

MEDIA RELEASE 11 JANUARY 2024

WHO'S IN THE RUNNING FOR THE 2024 AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR AWARDS?

Awards to be announced 25 January 2024

australianoftheyear.org.au

The national nominees for the 2024 Australian of the Year Awards include community leaders, educators, volunteers environmental and animal advocates, medical researchers, changemakers and community creators.

From nominations submitted by the public, and the selection of State & Territory recipients in all four award categories, there are now 34 people in the running to be named 2024 Australian of the Year, 2024 Senior Australian of the Year, 2024 Young Australian of the Year and 2024 Australia's Local Hero.

National Australia Day Council CEO, Mark Fraser AO CVO, said the national nominees represent what inspires Australians and makes us proud.

"Each of the national nominees were nominated by a member of the public, someone who was inspired by their achievements or contributions and believed their story should be shared with all Australians," said Mr Fraser.

"Whether they have spent a lifetime helping others, are forging new pathways, breaking down barriers, bringing people together, challenging us to do better or demonstrating the potential we all have to achieve greatness, the national nominees are all showing us what it is to be exemplary citizens."

The 2024 Australian of the Year Awards will be announced at the National Arboretum in Canberra on the evening of Thursday 25 January 2024.

The ceremony will be broadcast live on ABCTV and ABC iview from 7:30pm (AEDT).

The national nominees for the 2024 Australian of the Year Awards are:

2024 AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR NOMINEES

- 2024 Australian of the Year for the Australian Capital Territory - Joanne Farrell (Canberra)
- 2024 Australians of the Year for New South Wales - Prof Georgina Long AO & Prof Richard Scolyer AO (Sydney)
- 2024 Australian of the Year for the Northern Territory - Blair McFarland (Alice Springs)
- 2024 Australian of the Year for Queensland - Marco Renai (Gold Coast)
- 2024 Australian of the Year for South Australia - Tim Jarvis AM (Hyde Park)
- 2024 Australian of the Year for Tasmania - Stephanie Trethewey (Dunorlan)
- 2024 Australian of the Year for Victoria - Janine Mohamed (Gisborne)
- 2024 Australian of the Year for Western Australia - Mechelle Turvey (Perth)

2024 SENIOR AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR NOMINEES

- 2024 Senior Australian of the Year for the Australian Capital Territory - Ebenezer Banful OAM (Canberra)
- 2024 Senior Australian of the Year for New South Wales - John Ward (Georgetown, Newcastle)
- 2024 Senior Australian of the Year for the Northern Territory - Yalmay Yunupirju (Yirrkala)

2024 Senior Australians of the Year for Queensland - Reverend Robyn & Reverend Dr Lindsay Burch (Gold Coast)
2024 Senior Australian of the Year for South Australia - Sister Meredith Evans (Underdale)
2024 Senior Australian of the Year for Tasmania - Reverend James Colville AM (Bagdad)
2024 Senior Australian of the Year for Victoria - Glenys Oogjes (Heidelberg)
2024 Senior Australian of the Year for Western Australia - Charles Bass (Applecross)

2024 YOUNG AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR NOMINEES

2024 Young Australian of the Year for the Australian Capital Territory - Caitlin Figueiredo (Canberra)
2024 Young Australian of the Year for New South Wales - Nikhil Autar (Voyager Point)
2024 Young Australian of the Year for the Northern Territory - Peter Susanto (Darwin)
2024 Young Australian of the Year for Queensland - Emma McKeon AM (Gold Coast)
2024 Young Australian of the Year for South Australia - Tiahni Adamson (Adelaide)
2024 Young Australian of the Year for Tasmania - Naarah (Glenorchy)
2024 Young Australian of the Year for Victoria - Bhakta Bahadur Bhattarai (Wodonga)
2024 Young Australian of the Year for Western Australia - Kate Kirwin (Perth)

