

## MEDIA RELEASE

WEDNESDAY 19 OCTOBER 2022

### NORTHERN TERRITORY 2023 AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR AWARDS NOMINEES ANNOUNCED

Nominees for the 2023 Northern Territory Australian of the Year Awards include First Nations leaders, suicide prevention campaigners, creative students, community leaders, a podiatrist and a dude with deadly hair skills.

They are just some of the 16 Territorians in the running to be named the NT Australian of the Year, NT Senior Australian of the Year, NT Young Australian of the Year and NT Local Hero.

The 2023 Northern Territory award nominees are:

#### **Northern Territory Australian of the Year**

Samuel Bush-Blanasi – Chair, Northern Land Council (Beswick Community)  
Tyson Carmody – Founder, Kings Narrative counselling and coaching (Mparntwe)  
Matthew Hull – Suicide prevention ambassador (Humpty Doo)  
Gary Strachan – Founder, Deadly Hair Dude (Darwin)

#### **Northern Territory Senior Australian of the Year**

Barayuwa Mununggurr – Yolngu culture, community and country advocate (Bukudal Homeland)  
Georgia Opdenbrouw – Domestic violence services advocate and volunteer (Darwin)  
Bernard Tipiloura – Suicide prevention campaigner (Tiwi Islands)  
Lesley Woolf – Nurse, health administrator and co-founder, Run With Dad (Darwin)

#### **Northern Territory Young Australian of the Year**

Meredith Batey – Podiatrist (Darwin)  
Isabelle Craven – Student and creator (Palmerston)  
Myra Fordham – Leadership and confidence coach, public speaker, author (Darwin)  
Jahdai Vigona – First Nations community leader (Darwin)

#### **Northern Territory Local Hero**

Nicole Brown – Indigenous engagement consultant (Karama)  
Isla Hooper – Student and artist (Larapinta, Alice Springs)  
Sacha King – Social worker and founder, Two Two One Mental Health Charity (Darwin)  
Samuel Weston – Former soldier, ex-prison officer, owner of Mad Snake Café (Parap)

*\*see bios on following pages*

The NT nominees are among 131 people being recognised across all states and territories.

The four award recipients from the Northern Territory will be announced on the evening of Monday 31 October 2022 in a ceremony at the Darwin Convention Centre which will also be available to watch via ABC iView from 6pm (local NT time).

They will then join the other state and territory recipients as national finalists for the national awards announcement on 25 January 2023 in Canberra.

National Australia Day Council CEO Karlie Brand said this year's Northern Territory nominees reflect the strong sense of community within the Territory.

"The Northern Territory nominees share a sense of care – for others, for community and for country," said Karlie.

"They are all leaders, making a difference to others' lives and to the Territory's future."

### **20 Years Of Local Heroes**

The 2023 Awards also mark 20 years of the Local Hero category. Introduced in 2003, the award acknowledges extraordinary contributions made by Australians in their local community.

In 2019, the Northern Territory's Kate and Tick Everett were named Australia's Local Heroes for their advocacy against bullying through their foundation Dolly's Dream.

For more information on the Australian of the Year Awards, visit [australianoftheyear.org.au](http://australianoftheyear.org.au).

### **ENDS.**

Nominee [bios on the following pages](#) and can also be viewed from [australianoftheyear.org.au](http://australianoftheyear.org.au).

Nominee [photos can be downloaded](#) from this link (note all photos provided by nominees): [NT Nominee Photos](#).

**Media contact:** Nicole Browne 0414 673 762 or [nicole@mediaapps.com.au](mailto:nicole@mediaapps.com.au)

## **NT AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR – NOMINEE BIOS**

### **Samuel Bush-Blanasi**

Chair, Northern Land Council

Raised as a proud Mayili man, 60 year old Samuel Bush-Blanasi has worked for decades at local and national levels to empower Indigenous Australians.

As Chair and Deputy Chair of the Northern Land Council, he has been instrumental in securing sea country rights in Arnhem Land for traditional owners, and the incorporation in 2022 of the Aboriginal Sea Company (ASC).

The ASC is the first of its kind and will enable traditional owners to oversee commercial fishing, aquaculture and other fishing-related activities along the Arnhem Land coastline. It will provide employment and enable Aboriginal people to manage profitable and sustainable fishing.

Samuel has also supported native title claims, recently overseeing the historic hand-back of the remaining half of Kakadu National Park to 14 clan estate groups.

