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Australian Story: Stayin' Alive

Airs Monday, November 2 at 8pm on ABC and introduced by Caroline Jones

Ronald "Ronno" Morgan is a young tour guide from Wyndham in Western Australia's spectacular Kimberley region. But he's lucky to be alive, having twice faced a life-threatening health challenge.

Ronno's troubles began when he was just five. His mother Maria became concerned that he was in excruciating pain with backache, so rushed him to the local Wyndham hospital.

To the family's shock, doctors told them that young Ronno had been born with abnormal kidneys and he now had end stage kidney failure.

His only hope was an emergency kidney transplant. Maria Morgan did not hesitate. She donated one of her kidneys to save her son.

The operation was successful and Ronno went on to live a pretty normal life, working at the nearby Argyle Diamond Mine as well as helping out his parents' touring business.

But another shock was in store. Regular blood tests showed that the transplanted kidney from his mother, which he'd had for more than 20 years, was starting to fail and he'd need another transplant.

"I didn't know that a transplant kidney has got a certain life expectancy," he says. "I thought as soon as it's in, bang I'm cured forever."

With documentary footage filmed over two years, *Stayin' Alive* follows Ronno through the roller coaster time from diagnosis to finally receiving a deceased donor kidney.

As an Aboriginal man, Ronno considers himself particularly fortunate. Kidney disease is one of the major causes of death in Indigenous Australians. In remote areas, Indigenous people are over 50 times more likely to be admitted to hospital for dialysis than other Australians, but less than one in 20 kidney transplants involves an Indigenous person.

"Kidney disease can occur from many different medical conditions," says Dr Kevin Warr, nephrologist from Royal Perth hospital. "The interesting thing about kidney disease in Aboriginal populations is that it occurs two or maybe three decades earlier, so instead of people in their late middle age predominantly developing kidney failure we're talking about young people even if they don't have a congenital problem as Ronno had."

Now well again, and following in the footsteps of a distinguished ancestor, Ronno Morgan has found a new purpose in life: helping others in his community to live healthy and fulfilling lives.

Ronno Morgan and his family are speaking out about their experience in the hope of raising awareness about kidney disease and the need for organ donation.

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