2024 AUSTRALIA'S LOCAL HERO NOMINEES

2024 Local Hero for the Australian Capital Territory - Selina Walker (Canberra)
2024 Local Hero for New South Wales - Angus Olsen (Katoomba)
2024 Local Hero for the Northern Territory - Witiyana Marika (Yirrkala)
2024 Local Hero for Queensland - David Elliott OAM (Winton)
2024 Local Hero for South Australia - Rachael Zaltron OAM (Ridgehaven)
2024 Local Hero for Tasmania - Clair Harris (Blackmans Bay)
2024 Local Hero for Victoria - Betul Tuna (Shepparton)
2024 Local Hero for Western Australia - Nick Hudson (Wembley)

Detailed finalist bios are provided on the following pages.

For more information on the Australian of the Year Awards, visit <https://www.australianoftheyear.org.au/>

ENDS.

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BIOS: on following pages

PHOTOS of national nominees from State & Territory Awards announcements in Oct/Nov 2023 or as supplied at links below – please note credits

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BIOGRAPHIES – NATIONAL NOMINEES, 2024 AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR AWARDS

AWARD CATEGORY: 2024 AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR

Australian Capital Territory Joanne Farrell Founder of Build Like A Girl

Joanne (Jo) Farrell is a champion for females in the construction industry. In 2020, she founded Build Like A Girl, a not-for-profit program that supports girls and women to work in trades. Build Like A Girl matches females with pre-apprenticeship and entry-level training, then mentors them to secure work in the construction industry.

As the general manager of Kane Constructions ACT, part of the multimillion-dollar Kane group, 45-year-old Jo has pushed for a better gender balance. Kane Constructions ACT went from having 6 per cent female staff in February 2020 to a 48 per cent female team in December 2022.

Jo works closely with government, peak industry bodies, unions, training organisations and building contractors to help them recruit, train and employ women in trade roles. She also led construction of Strathnairn Charity House, a project designed and mostly built by women, which was auctioned in March 2023. Proceeds from the sale were distributed to local charities.

New South Wales Prof Georgina Long AO and Prof Richard Scolyer Melanoma treatment pioneers

Professor Georgina Long AO and Professor Richard Scolyer 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 Georgina and Richard'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 (57) was diagnosed with incurable grade 4 brain cancer, he and Georgina (53) 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.

Northern Territory Blair McFarland Founder of Central Australian Youth Link-Up Service

Blair McFarland has spent decades fighting to improve the health and lives of some of the most disadvantaged youth in Australia. Blair moved to Central Australia in 1986, and over the next two decades he gained a deep understanding of the lives of Indigenous people in the region. The petrol-sniffing epidemic of the 90s caused him to set up Central Australian Youth Link-Up Service (CAYLUS) in 2002.

CAYLUS was instrumental in developing youth programs, orchestrating the roll-out of Low Aromatic Fuel (LAF, or Opal) and implementing the Federal Low Aromatic Fuel Act. The combination of these activities resulted in a 95 per cent reduction in volatile substance misuse.

Now 66, Blair's passion and commitment to Central Australia is reflected in his participation in politics, advocacy, local radio and community services. In 2008, he received the Prime Minister's Award for Outstanding Contribution in Drug & Alcohol Endeavours by the Australian National Council on Drugs.

Queensland
Marco Renai
Founder of Men of Business

Marco Renai, 49, is founder of Men of Business (MOB) Academy. The senior secondary school focuses on empowering at-risk-young men with the skills, knowledge and confidence to be happy, healthy and successful.

After experiencing troubles at school as a teen and later volunteering in youth justice, Marco realised there were no programs for young men who struggled to engage with life and education. Inspired by his Italian heritage, which holds that family, food and doing good can make a difference, he piloted the first MOB program in 2011.

Marco and his community raised \$1 million to open the MOB Academy in 2020. Young men participate in education, work pathways and social and emotional wellbeing programs. Meals are provided and they can also engage with community in real-world experiences.

