

MEDIA RELEASE

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WESTERN AUSTRALIA 2023 AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR AWARDS NOMINEES ANNOUNCED

Nominees for the Western Australia (WA) 2023 Australian of the Year Awards include a Lifeline ambassador, an advocate for Stolen Generations survivors, an Autism researcher, a Paralympic gold medallist, an Olympian and a tropical disease adviser.

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

The 2023 Western Australian award nominees are:

Australian of the Year

Professor Samar Aoun – Researcher, advocate for end-of-life care, bereavement support (Bunbury)
Rodney Bridge – Founder, Sideeffect and anti-synthetic drugs campaigner (Churchlands)
Dr Saschveen Singh – Tropical infectious disease adviser (Perth)
Professor Andrew Whitehouse – Autism researcher and science communicator (Mount Hawthorn)

Senior Australian of the Year

Vince Garreffa – Lifeline ambassador, fundraiser and Chair, Mondo Community Warriors (Mount Lawley)
Theresa Kwok – Community advocate (Joondanna)
Antoinette (Toni) Russell – Community volunteer (Kingsley)
Carole Stacey – Paediatric physiotherapist and special needs advocate (Mandurah)

Young Australian of the Year

Zahra Al Hilaly – Gender equality and youth advocate (Mirrabooka)
Nagmeldin (Peter) Bol – Athlete and Olympian (Thornlie)
Madison de Rozario OAM – Athlete, Paralympic gold medallist, advocate
Scott Guerini – Telethon fundraiser and initiator, Scott's Great Walk (Alkimos)

Local Hero

James (Jim) Morrison – Advocate for Stolen Generations survivors and founder, Yokai (Dianella)
James (Jimmy) Murphy – Co-founder, Town Team Movement (Leederville)
Helen Shervington OAM – Co-founder and Chairwoman, CinefestOZ (Busselton)
Janine Wood – Co-founder, No Limits Perth (Madeley)

**see bios on following pages*

The Western Australian nominees are among 130 people being recognised across all states and territories.

The four award recipients from Western Australia will be announced on Monday 14 November 2022 in a ceremony at Government House, Perth which will also be available to watch via ABC iView from 7.00pm (local Perth time).

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

National Australia Day Council CEO Karlie Brand congratulated the nominees on their recognition.

“The 2023 Western Australian nominees reflect the wide and varied people of the state and their extraordinary achievements,” said Karlie.

“What an inspirational group of people, all of whom have something we can learn from, be inspired by or be supported by.”

20 Years Of Local Heroes

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

In 2009, Western Australia’s Graeme Drew was named Australia’s Local Hero for his work in sea safety education and rescue systems to save lives on the coast.

You can read more about Graeme here: <https://www.australianoftheyear.org.au/recipients/graeme-drew>

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/scl/fo/js4lqvpv60i19tjhn5z4c/h?dl=0&rlkey=rk4j44hujjibku75gp7ortix9>

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WA 2023 AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR – NOMINEE BIOS

Professor Samar Aoun

Researcher and advocate for end-of-life care, bereavement and grief support

Professor Samar Aoun advocates for a person-centred approach to end-of-life care. She focuses on under-served groups such as those with motor neurone disease (MND) and dementia, terminally ill people who live alone and family carers.

As Perron Institute Research Chair in Palliative Care at the University of Western Australia, Samar is known as an international leader in the advocacy of public health approaches to palliative care.

Her work has strengthened the Compassionate Communities movement that mobilises and equips people to better support those facing death and bereavement.

As co-founder and chair of the South West Compassionate Communities Network, Samar also volunteers in roles including director on the MND Australia Board, president of the MND Association of WA and a board member of Palliative Care WA.

Among numerous awards, 63-year-old Samar received the Medal for Excellence from the European Society for Person Centered Healthcare in 2018 and the Centenary Medal in 2003 from Australia's Prime Minister.

Rodney Bridge

Founder, Sideeffect and anti-synthetic drugs campaigner

Rodney Bridge's 16-year-old son died in 2013 after taking a synthetic form of LSD purchased over the dark web by a friend.

