

MEDIA RELEASE

THURSDAY 28 OCTOBER 2021

**ACT NOMINEES FOR
2022 AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR AWARDS ANNOUNCED**

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Nominees for the 2022 ACT Australian of the Year Awards include a diversity doctor, an inspirational basketballer, a resilient runner, a St Johns Ambulance volunteer, a young woman inspiring girls to run the world and an everyday champion.

They are among 16 ACT residents in the running to be named the ACT Local Hero, Young Australian, Senior Australian or Australian of the Year.

The 2022 ACT award nominees are:

ACT Australian of the Year

Dr Marrwah Ahmadzai - Doctor and diversity advocate (Canberra)

Patrick Mills - Basketball player and Indigenous rights advocate

Dr David O'Rourke OAM - Obstetrician and co-founder of Mother Ignacia Hospital (Canberra)

Dr Sam Prince - Doctor and entrepreneur

ACT Young Australian of the Year

Matthew Breen - Founder of Running for Resilience (Canberra)

Asha Clementi - Co-founder of The Girls Leadership Network (Canberra)

Sean Dondas – Advocate and Youth Leader, CanTeen (Canberra)

Jahin Tanvir - Policy adviser and multicultural youth advocate (Harrison)

ACT Senior Australian of the Year

Gregory Aldridge - CEO of EveryMan Australia (Canberra)

Anne Buttsworth PSM - Chair of the Early Morning Centre (Reid)

Valmai Dempsey - Volunteer at St John Ambulance (Canberra)

Julie Tongs OAM - CEO of Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health and Community Services (Narrabundah)

ACT Local Hero

Kate Crowhurst - Financial literacy educator (Canberra)

Luke Ferguson - Youth support worker at The Woden School (Canberra)

Kelli-Ann (Kelli) Jackson - Group Leader of Women's Adventure ACT (Canberra)

Rob Regent – Founder and Head Coach at Everyday Champions (Canberra)

**see bios on following pages*

The nominees are among 129 people being recognised across all states and territories as part of the program, which began in 1960.

The four award recipients from the ACT will be announced in a ceremony on Friday 12 November at the National Gallery of Australia which will also be available to watch online via livestream.

They will then join the other state and territory recipients as national finalists for the national awards announcement on 25 January 2022.

National Australia Day Council CEO Karlie Brand congratulated the ACT nominees for their achievements.

“The ACT nominees share a commitment to helping and respecting others,” said Ms Brand.

“Even in pursuing their own careers and pathways, they are supporting or showing the way for others.

“It’s people such as our ACT nominees who make our world a better place.”

For more information on the Australian of the Year Awards visit australianoftheyear.org.au.

ENDS.

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

Nominee [photos can be downloaded](#) from this link (note all photos provided by nominees):
<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/udh07q80wimh4oi/AAA1VGYSGTniveX5Cp217axBa?dl=0>

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ACT AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR – NOMINEE BIOS

Dr Marrwah Ahmadzai

Doctor and diversity advocate

Dr Marrwah Ahmadzai is an obstetrics and gynaecology registrar and a devoted advocate for providing empathetic and culturally sensitive care to women from all backgrounds.

As well as providing public commentary on other social and health issues, Marrwah has written an article for SBS Life about her parents' journey as refugees. Her article raises awareness of the sacrifices and challenges faced by refugees and migrants when they resettle in another country.

Marrwah helped develop a video on migrant and refugee health for Women's Health Week 2020 for the Royal Australian New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists. She has used her platform to open discourse about diversity more broadly, including a TEDxCanberra talk on the power of storytelling in breaking down barriers.

Marrwah represents the junior doctor body at the Canberra Region Medical Education Council, ANU COVID-19 peer support program and the Council of Doctors-in-Training.

In 2021, Marrwah won the ACT Multicultural Individual Champion Award at the ACT Multicultural Awards.

Patrick (Patty) Mills

Basketball player and Indigenous rights advocate

Since leaving Canberra for the US in 2007 on a sporting scholarship, Patrick (Patty) Mills has had a legendary basketball career. He became an NBA Champion in 2014 with the San Antonio Spurs, and recently competed in his fourth Olympics, leading the Boomers to their first-ever podium finish in Tokyo. Creating history, Patty was the first Indigenous Australian Olympics flag bearer.

