

Campaign stories

Whether it's helping a child with autism access mainstream education, fighting cancer in Africa or improving students' career prospects through funding internships, giving to the University can really change lives. Read our case studies below to find out more. Inspired to give? It's easy to do so [online](https://bhamalumni.org/NetCommunity/SSLPage.aspx?pid=210&frcrid=1) (<https://bhamalumni.org/NetCommunity/SSLPage.aspx?pid=210&frcrid=1>).

Edmund's story: Autism research

[Open all sections](#)



Edmund was nine years old when he was finally diagnosed with autism and able to access the specialist intervention he needed and by this time he had already been labelled as a 'naughty boy' in his class. His parents firmly believe earlier diagnosis together with better awareness and normalisation of autism in society would have had a significant impact on their lives.

'From an early age, teachers and other parents labelled Edmund as a very naughty boy, meaning he was ostracised by everyone; he had no friends and wasn't invited to birthday parties or after school play dates,' says Marianne Seary (MSc Computer Science, 1998), Edmund's mum. 'We felt instinctively that there was something more going on, but we found that doctors were reluctant to look at a child so young.'

'He continued in the local village school but there came a point when we had had enough and so we enrolled him in a private school with much smaller class sizes and demanded he see a specialist. One and a half years later, he was finally diagnosed with autism and he now works with an occupational therapist and a speech and language therapist to help improve his social interaction which has made a huge difference.'

'I am passionate about the University's research into the early diagnosis of autism and specialist educational interventions as it could have made a huge difference to my son and our family. Autism isn't visible and therefore it is often overlooked and dismissed as simply bad behaviour. Every child deserves friends and a chance to succeed in life and every family deserves to lead a normal life – to go on holiday, to eat out at restaurants – something which isn't currently possible because of society's attitude towards autism. But this is something the University's researchers are working hard to change.'

The University's groundbreaking training programme is giving teachers and carers the necessary knowledge to help all children in the classroom be the best they can be. [Find out more here \(/alumni/giving/Autism.aspx\)](#).

ACER's story: Autism research

At least one in 100 people globally are on the autism spectrum. The University of Birmingham is at the forefront of understanding the educational needs of these children and adults. This includes the development of teaching programmes and materials to address the knowledge gap and to better equip educators to give every child the best possible start in life to realise their potential.

The University's **Autism Centre for Education and Research (ACER)** (<http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/activity/education/acer/index.aspx>) is pioneering the way to provide appropriate advice and support for those working with individuals with autism of all ages and abilities. The ACER team combines teaching, practitioner and parental experience to make a real difference to the education and care of children and young people with autism.

Dr Karen Guldborg (</staff/profiles/education/guldborg-karen.aspx>) (MEd Education, 2000; PGCert, 2003; PhD Education, 2008) Senior Lecturer in Autism, School of Education and Director of ACER says: 'Autism is not uncommon any more. There are a lot of people out there in need of specialist intervention through education which is proven to make a real difference. What we do is encourage educators to look for the strengths in every child and to focus on autism as a difference rather than as a disability,' she says.

'I began my career as an early years teacher and had a boy with autism in my class. I found that my teacher training and instincts did not equip me to teach him and I needed more support. In ACER, we work collaboratively to develop strategies and intervention techniques for educators to transform their ability to teach children with autism. We have found that good practice in autism education is good practice for all children. The views and perspectives of individuals, family members and carers are also key areas emphasised in our work.'

ACER's ideas and work have been implemented nationwide to better equip teaching staff in the classroom and their groundbreaking e-learning programme aims to help staff feel comfortable and confident engaging with all children in their classrooms. ACER has also developed three sets of training materials for education staff commissioned by the Autism Education Trust funded by the Department for Education and a set of National Standards for Schools and a Competency Framework to audit staff knowledge and understanding in autism (see www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk (<http://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/>) for details of these).

The ACER team is pioneering technology-enhanced learning and recently made headlines for taking robots into classrooms to break down social interaction barriers. They are studying an international model of educational intervention in local schools and are calling for more support for autism on both a national and international scale.

Karen says: 'We have a responsibility to do something world-leading. International practitioners are thirsty for knowledge and want to better understand autism. They need input and ideas on how to best educate these children and young people. Everybody has something to give to society, and our teaching methods encourage individuals to feel valued by focusing on their strengths. Yet there are still some children who are denied access to effective education. We firmly believe in making a difference to children's lives as well as to their families and schools.'

