

# Honorary degrees at Queen Margaret graduation



At the Usher Hall on Friday the show was more than just the Three Degrees! Queen Margaret University held their 2015 graduation ceremony for all their students, but they also awarded some honorary degrees. They recognised a leading dementia campaigner and the founder of an art therapy charity for children with chronic illness during the ceremony.

**Henry Simmons, Chief Executive of Alzheimer Scotland Action on Dementia**, was awarded an honorary doctorate in recognition of his work in improving the lives of people living with dementia. Henry has been involved in developing a model which is transforming lives and altering the way we think about people with dementia and their carers. This approach has received much international recognition placing Scotland at the forefront of dementia practice.

The dementia campaigner was joined by **Laura Young, Founder of The Teapot Trust** charity. An honorary doctorate was bestowed upon Laura for her work in using art therapy to help children and young people cope with long-term medical conditions.

Both Henry Simmons and Laura Young joined 850 students and their families at an impressive ceremony in Edinburgh's Usher Hall. The honorary graduates also met with entrepreneur and founder of Kwik Fit, Sir Tom Farmer.

Sir Tom was inaugurated as the founding Chancellor of Queen Margaret University when the institution was granted full university title in 2007. After eight years serving as University Chancellor, Sir Tom Farmer will be stepping down

from his position. The July 2015 ceremony will be the last graduation he attends in his role as Chancellor, although Sir Tom told The Edinburgh Reporter that it will be a month or two until the University actually chooses its second Chancellor.

✘ As a leading light in the field of dementia, **Henry Simmons** was presented with the Degree of Doctor of the University, *Honoris Causa*. With a flagship in health and rehabilitation, QMU was delighted to recognise his tireless work in campaigning for the rights of people with dementia and their families and in establishing a community-based and person centred approach to dementia. Earlier this year, Alzheimer Scotland and Queen Margaret University signed a strategic partnership aimed at improving its healthcare students' understanding of dementia, ensuring they are more effective as professionals when they move into the workforce.

Born in Wishaw, Henry Simmons worked in nursing in London and Leeds before returning to Scotland to set up an innovative new mental health project with Lanarkshire Association for Mental Health. He worked at ENABLE Scotland for ten years as Development Manager and latterly Executive Director where he led the push for the learning disability hospital closure programme which saw hundreds of people moved out of the excluded world of long-stay institutions back into the heart of their communities.

Now Chief Executive of Alzheimer Scotland Action on Dementia, Henry introduced the rights of choice, power, control and inclusion as the driving values of the charity's work. Over the last few years, he has developed a new model of post diagnostic support and a Charter of Rights.

Working closely with the Scottish Government, Henry has contributed to the development of the National Dementia Strategy, eventually convincing the Deputy First Minister at the time, Nicola Sturgeon, to make a world-first commitment and guarantee that every person with dementia will receive a

minimum of one year's post diagnostic support using this model.

Alzheimer Scotland has developed a network of Alzheimer Scotland Nurse Consultants and has encouraged the funding of a nurse consultant in every NHS Board. For people in the mid and later stages of dementia a new transformational model known as the 'Eight Pillar' approach has been constructed. The final piece of policy is the development of a model for advanced dementia which will be launched later this year.

✘ **Laura Young** is the founder of The Teapot Trust, which she established with her husband John in 2010 following the death of their eight year old daughter Verity, who suffered from the autoimmune disease Lupus.

From the time Laura's daughter was three, she was frequently in hospital for treatment for Lupus, and when she was diagnosed with cancer three years later, hospital visits increased. Laura was aware that Verity associated the visits with pain and anxiety, but when Verity began using art, she realised that it was a successful coping mechanism that helped make her daughter's time in hospital more bearable and provided an outlet for expressing her feelings.

Over 1,000 children suffer from Lupus and related illnesses but very little funding is available to support services for these lifelong incapacitating conditions. Laura and Jon realised there was a gap in the hospital experience and following their daughter's death in 2009, the couple established The Teapot Trust in 2010 to provide an art therapy service for children and young people who are coping with long-term medical conditions. Such conditions can cause anxiety, anger or upset, and art therapy can provide a means of expressing feelings allowing the child to feel more in control. The work of the Teapot Trust aims to encourage self-expression, reduce anxiety, build resilience and promote healthy coping mechanisms.

Over the last few years the organisation has developed significantly and now funds art therapy in clinics, hospital wards, mental health services and hospices for children with chronic illnesses in six centres across Scotland, with a total of 21 funded art therapy projects providing either individual or group art therapy for sick children. There are also plans to expand the work in Fife and in the Scottish Borders. In the last year alone The Trust, which is the only Scottish charity to provide art therapy in hospitals, has supported over 3,500 children and their families.

Both honorary graduates were acknowledged for the relevance of their work to society, reflecting the university's own commitment to enhancing lives in the communities it serves.

Professor Alan Gilloran, Deputy Principal of Queen Margaret University, said: "Under Henry Simmons' leadership, Alzheimer Scotland has completely transformed the journey for someone with dementia from the point of diagnosis to the end of life. This has brought dementia out of the shadows, shedding its cloak of stigma and allowing people with dementia to live as equal, valued citizens."

He continued: "As QMU is the only provider of education and research in Art Therapy in Scotland, it is entirely appropriate that we recognise Laura Young and her work with The Teapot Trust. The impact of Laura's work with the Teapot Trust goes far beyond her home county of East Lothian. Laura has established services in six centres across the UK including Royal Hospital for Sick Children in Edinburgh, South Glasgow University Hospital and even the Rheumatology Ward at Great Ormond Street Hospital in London.

"Her passion for making a difference to people's lives has been recognised by other organisations. She has won the Family Hero for Scotland in 2013, was Tesco Charitable Mum of the Year in 2014 and more recently Laura and John Young were the latest recipients of a Point of Light award, which recognises

outstanding individual volunteers and people who make a change in their community and inspire others.”

The Principal of Queen Margaret University, Professor Petra Wend, paid tribute to Henry Simmons and Laura Young. She concluded: “We are delighted to honour both these highly influential individuals – Henry Simmons for his visionary work in ensuring Scotland is at the forefront of dementia practice, and Laura Young for her compassion and selflessness in improving the lives of children with enduring medical conditions. Both Henry’s and Laura’s achievements in their specialist areas reflect the relevance of the university’s work and its aim of serving communities and improving quality of life.”