Nationally, he's pushed for reform of the Australian Constitution, joining forces with Indigenous leaders to host dialogue and develop the historic Uluru Statement from the Heart.

### **Tyson Carmody**

Founder, Kings Narrative counselling and coaching

Proud Arrernte man Tyson Carmody launched Kings Narrative in December 2021 after feeling frustrated at the lack of support services available for Indigenous men in the Northern Territory.

Kings Narrative is an Aboriginal-owned and operated social enterprise that delivers culturally appropriate counselling and coaching.

Tyson aims to change the conversation surrounding Aboriginal men and provide much-needed services through the program. He wants to better connect Aboriginal men to their roots by taking men out on country, making bush medicines and providing cultural immersions.

Tyson spent more than a decade in lead roles in the community and education departments before establishing Kings Narrative. He worked with and mentored Aboriginal youth, supporting them to engage with culture, education, health and counselling services.

His experience in these positions has given him good insight into the systems that disadvantage Aboriginal men.

The 38 year old is also committed to working with non-Indigenous people to enable courageous conversations about reconciliation.

### **Matthew Hull**

Suicide prevention ambassador

Matthew Hull saw first-hand growing up in a mining family the lack of understanding and empathy for people working in construction, mining and fly-in fly-out jobs.

The 36 year old witnessed mental health issues that impacted families and people who lost mates to suicide.

So, he made it his life-long mission to help. MATES In Construction is a peer reviewed, industry-backed charity working on reducing suicide rates. The evidence-based community intervention program was featured in a World Health Organization global resource as an example of best practice.

Matthew is contacted by men and women from far and wide seeking help and sometimes immediate intervention.

Old Parliament House,  
King George Terrace,  
Parkes ACT 2600

[australianoftheyear.org.au](http://australianoftheyear.org.au)

He supports those with acute suicidality and other life situations, and where needed, connects workers and their families to relevant services for ongoing support.

Matthew's dedication has seen MATES in Construction grow into many work sites in the Northern Territory and into Queensland, with multiple lives saved.

### **Gary Strachan**

Founder, Deadly Hair Dude

Gary Strachan was a successful businessman with hairdressing salons across Darwin when he switched gears to give back to the community. He studied law, worked with the Northern Territory Legal Aid Commission, and realised his passion was to help young people break the cycle of offending.

Gary launched Deadly Hair Dude in 2020, a not-for-profit Indigenous and special needs training program for Aboriginal youth in remote communities. The program centres on providing training in remote communities in which young people feel supported, leading to greater success.

Gary has personally put \$100,000-plus into the training program and set up salons in remote communities – giving trainees a pathway to employment post-training.

He recently began working with the Federal and NT governments to develop a horticultural program in remote Indigenous communities to improve food security and quality.

At 57, he's also exploring aquaculture training opportunities and developing mud-crab farming enterprises in remote communities.

## **NT SENIOR AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR – NOMINEE BIOS**

### **Barayuwa Mununggurr**

Yolngu culture, community and country advocate

Barayuwa Mununggurr is a highly respected Djapu elder who advocates consistently for the rights of Yolngu people to live on their traditional homelands and stay connected to country.

Barayuwa fought against Northern Territory and Federal Government plans to close remote communities in 2007. He is a committed health advocate and led the way in encouraging First Nations people to be vaccinated against COVID-19. Barayuwa warned that COVID would spread like 'bushfire' in remote communities and lobbied for internal travel restrictions to be maintained.

After decades of campaigning, the 70 year old has successfully secured the aged care facility in north-eastern Arnhem Land so that residents won't need to be relocated to Darwin. The facility will be built in Nhulunbuy.

He was awarded Senior Citizen of the Year in 2022 by the Northern Territory Government.

His greatest passion is protecting the Yolngu way of life, preserving culture, history and the environment, while also improving the community's living standard.

### **Georgia Opdenbrouw**

Domestic violence services advocate and volunteer

Retiree Georgia Opdenbrouw is upfront and vocal in her advocacy for more funding and support for domestic violence services.

Georgia, who was born and raised in Darwin, has volunteered at the Darwin Aboriginal and Islander Women's Shelter (DAIWS) for many years. The shelter provides culturally appropriate services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

Old Parliament House,  
King George Terrace,  
Parkes ACT 2600

[australianoftheyear.org.au](http://australianoftheyear.org.au)

women who are homeless or escaping family violence. Volunteers and staff provide support, referral, outreach and crisis accommodation.