Off the court, Patty uses his platform to inspire, support and enact positive change. Patty is the founder of the Team Mills Foundation – an organisation dedicated to supporting and championing culture, diversity and underprivileged families.

Using the power of sport to create pathways and opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth, he launched Indigenous Basketball Australia, whose programs, competitions and inspirational and motivational sessions are a national first.

Patty was named 2015 ACT Young Australian of the Year.

In 2020, Patty donated his \$1.5 million salary to organisations tackling racial inequality.

A proud Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australian, Patty is inspiring the next generation to own their story.

Dr David O'Rourke OAM

Obstetrician and co-founder of Mother Ignacia Hospital

After an overseas trip in 2009, Dr David O'Rourke had an idea for a charitable project that would change the lives of thousands of people in West Timor, Indonesia – a place with high mortality rates for mothers and infants.

David spent eight years fundraising to build a maternity hospital, contributing \$1.2 million in patient fees earned at his private practice in Deakin, Canberra. On 11 June 2016, with the support of his wife Sue-Ann, David opened the Mother Ignacia Hospital in Soe, West Timor.

Since opening its doors, the hospital has treated more than 46,000 patients in the poverty-stricken town. The facility focuses on child and maternal health, but also accepts general admissions.

A father of four from Garran, David began his medical career as a general practitioner before specialising as an obstetrician. He's delivered thousands of babies in hospitals across both the public and private sectors throughout his career.

David is highly regarded by Canberra locals for his generosity, professionalism and good humour.

Dr Sam Prince

Doctor and entrepreneur

As a doctor, philanthropist, aid worker and entrepreneur, Dr Sam Prince has been a long-time contributor to the Australian and global community.

In 2005, he founded Zambrero – a Mexican restaurant chain with a mission to end world hunger. Through its Plate 4 Plate initiative, Zambrero has donated over 50 million meals to people in need.

This isn't the only cause close to Sam's heart. In 2011, Sam used the funds from Zambrero to underwrite and form an aid organisation, One Disease. One Disease is focused on eliminating Crusted Scabies – a disease affecting remote Indigenous communities in Australia, resulting in a 50 per cent mortality rate within five years if left untreated. Ten years on, One Disease has successfully achieved a zero per cent recurrence rate, thereby effectively eliminating this disease as a public health concern.

In 2012, Sam was named ACT Young Australian of the Year for his philanthropic efforts and in 2018 he was named EY's Social Entrepreneur of the Year.

ACT YOUNG AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR – NOMINEE BIOS

Matthew Breen

Founder of Running for Resilience

We've all had a tough time at some point in our lives that required us to keep moving and not give up. That's what inspired Matthew (Matt) Breen to establish Running for Resilience – an exercise campaign aimed at empowering people to turn their internal struggles into positive ones through movement.

Matt is open about his own mental health challenges. When he lost his dad to suicide in 2010 and his Mum to ovarian cancer in February 2021, he turned to exercise as a coping mechanism. It helped him feel good about himself and connect with others in a safe and unthreatening environment.

When Running for Resilience began in 2019, it had just 20 participants. Now it regularly hosts anywhere between 60 to 120 runners on the Kingston Foreshore every Wednesday night, with a smaller group on Friday mornings.

But most important to Matt is the number of conversations the campaign has opened up around mental health and the need to support one another.

Asha Clementi

Co-founder of The Girls Leadership Network

Through her work as co-founder of The Girls Leadership Network and founder of Girls Run The World, Asha Clementi is inspiring young women to pursue their leadership dreams.

Asha co-founded The Girls Leadership Network in 2017 at the age of 18. The program holds a series of free leadership workshops for young women aged 16 to 21, inspiring participants to create and run their own initiatives – from school clubs to social impact start-ups.

In 2018, Asha founded Girls Run The World – a program that encourages young women to engage in diplomacy. It gives participants the opportunity to spend a day in a participating Embassy or High Commission, meeting with Ambassadors and making tangible contributions to the embassy's work.

Asha also continues to positively impact the lives of hundreds of young people through her leadership position with Griffin Hall, at the Australian National University, and her role as a UN Youth ACT representative.

Sean Dondas

Advocate and Youth Leader, CanTeen

Sean Dondas has been an integral member of CanTeen's leadership team, first as a Local Youth Leadership Group member, then secretary, vice president and president in Western Australia. He later joined the national Youth Advisory Team, before being appointed a director on CanTeen's board in 2015.

