



**AI and cognitive thinking the way of the future**

Identified as the flag bearers of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, artificial intelligence and cognitive thinking have always been of interest to KPMG Partner Egidio Zarrella, who believes this ever-evolving technology will transform the world in years to come. [more...](#)



**MBA graduate hitting new heights with aviation career**

Poh Kait Lee has enjoyed a long and illustrious career that (literally) skyrocketed after he completed an MBA at the University of South Australia. Taking it as a call to serve his nation, he led Malaysia Airlines through some of their most trying times and is now proving himself as the very successful Director of Asia, Australia and New Zealand for Air Canada. [more...](#)



**The Long Forgotten Dream Opera House Debut**

Ngarrindjeri playwright, UniSA alumnus and former lecturer H Lawrence Sumner explains how his education has informed his writing and the importance of telling diverse stories with his play *The Long Forgotten Dream* coming to the most famous stage in Australia at the end of July. [more...](#)



**New magnetic probe to treat cancer on trial at UniSA**

New technology has been developed at UniSA to help stop the spread in some of the most misunderstood and pervasive cancers in our society. [more...](#)



**Last chance to bid on art from leading SA artists**

Bid on artwork from some of South Australia's most collectible and celebrated artists until August 1 at the Friends of the South Australia School of Art (FSASA) Silent Auction & Art Exhibition. [more...](#)



**Improving the lives of those living with dementia**

Social worker Marie Alford never imagined working in the industry of dementia and Alzheimer's, but she is passionate about supporting the next generation of aged care leaders and creating better lives for those living with the disease. [more...](#)



>> Image gallery: UniSA alumni events

**Alumni events**

- 09 AUG View from the Top – Adelaide**  
Fighting Hunger Through Innovation and Creativity with Greg Pattinson, CEO, Foodbank.
- 29 AUG Alumni Cocktail Reception – Melbourne**  
Join UniSA's Professor David Lloyd, Vice Chancellor & President for an update on the merger discussions with Adelaide University. Hear from Professor Leah Bromfield one of Australia's foremost child protection researchers and Co-Director at the Australian Centre for Child Protection, at All Smiles Melbourne Waterfront.
- 30 AUG Alumni Cocktail Reception – Canberra**  
Join UniSA's Professor David Lloyd, Vice Chancellor & President for an update on the merger discussions with Adelaide University. Hear from Professor Susan Hillier presenting *Advances in stroke rehabilitation through a partnered approach at UniSA*, in Canberra.
- 17 OCT Alumni Cocktail Reception – Perth**  
Join UniSA's Professor David Lloyd, Vice Chancellor & President for an update on the merger discussions with Adelaide University and fellow alumni for a networking event at COMO The Treasury in Perth.

THE HAWKE CENTRE

University of South Australia

ART AFTER DARK

**Thursday 9 August from 5pm**

**Join UniSA's fight against cancer**

[> Find out more...](#)

## AI and cognitive thinking the way of the future

Egidio Zarrella

Clients and Innovation Partner and ASPAC Head of Banking and Capital Markets, KPMG  
**Bachelor of Accounting**

Identified as the flag bearers of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, artificial intelligence (AI) and cognitive thinking have always been of interest to KPMG Partner Egidio Zarrella, who believes this ever-evolving technology will transform the world in years to come.

What some might consider the work of futuristic science fiction is already widely present in today's societies, with AI and cognitive thinking impacting our everyday lives and industries such as healthcare, finance, manufacturing and logistics.



As the company's youngest ever Global Head and current Senior Partner and Head of Banking in China, Egidio is passionate about starting the conversation surrounding AI development and believes it's important to always strive for new knowledge and understanding of our ever-changing world.

### How has your interest in technology shaped your successful career in financial services?

I always had a knack for technology and knew it would play a pivotal part in the future of the industry. After I graduated I went straight to work as an auditor for the firm Arthur Young, which was one of the Big 8 accounting firms of the time, then 18 months later I moved to Sydney to complete my professional year as a chartered accountant. I was really keen on working in technology and computers and became Manager of the Information Systems Audit Group, where I worked for quite a few years.

