

MEDIA RELEASE

THURSDAY 19 OCTOBER 2023

**2024 AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR AWARD NOMINEES
FOR AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY
ANNOUNCED**

A disability employment ambassador, a woman saving our bees, volunteers, a singer-songwriter, multicultural advocates, a youth affairs leader, and a veterinarian providing care for pets and owners in crisis are among nominees for the 2024 Australian of the Year Awards for the Australian Capital Territory.

The 2024 award nominees are:

2024 Australian of the Year for the Australian Capital Territory

Dr Raymond Akhurst – Volunteer, St Vincent de Paul Society (Waramanga)
Dan Bouchier – Journalist, broadcaster, public speaker (Lyneham)
Joanne Farrell – Founder, Build Like A Girl (Bungendore)
Kurt Gruber – Co-founder, Worldview Foundation & WV Technologies (Canberra)

2024 Senior Australian of the Year for the Australian Capital Territory

Ebenezer Banful OAM – Volunteer, multicultural advocate (Curtin)
William Bush & Marion McConnell OAM – President & Vice President, Families & Friends for Drug Law Reform (Turner & Giralang)
John Feint – Volunteer and Founder, VINES Youth program (Gilmore)
Dr Amanda Scott – Advocate for community language learning, bilingualism, multiculturalism (Chifley)

2024 Young Australian of the Year for the Australian Capital Territory

Charlotte Bailey – Employment ambassador, Down Syndrome Australia (Belconnen)
Sophie Edwards – Singer-songwriter, gender equality advocate (Curtin)
Caitlin Figueiredo – Co-Chair, Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (Canberra)
Saad Khalid – Advocate for multiculturalism, young people, mental health (Canberra)

2024 Local Hero for the Australian Capital Territory

Julie Armstrong – Founder, ACT for Bees (Canberra)
Dr Eloise Bright - Founder, ACT Pet Crisis Support and the Tiny Veterinary Clinic (Evatt)
Sandipan Mitra – Volunteer, advocate for diversity, multiculturalism (Chisholm)
Selina Walker – Co-Chair, ACT Reconciliation Council (Ngunnawal Country/Canberra)

*[*see detailed bios on following pages](#)*

The ACT nominees are among 133 people being recognised across all states and territories.

The ACT award recipients will be announced on Monday 30 October 2023 in a ceremony at the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra, which will also be available to watch online at australianoftheyear.org.au.

They will then join the other state and territory recipients as national finalists for the national awards announcement on Thursday 25 January 2024 in Canberra.

National Australia Day Council CEO Mark Fraser AO CVO congratulated the ACT nominees on their recognition.

“The nominees for the Australian Capital Territory Awards personify the values of the Australian of the Year Awards with their exceptional contributions,” said Mark.

“They are diverse in their areas of dedication and how they make a difference, which demonstrates we all have a role to play in making Australia better and we are all part of the national story.”

ENDS.

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

Nominee [photos can be downloaded](#) from this link: [ACT NOMINEE PHOTOS](#)

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2024 AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY – NOMINEE BIOS

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. Now aged 76, Ray's compassion and wise leadership has been instrumental in these communities' recovery.

Dan Bouchier

Journalist, broadcaster, company director and public speaker

Every day, 38-year-old Dan Bouchier 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 LGBTIQ+ 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. In 2005, Dan was recognised for his community leadership as NT Young Australian of the Year.

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, 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.

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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, 44-year-old Kurt's energy and passion inspire everyone around him.

2024 SENIOR AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY – NOMINEE BIOS**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, 66-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.

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 (78) and Marion (79) helped design the Drugs of Dependence (Personal Cannabis Use) Amendment Bill to the

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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, 67-year-old 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. The 74-year-old is also an Honorary Lecturer at the ANU School of Literature, Languages and Linguistics.

2024 YOUNG AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY – NOMINEE BIOS

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, 22-year-old 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, 24, 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, 21-year-old 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.

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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.

2024 LOCAL HERO FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY – NOMINEE BIOS

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, 63-year-old Julie 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, 47, 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, 49-year-old 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.

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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, 42-year-old Selina was awarded Barnardos' 2017 ACT Mother of the Year.