

Australian Capital Territory

NATIONAL GALLERY OF AUSTRALIA

30 October 2023

Australian
of the Year
➤ Awards

Reflect. Respect. Celebrate

20
24

MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF MINISTER

Each year, the Australian of the Year Awards recognise outstanding Australians and their immense contributions to our communities. These Awards allow us to celebrate the people in our community who continuously go above and beyond, demonstrating our great Australian spirit.

Today we will recognise 17 remarkable Canberrans. They have been selected from a talented and diverse group of nominees across our community, and it is an honour to be able to recognise their achievements.

Our finalists are volunteers, advocates, and proponents of change. They are community champions, passionate leaders and believers in equity for all. Their hard work and commitment are worthy of our attention, and they inspire us to continue to do our best and follow their lead.

As we celebrate our 2024 finalists, I would also like to acknowledge our outgoing 2023 ACT Australians of the Year – Olympia Yarger, Professor Tom Calma AO, Kofi Owusu-Ansah and Dr Shamaruh Mirza – and thank them for their contributions over the past 12 months.

I am excited to see what our finalists and recipients will go on to achieve and the impact their continued work will have on our community, on our country and beyond.

Andrew Barr MLA
ACT Chief Minister



2024



DR RAYMOND AKHURST

Volunteer, St Vincent de Paul Society

Dr Raymond (Ray) Akhurst brought practical support and kindness to communities devastated by the 2019-20 Black Summer bushfires.

A volunteer and member of the St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra/Goulburn, Ray coordinated the Society's Bushfire Taskforce, supporting local Vinnies volunteers and staff in bushfire-affected areas. He spearheaded both the emergency response and the years of work that followed to rebuild communities.

Ray organised the Vinnies' Bushfire Recovery Program, setting priorities and strategies, attending meetings, advising applicants and answering countless questions. The program provided almost 10 million dollars through emergency assistance and 165 community grant and development projects from the Snowy Mountains to the South Coast of New South Wales.

He established sanitation solutions for people without access to bathrooms or toilets after the fires and organised Vinnies' funding of training courses, helping locals find jobs and rebuild their communities.

Ray's compassion and wise leadership has been instrumental in these communities' recovery.



DAN BOURCHIER

Journalist, broadcaster, company director and public speaker

Every day, Dan Bourchier speaks up for people without a voice – and scrutinises those who hold power.

As the ABC's Voice referendum correspondent, he provided balanced coverage – even while receiving threats and abuse for his coverage, all while navigating the complexities and challenges which arose as part of the national debate.

A journalist, broadcaster and social commentator, Dan is a determined advocate for justice, especially for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the LGBTQI+ community.

Dan was born in Northern Territory's Tennant Creek and has Indigenous heritage from his mother's family in Victoria.

His first reporting job was at age 14 for a local newspaper. Now based in Canberra, he has worked for a range of television, print, radio and online news agencies including National Indigenous Television (NITV), Sky News and the ABC.

A sought-after public speaker, Dan is a company director and sits on numerous committees including as chair of the ABC's Bonner Committee.



JOANNE FARRELL

Founder, 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, 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.



KURT GRUBER

Co-founder, Worldview Foundation and WV Technologies

Kurt Gruber has dedicated his life to creating positive change for many.

Kurt co-founded the charity Worldview Foundation in 2018. The organisation helps Indigenous people, particularly 17- to 24-year-olds, to overcome disadvantage, build stable lives and become job-ready and prosperous.

Worldview combines holistic wrap-around support with employment and training opportunities in the group's social enterprises, as well as externally.

Kurt also co-founded the national social enterprise WV Technologies, a highly certified IT disposals and e-waste recycling firm that won Supply Nation's Registered Supplier of the Year Award 2023. The organisation, which employs and trains many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, is helping to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve cyber-security for both community and national interest.

Kurt was previously chairperson of No Slavery Australia and deputy chairperson of Victims of Crime Assistance League. With Anēwan ancestry, Kurt's energy and passion inspire everyone around him.