At 71, Georgia is DAIWS treasurer and the driving force behind the Sisterhood Group, a smaller volunteer group within DAIWS. This group brings together senior Aboriginal women from across Darwin to coordinate volunteer activities for the shelter and acts as a support network that enables women to maintain healthy connections to their communities.

The Sisterhood also organises and hosts events to help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women learn more about critical issues such as cardiac health, physiotherapy and mental health.

### **Bernard Tipiloura**

Suicide prevention campaigner

Tiwi Island elder Bernard Tipiloura is a suicide prevention campaigner whose efforts over 20 years have led to a dramatic drop in suicide rates.

The Tiwi Islands had one of the highest suicide rates in the world in 2006, reflecting the impacts of colonisation and deepening problems with 'gambling, gunja and grog'.

Bernard began his work to strengthen cultural identity and connection to country. He and wife Lynette Johnson visited schools each week to encourage young people to be proud of who they were and draw strength from their homeland.

He was a key contributor to the Healing Foundation's *Stories from Community* report that analysed the fall in suicide rates in the Tiwi Islands and at Yarrabah in Queensland as a result of community-led programs.

Now aged 83, Bernard donated a kidney when he was 60, volunteered and worked at the Red Cross until he was 80 and remains an avid anti-smoking campaigner.

### **Lesley Woolf**

Nurse, health administrator and co-founder, Run With Dad

Lesley Woolf is a nurse, midwife and administrator who has spent the past three decades working to improve the health of Indigenous peoples in Australia and Papua New Guinea.

Advancing and transitioning health services to Aboriginal Community Control Organisations has been a major achievement over the years.

Lesley is consistently focused on upskilling, building capacity and ensuring communities receive equitable healthcare. During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, she led a campaign to protect Indigenous peoples. 65 per cent of the eligible population was vaccinated in four days.

In 2014, Lesley co-founded Run With Dad, a community event to lift awareness of prostate cancer – the most commonly diagnosed cancer in men – and raise money for the prevention of the disease.

Lesley's contributions have helped progress health practices across the Northern Territory. Now aged 70, she's currently Manager of Health and Community Services at the Malabam Health Board in Maningrida.

## **NT YOUNG AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR – NOMINEE BIOS**

### **Meredith Batey**

Podiatrist

Meredith Batey is the first podiatrist employed by Danila Dilba Health Service in Darwin. The 28 year old provides an essential service to more than 700 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients.

Outside of Alice Springs, no other Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service employs a podiatrist, relying on visiting services.

First Nations Australians are disproportionately at risk of health issues, including diabetes-related foot complications. Meredith's patients say they feel heard. She has been able to increase access to her service by working out of several established clinics in the Greater Darwin Region, meaning patients can get the care they need early, without presenting to a hospital.

Meredith has more than tripled the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients receiving podiatric care within the greater Darwin region, assisted with reducing the number of diabetic-related foot complications, and made her patients feel more comfortable within a culturally safe service.

### **Isabelle Craven**

Student and creator

Isabelle Craven draws on her background as a young person of mixed heritage to create art that resonates with her community.

The Darwin local is the winner of the Road Safety Awareness Art Competition, as well as People's Choice Winner for the Exit Art exhibition by Year 12 students at the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory.

Isabelle's art speaks for those whose voices are not often heard.

She was named an ambassador for 2022 NT Youth Week, an annual event at which young Territorians can express ideas, raise concerns and enjoy drug- and alcohol-free events. As MC, she shared her own personal experience of abuse.

At 18, Isabelle is also a member of the City of Palmerston's Youth Media Team and is involved in the LAUNCHmedia training program through the City of Darwin.

### **Myra Fordham**

Leadership and confidence coach, public speaker, author

In 2016, Myra Fordham suffered a severe brain injury resulting from domestic abuse by her boyfriend at the time. She underwent surgery and was placed in an induced coma for 11 days.

Myra had to learn to walk and talk again and overcome PTSD, anxiety and depression. The cognitive impairment and pain linked to her injury made it difficult for her to find employment.

A proud Malijin Gurindji woman, 30 year old Myra is now a public speaker, an internationally best-selling author and founder of Myra Fordham Coaching. She supports female entrepreneurs to conquer self-doubt and unleash the leader within by healing the past.

Myra's journey is a true testimony of power, endurance and healing, and her footprint is expanding globally.