Today MOB is a federal and state-funded accredited academy with two branches, 35 passionate staff, thousands of past graduates and 195 thriving students.

South Australia
Tim Jarvis AM
Environmental scientist and advocate

An environmental scientist, author, filmmaker, philanthropist and speaker, 57-year-old Tim Jarvis AM seeks pragmatic solutions to climate change and biodiversity loss.

This includes South Australia's Forktree Project, which involves restoring degraded farmland back to nature and growing rare native plants to safeguard them from extinction. Tim is also vice-president at Fauna & Flora; a global ambassador and governor of WWF, ambassador to Koala Life and a board director of the Foundation for National Parks & Wildlife.

As an adventurer, Tim re-enacted Douglas Mawson and Ernest Shackleton's Antarctic explorations and advocates for the protection of Antarctica. And this year, he helped secure 475,000 square kilometres of marine sanctuary off World Heritage-listed Macquarie Island.

In 2017, Tim was made a Bragg Fellow by the Royal Institution of Australia and has won multiple awards, including the Australian Geographic Society's 2016 Conservationist of the Year for his 25Zero project about melting equatorial glaciers.

Tasmania
Stephanie Trethewey
Rural women's advocate and the founder of 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.

Victoria
Janine Mohamed
Indigenous health leader

Janine Mohamed is an exceptional leader, even if she sometimes jokes about being an ‘accidental CEO’. In her nearly five years leading the Lowitja Institute in Melbourne, and before that as CEO of the Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses and Midwives, she has created important platforms for Indigenous peoples and championed culturally safe health care.

A Narungga Kurna woman, 50-year-old Janine initially studied nursing at the University of South Australia, where she’s now an Adjunct Professor and a celebrated Alumni of the Year. For the next 25 years, she worked in nursing, health policy and research in the Indigenous Community Controlled Health sector. In 2020, she was awarded an honorary doctorate in nursing by Edith Cowan University.

Janine is committed to dismantling racism, expanding opportunities for the Indigenous health workforce, and to closing the gap in Indigenous health outcomes through the systemic integration of cultural safety.

Western Australia
Mechelle Turvey
Advocate for victims of crime

In 2022, Mechelle Turvey’s 15-year-old son, Cassius Turvey, was assaulted coming home from school. Tragically, the Noongar Yamatji schoolboy died of his injuries 10 days later.

Cassius’ death sparked a national day of action across Australia, with rallies and vigils to express grief, anger, hurt and solidarity with his loved ones. Mechelle, still grieving the recent death of her husband Sam, led the march in Perth. She gave a powerful speech about her son, calling for calm and non-violence – and the need for proper care for victims of crime and their families.

In 2023, Mechelle began utilising her lived experiences by training Western Australia Police Force recruits in dealing with victims of crime with empathy and support.

Through her life, 57-year-old Mechelle has volunteered to support her community, including helping people in prison. She has donated much of the money raised for Cassius to youth organisations. Her courage, care and compassion for others are exemplary.

AWARD CATEGORY: 2024 SENIOR AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR

Australian Capital Territory
Ebenezer Banful OAM
Volunteer and multiculturalism advocate

Ebenezer Banful OAM arrived in Australia more than three decades ago. Ever since, he has dedicated countless hours to helping others understand Ghanaian and African values, and promoting multiculturalism wherever he can.

Ebenezer spends much of his free time offering advice and assistance to newly arrived communities to help them integrate into Canberra. The Companion House community organisation that he helped found supports survivors of persecution, torture and other war-related trauma.

Ebenezer has served on numerous committees advocating for multiculturalism. He has volunteered at nearly every National Multicultural Festival and assisted the Ghana High Commission's participation in the event in 2013. He also set up Radio Ghana Hour, a community station focused on Ghanaian life and culture, for which he is program coordinator and presenter.

Respected in his community, 77-year-old Ebenezer’s efforts have helped create harmony and understanding. He gains deep satisfaction assisting Canberra’s new arrivals to settle in and thrive.