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, Ebenezer's efforts have helped create harmony and understanding. He gains deep satisfaction assisting Canberra's new arrivals to settle in and thrive.



WILLIAM BUSH AND MARION MCCONNELL OAM

President and vice president, Families and Friends for Drug Law Reform

William (Bill) Bush and Marion McConnell OAM have been at the forefront of the ACT's nation-leading drug reform, promoting a harm reduction approach to personal drug use.

Their activism to change drug laws and treat addiction as a health issue has had a local, national and global impact.

Through Families and Friends for Drug Law Reform, the pair has advocated for police to attend overdoses only if violence or death is involved. That makes it more likely people will call an ambulance if an overdose occurs.

They hold an annual remembrance ceremony for people who've lost their lives to illicit drugs and support families of people experiencing addiction.

Bill and Marion helped design the Drugs of Dependence (Personal Cannabis Use) Amendment Bill to the ACT Legislative Assembly, passed in 2019. They also generated community and legislative support for the Drugs of Dependence (Personal Use) Amendment Bill, decriminalising the personal use of common drugs.



JOHN FEINT

Volunteer and founder, VINES Youth program

John Feint has spent much of his life helping others. As a parent, he volunteered to help out with his children's sporting teams and Scouts groups.

As a volunteer with the St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra/Goulburn, he decided to start a program for young people aged 13 to 15 who were deemed to be at-risk.

John combined his volunteering experience at Vinnies and Scouts to create the VINES program, which is designed to give these young people some much-needed fun.

The VINES program offers two overnight camps a year plus some weekend activities every two months. This gives at-risk young people the chance to enjoy adventures and develop skills to navigate their sometimes complex lives.

Through his service at Vinnies since 2007, John has offered support and kindness to people in the ACT including refugees, asylum seekers and people experiencing homelessness or other hardships.



DR AMANDA SCOTT

Advocate for community language learning, bilingualism and multiculturalism

Dr Amanda (Mandy) Scott is a prominent advocate of community language learning, bilingualism and multiculturalism.

She has increased awareness of the diversity of languages in the Canberra region and helped promote the benefits of learning other languages. For example, bilingual playgroups in English and Mandarin, or Spanish or Polish, allow the youngest generations to pick up the language of their grandparents. They also provide a place to connect for parents who speak English as an additional language.

Mandy advocates for language learning through school and beyond, pointing to research that shows people who know more than one language have better memory and concentration skills. Having different languages also opens opportunities for work and travel.

An energetic and engaging speaker, Mandy is secretary of the ACT Bilingual Education Alliance and the convenor of the Canberra Region Languages Forum. She is also an Honorary Lecturer at the ANU School of Literature, Languages and Linguistics.



CHARLOTTE BAILEY

Employment ambassador, Down Syndrome Australia

Charlotte Bailey is raising the profile of inclusive employment and providing a strong voice for people living with a disability.

She is the ACT's Down Syndrome Australia employment ambassador, sharing her experience as a young person with a disability with potential employers. She also represented the ACT in the Down Syndrome Australia Right to Work campaign – supporting others to understand workplace expectations, identify their skills and strengths and prepare to apply for jobs. Additionally, Charlotte has spoken internationally at the United Nations World Down Syndrome Day celebrations.

Holding down two jobs – as an office assistant with the ACT Down Syndrome Association and a hospitality worker at Eastlake Football Club – Charlotte shows that, with reasonable adjustments, people living with intellectual disability can be valued employees.

Charlotte regularly goes above and beyond at ACT Down Syndrome Association, working independently from home during the COVID lockdowns, and co-facilitating workshops on self-advocacy.



SOPHIE EDWARDS

Singer-songwriter, gender equality advocate

Canberra singer-songwriter Sophie Edwards is a powerful advocate for women and non-binary people.

Sophie launched her 'She's on the Bill' project on International Women's Day in 2021 to tackle sexism in the music industry.

The project holds several events each month that empower women and non-binary people and provide them with practical working opportunities. This is helping address sexism experienced by artists and those working behind the scenes in the music industry – from photographers and technicians to event and stage managers.

