rector Franco Anelli, Rocco Bellantone, Dean of the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery, and Gigliola Sica, former President of the degree course in Medicine and Surgery. The inaugural address was led by Mark Tykocinski, Provost of the Thomas Jefferson University, with which Università Cattolica has recently signed a double degree agreement aimed at the students of the Medicine and Surgery program.



2

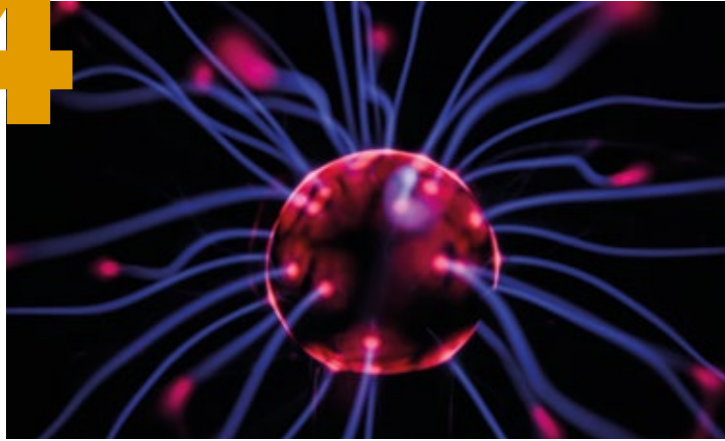
## RANKINGS

QS has recently published its latest edition of the QS Graduate Employability Rankings. Università Cattolica ranks 121-130 in the world and is placed 5<sup>th</sup> in Italy. Università Cattolica also ranks 58<sup>th</sup> in the world and 1<sup>st</sup> in Italy for the Employer-Student Connections indicator.



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## 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 Calulli, Lecturer in Middle East Politics, Leiden University; Prof. Joseph Grieco, Professor of Political Science, Duke University.

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# WORLD BOUND



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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!

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