



Western



*Annual*  
**IMPACT**



## Thank you to our donors.

Western's donors make a profound difference in the lives of others and contribute to making the world better. The 2025 edition of *Annual Impact* shares a few success stories—all made possible by the collective contributions of the Western community.



**“The generosity from donors has really helped us a lot. Donors play a vital role in student success.”**

**Chloe Coutts**, *fourth-year medical sciences and business student*

Chloe and her twin sister Sophie are not only national champions in Cross Country and Track & Field but are also dedicated students pursuing dual degrees in medical sciences and business. Their success on the track and in the classroom has been made possible in part by donor support.



**“Giving to scholarships and internships is such a great way for donors to help students excel, and I’m super grateful for their support. The financial award was a huge relief. I love Western with my whole heart, and I’m so glad I’m here!”**

**Ivy Luo**, *third-year medical sciences student*

Ivy was worried she couldn’t afford school until she received a donor-funded scholarship. She is now thriving and focused on her specialization in physiology and pharmacology.



**“The fact that a donor has given to Western to help students who are struggling to find their place in this world is such an inspiration. The scholarship I received was instrumental. I couldn’t commit to my schooling or volunteering without it.”**

**Aaron Beier**, *fourth-year clinical kinesiology student*

Aaron was at risk of failing high school and was saved just in time by a partnership between the Thames Valley District School Board and Western. As the recipient of a donor-funded award, Aaron was launched into a path of success where he is making a difference in patients' lives.



Phil and Heather in Italy in the summer of 2022.

# Made for each other

When ALS struck her husband, Heather Rea-Macaulay became an advocate, fundraiser and compassionate caregiver.

**H**eather Rea-Macaulay, BA'84, was not looking for another relationship. Previously married and with three grown children, she was focused on a different path—that is, until she saw a pair of “stunning blue eyes.”

It was a chance encounter at a grocery store in Thornbury, Ontario, Heather was getting out of her car in the parking lot when a gentleman caught her eye. “Now there’s a handsome man,” she thought to herself and went about her shopping.

A short time later, Heather’s friend Shelagh wanted to set her up on a date. “Shelagh said, ‘I have the perfect match for you.’ As it turns out, it was the same guy from the grocery store!” recalls Heather.

Through Shelagh, phone numbers were exchanged and a few days later, the “blue-eyed man”—Philip Macaulay—texted Heather to go for a swim, and she agreed. “During the mile-long swim I got to know him, and we just clicked,” she remembers.

During the summer of 2019, their romance blossomed. Then the pandemic hit.

“Honestly, it was great for us,” says Heather. “We fell in love and grew closer during the COVID years. We adored being ‘stuck’ together and had the best time.”

Heather and Phil decided to retire during the pandemic and spent their time swimming, skiing, biking and travelling.

It was relationship bliss.

“**Our marriage brought us so much joy. It was a beautiful distraction from the disease.**”

## The onset

In spring of 2022, Phil started to experience some strange sensations in his arms, including bicep twitching. After more than a year of ruling out other possible medical issues, numerous physician opinions and many diagnostic tests, Phil was diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, more commonly known as ALS, in June of 2023. ALS is a debilitating disease of the nervous system that affects nerve cells in the brain and spinal cord, resulting in the loss of muscle control.

The couple was devastated by Phil’s diagnosis, which happened shortly after his brother Mike also discovered he had ALS.

## Sacrifice and strength

When Phil was diagnosed, Heather made a private vow—she promised she would never leave him and would walk with him throughout the course of the illness.

Heather and Phil married in the summer of 2024. “It was a very emotional proposal,” Heather recalls. “He was never married which made the moment even more meaningful. Our marriage brought us so much joy. It was a beautiful distraction from the disease.”

## ALS champions

The couple also decided to make a difference in the world of ALS. “I had been thinking of what we could do to support a cure,” says Heather. “Then we saw Dr. Strong in the news! To see a Canadian doctor making huge strides in ALS, right in our backyard!? Phil’s eyes lit up—we were in! We had so much hope and it gave us purpose.”

Dr. Michael Strong, a distinguished university professor in the Department of Clinical Neurological Sciences at Western, has spent three decades inching ever so close to a cure. “Dr. Strong’s research was exactly where we wanted to put our attention,” says Heather.

The couple had the opportunity to sit down with Dr. Strong and they were so inspired, they held a fundraiser in Phil’s name to help find a cure. Friends and family rallied around Phil accumulating donations over \$140,000. “This was so important to Phil,” says Heather. “It was part of his legacy.”

Phil passed away on January 3, 2025. The couple only had six years together. “But they were amazing years,” says Heather.

Before his passing, Phil got all his finances in order. Heather didn’t quite know just how organized he was. “Phil made it easy and never wavered in his commitment to me. It was a testament to his character—caring for me, as I cared for him—together, until the end.”