'She's on the Bill' also raised funds for flood-affected Northern Rivers communities in 2022.

Sophie is a member of the Minister for Art's Creative Council and was a lead juror in the 2022 Australian Women in Music Awards. She also helped establish the Gugan Gulwan Music Program for young Indigenous people in the ACT.

Sophie plays a wide range of music genres and has performed at major Australian festivals.



CAITLIN FIGUEIREDO

Co-chair, 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.



SAAD KHALID

Advocate for multiculturalism, young people and mental health

Saad Khalid is a powerful advocate for multiculturalism and young people.

Saad has used his role in community broadcasting to tackle sensitive issues including mental health and suicide prevention. Through Pakwatan Urdu Radio on Canberra Multicultural Service FM91.1, he has provided a platform for migrant communities to share their stories, experiences and history.

A non-executive director for Relationships Australia Canberra & Region, Saad advocates for young people, mental health and the value of counselling and community support programs. For Mental Health Month in October 2023, he collaborated with ACT Health and Dr Elizabeth Moore to create a diaspora-led podcast about mental wellbeing in migrant communities.

Saad has volunteered for organisations including Amnesty International, Media Diversity Australia, the Australian Islamic Medical Association, ArtSound FM92.7 and the Canberra Islamic Centre.

He is the youngest-ever board director of the Canberra Multicultural Service, and the youth chair of the National Ethnic and Multicultural Broadcasters' Council.



JULIE ARMSTRONG

Founder, ACT for Bees

Julie Armstrong has spent the past decade advocating on the vital role of bees and other pollinators in our food and environmental systems.

Julie founded ACT for Bees in 2014 to help reduce the human impact on declining bee and other insect populations. Her work has led to policy changes and driven on-ground achievements within the ACT and surrounding region.

A gifted communicator, she has built strong relationships with government, industry, peak body and community groups and the diplomatic community.

ACT for Bees' education curriculum, 'Love food? Love bees!', has reached more than 770,000 students.

Julie has also provided important input on the ACT Government's Urban Landscape Planting List, including information on flower times, nectar, pollen seed resources and foraging species.

She has contributed thousands of unpaid hours at community events, advisory panels and meetings, raising awareness about pollinators and assisting communities to take effective action.



DR ELOISE BRIGHT

Founder, ACT Pet Crisis Support and the Tiny Veterinary Clinic

For people on low incomes, a sick pet comes with the added stress of a vet bill they can't afford. To counter this, Dr Eloise Bright created the charity ACT Pet Crisis Support, which helps these owners cover their vet bills.

Eloise created a mobile vet service to reach more pets and owners who needed help. With a grant from Petstock Foundation and help from a volunteer tradie, she converted a second-hand caravan into the Tiny Veterinary Clinic.

Thought to be the first of its kind in Australia, it provides a drop-in vet service for pet owners referred by veterinarians, Pets and Positive Ageing and the RSPCA, plus anyone who can't afford a vet visit. People pay what they can - even if that's nothing.

Eloise also runs a pet behaviour consultancy and is a vet at RSPCA ACT. Her service provides hope and compassion for pet owners experiencing hard times.



SANDIPAN MITRA

Volunteer and advocate for diversity and multiculturalism

Sandipan Mitra's journey from a childhood of extreme poverty to community leader is inspiring. A senior bank manager and dedicated father, Sandipan's volunteer work celebrates diversity and tackles local community issues.

Among his many initiatives, Sandipan helps children in need by employing low-cost tutors to provide free tuition, and partners with local senior care facilities to provide residents with opportunities for interaction.

During the COVID lockdowns, Sandipan distributed food and supplies, provided essentials to international students and free meals to healthcare workers, organised online wellbeing seminars, and assisted vulnerable and elderly community members.

His Stories That Matter event celebrated the lives of Canberra migrants and refugees. Sandipan also stood against the resurgence of racism during lockdowns.

