



# NEWS RELEASE

EMBARGOED 5.00AM Wednesday 30 November, 2016

## FINDING A WAY TO END EARLY AND FORCED MARRIAGE

**It is defined by the Australian government as a slavery-like practice, a form of gender-based violence and an abuse of human rights: early and forced marriage is a topic many would find daunting to face.**

**Laura Vidal, from South West Sydney, is up for the challenge, and thanks to the Churchill Fellowship she has been awarded, she will have the chance to learn from the best overseas.**

“Early and forced marriage is an issue in Australia that communities and policy makers are faced with, and there is a lot to learn from others with advanced practice in the field,” said Ms Vidal.

“My Churchill Fellowship will provide me an opportunity to develop nuanced and holistic responses, while building international networks to benefit and uphold the rights of individuals at risk.

“It is an incredible privilege to become a Churchill Fellow and I am grateful to the Churchill Trust.

“I know this is a complex issue, and there is no simple solution, but for the Trust to recognise the importance of Australia enhancing its approach is just outstanding.”

**Thanks to the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust, Laura is one of 106 Australians who will be announced today as a Churchill Fellow, and who will criss-cross the globe in search of answers.**

**Worth more than \$2.7 million in total this year, the Churchill Fellowships send people like Laura – who wish to harness overseas expertise to improve Australia – on the adventure of a lifetime.**

Under Australia’s current policy, individuals who disclose a risk of early and forced marriage or who experience it must engage with law enforcement to access a government support programs.

**“The size and scale of early and forced marriage in Australia has significantly increased since it was criminalised in 2013,” Ms Vidal explained.**

“Criminalising the practice to prevent it is only one part of a complex response, but a great deal more work needs to be done, particularly for 15-18 year olds, who are the most commonly affected.

“Through this Fellowship I seek to understand alternative models and approaches – I am particularly interested in early intervention programs that work toward ending early and forced marriage.

“I will bring back with me recommendations to help enhance policy and practice, strategies for community education, and knowledge about how to best work with affected communities to advance their human rights.

Laura’s research will see her go to USA, Kenya, Canada, Sri Lanka, Denmark and the United Kingdom.

“These are places where forced and early marriage have been more common for a longer time, and so too are the responses to end it and protect and support victims that we can learn from,” said new Churchill Trust CEO, Adam Davey.

**“Laura’s aim, and the objectives of her project, have the potential to enact powerful change in the lives of Australians who are incredibly vulnerable.**

“The epitome of a Churchill Fellow is someone whose desire to help is selfless, and someone whose research is anchored in a need for tangible outcomes – and Laura very much fits that bill.

“On behalf of the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust I congratulate Laura, and wish her luck on her Fellowship journey.”

For the full list of 2016 Churchill Fellows visit [www.churchilltrust.com.au](http://www.churchilltrust.com.au)

See where a Churchill Fellowship can take you...apply from 28 February 2017

**Media Contact: Isabelle Colla T: 02 9234 3850; M: 0432 970 548; E: [icolla@apa.net.au](mailto:icolla@apa.net.au)**