

## Media Release

### Chiefs of Staff, News Directors

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## Dementia-care MOOC set to transform more lives

The world's first Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) on dementia is changing lives, literally.

Since its launch in July last year, more than 24,000 students from 96 countries have participated in the course. Since enrolments opened for this year's offering just days ago more than 19,000 people have signed on.

The reach and impact of the program is illustrated through the remarkable story of participants including Namibian care worker Berrie Holzhausen, who undertook the course half a world away from the Wicking Dementia Centre at the University of Tasmania.

With the help of his iPhone, Berrie used the Understanding Dementia MOOC to educate the tribal communities of Namibia about dementia and the changes which occur in the brain.

He has helped people including Ndjinaa (pronounced 'Gee Naa'), an elder with dementia living in a small Namibian community, who was chained to a hut and crying for food and water.

"Before I had the privilege to understand dementia and the person living with dementia, I believe that I and 99 per cent of Namibians make people living with dementia feel that they have no identity, that they don't belong to the human race anymore," Berrie said.

Dementia stigmatism is a real problem in Namibia, as tribal communities believe that those with the condition are 'bewitched'.

"Ndjinaa was an outcast until her tribal community were educated that dementia is a condition of ageing, and were taught how to provide appropriate care for her," Berrie said.

The MOOC was developed by the Wicking Dementia Research and Education Centre, based in the University's Faculty of Health.

University Vice-Chancellor Professor Peter Rathjen said this foray into world of digital teaching and learning showed the institution was globally impactful.

"MOOCs work when you do something that is distinctively different and better than anywhere else in the world," he said. "Not only are thousands signing onto this MOOC, the completion rate last year was among the highest recorded since these online courses came into being."

“Our University is proud of this course and the innovation of our staff to have produced it.”

The nine-week course is free and anyone is eligible to enrol. Participants from all over the world have enrolled in the course, and set their own pace of study.

“The Understanding Dementia MOOC has far exceeded anyone’s expectations,” Faculty of Health Dean Professor Denise Fassett said.

Professor Fassett said the program transcended cultural and educational barriers.

“Berrie’s story demonstrates that MOOCs are able to have a profound flow-on impact for the poor and underprivileged,” she said.

For more about this story visit Alzheimer’s Dementia Namibia at:

<https://alzheimersdementianamibia.wordpress.com/> or <http://www.utas.edu.au/mooc-in-namibia>

For more information on the Understanding Dementia MOOC and the Wicking Centre visit [www.utas.edu.au/wicking/wca/mooc](http://www.utas.edu.au/wicking/wca/mooc)

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