

**MEDIA RELEASE**

**MONDAY 6 NOVEMBER 2023**

**2024 AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR AWARD NOMINEES  
FOR NEW SOUTH WALES  
ANNOUNCED**

Melanoma treatment pioneers, a woman saving koalas, childhood cancer heroes, the Founder of Gotcha4Life, a holocaust survivor, a slam poet and the most famous 'mullet' to ever run across Australia are among nominees for the 2024 Australian of the Year Awards for NSW.

The 2024 award nominees are:

**2024 Australian of the Year for NSW**

Maha Abdo OAM - Social worker and CEO, Muslim Women Australia (South West Sydney)

Dr Saul Griffith - Co-founder, Rewiring Australia (Austinmer)

Prof Richard Scolyer AO and Prof Georgina Long AO - Melanoma treatment pioneers (Petersham/Sydney)

Gus Worland - Media personality, mental fitness advocate and founder, Gotcha4Life Foundation (Elanora Heights)

**2024 Senior Australian of the Year for NSW**

Ernest Friedlander OAM - Holocaust survivor and founder, Moving Forward Together Association (Maroubra)

Tin Hta Nu - Founder, Mid North Coast Refugee Support Group (Kendall)

John Ward - Geriatrician and co-founder, Hunter Ageing Alliance (Georgetown)

**2024 Young Australian of the Year for NSW**

Nikhil Autar - Researcher and founder, Bheem Health (Voyager Point)

Nedd Brockmann - Runner and ambassador for people experiencing homelessness (Forbes)

Taylor Hawkins - Co-founder, Foundations for Tomorrow (Sydney)

Sara Mansour - Co-founder, Bankstown Poetry Slam (Sydney)

**2024 Local Hero for NSW**

Steven Fordham - Co-founder, Blackroo Community Indigenous Corporation (Muswellbrook)

Kristy Giteau - Founder, Win the Day (Googong)

Angus Olsen - Childhood cancer illustrator and author (Katoomba)

Linda Sparrow - Co-founder, Bangalow Koalas (Bangalow)

*\*see detailed bios on following pages*

The NSW nominees are among 132 people being recognised across all states and territories.

The NSW award recipients will be announced on Monday 13 November 2023 in a ceremony at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney, which will also be available to watch online at [australianoftheyear.org.au](http://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 NSW nominees on their recognition.

“The nominees for the NSW awards are ordinary people doing the most extraordinary things,” said Mark.

“They demonstrate selfless giving, commitment to excellence, passion for community and leadership.”

**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: [NSW Nominee Photos](#)

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## **2024 AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR FOR NSW – NOMINEE BIOS**

### **Maha Abdo OAM**

Social worker and CEO, Muslim Women Australia

Maha Abdo OAM has been with Muslim Women Australia (MWA), formerly the Muslim Women Association, for more than three decades. Under Maha's leadership, MWA provides advocacy, policy advice, community development and domestic violence support for women and children. In 2022 alone, it assisted women and children from more than 72 culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Maha began volunteering with MWA in the 1980s, becoming its first CEO in 2000. She guided the organisation through difficult times, including after the Lindt café siege, where she helped boost social cohesion through media appearances.

Maha's work has helped provide new arrivals and other women with safety and assurance. She also works at a local, national and international level to advise governments on policy, services and strategies for Muslim and non-Muslim women.

A trained social worker, 66-year-old Maha's contributions to human rights, equality and community cohesion have been recognised through numerous awards.

### **Dr Saul Griffith**

Co-founder, Rewiring Australia

Dr Saul Griffith, co-founder of not-for-profit Rewiring Australia, has a gift for turning large reams of complex data into simple, actionable plans.

The engineer and clean energy advocate has spent a substantial part of his career working in the United States where he set up Otherlab and Rewiring America. Under his leadership, Rewiring America helped shape the US Inflation Reduction Act – the largest ever investment in energy transition and electrification.

Since returning to Australia in 2021, Saul has focused on Rewiring Australia. The group promotes electrification of households, transport and businesses, and running them off renewable energy. This could help Australia achieve its 2030 greenhouse gas emissions targets, ease cost-of-living pressures and reduce dependence on imported petrol and diesel.

