

# Queensland

BRISBANE CONVENTION & EXHIBITION CENTRE

18 NOVEMBER 2024

Australian  
of the Year  
➤ Awards

Reflect. Respect. Celebrate

20  
25

# THE AWARDS PROCESS



**1**

If all starts with your nomination



**2**

An expert panel selects one state and territory 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](http://australianoftheyear.org.au) for the latest news and profiles of nominees, recipients and alumni

For information on Australia Day and the National Australia Day Council, visit [australiaday.org.au](http://australiaday.org.au)

## NOMINATE NOW



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples should be aware this program may contain images or names of people who have passed away

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



**ROBY CURTIS**

**Founder, Emmanuel City Mission**

Roby Curtis has followed a calling to serve the most vulnerable in his community.

He is the founder of Emmanuel City Mission (ECM), established in 2009 as a volunteer, street-based outreach service before finding its long-term premises in South Brisbane in 2014.

ECM supports anyone who has fallen on hard times, including those recently returned from the justice system, people experiencing homelessness or those who just need somewhere to turn to.

Roby's deep sense of purpose is driven by his Christian faith, and a desire to provide ministry to others and treat them with dignity and love. He coordinates all ECM's volunteers, donations and fundraising, including the yearly 300km pilgrimage from ECM to Cherbourg.

In a typical week, ECM serves 1,000 hot meals, provides 150 toiletry packs and 100 loads of cleaned laundry. Most importantly, they provide a non-judgemental sanctuary for empathetic conversations, ensuring every visitor feels valued for the person they are.



**MIRUSIA LOUWERSE**

**Musician and ambassador**

An internationally acclaimed, highly successful musician, Mirusia Louwerse has always used her musical talent to uplift and enrich the lives of others.

As an ambassador for the Australian Children's Music Foundation, a charity organisation working to expand access and equity in musical education, Mirusia is deeply invested in nurturing young talent, and has mentored many young singers and other musicians entering the industry.

Despite touring the world as a star soprano, she has always found time to give back, including conducting countless performances in places like aged-care facilities, since she was a child.

Mirusia knows the transformative power of music and is the ambassador for Silver Memories, a tailored, nostalgic music broadcasting service for older Australians, which is proven to increase happiness and wellbeing while providing a non-medical option for management of dementia.

Mirusia's community service efforts were recognised with the 2024 Redlands Coast Citizen of the Year award.



**GEOFFREY SMITH**

**Co-founder, Australian Spatial Analytics**

Data analyst Geoffrey Smith recognised the untapped potential of neurodivergent people to contribute to the workforce in Australia.

Geoffrey co-founded Australian Spatial Analytics (ASA), a work-integrated social enterprise providing geo-spatial and engineering services, addressing a skills shortage in the technology industry. Of their employees, 80 per cent are neurodivergent and 61 per cent have come from long-term unemployment, reflecting the social barriers that are often experienced by neurodivergent people.

While the unemployment rate for adults with autism is some ten times higher than that of the general population, Geoffrey knows that their unique skillset can make them an asset in the workplace. ASA's inclusive practices include a range of workplace supports for executive functioning, social interactions and sensory sensitivities, facilitating participation to employees' full potential, developing skills and leadership, and providing stable, long-term employment.

Geoffrey is a Social Impact Leadership Australia recipient, and through ASA, aims to employ 1,000 people by 2030.



**DR LEON STENSHOLM**

**Mental health advocate and founder, Lookout 07**

After losing his brother, Dean, to suicide, Dr Leon Stensholm knew there was a desperate need for change in his community on the Sunshine Coast.

He became an advocate in the mental health space and in 2023 opened Lookout 07 – a safe and accessible haven for young people aged 12-25 that helps to transcend isolation by fostering connection and supporting physical, mental and social wellbeing.

The centre, which has had over 6,500 youth sign in, provides recreational facilities such as a gym, table tennis and pool tables alongside resilience programs and crisis counselling.

Leon is on the ground in the centre each day, mentoring and providing an empathetic ear to anyone who needs it, driven by his sense of purpose in ensuring that no young person feels alone with their struggles.

For his dedication, Leon was recognised as Citizen of the Year at the Sunshine Coast Biosphere Community Awards in 2024.