New South Wales

John Ward

Geriatrician and co-founder of 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.

Northern Territory

Yalmay Yunupiṅu

Teacher, linguist and community leader

Gentle, generous and funny – Yalmay Yunupiṅu touches many lives in north-east Arnhem Land. As a teacher and linguist, she guided teaching at Yirrkala Bilingual School for four decades, retiring in March 2023.

Often called the mother of the school, Yalmay started by translating Dr Seuss books at the community library into her local Yolngu Matha language. She qualified as a teacher and, with her husband (of Yothu Yindi fame), forged a bilingual teaching approach to make young people strong in their Yolngu language and culture.

A respected elder, 68-year-old Yalmay is in constant demand for consultations, projects and her traditional healing work. She helps everyone, always with a smile on her face.

In 2005, she was awarded a 'Teacher of Excellence' by the Northern Territory Department of Education and was an Honorary University Fellow at the Charles Darwin University. Since retiring, she has been teaching the next generation about traditional healing.

Queensland

Reverend Robyn and Reverend Dr Lindsay Burch

Founders of Havafeed Relief

Reverend Robyn and Reverend Dr Lindsay Burch's not-for-profit organisation Havafeed Relief has fed more than one million people. The couple started Havafeed in 1994 with a van and donated loaves of bread. It's now a regular fixture at the Mermaid Beach Community Centre. Six days a week, visitors can enjoy a hot meal, pick up a hamper, connect with others or talk with a local support service if they need help.

Robyn (72) and Lindsay (75) have dedicated their retirement years to Havafeed. They start before dawn to make sure they have enough food and volunteers for each day's work. The organisation receives no funding and relies entirely on donations from the community. The couple have never asked for wages, often using their own funds to keep their work afloat.

Havafeed Relief currently provides more than 300 meals a week and has raised almost \$2 million in donations over the last 30 years.

South Australia **Sister Meredith Evans**

Sister of Mercy Meredith Evans has dedicated her life to helping the vulnerable and inspiring others to do the same. Through her vocation, 75-year-old Meredith has provided kind, non-judgemental care and assistance to many – including refugees, young people, women experiencing homelessness, women exiting violent relationships and women leaving prison.

In 2019, Meredith established the South Australian division of Young Mercy Links – a network of young people passionate about social justice, advocacy and education.

She was also instrumental in re-establishing Justice for Refugees SA and the Young Christian Workers Movement in South Australia. In 2014, Meredith partnered with like-minded people to start a new Circle of Friends in Adelaide, providing on the ground support for refugees.

Meredith's care has extended abroad, engaging people to contribute to the work of the Jesuit Refugee Service in Siem Reap, Cambodia. The service provides newly built homes for people with a landmine injury and their families.

Tasmania **Reverend James Colville AM** **Founder of 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.

Victoria **Glenys Oogjes** **Animal justice advocate**

Glenys Oogjes started work at Animals Australia in 1983 as its sole employee. She is now CEO of the organisation, which is one of Australia's most effective animal advocacy groups, and has been putting animal welfare on government and community agendas for four decades.

Glenys has been a quiet force behind historic changes in Australian animal policy, including some of our current animal protection laws. She was one of the instigators behind the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy – first endorsed in 2004 – and the more recent Australian Animal Welfare Standards for Poultry, which will see battery cages for egg-laying hens phased out across the country.

Even when faced with distressing evidence or vehement opposition, 67-year-old Glenys remains a calm bulwark for animal justice.

Highly regarded internationally, Glenys is also a board member of the World Federation for Animals and works with other leaders to build a kinder world on a global scale.

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Western Australia
Charles Bass
Founder of the Centre for Entrepreneurial Research and Innovation

When Charles (Charlie) Bass founded the Centre for Entrepreneurial Research and Innovation (CERI) in 2015, he became a mentor for hundreds of start-ups and a powerful supporter of innovation and sustainability in Western Australia.