Told by authorities that investigating the drug organisation was futile, he tracked down the company that made the drug himself and travelled to China, secretly filming a meeting with the drug's distributors. Rodney took the evidence to the Australian Federal Police. Later, he enlisted Nine's current affairs program *60 Minutes* to film another meeting in China using hidden cameras. That vision was seen by 1.2 billion people worldwide.

Rodney's investigation resulted in a crackdown in China and the restriction of manufacturing, trade and sale of 116 synthetic drugs. Twenty-one thousand Chinese nationals were arrested, 1,500 factories were closed and 248 websites were shut down.

Rodney's tragedy became his life's mission. The 63-year-old founded Sideeffect Australia, a not-for-profit that builds awareness about substance use and teaches young people to make informed decisions.

Dr Saschveen Singh

Tropical infectious disease adviser

As a tropical infectious disease adviser for Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders), 42-year-old Dr Saschveen Singh has helped some of the world's most disadvantaged people during epidemics and in conflict hotspots.

Saschveen has been on the front line with medical teams in the Democratic Republic of Congo, treating patients for tropical illnesses including Ebola amid civil unrest. She's worked in a variety of other contexts including COVID-19 and measles outbreaks, helping to treat malaria and neglected diseases of poverty, and caring for refugees in a camp in Tanzania after they fled conflict in Burundi.

Back home in Perth, Saschveen – an advocate for human rights and equitable access to healthcare – has worked in general practice, adult and paediatric emergency medicine, refugee health, travel and occupational health.

She is a long-term volunteer for community radio station RTRFM, presenting on a music show featuring women and gender diverse artists, and has featured on ABC Radio National's Health Report.

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Professor Andrew Whitehouse

Autism researcher and science communicator

For more than two decades, Professor Andrew Whitehouse and his research team have significantly advanced research into autism, which affects about two per cent of the Australian population. Their knowledge has fundamentally improved clinical practice and community perceptions about autism.

Andrew is Professor of Autism Research at both the Telethon Kids Institute and the University of Western Australia. He led development of the first Australian guidelines for the diagnosis of autism and for supporting children with autism.

His internationally renowned research program was the first to prove that parent-led therapy applied early in life can significantly reduce disability experienced by children with autism.

Andrew has published more than 250 peer-reviewed journal articles. He is also a dedicated community advocate for autism and a renowned science communicator.

Thanks to 41-year-old Andrew's commitment and transformative work, Australians living with autism can now receive better, safe and effective therapies.

WA 2023 SENIOR AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR – NOMINEE BIOS**Vince Garreffa**

Lifeline ambassador, fundraiser and Chair, Mondo Community Warriors

Since leaving school to become a butcher at the age of 14, Vince Garreffa has lived a life of service, becoming one of Western Australia's best known and most successful butchers – and a major fundraiser.

Italian-born Vince appreciates everything he has but gets even more joy from helping others. Vince and his volunteers have raised more than \$1 million for a variety of charities and over \$4 million for Lifeline WA over the past 25 years. All funds have gone towards mental health care.

Vince also supports many smaller charities as chair of non-profit organisation Mondo Community Warriors. And through COVID-19 he provided care packages for elderly customers who were isolated and vulnerable.

The 71-year-old philanthropist is an enthusiastic foodie and vocal advocate for Australian farmers, independent butchers and the food and wine industries.

Theresa Kwok

Community advocate

With a background in social work, Theresa Kwok has been helping migrants settle in Australia from the moment she arrived from Hong Kong 35 years ago.

For most of this time, she has supported older migrants from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities at Perth's Chung Wah Community and Aged Care. Theresa is now CEO of the organisation, which delivers a range of community care programs for clients, their families and ethnic communities. She looks after about 800 clients.

Theresa helps elderly members of CALD communities to live independently and has created more equitable access to culturally appropriate migrant and aged-care services across all communities.

Recognised with multiple awards for her efforts, 68-year-old Theresa is constantly reshaping how aged and community care services are delivered to meet changing demands.

Her advocacy continues to raise awareness of the unique challenges and strengths of CALD older people within government, service providers and CALD communities.

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Antoinette (Toni) Russell

Community volunteer

Eighty-year-old community volunteer and former nurse Antoinette (Toni) Russell packs more into a day than many do in a year.

Each morning from 7am, she hits the phones for the Red Cross, calling five different people considered socially isolated or vulnerable due to health issues. She's made more than 25,500 calls over the past 13 years.