After Arthur Young became Ernst & Young, they sent me to Canada to continue working in the technology sector of the business, where I was promoted to Senior Manager. After three years, my wife started to miss home, and we decided we wanted our future children to be Aussie kids, so we came back to Australia. I planned to keep working for Ernst & Young in my home town of Adelaide, but KPMG found me when we got back – I ended up joining them and 18 months later I became their youngest partner and ran the consulting business for a few years before returning to Sydney to take on the National Technology Practice for the firm.

At 36, I became KPMG's youngest Global Head and held the position for eight years, during which we built a US\$1.5 billion business with 10,000 people globally, which was incredible. What I loved more than anything during these years were the clients. I'm a very lucky guy, to have had these opportunities to travel around the world and meet so many interesting people. You have to love what you do, and I made it because I love my job and always try to have fun with it.

After my time as Global Head, KPMG's Chairman of China asked me to move to Hong Kong and I've been here in China for 10 years. I'm currently the Senior Partner for the firm's biggest account in Asia, HSBC, one of the biggest banks in the world. I'm very privileged because of my great interest in technology – I have worked in financial services for 31 years but I'm one of the very few partners globally with a convergence of the financial and technological. As Global Head I travelled all around India, China, Malaysia, the Philippines and Singapore – all countries where technology went through the roof as people moved their back-office operations to this side of the world. Thinking about where the world is going to go now in regard to technology, it's going to be amazing; what I'm seeing now is seriously unbelievable.

### Tell us how AI and cognitive thinking are changing the future of business.

In the blink of an eye we're seeing the rise of AI here in China, where we're currently setting up cognitive architects and systems. The first article I ever wrote as a young partner was on AI, and that was 21 years ago. Nobody seemed to believe me then, but AI is going to impact every business – it's already drastically taking over the financial sector and we need to be prepared. Look at our phones, they have AI inside them, but people tend not to think about it because they assume AI doesn't directly affect them. When I first started my career, they had only just introduced punch cards, and now my iPhone has more power than all the PC's at the time put together. People can make the mistake of underestimating China, but here technology is already so intuitive, they're the world leaders in technology. It's always easy to spot foreigners in China because they're the only ones still using cash, whereas 84% of the Chinese population are using WeChat, a social media and mobile payment platform with over one billion monthly users.

Every quarter here in Hong Kong we host an event for 400 of our clients, and I always ask the audience: how can we walk into a world where AI and cognitive is literally learning at a speed no humans can achieve, if we don't understand it? I ask bankers if they know about algorithmic trading, but hardly anyone understands it. Algorithms are now trading most of the world's trade flows – trillions and trillions of dollars go through it, so we're already in a world of AI. I'm not a futurist, but it's already impacting my profession so I'm helping to drive the change. For some reason every time we talk about AI, we always end up talking about the Terminator and Skynet – let's get rid of that for a second. I don't believe the world is going to end up as machine against man. It's not about machines replacing humans, it's about humans and machines working together, and the results will be amazing. We're soon going to live in a world where the technology is so advanced, it will look just like magic.

### Why is it important to create discussions about technological advancement and the future world of AI and cognitive thinking?

I think the danger for many people is they think after they've graduated that they can stop learning. I am a ferocious reader and learner and even I'm barely keeping up with all the new developments in AI. We need to influence students and graduates to learn about it, because if you're in a profession or business then it's going to impact you, whether it is this year, the next or further into the future. The question is when do we start to prepare for this change – when it has already happened? We need to teach graduates not only what they're going to need for today, but the ways of the future. Having robust conversations with each other is exactly what we should be doing, and what is really important, especially for new accounting graduates, is to consider and learn about the technology side of the industry.

We should never stop learning, no matter what, whether we're reading about AI and cognitive or any other topic. If we're not constantly reading, then how can we know about the world? In the last year of my degree I studied philosophy and poetry, just to enrich my learning with something different. To gain empathy for the world and its people, we need to learn about perspectives and opinions different to our own.



[Back to Alumni News](#)

## MBA graduate hitting new heights with aviation career

Poh Kait Lee

Director of Asia and Pacific, Air Canada

Master of Business Administration (MBA), International Business

Poh Kait Lee's career has taken him to great heights, with high-profile positions at Canon, Malaysia Airlines and Air Canada, after a fated night with former classmates over Bah Kut Teh (slow-cooked pork in herby soup) changed the course of his career forever.