To date, CERI has provided over 600 aspiring entrepreneurs with the tools, mentorship and support needed to turn their ideas into successful businesses – including raising over \$7.5 million in funds. CERI also facilitates research commercialisation, particularly in medical technology and biotech.

Charlie worked in Western Australia's mining industries – very successfully – for decades. But he knows the state can't rely on its resources forever. CERI reflects Charlie's desire to see greater economic diversification in Western Australia. Through speaking engagements and CERI, 74-year-old Charlie advocates for the creation of high-knowledge, high-value, export-oriented businesses for the long-term sustainable growth of the state.

A notable philanthropist, Charlie created the Bass Family Foundation in 2006 to help provide disadvantaged children with a quality education.

AWARD CATEGORY: 2024 YOUNG AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR

Australian Capital Territory
Caitlin Figueiredo
Co-chair of the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition

Changemaker Caitlin Figueiredo is determined to give young people a say in politics. In 2015, she worked to bring young people's voices into parliament through a national youth advisory council. This led to her election to the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (AYAC) board, a volunteer position that she juggled with university work. Caitlin revitalised and transformed AYAC, which represents 4.5 million young Australians, creating a more diverse board that better represented young people.

Empowering the next generation of female politicians, she co-founded a political leadership group called Girls Take Over Parliament. It connects with young women from all political parties and enables them to receive support and training from a bipartisan lens.

Caitlin has also addressed the United Nations about the Sustainable Development Goals; this previous work establishing youth structures on gender equality is ongoing. Caitlin's efforts remain focused on making waves and creating more visionary leadership.

New South Wales
Nikhil Autar
Researcher and founder of 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 Kنيا 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.

Northern Territory
Peter Susanto
Medical student and community volunteer

When he was two years old, Peter Susanto astounded his parents by translating words from Bahasa Indonesia into English. In 2022, he started a Bachelor of Clinical Science at Charles Darwin University on his way to a career in medicine, aged just 15.

Peter's intelligence is phenomenal. At age 12, he won second place in the RoboCup National in Melbourne, competing against Year 11 and 12 students. He was also the first Territorian to represent Australia in the International Brain Bee Olympiad, a competition about the brain and neuroscience, and came third in the world.

Peter has a generous spirit and love for his community. Since 2015, he and his sister, Eva, have sold Indonesian snacks at Nightcliff foreshore to raise money for charities, including The Fred Hollows Foundation and Indonesian orphanages. He also volunteers with several community groups and is an active member of the Nightcliff Swimming Club.

Queensland
Emma McKeon AM
Olympian

Emma McKeon AM is the most successful Australian Olympian of all time – a title she claimed before her 28th birthday. She comes from a strong family of Australian swimmers. In fact, her father, uncle, brother and mother have all represented Australia.

Back in 2012, Emma just missed out on being chosen for the London Olympics. She took a break, but rediscovered her passion and went on to make a splash at the 2014 Commonwealth Games, where she claimed six medals from six races.

At the 2020 Summer Olympics, Emma became the first female swimmer and the second woman in history to win seven medals in a single Olympics. She has also broken Commonwealth Games, Olympic and World records.

Now aged 29, Emma has other titles to her name. In 2022 she was made a Member of the Order of Australia, and in 2023 she was named Gold Coast Young Australian of the Year.

South Australia
Tiahni Adamson
Wildlife conservation biologist

A proud Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander woman descended from the Kaurareg Nations, Tiahni Adamson is passionate about sustainability.

She graduated from University of Adelaide with a Bachelor of Science (wildlife conservation biology) and is now the lead community engagement officer at climate change solutions company CH4Global, where she ensures Indigenous knowledge is embedded into CH4Global's projects.

Tiahni has worked with the CSIRO on Indigenous education programs, trained under Al Gore as a Climate Reality Leader in 2019 and fostered relationships between First Nations communities and government.