Sandipan and his team's barbecues raise money for social causes such as the National Breast Cancer Foundation, Painaustralia and CARE Australia.

His many contributions foster unity, compassion and inclusivity among the ACT community.



SELINA WALKER

Co-chair, 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, Selina was awarded Barnardos' 2017 ACT Mother of the Year.

PHOTO CREDIT: THE CANBERRA TIMES

RECOGNISING ACT'S FINEST

Since 1960, the Australian of the Year Awards have recognised people from all across the country and from all fields of endeavour. This is just a snapshot of the recipients from the Australian Capital Territory for the past five years. The full honour roll can be viewed at australianoftheyear.org.au

	2023	Olympia Yarger – Insect farming pioneer and founder, Goterra
	2022	Patrick Mills AM - Basketball player and Indigenous rights advocate
	2021	Professor Brendan Murphy AC - Former Chief Medical Officer
	2020	Katrina Fanning AO PSM - Women's rugby league pioneer
	2019	Virginia Haussegger AM - Journalist and women's advocate
	2023	Professor Tom Calma AO - Human rights and social justice advocate
	2022	Valmai Dempsey - Volunteer at St John Ambulance
	2021	Patricia Anderson AO - Writer and advocate for Australia's First Peoples
	2020	Sue Salthouse AM, In memoriam - Leader and disability advocate
	2019	Dr Suzanne Packer AO - Paediatrician and child advocate
	2023	Kofi Owusu-Ansah – Award-winning performer and songwriter
	2022	Sean Dondas - Former Board Director at CanTeen
	2021	Tara McClelland - Advocate for the rights of young people
	2020	Madeline Diamond - Sustainability advocate
	2019	Hannah Wandel OAM - Change agent for young rural women
	2023	Dr Shamaruh Mirza – Scientist and co-founder, SiTara's Story
	2022	Luke Ferguson - Youth support worker at The Woden School
	2021	Timothy Miller - Founder of Lids4Kids
	2020	Julia Rollings - Foster carer
	2019	David Williams AM - Disability advocate

* Names of recipients in the Honour Roll are a reflection of the time they received the Award.

THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS



THE TROPHIES

The Australian National University (ANU) is committed to better outcomes for our community, the environment, our nation and the world. As the national university, we feel immensely privileged to be the exclusive cultural partner of the 2024 Australian of the Year Awards, recognising the outstanding service to the community that many Australians make.

The trophies for the 2024 Australian of the Year Awards are the stunning result of a collaborative effort by staff and students of the Glass Workshop in the ANU School of Art & Design.

The geometric nature of the design aims to represent the multiple facets that have shaped Australian society, embodying a nation that is confident in its leadership, contemporary in its outlook and distinguished by its diverse community. The facets also capture the points of the Southern Cross, the star of federation, and are rendered in a brilliant blue symbolising the Australian sky.

Each award has been created through a process of cast glass, and meticulously ground and polished by hand. The awards have been a wonderful project for students to apply their creative and technical skills to complete a professional commission.

ANU School of Music students have also contributed theme music for the Australian of the Year Awards, which will be used throughout the state and territory announcements.



THE AWARDS PROCESS



1

If all starts with your nomination



2

An expert panel selects one state and territory level recipient in each of the four award categories



4

The National Australia Day Council Board selects the national recipients



3

The state and territory recipients are awarded and go through to the national judging process



5

The four national recipients are awarded on Australia Day eve in Canberra

Want more information?

Visit the Australian of the Year Awards website australianoftheyear.org.au where you'll find latest news and profiles of Australian of the Year Awards nominees, recipients and alumni.

For more information on Australia Day, the Story of Australia campaign and the NADC, visit australiaday.org.au.



If our nominee stories have brought anything up for you or you're concerned someone you know is at risk, please reach out to:

Lifeline on 13 11 14

Beyond Blue on 1300 22 4636 or

13YARN, a crisis line for Indigenous Australians.

The National Australia Day Council acknowledges and pays its respect to the past, present and future Traditional Custodians and Elders of this nation and recognises their continuous connection to country, community and culture.

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