PK (as he is known affectionately) explains that two years after he completed his tertiary education he bumped into old friends in his hometown of Klang in Malaysia, famous for its seafood and traditional delicacies, at a restaurant.

"That brief encounter with my ex-classmate was a game-changing moment for me because all of us decided to enrol into this MBA program. It wasn't an easy decision though as the odds were up against me."

"Firstly, I needed to fund the course on my own and at the time we were welcoming the newest addition to our family. Also, my job back then at Canon was very demanding with new roles and responsibility added onto my plate almost every month.

"However, after I had the opportunity to better understand the program, which was designed to suit executives like me, I was convinced.

"Most importantly though, I have a very understanding spouse that encourages me all the time. Hooi Leng Ng is not only my trusted wife, but a best friend, an advisor, and a great mother to our three children, so I soon learned how to cope with work and study-life stress and how to balance family life at the same time."



Poh Kait Lee with his family

Rapidly, he began climbing the corporate ladder at camera and electronic manufacturer, Canon, where he established himself as a valuable asset to the company with the knowledge and experience he had gained at UniSA.

A call from a head-hunter then pulled him out of the comfort zone that he had established in his 16-year tenure at Canon and into the aviation industry. Equipped with his experiential learning from UniSA, PK entered the aviation industry and lead Malaysia Airlines through one of its most difficult periods.

"I had a very promising future and career in Canon. Being a highly reputable company, Canon was a very profitable electronic giant and rewarded their employees well. But when I was told Malaysia Airlines were looking for leaders to turn the company around, to me it was a calling to serve the nation.

"In 2005, Malaysia Airlines was at the verge of bankruptcy and needed a transformational leader to drive structural changes in the airline. With my operations expertise, armed with an Australian education, I was extremely confident in adding value to this national icon of Malaysia.

"I'm a person who likes challenges and is inspired by self-actualisation, and I saw this as a great opportunity to test and to prove myself by accepting this risky decision to join Malaysia Airlines."

After PK took the risk, he quickly made his way up the ranks becoming the Area Manager for Hong Kong, Macau and Shenzhen, displaying a natural talent for market analysis, revenue and management development and strategic partnership engagement.

Just three years later, he was promoted to Regional Senior Vice President (North Asia and North America) where he was responsible for overseeing operations across seven offices and dynamically led a team in achieving new heights.

PK was then appointed the Regional Senior Vice President (Australia, New Zealand and Southwest Pacific) position in 2013 overseeing one of the largest region and crucial markets for the company.

"Starting my aviation career with Malaysia Airlines without any airline experience was both challenging and crazy. But again, my education on Strategic Project Management at UniSA was put in effective use. At the same time though, I needed to unlearn all my technical skills and relearn another new set of airline skills.

"After turning around the North Asia and North America region in six months, I was posted to Sydney to lead the Oceania region. Australian flights were under attack from AirAsia X flying into Australia.

"Malaysia Airlines in Australia was on the right path until two major incidences put our focus on supporting the victims and their families as our top priority."

In 2014 tragedy struck when two Malaysia Airline planes, MH7 and MH370, were involved in disastrous plane crashes.

PK played a key role in guiding the company through this period of turmoil and rebuilding confidence in the brand and Malaysia Airline's perception.

"During the MH370 and MH7 incidents, I provided the much-needed leadership in crisis during the most difficult times for Malaysia Airlines," he says.

"I also acted as the airline's Emergency Operation Centre's Chairman when the MH370 search was headquartered in Perth, working very closely with Embassies and Commissions, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australian Federal Police and local governments in designing very delicate family reception plans in Perth.

"It was also imperative to provide local emotional support not just to the families, but also to employees tasked with family assistance roles."

As a result of PK's strong leadership and tenacity, he was promoted to Regional Head of Sales for Oceania and Southeast Asia, spearheading its needed corporate restructuring and leading all commercial activities in these markets.

These days, he heads Air Canada as Director of Asia and Pacific, where he hopes to contribute to the long-term profitability of the company, making Air Canada and Canada the preferred carrier and destination for both work and leisure.

After so many high pressure roles with a range of great expectations on his shoulders, how does PK relax and recharge?

"I enjoy listening to my favourite music when I'm resting or travelling. An ability to maintain a positive mind when faced with challenges keeps me moving forward. You need to surround yourself with like-minded friends," he says.