Stephen's story: Fundraising for us



International Recruitment Administrator, Stephen Chand first began fundraising for charity following the Japanese earthquake in 2011, which affected his family a great deal and he wanted to help. A number of successful bake sales within the University's International Relations and Student Recruitment teams allowed Stephen to provide his support.

Following this success, he decided to fundraise for the **Circles of influence** (</alumni/giving/index.aspx>) campaign and has raised more than £1,000 for the University's life-changing research into Burkitt's lymphoma, cancer and autism from the External Relations Coffee Morning Bake Sales.

'We have three External Relations meet ups a year where staff from across all sections can come and meet each other and ask questions to the senior team. We had the idea that this would be the perfect opportunity to showcase some of the research that we do and at the same time raise some money,' Stephen explains.

'We have a number of budding Mary Berry's and so the standard of baking is always very high and we always invite a guest speaker from the research team we are fundraising for to come in and talk a little about their work. This gives everyone an idea of what their money is going towards and we are delighted to be able to fundraise for such worth causes, whether it be contributing for new equipment in cancer research or paying for expensive tests to diagnose autism in children.'

'We now have a tight knit group of bakers who contribute regularly but I am always amazed by how many colleagues want to help and contribute. The work that the University is doing is exciting and extremely important, helping to save lives. By raising money for research at the University, you can see quite clearly where the money is going and what you are contributing to.'

Rich's story: Prostate cancer



Prostate cancer affects one in nine men in the UK, making it the most common cancer among the country's men, with 40,000 new cases diagnosed annually. The University is at the forefront of developing pioneering treatments to improve quality of life and finding novel ways to treat the disease.

Dr Richard Viney, Senior lecturer in Urology, School of Cancer Sciences and consultant at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, is leading a groundbreaking clinical trial which will combine two existing therapies in a unique way.

'Unfortunately prostate cancer is a very common disease but it is hoped that this new trial will develop a novel way of managing the cancer to improve the lives of thousands of men across the country,' he says.

'We will do this by using an innovative combination of High-Intensity Focused Ultrasound (HIFU) treatment which heats and cools the prostate to destroy the tumour, coupled with a powerful vaccine to protect patients from the disease in a minimally invasive procedure.'

The treatment is expected to improve life expectancy of advanced sufferers who have exhausted all other options and if successful, will act as an alternative treatment to chemotherapy and radiation for newly diagnosed patients.

'The excellent partnership between the University and the Queen Elizabeth Hospital makes it possible for us to initiate this trial and we are confident it will improve the lives of our patients. Whilst the hot and cold treatment exists and the vaccine is a popular form of treatment in America, they have never been used together or in such a cost-efficient manner as our trial proposes.

'Prostate cancer has been my passion for more than ten years. It is a disease that I believe we can really make headway with and change the outcome for many sufferers. It affects really great people and you get to know your patients well throughout their treatment; it's great to be able to share in their lives and hear about the weddings of their children or the births of their grandchildren. To be able to develop new treatments that extend the lives of my patients is something I am committed to. Thanks to such advances, they will live with prostate cancer instead of die because of it,' he adds.

Emma's story: International internships



Emma West, a 3rd year law student, completed an international placement in Cape Town, South Africa, with the help of the University's International Work Experience scheme. Emma went out to Cape Town in summer 2011, initially working in a human rights office and later with young juveniles and petty criminals.

'My internship has had a profound effect on my studying as well as my future career plans. The financial award of £800 allowed me to afford to go on this fantastic placement,' she says.

'As a result of my trip I have now decided that I don't want to be a solicitor or barrister any more and once I have finished my undergraduate degree, I'm going to do an MA in social work with the view to working with young offenders. I'd like to thank everyone who supported the scheme for allowing me to gain the insight and opportunity into experiencing what I now want to do with the rest of my life.'

Jo's story: The new University Library



'Working in the library free of distraction makes an enormous difference to me. In this high-tech age, I think it's really important for a library to have digital publications, enough plug points for laptops and the latest equipment for updating the catalogue and checking

out books. More space for group work is another important feature as students now complete joint projects regularly to enhance our employability skills. Under the new fees regime students will want the best.

'The plans show an amazing facility and I hope the new building will provide a light, beautiful space which will inspire people to work.'the best.'

Ikhoza's story: Burkitt's Lymphoma research



Ikhoza Kuchizidwa has Burkitt's Lymphoma, an aggressive cancer which accounts for half of all childhood cancers in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Researchers at Birmingham are developing a new combination of drugs to fight this killer illness. Our first trials have had very exciting preliminary results. In every one of the 20 children tested, the disease growth was halted within a week and in 65% of cases the cancer had begun to regress.