Toni has also made almost 1,300 visits to elderly or vulnerable people as part of the Red Cross Community Visitors Scheme. And she volunteers with Uniting Care (now Juniper Aged Care) to visit those in care.

But Toni shares more than her friendly smile with the community. Over the past 50 years she's donated blood and plasma to the Red Cross about 650 times – that's an average of 13 times a year.

She also continues to play tennis at least twice a week, and supports junior development and other tennis club activities at the Greenwood Tennis Club.

Carole Stacey

Paediatric physiotherapist and special needs advocate

Paediatric physiotherapist Carole Stacey has advocated for almost 40 years for facilities to improve the lives of children with special needs.

Carole became aware early in her career of the lack of opportunities for these children to be included in activities others took for granted, such as playing, exercising and competing. She knew parents, carers and families were also disadvantaged because of the lack of support, so she facilitated interactions between them to share experiences, advice and equipment.

Carole fundraised more than \$100,000 to design and construct an accessible, sensory-rich local playground for children of all capabilities and continues her advocacy for more widely accessible play equipment in Mandurah. She has worked in aquatic physiotherapy and volunteer swim coaching both in mainstream swim clubs and with squads designed for children with physical, medical and learning difficulties.

At 68, Carole continues to voluntarily support children with a weekly swim squad and through Save the Children activities.

WA 2023 YOUNG AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR – NOMINEE BIOS

Zahra Al Hilaly

Gender equality and youth advocate

Zahra Al Hilaly is determined to be heard. A first-generation Australian from a Palestinian and Iraqi family, she advocates for gender equality and sustainable change at local, national and international levels.

She helped deliver Christmas Island's first leadership and advocacy summit for young people, which led to the creation of the Christmas Island Youth Association, encouraging young people to speak out about issues that affect them.

Zahra has spoken for Australian youth at the United Nations and is in the UN Women's 30 for 2030 Network of young gender equality champions. The 22-year-old is a participant of the UN Women's Generation Equality Youth Task Force, where she aided in drafting of the Global Young Feminist Manifesto and contributed to the pledge of \$40 billion for gender equality initiatives by 2026.

Zahra also delivers workshops to help organisations remove their unconscious biases when working with multicultural Australia.

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Nagmeldin (Peter) Bol

Athlete and Olympian

Nagmeldin (Peter) Bol is a two-time Olympian, holds the current national 800m record, and in 2021 was the first Australian runner in 53 years to make it into an Olympic 800m final.

Peter and his family, originally from Sudan, arrived in Australia from Egypt when he was eight. His sporting talent was soon recognised with a sporting scholarship to Perth's St Norbert College for basketball. When he was 16, a coach persuaded him to try athletics.

His running soon started getting him noticed and Peter debuted for Australia at the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro. He became a household name at the Tokyo Games, held in 2021, where he won his semi-final and became the fastest-ever Australian over 800 metres.

When he's not training or studying, 28-year-old Peter works as a coach, mentor and keynote speaker, aiming to help others achieve their dreams. His philanthropic efforts were recently recognised by Athletics Australia with the prestigious 2022 Peter Norman Humanitarian Award.

Madison de Rozario OAM

Athlete, Paralympic gold medallist and advocate

Madison de Rozario OAM was just 14 when she won her first Paralympics medal as part of the Women's T53/54 4x100m relay in Beijing in 2008.

Madison is now widely regarded as one of Australia's greatest athletes. Nine of her 20 medals are gold. She is the first Australian athlete to win four gold medals in any Para sport at the Commonwealth Games and, in 2021, she was the first Australian woman to win the New York City Marathon.

Now 28, Madison advocates for genuine and authentic diversity throughout society, with a specific focus on people with disability.

Taking out top honour in the 2022 Australian Women in Sport Awards, she is determined to use her platform to influence change well outside of sport.

Scott Guerini

Telethon fundraiser and initiator, Scott's Great Walk

At the age of four, Scott Guerini spent two weeks trying to convince his parents to let him walk the 25km from their farm to the town of Southern Cross for charity. They weren't convinced he'd make the distance.