**JILL COSTELLO OAM**

**Co-founder, ManUp! Australia**

When Jill and Brian Costello learned Brian had prostate cancer, they had trouble finding information and support. Determined to raise more awareness, especially in rural areas, the couple founded ManUp! Australia in 2010.

When they launched the program, Jill and Brian visited 37 communities. Three years later, they were visiting 65 per year.

Brian passed away in 2018. The couple's daughter, Leah, joined the charity to ensure it could continue. Today, Leah and Jill spend 10 months of the year on the road, visiting more than 80 regional and remote communities to educate people about prostate cancer. Over the past five years, 142 men have been diagnosed with early-stage prostate cancer as a result of the program.

Jill also developed the Queensland Directory of Prostate Cancer Services, a free app that helps men navigate the healthcare system. For her contributions to healthcare, Jill was awarded the Order of Australia in 2023.



**DR BRONWYN HERBERT**

**Social worker and scholar**

Dr Bronwyn Herbert completed a Bachelor of Social Work at age 40 years, her master's at age 61 years, and was awarded her PhD last year at age 90 years.

As a child, Bronwyn saw her parents give food and clothing to people who were struggling. Then, as a new widow experiencing grief with a newborn, she noticed no help was available to a young couple in the same hospital who had lost their baby. Bronwyn enrolled in a social work course and embarked on a career that has lasted 60 years.

As a social worker, Bronwyn noticed many children who had experienced homelessness with their parents, fell into homelessness as adults. She wanted to know why – and retired at 81 so she would have time to study this for her thesis.

Bronwyn's work and research has changed countless lives nationally and contributed to a better understanding of homelessness and how to break the cycle.



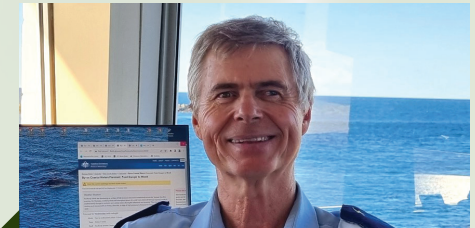
**UNCLE GLEN MILLER**

**Founder, Butchulla Men's Business Aboriginal Association**

Uncle Glen Miller is a Butchulla elder who is a teacher, mentor, friend and support person to many.

Having worked in state government, Glen knows how best to bring about change. In 2015, he founded Butchulla Men's Business Aboriginal Association (BMBAA) to help the young Indigenous men of the Fraser Coast reclaim their cultural identity and heritage. BMBAA strives to support boys to transition into men who have respect, responsibility and pride; all are welcome, whether Indigenous or not, through the Rites of Passage program.

He is on several Fraser Coast committees and works with local high schools to support young Indigenous people and spread Aboriginal history and culture within the community. Glen was also the driving force behind the Butchulla Warrior's Memorial, which recognises the fight by local Indigenous men for their country. It's the only memorial of its kind in Australia and was successful in winning both the Community and Premier's Reconciliation Award in the 2024 Queensland Reconciliation Awards.



**WAYNE STICHER**

**Founder, Cycling Without Age, Gold Coast**

For firefighting veteran Wayne Sticher, community service didn't end at retirement. A lifetime cyclist, Wayne launched the Gold Coast chapter of Cycling Without Age in 2020 so that everyone, no matter their age or ability, could enjoy a bike ride.

Cycling Without Age takes the elderly or those who have disabilities out on specially designed trishaws piloted by volunteers. Its youngest passenger was three months old and the oldest, 104. Passengers report improvements in mood, appetite and sleep after a trip. The local community has also rallied around the initiative. The volunteer team, who are trained to ensure the safety and enjoyment of all passengers, is now 60 strong with an age range spanning 65 years.

On top of Cycling Without Age, Wayne holds several volunteer positions in the community, including as a radio operator for Volunteer Marine Rescue Southport.

Cycling Without Age was recognised last year with the Queensland Volunteering Impact Award.



**DYLAN CONWAY**

**Founder, Brothers and Books**

Dylan Conway's journey began with his service in the Australian Defence Force, where he served for 12 years.

Then, at 26, Dylan was diagnosed with pilonidal sinus disease. He spent nearly two years in and out of hospital, largely bedridden. He found solace and strength in books – and decided to share those benefits with the world.