If 10 people gave just £50 each, a child like Ikhoza Kuchizidwa could take part in this life-saving research. Please **support us** ([https://bhamalumni.org/NetCommunity/page.redir?](https://bhamalumni.org/NetCommunity/page.redir?target=http%3a%2f%2fbhamalumni.org%2fNetCommunity%2fSSLPage.aspx%3fpid%3d210%26frcrid%3d1&srcid=27324&srctid=1&erid=5023928)

[target=http%3a%2f%2fbhamalumni.org%2fNetCommunity%2fSSLPage.aspx%3fpid%3d210%26frcrid%3d1&srcid=27324&srctid=1&erid=5023928](https://bhamalumni.org/NetCommunity/page.redir?target=http%3a%2f%2fbhamalumni.org%2fNetCommunity%2fSSLPage.aspx%3fpid%3d210%26frcrid%3d1&srcid=27324&srctid=1&erid=5023928)).

Kostas' story: Birmingham Fellowships



Birmingham Fellow Kostas Nikolopoulos convenes a major analysis in the ATLAS experiment at the CERN laboratory in Geneva. He is searching for the Higgs boson, the only particle in the standard model of particle physics that has not been discovered yet, using proton-proton collision data recorded by the ATLAS detector at the CERN Large Hadron Collider.

'The Birmingham Fellowship Scheme is an excellent opportunity for researchers at a relatively early stage in their career to



receive the support they need to continue performing cutting-edge research and establish themselves among their peers as recognised leaders in their fields, while developing their teaching capacities in a staged and smooth manner,' he says.

'The University's firm commitment to invest in the development of future academics builds confidence for a long and fruitful relationship.'

Laura's story: Fighting infection



Described as one of the three greatest threats to human health by the World Health Organisation, antibiotic resistance is just one aspect of the University's fighting infection research.

Professor Laura Piddock, president of the British Society for Antimicrobial Chemotherapy, leads the Antibiotic Action initiative and has been lobbying the British Government and opposition party politicians to find solutions to the lack of discovery, research and development of new drugs.

'An estimated 25,000 people die each year in the European Union from antibiotic-resistant bacterial infections and many infections are due to multidrug resistant (MDR) Gram negative bacteria,' she says.

'Bacteria are able to share DNA and because of the frequent use of some antibiotics, resistance genes on the DNA spread very quickly. This means increasing numbers of bacteria such as E. coli are becoming MDR. These infect not just patients with serious medical conditions but ordinary people in the community.

'For example, a woman who develops an MDR bacterial urinary tract infection could develop a "bacteraemia" [the presence of bacteria in the blood], a life-threatening infection, for which there are limited choices for treatment.

'There have never been many drugs available to treat Gram negative bacteria and the reason for that is they have very good export mechanisms – as soon as a drug gets in it is pumped out. In my lab we're trying to understand how we can turn that system off or inhibit it as a basis for new drug development.

'The prudent use of antibiotics, called antibiotic stewardship, is another issue. Only now, in the 21st century do we understand the fundamental biology of antibiotic resistance and start to put treatment strategies in place to minimise the risk. Furthermore, while we're waiting for new drugs to be developed, doctors and scientists are re-investigating older drugs and whether they can be used more strategically.'

Andy's story: PhD students



PhD student Andy Chisholm was part of the team at the centre of what is believed to be the first clear observation of a new particle at the Large Hadron Collider. The discovery moves us a step closer to understanding how the universe is held together.

'Being part of the research at CERN is one of the most exciting research opportunities in modern physics. It is not all that common that the research you contribute to will almost certainly re-write the textbooks for the next generation of physics students,' he says.

Robin's Story: Autism research



Becky Heptinstall brought her son, Robin, to the University when he was three to help get him diagnosed as autistic so the family could access appropriate support. Our team also provided 10 weeks of early intervention which greatly improved his ability to be socially interactive.

'When Robin first came to the University his play was very limited, literally opening and closing doors, banging the wall, putting things in one place and switching things on and off. He had no understanding of imaginative play and didn't really respond to body language or gestures.

'After the study the change in him was just amazing. The researchers help him engage with activities with another person and he began copying actions, gestures and even some words and phrases.

'Our family lives in an autistic world but Robin's path in life is very different to my older son's. He was going to a mainstream school and I really wanted him to be able to interact with other children in a way they wouldn't find too strange. He is now functioning in that setting with some level of confidence and the University helped give him the skills he would need to be able to survive.'