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A life with deep purpose

Wake up at 4 a.m. Coach women's football. Head to the gym to train. Zip home for a quick meal. Walk to class. Go to football practice. Study on the bus en route to a volunteer gig. Go home and work on an assignment before bed.

Sound overwhelming? For football athlete and Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry student Jackson Findlay, it's a preferred routine. "Everything I do has purpose and helps me focus and be my best self," says the Mustangs football defensive back.

At age 11, Jackson volunteered at a baseball camp in his hometown of Vancouver, British Columbia, which sparked his interest in working with children – and may have set the course for his career.

"I want to be a paediatric oncologist to give children with cancer a fighting chance."

In his drive to help children while balancing a busy school workload, Jackson and fellow Mustangs volunteer at the Boys and Girls Club (BGC) of London every week. As vice-president of the Mustangs Athlete Student Council, he helps recruit students to support this important initiative.

"I was drawn to volunteer with BGC because the organization provides vital programming for kids that helps them reach their full potential. Playing sports with the kids is a joy, and it means a lot for us to be able to give back."

Football is in the DNA

Jackson's family has a deep history in professional football. His father, uncle, grandfather and great-grandfather each played for the Canadian Football League (CFL). However, his father didn't pressure Jackson to uphold the family tradition.

"I started out as a hockey goalie because I loved getting in front of the puck, but it was my coach who recognized my potential as a footballer. He got my dad on board."





Jackson volunteering at the Boys and Girls Club of London

After playing in high school, Jackson had ambitions to achieve a medical degree at a world-renowned university and to join one of the best football teams in Canada. Western was his number one choice.

The MVP

When Jackson arrived on campus in 2021, it was an exciting time. The built-in Mustangs family meant he hasn't been homesick. "I'm fortunate to have teammates who invite me for Thanksgiving and other occasions, and my parents were able to visit for a few games last year."

Jackson was recently named the 2023-24 season's Most Valuable Player – well-deserved recognition for his work on and off the field.

"Jackson is an outstanding individual and a high-achieving student," says football head coach Greg Marshall. "He models everything that makes our team strong and passes that to younger players."

Donors make dreams a reality

Jackson has received valuable support from donors throughout his time at Western. "Student-athletes have commitments to school and to the team. It can be very stressful. I wouldn't be at Western without donors. I love it here and I couldn't have had this experience at any other school in the country."

Jackson says it's the community spirit that makes Western unique. "As athletes and academics, we wouldn't be successful without fans, alumni and donors."

Greg echoes the sentiment. "We have the best group of alumni and donors in Canada," he says. "They not only provide generous financial support, but they show up to games and events and truly enjoy mentoring our athletes. They help us recruit the best in the country."

After completing his undergraduate degree, Jackson plans to pursue a medical degree while playing for the CFL – scheduling school and a clerkship around the football season. It's an ambitious plan but with his instinct to make a positive difference, Jackson will undoubtedly achieve greatness.

“ I wouldn't be at Western without donors. I love it here! ”





The Schulich Excellence Fund

Unrestricted funds are crucial to advance the Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry's top priorities. They give the school flexibility to respond to urgent needs. Donors help to broaden clinical training opportunities, fuel life-changing research and provide students with state-of-the-art equipment to enhance their practice.

Empathy in practice

Mohnish Rao once dreamed of a career in business. Inspired by his parents, who moved from India to Canada and opened a gas station, Mohnish chose business electives in grade nine and joined student activities with a focus on the corporate world.

Everything changed a year later when Mohnish's mother had a significant health battle, and medical professionals saved her life. From that, Mohnish found a new purpose.

"My mom had an eight hour surgery for her tumour, which resulted in unexpected complications," Mohnish recalls. "Health-care workers helped her overcome those challenges. I wanted to be a doctor so one day I could do the same for others."

Mohnish has brought that empathy for patients and families to his educational journey. After completing an honours bachelor of medical sciences in interdisciplinary medical sciences and physiology at Western, he is now a student in the doctor of medicine program at the Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry.

Halfway through a two-year clerkship with rotations in different specialties at London hospitals, Mohnish has embraced the opportunity to put his skills into practice.

Learning from the best

Mohnish and his parents navigated many obstacles when they moved to Canada. Evenings and weekends were filled with homework and helping with the family business.