Old Parliament House,  
King George Terrace,  
Parkes ACT 2600

[australianoftheyear.org.au](http://australianoftheyear.org.au)

## **Jahdai Vigona**

First Nations community leader

Jahdai Vigona knows an individual can make a change much bigger than themselves. A proud Tiwi Islands man, he is passionate about improving the lives of Indigenous people.

He believes Aboriginal people are best placed to deliver better health outcomes to Aboriginal communities as they understand the services that are needed. He's at the forefront of delivering health messages and mental health programs that educate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students on how to seek help.

Jahdai has been a presenter at government forums, research summits and community events and is well sought-after for his public speaking. He encourages Indigenous people to use their voice, and for those voices to be heard.

Currently chair of the 2022 NT Youth Round Table, 21 year old Jahdai has been recognised with several awards including the 2021 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student of the Year and 2022 NT Young Achiever of the Year Award.

## **NT LOCAL HERO – NOMINEE BIOS**

### **Nicole Brown**

Indigenous engagement consultant and social activist

Proud Larrakia woman Nicole Brown is a social activist whose primary aim is to advance Australia's First Nations peoples. This she does from her head and her heart.

Her diverse activities include investing in young leaders; facilitating safe spaces for people to come together; initiating purpose-led events; and speaking across the nation and the globe.

As a strong single mum, she has a particular desire to support marginalised groups such as Indigenous girls and the wider Indigenous community. Her passionate advocacy and positive energy have been recognised through multiple awards including the 2022 City of Darwin Citizen of the Year and 2022 Darwin Community NAIDOC Volunteer of the Year.

The thread connecting Nicole's initiatives is pride in her heritage and her desire to see her fellow first Australians thrive and prosper. By championing First Nations people and culture at every opportunity, 37 year old Nicole is changing the narrative - and, ultimately, changing the future.

### **Isla Hooper**

Student and artist

Isla Hooper is a passionate member of and advocate for the LGBTIQ+ community and has been working with fellow Northern Territory Youth Round Table members (who represent the geographic, cultural and ethnic diversity of the territory) to advocate for increased accessibility to the arts.

As part of their studies at Centralian Senior College in 2021, Isla organised a week-long exhibition and workshops called the 'Love a Local Portraiture Challenge' for the Desert Festival, attracting 150 submissions and being visited by 250 people. Through the portraiture challenge, Isla aimed to reinforce community connections by displaying the love young people have for those around them.

Through 20 year old Isla's work with Central Craft, they also planned and facilitate ceramics workshops for kids in Alice Springs to help build their confidence and pride in their works. They worked with Yipirinya Primary School for the first two terms of 2022 and also held workshops during school holidays.

Old Parliament House,  
King George Terrace,  
Parkes ACT 2600

[australianoftheyear.org.au](http://australianoftheyear.org.au)

**Sacha King**

Social worker and founder, Two Two One Mental Health Charity

Darwin social worker Sacha King set up her own charity in 2019 after she noticed a lack of mental health services in the Northern Territory. The region has almost twice the amount of mental health patients per capita than the Australian average and the lowest number of services.

Two Two One delivers accredited mental health training and community workshops to close gaps in the delivery of mental health services and education.

Sacha also organises events for young people around Darwin that create safe spaces where they can relax, share stories and access services and support.

The 'GO (Girls Only) Night' brings girls together with women from different backgrounds to connect and develop life skills, while the Darwin City Launch series offers local disadvantaged youth a sporting outlet on Saturday nights. Sacha, aged 32, also coordinates events for the Annual Mental Health Week. Funds raised go to running Mental Health First Aid courses in schools.

**Samuel Weston**

Former soldier, ex-prison officer; now owner of Mad Snake Cafe

Samuel Weston was at his lowest point when he packed up his life and moved to Darwin to start a cafe.

He'd just finished 10 years as a prison officer in Western Australia. Before that, he'd spent six years in the army. He was drinking too much and angry all the time. His relationship with his partner, the mother of his children, was the worst it had ever been.

Wanting to work for himself and with his long service leave in hand, Samuel went to Darwin. The 41 year old now runs Mad Snake Cafe, named to honour those with mental health concerns or who haven't always fitted in.

Mad Snake Cafe provides a safe, friendly place for people to connect with others in the community.

This 1980s-themed cafe has a movie room, tabletop games and serves as a venue for board-game evenings, themed competitions, and meet-ups for Defence Force veterans and other groups.

Old Parliament House,  
King George Terrace,  
Parkes ACT 2600

[australianoftheyear.org.au](http://australianoftheyear.org.au)