A best-selling author, speaker and promoter of energy literacy, 49-year-old Saul advocates for bold and ambitious climate policy. He's inspired communities across Australia to form their own Electrify Everything groups and campaigns.

### **Prof Richard Scolyer AO and Prof Georgina Long AO**

Melanoma treatment pioneers

Professor Richard Scolyer AO and Professor Georgina Long AO's enduring partnership has saved thousands of lives from melanoma, known as Australia's national cancer.

Less than a decade ago, advanced melanoma was fatal – but thanks to Richard and Georgina's immunotherapy approach, which activates a patient's own immune system, it has become a curable disease. The co-medical directors of Melanoma Institute Australia are sought-after media commentators and advocates for sun-safe behaviour and melanoma prevention.

In June 2023, when Richard (56) was diagnosed with incurable grade 4 brain cancer, he and Georgina (52) developed a series of world-first treatments based on their melanoma breakthroughs. Richard became the world's first brain cancer patient to have pre-surgery combination immunotherapy. By undertaking an experimental treatment with risk of shortening his life, he has advanced the understanding of brain cancer and is benefiting future patients.

Richard has generated widespread public interest by publicly documenting his own cancer treatment and progress.

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## **Gus Worland**

Media personality, mental fitness advocate and founder, Gotcha4Life Foundation

Each year, 65,000 Australians attempt to take their own life. Gus Worland is determined to reduce that to zero by helping Australians build their mental fitness, resilience and social connections.

After losing his beloved mentor to suicide, Gus decided to speak out. A breakfast radio presenter at Sydney's Triple M, he spoke about this experience live on air, attracting hundreds of callers.

Gus then produced the ABC documentary series *Man Up*, about men's mental health, encouraging people to speak up. The series has had more than 133 million views in Australia and been released internationally.

In 2017, Gus and his wife, Vicky, founded the not-for-profit Gotcha4Life Foundation to foster mental fitness. In 2022 alone, it delivered more than 2000 programs to 120,000 mental fitness workshop participants in schools, sporting clubs, community groups and businesses.

Now 54, Gus has travelled Australia spreading his message, helping ensure no one worries alone.

## **2024 SENIOR AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR FOR NSW – NOMINEE BIOS**

### **Ernest Friedlander OAM**

Holocaust survivor and founder, Moving Forward Together Association

Ernest Friedlander OAM has spent his life spreading peace. A Holocaust survivor, he uses his extraordinary story of being saved by a German soldier to help change attitudes towards racism and prejudice.

Ernest is founder of the Moving Forward Together Association (MFTA), a Sydney-based social initiative aimed at creating better understanding.

After a 60 per cent spike in racist incidents early in the pandemic, the NSW Governor launched the Stop Racism Now campaign in 2021 teaching individuals how to combat racism. With their track record in designing effective programs aimed at fostering communal harmony, MFTA created the 2023 Stop Racism Now social media outreach campaign. It won the NSW Premier's Multicultural Award for Community Campaign of the Year.

Now 88, Ernest received an Order of Australia in 2007 for his services in combatting prejudice, and a Lifetime Achievement Award from Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors in 2022.

### **Tin Hta Nu**

Founder, Mid North Coast Refugee Support Group

Economics lecturer Tin Hta Nu fled Myanmar in 1990 after her life was threatened. Despite her experience of post-traumatic stress disorder and racism, she is devoted to giving back to her community.

In 2005, after setting up a community cafe, Tin created a community garden where she teaches locals how to grow and cook fresh produce. With friends, she founded The Mid North Coast Refugee Support Group (MNCRSG) in Port Macquarie in 2011. The group counters myths about asylum seekers and advocates against the inhumane treatment of refugees. MNCRSG has since helped 20 refugees successfully settle in the town.

Tin holds events at her home for refugees and volunteers to connect and sells produce from her garden to fundraise for MNCRSG. She also provides regular meals for people experiencing homelessness.

Tin, 74, helped set up a school in Myanmar, educating 200 children living in poverty, as well as financing the education of female orphans and libraries in rural areas.

