

MEDIA RELEASE

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2024 AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR AWARD NOMINEES FOR TASMANIA ANNOUNCED

A First Nations leader, an advocate for migrant women, an actor and musician using social media to share Indigenous culture, a woman creating connections for mothers, an autism and disability advocate and a forensic pathology expert whose research was critical in identifying sudden infant death syndrome causes are among nominees for the 2024 Australian of the Year Awards for Tasmania.

The 2024 award nominees are:

2024 Australian of the Year for Tasmania

Professor Roger Byard AO PSM - Forensic pathology expert
Dr Alice Edwards - Global advocate for human rights
Kathryn Fordyce - Autism and disability advocate (North Motton)
Stephanie Trethewey - Rural women's advocate and founder, Motherland (Dunorlan)

2024 Senior Australian of the Year for Tasmania

Reverend James Colville AM - Founder, Colony 47 (Bagdad)
Rodney Dillon - First Nations advocate and co-founder, weetapoona Aboriginal Corporation (Hobart)
Rosalind Escott AM - Breastfeeding educator, family historian (South Hobart)
Sajini Sumar - Migrant advocate and co-founder, Multicultural Women's Council of Tasmania (Kingston)

2024 Young Australian of the Year for Tasmania

Naarah - Actor, musician, Indigenous activist (Glenorchy)
Dr Brooke Mason - Surfer, medical registrar and mental health advocate (Hobart)
Joanna Smart - Marine scientist and underwater photographer (Howrah)
Ella Watkins - Writer, filmmaker, actress and mental health advocate (Hobart)

2024 Local Hero for Tasmania

Robyn Flittner - Refugee advocate and co-founder, Women's Friendship Group (Launceston) (Meander)
Clair Harris - Founder, Tassie Mums (Blackmans Bay)
Natalie Potter and Emily Versluys - Co-founders, Albert St Gang surfers (Turners Beach)
Michelle Williamson - Founder, Farm It Forward Tasmania (Wynyard)

**see detailed bios on following pages*

The Tasmania nominees are among 133 people being recognised across all states and territories.

The Tasmania award recipients will be announced on Friday 10 November 2023 in a ceremony at Princess Wharf No1 in Hobart, which will also be available to watch online at australianoftheyear.org.au.

They will then join the other state and territory recipients as national finalists for the national awards announcement on Thursday 25 January 2024 in Canberra.

National Australia Day Council CEO Mark Fraser AO CVO congratulated the Tasmania nominees on their recognition.

“The nominees for the Tasmania awards are extraordinary people whose achievements and contributions are to be applauded,” said Mark.

“From research with global impact, through lifelong commitment to bringing about change, to new ways of connecting people in need, they are an inspirational group of Tasmanians.”

ENDS.

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

Nominee [photos can be downloaded](#) from this link: [Tasmania Nominee Photos](#)

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2024 AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR FOR TASMANIA – NOMINEE BIOS

Professor Roger Byard AO PSM

Forensic pathology expert

Professor Roger Byard AO PSM started life in Tasmania, but his contribution to forensic pathology is known around the world.

He helped identify victims of the Bali Bombings in 2002 and the Boxing Day tsunami in Thailand in 2004, bringing closure to families seeking lost loved ones. He also investigated the 1995 Srebrenica massacre in Bosnia. His research into sudden infant death syndrome pinpointed cigarette smoke and sleeping facedown as contributing risks – a groundbreaking discovery that no doubt saved many babies' lives.

Roger grew up in Wynyard in north-west Tasmania, studied medicine in Hobart and trained in pathology in Canada. His research has been recognised with many academic honours and, in 2021, he was ranked in the top two per cent of scientists worldwide by Stanford University.

At 68, he is now an Emeritus Professor at The University of Adelaide and a senior specialist forensic pathologist at Forensic Science SA.

Dr Alice Edwards

Global advocate for human rights

The important work of Dr Alice Edwards has assisted victims of war and violence around the globe. In August 2022, Alice was appointed as the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture to conduct fact-finding missions on allegations of torture and ill-treatment.

From studying law at the University of Tasmania and a doctorate from the Australian National University, Alice's commitment to people and peace has made a mark internationally.

A highly skilled lawyer, scholar and negotiator, 50-year-old Alice has held senior roles at international organisations and the United Nations, and appointments at leading universities.