Dylan founded Brothers and Books, a bibliotherapy charity that sets up community libraries nationwide. To date, there are 102 libraries in workplaces that often face mental health challenges like army bases, hospitals, police stations, homeless shelters and domestic violence centres. The libraries are a resource for people dealing with stress, trauma and workplace pressures.

Since the founding of his charity, which he funds through his personal efforts and community support, Dylan has donated over \$150,000 to other charities and donated over 18,000 life changing books. It's led to more people utilising bibliotherapy to deal with life's challenges.



**ALEXA LEARY**

**Paralympian**

It was always Alexa Leary's dream to be an Olympian. In 2021, when she was 19, Alexa was a promising triathlete until a horrific cycling accident.

Crashing at 70 km/h, Alexa suffered major brain damage and traumatic abrasions and her parents prepared to say goodbye to her multiple times. Fortunately, they didn't have to.

Alexa spent five months in hospital and then another three months in rehabilitation, learning to walk and talk again. Two years on from her accident, she represented Australia at the World Para Swimming Championships, winning gold.

In 2024, Alexa qualified for the Paris Paralympics, breaking the 100m freestyle S9 world record. In Paris, she broke her own record twice, winning two gold and one silver medal.

Through her MoveForLex Foundation, Alexa has raised \$271,000 for the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital, who saved her life, and was part of the WeCU program that raised money to renovate its ICU waiting room.



**JAMES PETERSON**

**Founder, breakingFree**

When James Peterson lost a close family member to suicide just a few weeks after graduating high school, he decided he wanted to help others live.

At 18 years old, James created an educational school program that teaches young people practical habits and strategies to look after their mental health. In the first year, he delivered nine programs, followed by 34 in the second year. Today, James delivers approximately 80 programs annually, impacting over 20,000 young people.

Initially, James self-funded the programs and resources while he attended university and worked part-time jobs. He then founded the charity, breakingFree, to expand and deliver his program.

Since starting 11 years ago, James has personally delivered over 630 school programs, providing comprehensive mental health education to over 130,000 young people. Eighty-five per cent of students report making a positive life change and 87 per cent are more likely to seek help for mental health issues.



**DR KATRINA WRUCK**

**Scientist**

Dr Katrina Wruck's research is giving back to remote communities. Based on her research, Katrina has set up a profit-for-purpose business, Nguki Kula Green Labs, which is poised to transform the consumer goods sector by harnessing the power of green chemistry, while inspiring others to step into STEM.

Katrina's method of converting mining by-products to zeolite LTA – which can remove contaminants from water that cause hardness – will be commercialised.

Her postdoctoral research examines how to break down dangerous 'forever chemicals' into benign ones. Altogether, Katrina's work is a possible foundation for reducing global contamination.

A proud Mabuigilaig and Goemulgal woman who has long advocated for First Nations knowledge, Katrina also participates in community engagement programs. She is frequently told by the students she speaks to that she's the first Indigenous scientist they've met. Her work has been recognised with several awards and she is already well known in her field.



**ELIZABETH GOUGH**

**Lifeline volunteer**

Elizabeth Gough has been volunteering for Lifeline in Queensland for almost 40 years, helping to make sure that no person must spend their darkest days alone.

She has been a voice of hope for innumerable callers in this time and has surely saved many lives with her gentle, unassuming manner.

Affectionately known as 'Auntie Elizabeth', she is a highly respected and valued mentor for other crisis supporters and gives freely of her time to observe and coach them. Elizabeth shares her extensive knowledge and experience generously, running practice calls with new volunteers and supporting them individually and in small groups. At the age of 92, she has impressed fellow Lifeline staff with her willingness to take on new technologies to expand her skillset.

Taking inspiration herself from their courage, Elizabeth's wisdom, kindness and steadfast dedication to supporting people during troubled times have quietly made a real difference in countless lives.



**PAULA POOL & DEMELZA GARDEN**

**Founders, Fuel for Schools**

Paula Pool and Demelza Gardem's charity, Fuel for Schools (FFS), began with a simple donation of five backpacks containing school supplies in 2015.

This grew into an annual initiative, collecting donations to provide hundreds of packs to schools each year. Paula and Demelza later learned that many students were coming to school without having had breakfast, or even dinner the night before. They set about collecting and distributing food donations to ensure no student had to try to learn while hungry.