**John Ward**

Geriatrician and co-founder, Hunter Ageing Alliance

John Ward, 79, has devoted his life to providing outstanding medical care for disadvantaged people and ageing Australians – often at personal cost and with little recognition. As director of the Prison Medical Service, he provided care to inmates – despite few resources – and advocated for prison reform to protect this vulnerable group.

Focusing on geriatric medicine and aged care since the mid-1980s, he advocates for older Australians and the importance of social determinants of health such as social connection, exercise and accessible environments.

His integrated, collaborative approach to dementia care for patients and their carers has made the Hunter region a leader in this field.

John also co-founded the Hunter Ageing Alliance, which calls for governments, businesses and organisations to better focus on older people's needs. The organisation has eight programs in planning or implementation stage to create age-friendly communities, tackle elder abuse and end social isolation of older people.

**2024 YOUNG AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR FOR NSW – NOMINEE BIOS****Nikhil Autar**

Researcher and founder, Bheem Health

Diagnosed with leukaemia at the age of 17, Nikhil Autar has undergone chemotherapy, bone marrow transplants, open heart surgery and survives a life-threatening chronic illness.

As a cancer survivor who understands the importance of access for people with disability, Nikhil created Knia Maps – 'Know In Advance Maps' – which has plotted accessibility at major Sydney hospitals, universities, public venues and transport, plus hundreds of small businesses.

Nikhil also founded Bheem Health, a social enterprise that provides low-cost medical devices for sick and vulnerable people. His first device, BheemUP, allows any bed to convert into a hospital bed. He's now developing BheemSense, the world's first sensor mat that tracks sleep phases and helps minimise pressure sores.

Medical student Nikhil has raised almost \$500,000 in grant funding and conducted cancer research.

A blogger, disability advocate and motivational speaker, the 30-year-old's diverse and inclusive hiring practices have given migrants, people with disabilities and student engineers their first jobs.

**Nedd Brockmann**

Runner and ambassador for people experiencing homelessness

When Nedd Brockmann moved to Sydney from the New South Wales' country town of Forbes, he was shocked at how many people were without homes and living on the street – and how normalised it seemed to be. An electrician who had just started running, Nedd decided to take action.

In 2022, Nedd ran across Australia from Perth's Cottesloe Beach to Sydney's Bondi Beach to raise awareness about homelessness – and make money for people experiencing it. Nedd completed the run in just 47 days, covering an average 86km a day, and was the fastest Australian at the time to run across the country. More than 10,000 people were there when Nedd reached Bondi Beach.

The 24-year-old's run raised \$2.5 million for homelessness charity Mobilise. With the money, Mobilise started 'Nedd's Kickstart Scholarship', a program aimed at offering employment, direct cash transfers, and ongoing support including housing and financial counselling to people at risk of homelessness.

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## **Taylor Hawkins**

Co-founder, Foundations for Tomorrow

During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, Taylor Hawkins set up Foundations for Tomorrow, an independent, not-for-profit organisation that aims to protect Australia's future interests by tackling today's social, economic and environmental issues.

As the Foundation's managing director, Taylor gathered 30 young Australians to propose a vision for a more equitable and sustainable Australian future that would serve future generations of Australians. She surveyed young Australians about their concerns in 2021, collecting more than 10,000 responses – the single largest survey of young Australians by young Australians.

Despite facing disengagement of volunteers after extended lockdowns, maintaining her full-time work and having to learn on the job, Taylor has successfully sustained Foundations for Tomorrow.

An experienced speaker and facilitator, 29-year-old Taylor is also an advisor to the Our Future Agenda team of the United Nations Foundation. She has been recognised in Smart Company's 30 under 30 and is part of the Australia-ASEAN Emerging Leaders Program.

## **Sara Mansour**

Co-founder, Bankstown Poetry Slam

For 10 years, Sara Mansour has directed and led significant Australian cultural institutions and events. In 2013, aged 19 years, Sara – a poet and writer herself – co-founded Bankstown Poetry Slam, the first poetry slam in western Sydney. Under Sara's leadership, it has grown into Australia's largest regular live poetry event.