Sean joined the organisation in 2008 at age 14 after his mother's terminal cancer diagnosis. She passed away a year later, leaving him and his two younger brothers as wards of the state.

He's spent the past 13 years helping many young people in similar situations cope with a cancer diagnosis in their family and been a staunch advocate for young people's needs. His input has helped shape decisions on a range of vital strategies, including clinical trials, youth cancer services, community-based support, and an online support community and counselling service.

Sean has a keen interest in public policy and economics. In 2019, he moved to Canberra and now works as a senior policy officer with the Attorney-General's Department.

Jahin Tanvir

Policy adviser and multicultural youth advocate

Buoyed by his experiences as a first-generation migrant facing racism and discrimination, Jahin Tanvir has become a leading advocate for young people across Australia's multicultural communities.

Jahin has worked with organisations such as Oaktree, the Australian Red Cross, World Vision, headspace Canberra, and the Sydney Children's Hospital, Randwick. These efforts have seen him receive the 2021 Young Canberra Citizen of the Year Award for Individual Community Service, as well as recognition in the 7NEWS Young Achiever Awards for Community Service.

Vocal about the importance of mental health, Jahin regularly visits high schools to offer support to students who might be struggling with stress and anxiety due to the pandemic. He's also represented Australia on the global stage, as a guest speaker at the Australasian Aid Conference and the National Youth Commission Summit.

On top of his advocacy for young people, Jahin is studying optometry at the University of Canberra. He complements this by volunteering with the Canberra Blind Society.

ACT SENIOR AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR – NOMINEE BIOS

Gregory Aldridge

CEO of EveryMan Australia

A registered psychologist, Gregory (Greg) Aldridge has long offered his skills and knowledge to a range of programs dedicated to helping individuals, couples and families deal with domestic and family violence.

For the past two decades, he's devoted himself to building EveryMan Australia into a trusted organisation that helps men with a range of issues take control of their lives – starting with their violent and aggressive behaviours. He gives them a voice and the tools they need to overcome tough times.

Greg also supports men who live with high and complex needs, arising from childhood exposure to domestic violence and sexual abuse, mental health conditions, substance use, intellectual disability and acquired brain injury.

Greg is a member of the Domestic Violence Prevention Council, and was previously a board member for the ACT Council of Cultural & Community Organisations.

Working in the community sector since 1977, Greg is a creative thought leader and a strong advocate for changing the way we understand men's violent and aggressive behaviours.

Anne Buttsworth AM PSM

Chair of the Early Morning Centre

Anne Buttsworth is driven by a strong sense of social justice and understands the positive difference that volunteering can make within communities.

As Chair of the Early Morning Centre in Canberra, which provides support to people who are homeless, Anne's skills as an administrator and analyst have helped expand the centre's outreach. This has enabled the centre to continue its work, despite the recent challenges of the pandemic. She's also been a driving force in securing funds, helping the centre extend the range of services it offers to the homeless community.

In addition, Anne has been an active contributor to the success of the Australian Women's Archives Project. She's played a major role in documenting the lives of Australian women, past and present, and making this information available to a broad audience.

Through her inspiring leadership and contagious enthusiasm, Anne has built teams to achieve impressive goals that strengthen the community around her. She also excels in her mentorship of young female leaders.

Valmai Dempsey

Volunteer at St John Ambulance

Starting as a cadet volunteer while still in primary school, for more than 50 years Valmai (Val) Dempsey has dedicated her life to St John Ambulance. She's one of the Australian Capital Territory's longest-serving volunteers and, year after year, she still dedicates more hours than any other volunteer.

In 2020, Val faced her biggest challenge yet as a St John Ambulance volunteer – first with the 'Black Summer' bushfires, followed by the COVID-19 pandemic. In response, she led 40 fellow volunteers as they supported fire-affected communities during the emergency that stretched over many weeks.

Then when the pandemic hit, Val displayed unwavering commitment to the St John team, despite heavy impacts on team morale. Without hesitation, she personally contacted every volunteer to check they were 'doing OK' in terms of welfare, mental health and morale.

It is these tireless commitments to St John that has led many in the community to know her lovingly as 'Aunty Val'.