A regular speaker on the intersection of Indigenous justice, climate change and environmental conservation, 28-year-old Tiahni is also on the national leadership team with Seed, Australia's only First Nations-led youth climate justice group, and a youth dialogue member for the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

She was recognised as one of Science and Technology Australia's Superstars of STEM and an InDaily South Australian 40 Under 40 for 2023.

Tasmania

Naarah

Actor, musician and 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.

Victoria

Bhakta Bahadur Bhattarai

Registered nurse and founder of Albury Wodonga Multicultural Community Events Inc

Better known as Durga, 28-year-old Bhakta Bahadur Bhattarai's selfless actions are a constant source of care and connection among Wodonga's multicultural community.

Born and raised in a Bhutanese refugee camp in Nepal, Durga came to Australia with his family in 2012. He completed high school and then trained as a pharmacy assistant and registered nurse. Feeling lonely and isolated during his studies, Durga founded the Albury Wodonga Multicultural Community Events Inc in 2014. The organisation advocates for and showcases multicultural communities and organises help during difficult times.

On top of his work as a nurse, Durga supplied homemade masks to the elderly and emergency food relief during the COVID-19 lockdowns. He also arranged multiple community wellbeing and entertainment programs, and has raised thousands of dollars for sick young people and disability support.

Among several awards recognising his contributions, Durga was awarded the Meritorious Service Award from the Government of Victoria in 2019.

Western Australia

Kate Kirwin

Founder of She Codes and women in STEM advocate

Kate Kirwin founded She Codes Australia in 2015 with the aim of teaching women coding skills, helping them enter technical careers and building a likeminded community.

As a country girl, 30-year-old Kate strongly believes in empowering women from some of Australia's most remote regions. So far, more than 6000 women from all over the country have learned to code through She Codes.

Kate's work is closing the gender gap in tech, where only 30 per cent of employees are women. She has sourced more than \$1 million from government and industry to support women in STEM.

Kate has also contributed to the growth of Spacecubed, a start-up hub in Perth, and since 2014 has played a pivotal role in building communities and coordinating programs such as Plus Eight and Startup Weekend. Her achievements have been recognised with the Business News 40 Under 40 Award and The West Australian's Rising Star Award.

AWARD CATEGORY: 2024 AUSTRALIA'S LOCAL HERO

Australian Capital Territory

Selina Walker

Co-chair of ACT Reconciliation Council

Ngunnawal woman Selina Walker is a respected emerging elder and leader whose integrity has supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and reconciliation across the ACT.

The granddaughter of Aunty Agnes Shea, a recipient of the Order of Australia and a former ACT Chief Minister's Senior Citizen of the Year, Selina continues her grandmother's legacy of influencing and driving change with her unwavering efforts.

Since 2018, Selina has promoted reconciliation as co-chair of the ACT Reconciliation Council. As a founding member of Yerrabi Yurwang Child and Family Aboriginal Corporation, she helps improve outcomes for Aboriginal families and children, especially those in out-of-home care.

Selina advocates for Indigenous people within the justice system as a member of the ACT Victims of Crime and Justice Committee and has held roles to improve all children's educational outcomes in the Catholic school system. A kinship carer, 42-year-old Selina was awarded Barnardos' 2017 ACT Mother of the Year.

New South Wales

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 and social media pages.

Northern Territory

Witiyana Marika

Musician and filmmaker

Witiyana Marika has lived his life celebrating and teaching his culture. The 62-year-old Rirratjingu (Yolngu) elder is best known as one of the founding members of famous rock band, Yothu Yindi. Witiyana is also celebrated for his acting roles, other musical projects, cross-cultural education and being a leader of his people.

Most recently, Witiyana was the senior cultural advisor to the film *High Ground*, which he also co-produced and starred in. Although the movie's story is fictional, its roots are fact and portray the stories of the massacres of Indigenous people. Witiyana's involvement in the film reflects his strong belief in truth telling and sharing Indigenous and Australian colonial history.