Alice has led precedent-setting cases on human rights. She successfully argued that rape and sexual violence are forms of torture and persecution, enabling hundreds of thousands of victims to claim UN protection as refugees. Her fieldwork in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the late 1990s for female victims of war violence is still used as UN operational practice.

Kathryn Fordyce

Autism and disability advocate

Kathryn Fordyce's leadership has been life-changing for neurodivergent children and their families.

Originally training as a speech pathologist, Kathryn worked for Autism Queensland, Autism Spectrum Australia and in the UK, before moving to Burnie in 2011 to lead the North West Tasmania Autism Specific Early Learning and Care Centre. There she championed crucial early intervention, research, and capacity building initiatives for families and the community.

Kathryn has expanded inclusive programs for children living with disabilities across the nation, from playgroups to schools. She's also campaigned for high-quality rural services, including early autism surveillance, and speech pathologist training in Tasmania.

In 2021, Kathryn became CEO of Laurel House, a sexual violence service in northern Tasmania. In this role, she has elevated the voices of victim-survivors living with disability.

Numerous boards and committees have benefited from 45-year-old Kathryn's expertise, including Autism Tasmania, Playgroup Tasmania, the National Child Sexual Abuse Strategy Advisory Group, and various Tasmanian Government committees.

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Stephanie Trethewey

Rural women's advocate and founder, Motherland

It takes a village to raise a child – but with no family, friends or mothers groups nearby, too many rural women are raising children without support when they desperately need it.

Stephanie Trethewey, 34, experienced that crippling isolation herself when she moved from Melbourne to a beef farm in Tasmania's Central North with her husband and first baby.

So, in 2019, the former TV journalist set up national charity Motherland to connect mothers raising children on the land, along with her podcast, Motherland Australia.

Then in 2021, she created Australia's first online rural mothers group program – Motherland Village. The six-week online program matches rural mums to their own small support group to relieve isolation and improve wellbeing. In less than two years, Stephanie's online program has 20 virtual villages and is supporting over 200 rural women.

In 2022, Stephanie won the AgriFutures Rural Women's Award for her trailblazing work – and she's just getting started.

2024 SENIOR AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR FOR TASMANIA – NOMINEE BIOS

Reverend James Colville AM

Founder, Colony 47

When the Reverend James Colville AM opened the doors of Colony 47 in 1973, Hobart was a very different place. There were no gay rights, access to contraception was difficult and people were rejected for being different.

After renting an old church at 47 Davey Street, Hobart, a coffee shop was opened where everyone was welcome and help provided when requested. This included many young people, older people, Indigenous Australians, the lonely, hungry and unemployed.

James believed those struggling with rejection had a lot to give with the right support – they just needed non-judgemental assistance, acceptance and respect.

Fifty years on, not for profit Colony 47 continues to deliver programs for Tasmanians in need, with a particular focus on housing. It's helped more than 50,000 households with bond or rental assistance, more than 7000 young people with early intervention support, and more than 17,500 young people with education and employment.

Rodney Dillon

First Nations advocate and co-founder, weetapoonna Aboriginal Corporation

A highly respected elder of the Palawa Nation in lutruwita (Tasmania), 67-year-old Rodney Dillon has dedicated his life to rights for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. He is often asked to speak to the media and sit on Indigenous panels and boards.

Rodney is focused on building economic, social and cultural security for First Nations peoples.

In 2022, he finally persuaded Tasmania's Government to allow First Nations Tasmanians sea rights to harvest a commercial quota of abalone and profit from their catch. He's also negotiated the repatriation of Aboriginal artefacts and remains.

Equally important is Rodney's push for reconciliation and a more compassionate Australia. He co-founded weetapoonna Aboriginal Corporation to promote positive working relationships with community groups and was part of the Referendum Working Group for the Voice to parliament.

Rodney was previously a nominee for the 2011 Australian of the Year for Tasmania. He continues to make an extraordinary contribution to Australian society and to call out injustice.

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Rosalind Escott AM

Breastfeeding educator, family historian

Rosalind (Ros) Escott AM has made outstanding contributions to breastfeeding education, convict women's history and family history research. What connects these passions is her dedication to women and their children.

