

New book celebrates the success stories of ACU's Clemente students

A new book published by Australian Catholic University offers a window into the real lives of 11 Australians who overcame traumatic and life-threatening experiences to become university graduates of a certificate in liberal arts.

Voices of Clemente: The transformative power of a Liberal Arts education celebrates the graduates of one of ACU's most esteemed programs, Clemente Australia: a free and fully supported university course in the Liberal Arts offered to people who might otherwise be excluded from tertiary education opportunities.

Clemente students study philosophy, history, sociology, and literature, and are graded on the same level as other students at ACU. Clemente is run out of ACU's Blacktown, Strathfield, Melbourne, Brisbane and Ballarat campuses.

The book's editor, Clemente Fitzroy program advisor Samuel Zifchak, had the privilege of compiling in-depth interviews with the featured students along with his fellow Clemente coordinators in Queensland and New South Wales.

He then arranged elements of these interviews into anonymous vignettes that detail the students' upbringings, adulthoods, the life-changing impact of Clemente, and their reflections upon completing the program.

Mr Zifchak said readers could expect stories of loss and grief, empowerment, the forging of friendships and community, and hopeful vulnerability.

While some of the graduates featured in the book have gone on to pursue further studies at ACU, Mr Zifchak said Clemente was more than just a stepping stone into further undergraduate study.

"The actual impact that it has on the student cohort goes well beyond whether or not they graduate the course or go on to further study," Mr Zifchak said.

"The true success of the program is how it positively improves the students' lived experience, on the way that they're able to develop critical thinking skills or a sense of empowerment and objectivity, to help re-examine their lives critically with the support of their new skills and new community. This can be seen time and time again in the honest reflections of each student who contributed to this collection.

"The stories in *Voices of Clemente* are a real testament to the intelligence, resilience, and courage of our students, and how community and the power of the arts and humanities can come together to help them succeed in their lives."

Voices of Clemente: The transformative power of a Liberal Arts education is being launched on August 12 at the Mercy Lecture Theatre, ACU Melbourne Campus.

Samuel Zifcak is available for interview.

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