# Breaking through: ALS research at Western

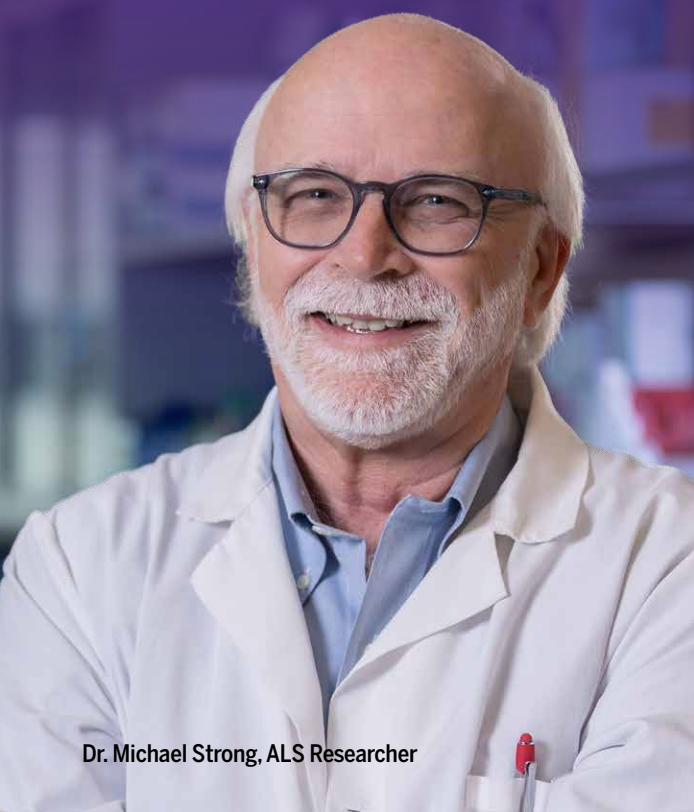
**A**fter 30 years of dedicated research, Dr. Michael Strong and his team at Western have discovered a potential path to an ALS cure—a breakthrough that could change everything for patients and families facing this devastating disease.

The key? Two proteins that, when they interact, can halt the nerve cell death that defines ALS. In laboratory studies, this approach extended lifespan, improved mobility and protected cells from degeneration.

This discovery represents the culmination of decades of Western research backed by donors who have contributed at all levels, including Heather Rea, whose husband passed away from the disease. A large investment from the Temerty Foundation is now powering the next crucial phase: bringing this potential treatment to human clinical trials within five years.

"It's been 30 years of work to get here; 30 years of looking after families and patients and their loved ones, when all we had was hope," says Dr. Strong. "This gives us reason to believe we've discovered a path to treatment."

For ALS patients who typically face a life expectancy of just two to five years post-diagnosis, this research offers precious hope backed by science, made possible by the vision and generosity of donors who believe in Western's potential to change lives.



**Dr. Michael Strong, ALS Researcher**



# Finding purpose through real-world experience

Helping others has always been at the heart of Noel Ongpauco's ambitions. That's what led him to law school—and to Western.

In first year, Noel participated in a moot court competition—a simulated courtroom proceeding where law students argue real legal cases before judges—centered on a medical malpractice case. The practicing lawyers who coached him opened his eyes to something powerful: how much of a difference legal advocates can make in people's lives.

"It was really inspiring," Noel recalls. "That's something I want to do. That's the kind of impact I want to have."

Like many first-year law students, Noel faced the challenge of gaining practical experience. That's where Western's Summer After 1L (SA1L) program made all the difference.

"SA1L was a big driver in my decision to come to Western," Noel explains. The program guarantees meaningful paid legal work for first-year students. "That made Western especially appealing."

The program matches students' interests with appropriate placements. "I got matched with the Canadian Civil Liberties

Association, which was a great fit for my interests in litigation and legal research." The experience gave Noel hands-on exposure to advocacy work that aligned with his passion for civil rights.

Noel is particularly interested in civil litigation, especially medical malpractice and personal injury law. He credits his SA1L placement with shaping his career trajectory.

Noel understands that opportunities like SA1L don't happen without generous donor support. "I'm really grateful to the donors who make this program possible," he reflects. "Without that support, I wouldn't have had this experience that's been so formative for my career."

Through giving to the Western Law Experiential Learning Fund, donors enable the law school to create opportunities that bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world practice—ensuring students like Noel can make a positive change from day one.

"I want to help people who've been harmed or mistreated," Noel says. "That's the kind of impact I want to have."

“**I want to help people who've been harmed or mistreated. That's the kind of impact I want to have.**”



## Donor support changes lives

**N**adia Fyfe's Summer After 1L (SA1L) placement at the HIV Legal Network gave her chances she never expected. What started as valuable legal experience quickly became meaningful work helping others.

"I'm incredibly grateful for the opportunities my SA1L placement provided me," Nadia says. "The program's support made a lasting impact beyond my ten weeks at the HIV Legal Network."

Her big moment? Co-authoring an article published in *The Hill Times* about health care gaps facing migrants in Canada. "It was exciting to watch the piece grow and transform as it went through multiple drafts and ultimately contribute to a larger conversation on health equity."

Nadia also helped write submissions to the UN and created easy-to-understand "Know Your Rights" guides for people without permanent residence.

"Working at this organization allowed me to expand my legal writing skills, gain invaluable feedback from incredible lawyers, and support efforts that advance health equity and human rights," she says.

## The Western Fund: Unrestricted gifts and their vital need

### Q: What is the Western Fund?

A: The Western Fund is Western's flexibility fund—our ability to say "yes" when opportunity knocks. It's the strategic reserve that lets us respond immediately to student emergencies, seize breakthrough research opportunities and adapt quickly to financial needs across campus.

### Q: What does the Western Fund make possible?

A: It's everything from emergency support to research seed funding to sustaining collaborative and educational spaces across Western. The fund ensures we can meet emerging challenges head-on and act when it matters most.

### Q: How do gifts of every size create impact?

A: Every gift joins a powerful collective reshaping Western's future. Together, we enable our students, researchers and faculty to pursue bold ideas without delay. Giving to the Western Fund is a collective action that keeps Western competitive and students thriving.



### Thank you for your continued support.

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