Ros has been a volunteer breastfeeding counsellor and educator with the Australian Breastfeeding Association since 1987. She has spoken at many major conferences and worked for the International Board of Lactation Consultant Examiners for 17 years.

Her other interest is using DNA to help people untangle family mysteries. In 2015, she established the Tasmanian Family History Society's DNA Interest Group. By mastering the intricacies of analysing DNA, Ros has helped dozens of individuals identify previously unknown parents and family members. Recipients say it's 'life changing'.

Ros, 74, also volunteers with the Female Convicts Research Centre and Convict Women's Press.

In 2023, she was created a Member of the Order of Australia for her service to women's health and to the community.

Sajini Sumar

Migrant advocate and co-founder, Multicultural Women's Council of Tasmania

Sajini Sumar has championed the cause of migrant and culturally diverse women in Tasmania for decades, giving a voice to groups that are often silenced.

Having lived and worked around the world as a registered nurse, Sajini has used her lived experience and cultural understanding to assist, support and advocate for migrant women. She's helped new migrants develop networks and delivered school workshops to promote cross-cultural understanding and harmony.

In 2005, she co-founded the Multicultural Women's Council of Tasmania as a platform to develop and support women – and she's still lobbying and advocating for positive change.

Due to her outstanding work, 76-year-old Sajini has been a recipient of many community awards, including being inducted into the Honour Roll of Women in 2005 for her service to multicultural affairs.

In 2012, this 'champion of multiculturalism' was selected as a People of Australia ambassador to help promote multiculturalism and provide feedback to the Federal Government.

2024 YOUNG AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR FOR TASMANIA – NOMINEE BIOS

Naarah

Actor, musician, Indigenous activist

A Gija woman raised in Hobart, 26-year-old Naarah is making a positive impact through her acting and music. She has toured in Wesley Enoch's musicals *The Sunshine Club* and *The Sapphires*. She played supporting lead Sharelle in the Amazon Prime series, *Deadloch*. She also co-created a TikTok series, *Bad Locals*, filmed in Tasmania.

During 2024, she'll be studying musical theatre at the Royal Academy of Music in London, after winning an Aurora Foundation Roberta Sykes Scholarship. All this from a 'proud underdog' who failed music at school in Hobart.

Naarah uses Instagram and TikTok to spark important conversations about First Nations identity, culture and representation.

She wants children to grow up seeing an entertainment industry full of diversity. To grow their dreams, she's worked with The Salvation Army Communities for Children music programs in disadvantaged schools, and with Indigenous students at schools in the Northern Territory through the National Aboriginal Sporting Chance Academy's programs.

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Dr Brooke Mason

Surfer, medical registrar and mental health advocate

As a child, 29-year-old Dr Brooke Mason found confidence in surfing and she became well respected among Hobart's surfing community. In 2017, she spoke out about women getting no prize money after she won the West Coast Classic, kickstarting a trend for equal pay in surfing competitions.

But surfing also exposed her to a tragic event. In 2015, she saw her friend fatally attacked by a shark off Ballina in NSW. It happened two days into a year-long break from her medical degree at the University of Tasmania.

Brooke developed post-traumatic stress disorder, an experience that made her more aware of mental health issues. It's knowledge she now uses as a GP registrar on Queensland's Sunshine Coast.

Brooke first promoted mental health as a teenager at the ABC's Heywire Summit in 2013, when she co-founded the Fresh Face Friday body positivity campaign. A decade on, she's still making important contributions to mental health.

Joanna Smart

Marine scientist and underwater photographer

As a marine scientist, Joanna Smart strives to limit the impact of aquaculture and wastewater on Tasmania's marine environment. As a storyteller, she uses her astonishing images to alert people to the majesty and fragility of the underwater world.

Joanna, 27, grew up just outside Hobart but spent her summers on the Freycinet Peninsula. She became captivated by the bustle of life she saw under the waves. In 2019, she graduated from the University of Tasmania with first class honours with a Bachelor of Marine and Antarctic Science.

She was then awarded the Australasian Rolex Scholar of the Our World-Underwater Scholarship Society. This took her from Fiji to the Faroe Islands and beyond. She swam with great white sharks and worked with National Geographic photographers on the Great Barrier Reef.

Joanna has won many prestigious photography prizes, including the 2020 United Nations World Oceans Day Photo Contest.