A senior Dirritay and Dhalgarra (ceremonial leader) and a teacher of songlines and ceremonies for his clan, Witiyana is known for being generous and inclusive with his cultural knowledge and continuing the practice of Yolngu Nation Cycle and Rom (lore).

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Queensland
David Elliott OAM
Co-founder of the Australian Age of Dinosaurs Museum of Natural History

David Elliott OAM's chance discovery of a dinosaur fossil during routine sheep mustering in 1999 led to the revival of Australia's palaeontology field – and the creation of a palaeo-tourism industry that put outback Queensland on the map.

David's initial fossil discovery was followed by others. As palaeontologists began to return to the region to investigate, David and his wife Judy founded the Australian Age of Dinosaurs Museum of Natural History in 2002 as a not-for-profit charity.

The Museum first operated on the couple's property, where they conducted dinosaur digs and built an impressive collection of fossils. Later, it was moved onto donated land. Today, it houses Australia's most significant collection of fossils from the country's largest dinosaurs. A major tourist attraction, it serves as a centre for Australian paleontological research and discovery in Australia.

David, now 66, was recognised for his contributions to science with an Order of Australia Medal (OAM) in 2015.

South Australia
Rachael Zaltron OAM
Founder of Backpacks 4 SA Kids

In 2013, Rachael Zaltron OAM and another family began collecting donations and putting them into backpacks to help a few vulnerable and neglected children.

This was the start of Backpacks 4 SA Kids. Commencing in Rachael's carport, the organisation now has its own warehouse and volunteers helping vulnerable children across the state.

Under Rachael's leadership, the organisation provides backpacks with age-appropriate emergency clothing, toiletries and other necessary supplies for children aged 0 to 16 years who are taken into care, need to quickly leave their homes due to family violence or experiencing homelessness.

Backpacks 4 SA Kids also provides home starter packs for families starting again after domestic violence, and anchor packs for young people aged between 12 and 25 who are experiencing homelessness. They also provide Christmas presents for 0- to 18-year-olds entering emergency care.

Since 2012, 50-year-old Rachael and her team have helped more than 86,000 South Australian children.

Tasmania
Clair Harris
Founder of 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.

Victoria
Betul Tuna
Co-founder of Point of Difference Studio

Betul Tuna is deeply committed to humanitarian and community causes. The Turkish Muslim-Australian – who was born, raised and lives on Yorta Country – has been instrumental in supporting local and international communities during emergencies and making the district a safe, supportive place.

During the 2022 floods in her local community and the 2023 earthquake in Turkey, Betul helped ensure affected communities received necessary supplies and access to essential services.

She also coordinated the design and implementation of a state-funded program that aims to prevent violence against women in migrant and refugee communities and created a bold and successful campaign against female genital mutilation.

Betul co-founded the 'Hijack'd' mobile food van, which provides culturally appropriate food and creates jobs for local young people. The 38-year-old also co-founded the Point of Difference Studio which champions arts, culture and identity and advocates for culturally safe, respectful and accessible environments in regional Victoria.

Western Australia
Nick Hudson
Founder of The Push-Up Challenge and mental health advocate

Nick Hudson and his friends had started a push-up challenge in 2017 to get fit and motivate each other. In 2018, Nick extended the challenge to more friends to raise awareness and funds for mental health. Then Nick experienced depression himself following open heart surgery. While recovering, he focused on making The Push-Up Challenge a public event.

Fast forward to 2023 and The Push-Up Challenge has become an annual event. Individuals and teams across Australia aim to meet set push-up targets, learn facts about mental health and, if they choose, raise funds for mental health charities. To date the event has raised \$40 million.

In 2023 alone, over 200,000 participants completed 315 million push-ups, making them fitter, raising \$14.6 million for mental health and getting people talking and thinking about mental health.

Now an inspiring public speaker and aged 46, 'Chief of Push-ups' Nick was awarded Mental Health Advocate of the Year WA 2021.