FFS expanded quickly over the ensuing decade to respond to community need, and now includes 58 primary and high schools in a vast geographical area from Townsville to Mount Isa.

Paula and Demelza's dedication in securing fundraising and coordinating the efforts of FFS mean that thousands of underprivileged students are given a meal to start their day. Schools have reported improved wellbeing, attendance, behaviour, and learning outcomes among their students.



**CLAIRE SMITH**

**Founder, Wildlife Rescue Sunshine Coast**

Claire Smith is a fierce protector of all living things, but especially native Australian wildlife.

She is the founder of Wildlife Rescue Sunshine Coast, the first dedicated, volunteer-run, 24-hour wildlife rescue service in Queensland. The group's purpose is threefold: education, rescue and rehabilitation.

Over decades of advocacy and conservation, Claire has actively forged vital relationships within the community, educating people about wildlife management through online resources and speaking on radio and in person. She engages with all levels of government to advise on policy decisions, motivating them to take action to protect native species through habitat preservation.

Claire raised over \$600,000 to directly assist those caring for injured animals after the 2019 bushfires. She also fundraised to establish Queensland's first dedicated kangaroo hospital and purchase two wildlife ambulances to facilitate more animal rescues. Claire inspires others to join her fight to protect our precious native fauna with her compassion and determination.



**SUE & JASMINE TASKER**

**Driving force behind Angels Community Group**

Sue and her daughter Jasmine are the team behind Angels Community Group, a not-for-profit working to take care of their community in Bundaberg.

The Angels began as a training organisation, founded by Sue. It evolved to include a pre-loved clothing and furniture shop, and a food pantry providing low-cost groceries.

The cost-of-living crisis has seen the Angels expand to provide many additional services, from hairdressing to school lunches, and vocational training through their mini-mart and café. Their support centre provides hot meals and showers to visitors, while being a hub for services such as assistance with employment and counselling.

The Angels' success is driven by Sue and Jasmine's dedication and determination to address inequity and food insecurity. They have developed vital relationships with local businesses and government, helping them secure the resources they need, and they have created a united, generous and powerful community that doesn't allow anyone to fall through the cracks.

# 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 2025 Australian of the Year Awards, recognising the outstanding service to the community that many Australians make.

The trophies for the 2025 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.



# RECOGNISING QUEENSLAND'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 Queensland for the past five years. The full honour roll can be viewed at [australianoftheyear.org.au](http://australianoftheyear.org.au)



- 2024** Marco Renai – Founder, Men of Business
- 2023** William Barton – Multi-instrumentalist, composer, vocalist and producer
- 2022** Sue and Lloyd Clarke – Founder, Small Steps 4 Hannah
- 2021** Dr Dinesh Palipana OAM – Advocate for doctors with disabilities
- 2020** Rachel Downie – Educator and social entrepreneur



- 2024** Reverend Robyn and Reverend Dr Lindsay Burch – Founders, Havafeed Relief
- 2023** Claude Lyle Harvey OAM – Child protection campaigner and Bravehearts fundraiser
- 2022** Dr Colin Dillon AM APM – Australia's first Indigenous police officer
- 2021** Aunty McRose Elu – Advocate for Torres Strait communities and climate change
- 2020** Peter Dornan AM – Men's health activist



- 2024** Emma McKeon AM – Olympian
- 2023** Talei Elu – Community organiser
- 2022** Dr Tahnee Bridson – Founder, Hand-n-Hand Peer Support
- 2021** William and Daniel Clarke – Conservationists for the endangered orangutan
- 2020** Ash Barty AO – Professional tennis player



- 2024** David Elliott OAM – Co-founder, Australian Age of Dinosaurs Museum of Natural History
- 2023** Melissa Redsell OAM – Founder, A Brave Life
- 2022** Saba Abraham – Community leader and founder, Mu'ooz Restaurant & Catering
- 2021** Natasha Johnston – Founder and director, Drought Angels
- 2020** Adjunct Assistant Professor Nick Marshall OAM – Founder, Albatross Nippers

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

# THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS



Australian Government  
Department of Health  
and Aged Care



Australian Government  
Department of Home Affairs



The Canberra Times  
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Australian  
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MinterEllison



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.

**NADC** | National  
Australia Day  
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**Queensland  
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