Ella Watkins

Writer, filmmaker, actress and mental health advocate

Ella Watkins brings her off-centre humour to an audience of millions through online platforms TikTok and YouTube.

The Tasmanian writer and filmmaker uses her platform for good, promoting LGBTIQ+ and autism awareness with joy and irreverence.

Creating her first short film at 15, by age 17 Ella had made *The Book of Memories*, which was short-listed in the 2013 Tropfest Short Film Festival. She is also an author and illustrator with her *Henry the Goat* series.

Ella is a creative for the modern digital age. She rose to fame for her comedic takes on body positivity and mental health on TikTok.

In 2023, 28-year-old Ella was awarded funding through Screen Australia's Skip Ahead program to create *You May Think I'm Joking*, a YouTube series about an autistic influencer whose true self begins bursting through the mask of 'who she thinks she should be', in blunt, honest and unfiltered musical numbers.

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2024 LOCAL HERO FOR TASMANIA – NOMINEE BIOS

Robyn Flittner

Refugee advocate and co-founder, Women's Friendship Group (Launceston)

Robyn Flittner is a person who makes things happen; if she sees a gap in services, she acts.

Warm and empathetic, Robyn's work has profoundly influenced thousands of lives. As a teacher in Tasmania's north, she helped families facing challenging circumstances to navigate complex bureaucracy. From 2005 to 2014, she taught and managed the English as an Additional Language program, supporting young people and families from a refugee background. She is now a family group conference facilitator, assisting families in crisis.

Robyn's volunteer work with refugees and asylum seekers is remarkable. She co-founded the Women's Friendship Group (Launceston) in 2015 to assist new arrivals in the local community. As part of Northern Refugee Support, she is on a taskforce that finds work opportunities. She also connects refugees with outdoor experiences.

Robyn, 64, never gives up on the hopes and dreams of refugees – and the community is all the better for it.

Clair Harris

Founder, Tassie Mums

Clair Harris believes no child should go without. She started Tassie Mums at her kitchen table in Hobart in 2018 to help families with essentials; her charity now assists more than 1,800 children each year with clothing bundles, nappy packs, activity packs, prams and car seats.

Tassie Mums supplies items to 70 social service organisations across the state working with refugees, families escaping domestic violence or affected by mental health issues and financial stress.

Clair, 42, is incredibly humble, but her efforts have made a real difference. She drums up financial support and clothing donations from across the community and her vision has inspired a large group of regular volunteers.

Last year, Tassie Mums' winter coat and pyjama drive collected more than 800 coats and vests and 600 pairs of pyjamas to ensure Tasmanian children are warm in winter. The group also helps schools with new socks and underwear to distribute.

Natalie Potter and Emily Versluys

Co-founders, Albert St Gang surfers

Natalie Potter and Emily Versluys started their free surfing group, the Albert St Gang, as a way to give a little back to the community.

It started small, but now people are coming to 'The Sunday session' at Turners Beach from all over the region – Burnie, Devonport, Wilmot, Port Sorell and Deloraine. A group of women in wetsuits, aged 20 to 69, grab their surfboards and walk from the backyard of a home on Albert Street to the ocean. For the next couple of hours they can focus on paddling, catching party waves and laughing.

Natalie and Emily are exploring bringing their idea into Tasmania's school system, working with disabled surfers and veteran groups, and even launching "spa weekends" with yoga, meditation and a bit of surfing.

But they say the greatest reward is seeing women enjoy the free playground of the ocean, being in the moment and having fun.

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Michelle Williamson

Founder, Farm It Forward Tasmania

Community gardens are a place to grow food, flowers and friendships – but Michelle Williamson has supercharged the idea. Through Farm It Forward Tasmania, Michelle harnesses the volunteer power of Tasmania’s north-west coast to add craft and cooking workshops that everyone can come to.

Michelle runs the workshops six, sometimes seven days a week, at community locations in Somerset and Wynyard. They are open to anyone who needs a safe place to sit, chat and have a free tea or coffee and a biscuit. She set up the program in 2021 and it’s worked wonders in reducing social isolation and helping people acquire new skills.

Michelle, 61, also coordinates the community gardens where food is grown and given to local food hubs to be distributed or made into meals. She is the glue that binds the community, helping people work with what they have to make a better life for themselves and others.

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