"I also love driving long distances while enjoying the beautiful sceneries along the journey. Such a holiday is a good opportunity for me to engage with my family and at the same time enjoy the drive!"

PK also acknowledges that having a strong family base and support is key in his many successes.

"I travel extensively but I try to maintain a happy family. I have Hooi Leng to thank for her sacrifices and support allowing me to have my undivided commitment on my career. We communicate and consults each other all the time to set expectation and fulfilling them.

"I will be lying if I told you I have a work and family balance. In my role I'm always away from home, but when we are together we create and add value to our relationship."

"When asked for his best advice for recent graduates and those hoping to reach similar career heights in business, PK explained that remaining open-minded and teachable are key.

"Be humble and learn from others, even from your junior colleagues. Asking questions is the quickest way to learn, but it has to be done with courtesy, especially if someone is older. Work as a team. You are as good as what the team can deliver.

"AQ (adaptability quotient) will ensure you consistently deliver and perform. Be sensitive to cultural and language differences. Expose yourselves to diversity; try understanding the rationale behind certain practices or beliefs.

"Identify your purpose in life. Once you anchor that it will be your main source of sustainable leadership energy. Frankly, without this leadership energy I would have given up long ago."



[Back to Alumni News](#)

## The Long Forgotten Dream Opera House Debut

Howard Lawrence Sumner

**Bachelor of Education (Junior Primary and Primary)**



Hitting the fabled Sydney Opera House at the end of July is *The Long Forgotten Dream*, the first major play from Ngarrindjeri playwright and University of South Australia graduate, H Lawrence Sumner, with the Sydney Theatre Company.

In his own words, *The Long Forgotten Dream* – directed by Neil Armfield and starring Jada Alberts and Wayne Blair – tells the story of a PhD student returning home to her ancestral land having found the remains of her great, great grandfather in a museum in England.

She wants her father to conduct a ceremony welcoming the bones back to country, but he is reluctant, having spent years ignoring his community and building a wall between himself and everyone outside his home. An emotional and unique story inspired by real life then ensues.

Speaking about his play making it to the Sydney Opera House, Sumner is remarkably measured, acknowledging the work that has gone into creating the play and is still being done in the current workshopping stage, but does recognise what the achievement symbolises for his writing.

“The Opera House stage has a well-earned reputation for excellence. It’s our Carnegie Hall, I suppose. So, making it there is great. It says something about the quality of work, but that was the Sydney Theatre Company’s call, not mine,” he says.

After completing his Bachelor of Education (Junior Primary and Primary) in 2001, Sumner taught for quite a few years and then came back as a lecturer to UniSA in the Unaipon School as Course Coordinator and lecturer for the Aborigines, History and Colonialism course.

However, having semi-retired from education and turned full-time writer, he has certainly “upped the ante” in the last few years presenting his first major play with the Sydney Theatre Company.

Despite having written and directed a number of theatre works since the early nineties, Sumner believes his time at UniSA hugely informed his career as a successful playwright, which has resulted in his work now being showcased on the most famous stage in Australia.

“UniSA helped me strengthen my argument muscle. Writing essay after essay on Piaget, Bourdieu, and every other innovation in education helped me find my particular voice and a way to frame an argument,” he says.

“That’s all playwriting is – framing an argument in another format. There is no secret to it.”

While at university, Sumner also received a scholarship and says he was grateful for the support and encouragement during his time at UniSA.

“The Irene and David Davy scholarship helped tremendously with the purchase of text books and course necessities such as a decent pack to carry my teaching gear in.”

It feels fitting in a month that honours NAIDOC Week and celebrates the history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal people that *The Long Forgotten Dream* is premiering at the Sydney Opera House.

Speaking to the Sydney Theatre Company Magazine, Sumner discusses the importance of making sure diverse stories come from diverse voices and how the Sydney Theatre Company has championed *The Long Forgotten Dream*.

“It’s one thing to write about Aboriginal people, but it’s a totally different thing to include pieces by Aboriginal writers. With Kip Williams (Artistic Director) and the rest of Sydney Theatre Company there is a clear distinction between ‘speaking of’ and ‘speaking as;” he says.

Now at 53, H Lawrence Sumner is showing no signs of slowing down. He has big plans for the next few years including a number of new plays and even plans for a National Aboriginal Theatre.