Bankstown Poetry Slam won the Special Award at the 2023 Premier's Literary Awards – the first arts organisation to receive this honour – and the 2016 Western Sydney's Leadership Dialogue Pemulwuy Prize.

Sara has curated and hosted over 150 poetry events. She's also coordinated high school programs for young people, established Australia's first ever National Youth Poetry Slam and directed multiple festivals. Her efforts have built lasting connections and uplifted the voices of marginalised young people.

Lawyer Sara, now 30, sits on the boards of the Crescent Institute and Monkey Baa Theatre Company, and volunteers with Arise Foundation, running poetry workshops for women who've experienced domestic violence.

## **2024 LOCAL HERO FOR NSW– NOMINEE BIOS**

### **Steven Fordham**

Co-founder, Blackroo Community Indigenous Corporation

Proud Kamilaroi man Steven Fordham is fuelled by the desire to help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who've been in prison avoid returning there.

The co-founder of Blackroo Community Indigenous Corporation, Steven is helping reduce Indigenous recidivism through training and education. He collaborates with local educational institutions and vocational training centres to give Indigenous people the skills they need to find employment.

Steven also helps former inmates develop community ties and a sense of belonging by promoting positive family relationships and cultural pride. He advocates for culturally appropriate counselling and therapy services to address trauma and help participants heal. Through Steven's Second Chance for Change program, more than 160 men have found meaningful pathways to a life after prison.

Steven, who has dyslexia, taught himself to read after leaving school. The 32-year-old co-founded and manages the multimillion-dollar construction and mining support firm, Blackrock Industries, in the Hunter Valley.

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**Kristy Giteau**

Founder, Win the Day

In 2019, Kristy Giteau's four-year-old daughter, Ka'ili, was diagnosed with a rare cancer. When Ka'ili and her parents relocated to Sydney for six months for Ka'ili's treatment, Kristy noticed gaps in services for the carers of children with rare cancers.

In response, Kristy started the non-profit organisation Win the Day. Initially, the organisation provided meals for carers who were with their children in hospital. Soon, the charity was also helping with accommodation, funeral expenses and emotional support for families who had to travel from rural, regional and remote areas for their child's treatment. To date, the charity has supported over 135 families.

Win the Day now also offers financial support and advocacy for research organisations trying to find cures for rare childhood cancers and raises community awareness about these illnesses.

Kristy, a former rugby union player for the Wallaroos and now 42, runs Win the Day on an entirely voluntary basis. She was announced as 2023 Monaro Woman of the Year.

**Angus Olsen**

Childhood cancer illustrator and author

Angus Olsen's daughter, Jane, was two when she was diagnosed with an aggressive form of cancer. While Angus sat at his daughter's bedside during her weeks of chemotherapy and surgery, he began drawing about her procedures to make sense of it.

The former Disney artist now creates artworks and books in simple language to help children better understand their cancer treatment. He's produced more than 20 books, which have been translated into 24 languages. His books and artworks have been accessed by people in 102 countries.

In 2020, Angus also made a series of comics that illustrated the similarities between lockdown and what children with cancer face all the time. Angus has teamed with several charities to create resources and raise funds for childhood cancer research.

The 44-year-old makes no profit from his illustrations. Every one of his images can be accessed free from his website [idrawchildhoodcancer.com](http://idrawchildhoodcancer.com) and social media pages.

**Linda Sparrow**

Co-founder, Bangalow Koalas

Koalas are one of Australia's most loved native animals. Tragically, they're also an endangered species, largely due to land clearing and bushfires.

Linda Sparrow is determined to help restore her local koalas' habitat. The co-founder and president of Bangalow Koalas dedicates much of her time and energy to securing grants and donations to cover the costs of establishing a koala wildlife corridor through New South Wales' Northern Rivers region.

Since 2019, Linda's efforts have led to the planting of more than 336,000 trees on more than 119 planting sites. The community-driven organisation aims to plant 500,000 trees by the end of 2025.

Linda has encouraged local landowners to make their properties available to be part of the koala corridors, which will also be home to other native species.

The 60-year-old's achievements were acknowledged by The Australian Geographic Society in 2022 when it named her the Conservationist of the Year.

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