Scott did the walk in eight hours, 40 minutes and raised \$3,000 for Telethon. That was the beginning of Scott's Great Walk. Now 16, Scott's walk has become an annual marathon bolstered by numerous walking challenges and hikes.

In 2017 Scott wrote, illustrated and published his book *Did You Know You Can Change the World?* with sales donated to Telethon. His podcast Scott's Great Chat also encourages young people to make a difference.

An accomplished public speaker at corporate events across Australia, Scott has walked more than 1,000km so far and raised more than \$200,000 for Telethon. His goal is to raise \$1 million for the charity by the time he's 90.

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WA 2023 LOCAL HERO – NOMINEE BIOS

James (Jim) Morrison

Advocate for Stolen Generations survivors and founder, Yokai

For more than four decades, Noongar Elder James (Jim) Morrison has advocated for Stolen Generations survivors, families and communities. He seeks acknowledgement, healing and redress for the children forcibly removed from their families, country and culture.

Jim founded the organisation Yokai to help heal the spirits of the Stolen Generations. Yokai hosts the Sorry Day commemorations in Perth's Wellington Square each year. He also championed the Mia Mias memorial in Wellington Square that acknowledges the Stolen Generations.

Jim, 68, personally supports and mentors many Stolen Generations survivors and family members. He advocates for appropriate financial redress, Aboriginal-led social and emotional wellbeing programs to heal intergenerational trauma, and for all Western Australians to know the truth about the genocidal policies that created the Stolen Generations.

Jim was a founding member of Reconciliation WA, the co-convenor of Bringing Them Home WA and the inaugural Chair of the WA Stolen Generations Alliance.

James (Jimmy) Murphy

Co-founder, Town Team Movement

Social entrepreneur James (Jimmy) Murphy founded the Town Team Movement to inspire and support people to be responsible for improving their communities. The non-profit social enterprise enables people and local government to connect, organise and act to regenerate neighbourhoods.

Jimmy uses Town Teams to advocate for more accessible and affordable community spaces that reflect the people who inhabit them. Residents, businesses and other community members are encouraged to form or join an existing Town Team group. Town Team Movement groups have held street festivals, run working bees, introduced street art, built community gardens, rewilded areas and created food co-ops.

Jimmy, 42, also co-founded Arts Impact WA, a philanthropic organisation that funds arts projects.

Jimmy's practical, positive approach has spread from Western Australia across the nation and to New Zealand. There are now more than 108 Town Teams making the world better – one community at a time.

Helen Shervington OAM

Co-founder and chairwoman, CinefestOZ

Helen Shervington OAM is a driving force behind the hugely successful CinefestOZ Film Festival, held annually in Busselton. The festival has grown from 2008 from being a small event attended by 1,800 people to one drawing over 26,000 in 2022.

The \$100,000 CinefestOZ Film Prize is the largest in the Australian film industry. The event also provides a boost to tourism and the arts to the State's south-west region.

Born and raised in Busselton, 76-year-old Helen has been an unwavering supporter of her local community since returning in 1996 from Perth. From 2002 to 2007 she was a Councillor for the Shire of Busselton. She spent 10 years as the chair of the Busselton Water Corporation and chaired the committee that designed and oversaw the redevelopment of the Busselton foreshore.

Helen has received multiple awards including a Lifetime Achievement award at the 2018 Business Excellence Awards, and an honorary Doctor of Arts conferred by Edith Cowan University in 2022.

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Janine Wood

Co-founder, No Limits Perth

Janine Wood is co-founder and Chair of No Limits Perth, a not-for-profit that supports vulnerable people in metropolitan Perth and its surrounds.

The organisation provides food and essential items to people doing it tough – including those escaping domestic violence, the homeless, vulnerable families and older people. It also gives care, respect and hope to those seeking help.

No Limits Perth supports 72 other charitable and government organisations. With no ongoing financial support, it's Janine and her dedicated volunteers who keep it running.

Janine, 53, has collaborated with Fortuna Foundation on its Positive Spin mobile laundry van so vulnerable people can clean their clothes. She has also set up Heart of the Street, a mobile service to distribute essential items to homeless people.

Janine was the 2019 Westfield Whitfords Local Hero. Her compassion and kindness have created an inclusive environment, allowing vulnerable people to create friendships and experience a sense of belonging.

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