“I have six more plays I’m working on. Another play was a finalist in the Griffin Theatre Lysicrates Prize this year and the other four are being written, tightened, honed and shaped under lock and key in my writing room at Goolwa. So I’ll have seven plays by the time I’m 58.

“Within the next two years, myself and a few industry colleagues will begin the structural framework for a National Aboriginal Theatre, and I’m visiting Scotland in September to investigate the organisational framework of their own National Theatre.”

When asked why it is important as an Ngarrindjeri writer to tell stories of his history and family, he explains that to him it’s not about an innate need to tell stories, but more a sense of defiance.

“I could fall back on the age-old trope that we are a storytelling people. But I don’t think we are. I think Aboriginal people are a people group who live a very tough and very complicated narrative that is often mistaken as story,” he says.

“Our historic narrative is one of a peaceful and orderly existence that was thrown into chaos by the introduction of people who had no concern for that narrative. The ensuing violence, decimation and struggle only served to confirm that we needed to fight to maintain our own narrative in the face of destruction.

“That’s a writerly way of saying ‘we’re still here, you can’t kill our stories.”

*Previews for The Long Forgotten Dream at The Sydney Opera House start 23 July 2018, with the official season showing 28 July 2018 to 25 August 2018. For more information and tickets please visit the Sydney Theatre Company website [here](#).*



[Back to Alumni News](#)

## New magnetic probe to treat cancer on trial at UniSA

Dr Aidan Cousins

Doctorate by Research Engineering (Minerals and Materials)

Professor Shudong Wang

Professor of Medicinal Chemistry **School of Pharmacy and Medical Sciences**

At the forefront of UniSA's cancer research movement are our researchers dedicated to tackling one of our society's most challenging and pervasive diseases – cancer – creating a groundswell of expertise unsurpassed in the State.

For Dr Aidan Cousins, talent and hard work were rewarded last year as he was the recipient of UniSA's prestigious Norton Jackson Material Science and Engineering Medal for the translation of world-leading cancer research into industry.

This encouragement has led to him spearhead the development of a tool to help cancer doctors pinpoint the accuracy of surgery to remove cancers that have spread into other areas of the body, leading the project alongside Professor Benjamin Thierry from UniSA's Future Industries Institute.



This revolutionary new device called the Ferronova Probe will solve a clinical problem in the successful treatment of cancers using magnetic tracers.

"Current procedures to find cancers that have spread through the lymphatic system into lymph nodes include injecting radioactive tracers into the tumour area that can be used to find the migration paths of cancer cells," says Dr Aidan Cousins.

"There are problems with this approach due to the limitations of current technologies and the complexity of how lymph nodes are used by different cancers to spread.

"Through our research at UniSA, we developed a revolutionary new clinical tool that will improve the accuracy of surgery for the removal of metastatic solid cancers."

For example, some cancers, like in the oesophagus or oral cavity, may not spread very far from the tumour, and can be lost amongst the background 'noise' of radioactivity in the injection site.

"Our magnetic tracers allow surgeons to locate where cancers have spread within millimetre accuracy, both improving the result of surgery and reducing the need for further operations.

"The magnetic tracers we use are also cheaper and have longer shelf-life than radioactive ones. This means that more smaller and regional hospitals could use the technology to save patients travelling to larger cities for treatment."

This device will begin clinical trials for head and neck cancers in late 2018. It holds the potential to transform clinical procedure by creating a much more targeted approach to tracking cancer spread.

Every day our experts are getting one-step closer to saving more lives as well as improving the quality of life for cancer survivors. But they need your help.

To join fight cancer, please go to [www.unisa.edu.au/jointhefight](http://www.unisa.edu.au/jointhefight).

### Professor Shudong Wang recognised in Australia's top 20 health and medical researchers

Professor Shudong Wang, one of UniSA's leading cancer researchers, was recently honoured the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) Research Excellence Award.

Each year the NHMRC funds a series of highly competitive research funding schemes. The 20 individuals or research teams who are ranked at the very top of each grant category are recognised in the annual Awards.

Professor Wang was awarded the prize for her work to develop targeted cancer therapies that block a series of key cancer causing proteins.