"I can only imagine how tough it was to come to a new country, start a business and learn new skills. My parents taught me the strong work ethic and warmth I want to model as a physician."

Donor support, every step of the way

Mohnish recalls the moment he read an email about receiving a donor-funded award in his third year of medical school, during a 26-hour call shift at the hospital.

"It was energizing! Clerkship hours are demanding, so medical students can't often work to help pay for education and expenses. That's why donors are so important! Their generosity allows me the time to focus on being a good clinician for our community."

The award was also a relief for Mohnish's parents, his biggest supporters. "It meant so much to them," he says.

Representation matters

Mohnish also received assistance with his medical application from Community of Support (COS), an initiative made possible through the Schulich Excellence Fund. COS provides coaching and other resources to learners from underrepresented communities. This valuable program aims to increase the racial diversity of health-care professionals in Canada, enhancing the overall health-care system for equity-deserving patient populations.

"Medicine is about collaboration, not competition. Schulich's donors cultivate that mindset by helping medical students in their time of need."

Mohnish recently chose family medicine and psychiatry as specialties of focus.

"Practicing medicine is about validating people's experiences, often during the most difficult obstacles they'll ever face. Patients deserve to be heard and live their lives fully. I want to help them in their journey."



A force for change

Naomi Ngobila works tirelessly to enhance the Black student experience at Western. Through organizing Black History Month initiatives, facilitating safe spaces and speaking out about important issues, Naomi is a force for change.

"When I arrived on campus in first year, I knew I was a part of a minority group. But I also knew that I deserved to be here. I want fellow Black students to feel as empowered as I do."

Now a third-year student in the School for Advanced Studies in the Arts and Humanities (SASAH), Naomi dreams of becoming a lawyer to positively change the lives of marginalized people.

The power of identity

For Naomi, the importance of Black identity began at home. Her parents were born in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. They wanted to nurture tight familial bonds and a strong sense of culture while providing their family with a quality education. The family immigrated to Montréal, Québec and later moved to Hamilton, Ontario.

"My parents sacrificed a lot and I want to make them proud."

In high school, Naomi enjoyed meaningful discussions about global and social justice issues but struggled with public speaking. She became inspired by the concept of criminal justice reform in Grade 11 and wanted to learn more.

"I stepped outside of my comfort zone and found my community."

"Through SASAH I have the ability to earn a dual bachelor's degree and take part in smaller classes."

Joining in and speaking up

In Naomi's second year she obtained an executive position with the African Students' Association (ASA). "I stepped outside of my comfort zone and found my community," she says.

Naomi discovered her voice advocating for the Black student experience. As a reflection officer at the ASA, she facilitated group discussions on challenging topics. She is also a member of Black Future Lawyers and serves on the Social Science Students' Council.

Donor generosity ignites hope

Handling finances as a student was an adjustment for Naomi. "The daily struggle to manage bills along with the many demands of being a student is very stressful," she says.

Naomi received a donor-funded award in her second year at Western, which covered the remainder of the tuition she owed. She was immediately relieved and proud to tell her parents the news.

"I will be attending law school which is very expensive. Donors recognize students will pay for our educations long after we start our careers. Their giving means so much."

Naomi is hopeful about the Black student experience beyond her time at Western. "I want to graduate knowing I did everything I could so future Black students understand their value and know they belong."



Leading by example

Sarah Padfield has a strong devotion to Western, where she has worked for over six years. Sarah is currently director of operations and finance in the Faculty of Health Sciences, and executive director at Fowler Kennedy Sport Medicine.

When Sarah began working at Western in 2018, she noticed a need to support students experiencing financial barriers. “Philanthropy is critical for the Western community, and supporting student success is important to me.”

Pleased to give back, Sarah’s most recent gift designation is to the Diversity in Health Bursary, which is awarded to full-time undergraduate students in the Faculty of Health Sciences, where preference is given to students who belong to an equity-deserving group.

“Western has shown commitment to diversity and inclusion, and it’s important for me to model that,” says Sarah. “Many people make tremendous sacrifices to attend university, and it is rewarding to see the tangible difference donors make in the lives of others.”



Sarah Padfield

Thank you for your continued support.

For more information about this publication, or to make a gift to Western, please contact Annual, Leadership & Legacy Giving by phone (519.661.4200 or 1.800.423.9631) or email (annual.giving@uwo.ca).