Julie Tongs OAM

CEO of Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health and Community Services

While working at Canberra Hospital more than 30 years ago, Julie Tongs initiated a liaison service to bridge the gap between Indigenous patients and hospital staff. This work led her to become CEO of Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health and Community Services in 1998. Winnunga provides a culturally safe environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to access health and community services.

A Wiradjuri woman, Julie is always generous with her time, readily available to offer advice and information on matters involving the health and wellbeing of the Australian Capital Territory's Indigenous population. Julie also dedicates her time to helping Indigenous people who are detained in the Alexander Maconochie Centre. In 2012, Julie was named ACT Local Hero.

She advocates for more appropriate monitoring, effective management and support. This work can be stressful at times, and sometimes involves supporting families whose relatives have died in prison. Despite this, Julie never shies away from the work. She's always prepared to pursue their concerns in a bid to achieve better social outcomes.

ACT LOCAL HERO – NOMINEE BIOS

Kate Crowhurst

Financial literacy educator

As a high school teacher, Kate realised that the one thing students weren't supported to learn was the one thing they'd need to thrive beyond school: financial literacy. Despite being on the national curriculum, it wasn't available in all schools – and the resources weren't relatable for her students.

Kate was inspired to study financial literacy at the University of Melbourne and the University of Cambridge, returning to Australia to work on national education policy and programs. Her efforts in advocating for financial literacy education saw her recognised with a place on the Forbes 30 under 30 list in 2018.

She launched Money Bites in 2019 as a financial literacy platform that makes learning about money more accessible to young people, by presenting important financial concepts in bite-sized snippets.

She has worked with the Foundation of Young Australians as a Young Social Pioneer and supports young people globally as a Coordinating Ambassador for One Young World. Kate is now turning her attention to reversing the economic disadvantages women face in Australia.

Luke Ferguson

Youth support worker at The Woden School

At The Woden School – a Canberra high school catering to the functional needs of students with disabilities – Luke Ferguson empowers young people with disability to increase their independence, achieve their goals, and engage with the wider community.

In 2019, Luke established Party Down Productions, an inclusive school-wide music program that engages students in all aspects of event planning. This includes teaching them to use Photoshop to make posters, set playlists and perform as DJs.

Helped by the students at The Woden School, Luke co-wrote and produced the music video 'Labels Don't Define Us' – a song about accepting diversity. The video went viral with more than 120,000 views and was shared by the United Nations on their Social Development Network website.

Through the program, Luke helps to break down barriers, remove stigma and enhance the self-esteem of young people with disability, by shifting the focus to their innate ability to spark joy in the lives of those around them.

Kelli-Ann Jackson

Group Leader of Women's Adventure ACT

One of the early members of Women's Adventure ACT, Kelli-Ann (Kelli) Jackson took over the leadership of the group in 2018. Established in 2017, Women's Adventure ACT is a volunteer-led, community social enterprise based in Canberra helping women experience the outdoors in a safe, supportive and judgement-free way.

In just a few years, Women's Adventure ACT has grown into a significant and well-organised hub of nearly 4,000 members. Kelli has since left her full-time job in the public service to wholly dedicate herself to Women's Adventure ACT – completely unpaid, with some group costs coming directly out of her own savings.

In addition to organising and leading events herself, Kelli helps other group volunteers build the skills and confidence they need to lead group activities.

Kelli has plans to make Women's Adventure ACT financially sustainable, with avenues to offer paying jobs to women in the community, while remaining accessible and affordable to those who experience cost as a barrier to enjoying the outdoors.

Robert Regent

Founder and Head Coach at Everyday Champions

Robert (Rob) Regent is a passionate advocate for people with a disability, using his passion for sport, health and fitness to create a more understanding and inclusive community. Having travelled the world setting up sporting programs in developing countries, Rob turned his attention to his local community when he founded Everyday Champions in Canberra.

Everyday Champions runs programs, activities and events built around six life areas: health and wellbeing, family and friends, wealth, meaning, growth and fun. By focusing on these elements, Rob inspires people with a disability to live their best lives.

Involved in sport and disability services for 20 years, Rob was previously a community educator at the Cerebral Palsy Alliance, a project officer at Right To Play, and a sport and development consultant for Sport Australia.

Rob has also been a mentor and community outreach coordinator for Menslink, and a sport development manager for the Special Olympics Australia in the Australian Capital Territory and New South Wales.