"Our approach to creating better cancer therapies is to find and then target the specific genes or proteins that drive cancer cell development and growth," says Professor Wang, Head of the Centre for Drug Discovery and Development.

"By targeting these specific genes or proteins, our drug molecules are more effective against cancer cells but less toxic to normal tissue. So, our therapies are very different to the conventional chemotherapies that kill both cancer and healthy cells."

Professor Wang and her team have been focusing their efforts on a family of enzymes called cyclin-dependent kinases (CDKs) that are involved in helping cancer cells survive and grow.

"We have developed several drug molecules including a first-in-class highly potent and selective CDK4 inhibitor drug named CDDD2-94 that can effectively block the cancer from continuing to grow and kill it with minimal toxicity to healthy cells," she says.

"We have demonstrated its ability as potential improved treatment for acute myeloid leukaemia—which is particularly important for the high number of child cancer patients suffering from this form of the disease."

Professor Wang's team have also had success in developing CDDD2-94 for treating breast and ovarian cancers.

"Ovarian cancer is such a difficult cancer to treat successfully as it is often highly aggressive and identified only in its later stages."

"CDK4 plays a fundamental role in how ovarian cancer cells proliferate. High levels of this protein are observed in the most aggressive ovarian cancers with the poorest patient outcomes." Professor Wang says. "The novel drug we are developing offers new hope for patients living with this disease."

"The population is ageing, Australians are living longer and the incidence and burden of cancer is rapidly increasing. Research focusing on new and more effective therapies is critical."

Drug discovery is expensive and securing ongoing research funding is necessary to accelerate the development to make drug available to cancer sufferers.

To support Professor Wang's research and help fight cancer, please go to [www.unisa.edu.au/jointhefight](http://www.unisa.edu.au/jointhefight).



Professor Shudong Wang pictured with Federal Health Minister Greg Hunt at the NHMRC Research Excellence Awards on 27 June.



[Back to Alumni News](#)

## Last chance to bid on art from leading SA artists



Laura Wills *Clense*

This is your last chance to own artwork from some of South Australia's most celebrated artists and their highly collectable catalogues with the Friends of the South Australian School of Art (FSASA) Silent Auction and Art Exhibition at the SASA Gallery.

The auction is currently being conducted on the online platform Galabid, where anyone can make a bid at [app.galabid.com/fsasa18](http://app.galabid.com/fsasa18) or by texting fsasa18 followed by your first and last name to (+61) 447 447 549 until August 1.

More than thirty leading South Australian artists have generously donated their artwork to support continuing prestigious art scholarships at UniSA, including the Sydney Ball FSASA Inc. International Travel Grant and the FSASA Inc. Prize for undergraduate students, to maintain the oldest art school in Australia's legacy and encourage the next generation of great artists.

The auction and exhibition includes many prominent South Australians that have had a special relationship with UniSA and the South Australian School of Art over the years.

Legendary abstract painter Sydney Ball, glass artist Gabriella Bisetto, photographer Mark Kimber, potter Jeff Mincham, printmaker Olga Sankey, sculptor Greg Johns, and painter and recent graduate Laura Wills – who won this year's coveted Fleurieu Biennale Art Prize – have all donated pieces to boost scholarship funding.

Tom Moore, a current UniSA PhD student, received scholarships both this year and in 2017 to research glassmaking techniques in Italy and has donated his Carrot Angel mobile glass sculpture, a piece from his 2016 Adelaide Biennial installation.

Having directly benefitted from the scholarships and seeing firsthand how much of an impact they have on an artist's career and output, he tells the Advertiser what supporting the auction meant to him.

"I found it really valuable and wanted to support the scholarships so that other people could also benefit," he says.

All the artwork from the auction can be viewed at the SASA Gallery exhibition on weekdays until 7.30pm August 1, where the total amount of money raised will be announced at special evening event.

To view or bid for works, please visit [app.galabid.com/fsasa18](http://app.galabid.com/fsasa18). Contact Robyn Zerna-Russell on 0400 841 362 or [friendsofsasa18@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofsasa18@gmail.com) for enquiries about the silent auction and art exhibition, and final night event.



[Back to Alumni News](#)

[Postgraduate Study](#) | [Research Degrees](#) | [Alumni Giving](#) | [Career Services](#) | [Events](#) | [Contact Us](#)

© 2018 University of South Australia | CRICOS Provider Number: 00121B | [View our privacy statement](#)

DISCLAIMER OF LIABILITY: While every effort is made by the University to ensure that accurate information is disseminated through this medium the University of South Australia makes no representation about the content and suitability of this information for any purpose. It is provided 'as is' without express or implied warranty.

## Improving the lives of those living with dementia

**Marie Alford**

**Head of Implementation, Dementia Centre HammondCare**

**Bachelor of Social Work (Honours)**

Dementia does not discriminate – it currently affects more than 400,000 people in Australia of all different backgrounds and ages, and has a huge impact on the physical, mental and emotional health of not only the patient but also on their carers and loved ones.

According to Dementia Australia, it is estimated that nearly one million Australians will live with dementia by the year 2050, and with the country's ageing population and no known cure, social worker Marie Alford is working to inspire the next generation of leaders in dementia and aged care.

"My grandmother, who was my last living family member, lived with dementia. There was never a formal diagnosis, but I watched her transition from independent to fiercely independent as a way to protect herself from what she knew was coming," says Marie.



"If you had told me I would end up working in dementia and aged care, I wouldn't have thought it possible – but I discovered that I could use all my skills in counselling, mediation, advocacy and research to create a better quality of life for people living with dementia and their carers.

Marie was the General Manager of Alzheimer's Australia South Australia (AASA) for 10 years before moving to Sydney in 2013 to work for HammondCare in the Dementia Centre alongside Associate Professor Colm Cunningham, an inspirational leader in the industry.

"I had watched the work of the Dementia Centre from afar and visited HammondCare facilities to learn more about their simple model of domestic, homelike cottages for aged care and wanted to be part of this journey and the challenge to make dementia a national health priority.

The Dementia Centre is an international program with offices across Australia and the UK, and Marie's current role as Head of Implementation supports the strategic stakeholder and political engagement with the organisation's funders, partners and collaborators.

"I have the best job in the world – I get to work with fantastic teams who translate learning from our clients into new opportunities for funding, research and policy. Every day is different, and I love meeting with people living with dementia and hearing their stories that inform our work and practice.

"It's the little things that make the biggest difference, and I get so much joy from the people I meet. To hear and see the outcomes they achieve is amazing, to know the work we do really makes a difference.

"Meeting people diagnosed in their 30s, 40s and 50s really challenged me and my skills, but it also taught me so much. People living with dementia are not defined by their disease, and living well with dementia – which was unheard of even 15 years ago – has grown so much as a movement."

From 2009 to 2013, Marie was the Director of the South Australian and Northern Territory Dementia Training Study Centre, which works to influence undergraduate and postgraduate curriculum to ensure there was a focus on dementia and aged care and provide increased training and knowledge transition to students.

"This was an exciting role for me and we had a lot of great partners including UniSA to achieve our goals. We rolled out training in SA to medical and nursing students which provided foundational learning about dementia; some of this training is still in place today."

While Marie believes there has been real progress in terms of education, training, support and improvement for the lives of people living with dementia, she says it is vital we continue to push for more change, from spreading awareness to building the next generation of leaders in aged care.

"Australia is lucky to have a government who supports funding for dementia; we lead the way in innovative programs and research, such as Dementia Support Australia which offers a world first national behaviour support program.

"We tend to only hear about the bad stories of care, but there is so much good happening and we should hear those stories too. Together we are all accountable for being part of that change.

"We need younger people coming into the field – I see myself as a supporter to their career pathways. Social work is a foundation upon which you can go in any direction, so young graduates need to consider roles that aren't as traditional as well as the ones core to our discipline.

"Aged care and dementia is an industry that will only continue to grow, but more than that it is an area in which you can use all of your skills to build and develop change and make a real difference."



[Back to Alumni News](#)

[Postgraduate Study](#) | [Research Degrees](#) | [Alumni Giving](#) | [Career Services](#) | [Events](#) | [Contact Us](#)

© 2018 University of South Australia | [CRICOS Provider Number: 00121B](#) | [View our privacy statement](#)

DISCLAIMER OF LIABILITY: While every effort is made by the University to ensure that accurate information is disseminated through this medium the University of South Australia makes no representation about the content and suitability of this information for any purpose. It is provided 'as is' without express or implied warranty.