Australian of the Year Awards
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MEDIA RELEASE
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FROM HUMAN RIGHTS TO ENDING ISOLATION – MEET THE 2027 AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR AWARD RECIPIENTS FOR THE ACT

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Four extraordinary people have been named the 2027 Australian of the Year Award recipients for the Australian Capital Territory at a ceremony in Canberra this evening.

2027 Australian of the Year for the ACT – Martin Hodgson (Monash)
2027 Senior Australian of the Year for the ACT – Dr Andrzej Kilian (Kaleen)
2027 Young Australian of the Year for the ACT – Zakary Pino (Dickson)
2027 Local Hero for the ACT – Micaela Centenera (Pearce)

From upholding justice and improving global food security to connecting isolated people and creating a support network of mothers, the recipients of the 2027 Australian of the Year Awards for the ACT are making a difference at home in Canberra and beyond.

The 2027 Australian of the Year for the ACT is human rights advocate Martin Hodgson.

Martin Hodgson, 46, has spent more than 20 years advocating for human rights. He has represented over 500 clients pro bono across more than 30 countries through his work with The Disappeared Project and the Foreign Prisoner Support Service.

Through his work, Martin has supported First Nations people, vulnerable Australians, the Bali Nine and journalist Peter Greste. Martin's fearless advocacy has secured fair treatment, justice and, in some cases, release or repatriation.

Recognised for his integrity, resilience and compassion, Martin works closely with communities affected by violence and systemic injustice. His persistence is exemplified by his successful advocacy for First Nations man, Kevin Henry who was wrongfully imprisoned in Queensland for more than 25 years.

Through national and international media, publications and the podcast *Curtain*, Martin raises awareness of injustice and drives accountability. As an expert in international law and human rights, he continues to lead legal teams, support families in crisis and push for systemic reform.

The 2027 Senior Australian of the Year for the ACT is scientist and inventor Dr Andrzej Kilian.

Dr Andrzej Kilian, 68, is expanding the diversity and nutritional quality of food across the world by making advanced genetic technology both affordable and accessible.

In 2001, Andrzej founded the Canberra-based social enterprise, Diversity Arrays Technology (DArT), to commercialise his breakthrough invention: a fast, cost-effective method of analysing the DNA of virtually any organism. Doing so gives farmers, scientists and ecologists invaluable data that improves crop productivity.

Beginning with two people and limited funding, DArT has grown into an internationally recognised genomics and technology enterprise, supporting farm yields, biodiversity and conservation. DArT keeps its services affordable, undertaking work pro bono or at below cost.

Andrzej is deeply affected by the injustice of children dying from hunger and the problem of communities suffering poor health from inadequate food nutrition. His vision is to match crops to the environments in which they will thrive, reduce dependence on chemical use and improve global food security.

The 2027 Young Australian of the Year for the ACT is loneliness changemaker Zakary Pino.

Zakary Pino, 30*, leads a movement that has lifted thousands of Canberrans out of loneliness and into genuine connection.

In 2021, facing anxiety and loneliness, Zakary started Sunday morning walks around Lake Burley Griffin. At first, he walked alone, until word spread and others gradually joined him.

Over five years, that weekly walk grew into WITH-ME, a charity connecting more than 2,000 people of all ages. Today it offers walking, running, yoga and cooking sessions to people from all walks of life.

Zakary's work was highlighted as a case study in a submission to the ACT Legislative Assembly's Inquiry into Loneliness and Social Isolation. He recently contributed to research on adolescent loneliness with Adelaide University's Australian Research Centre for Interactive and Virtual Environments.

He speaks openly about anxiety and mental health with school students across Canberra, bringing these struggles into the open. He proves connection begins with one person willing to show up and keep showing up.

**Zakary turned 30 today, 11 November 2026*

The 2027 Local Hero for the ACT is motherhood and community champion Micaela Centenera.

Micaela Centenera, 42, is a champion for mothers and community. She touches people's lives as co-founder of The Little Capsule Co. (TLCco), creator of Mumma Mingle, and deputy chair of the Canberra Circle of Women.

TLCco is a social enterprise with an environmental and social purpose. Through TLCco, Micaela and her friend and business partner, Jane, keep children's clothes in circulation for longer, while raising money for research into maternal health – all through the sale of new and pre-loved childrenswear.

At the heart of TLCco is Micaela and Jane's mission to create a free community for women in Canberra. Sales from TLCco fund their mother's group, Mumma Mingle, which has brought together 2,100 mums and mums-to-be over one year.

Through her work with the Canberra Circle of Women, Micaela's impact also extends as far as the Philippines, where she sends around 20 large boxes of medical supplies, clothing, bedding and toiletries to families in extreme poverty every month.

National Australia Day Council CEO Carrie Leeson congratulated the ACT award recipients.

"Whether they're supporting people in their local communities or around the world, these four Canberrans are truly making a difference," said Carrie.

"Martin has spent more than 20 years advocating for human rights here and abroad, while Andrzej's work is changing the balance of food supply and health globally. Meanwhile, both Zakary and Micaela have built local communities inspired by their own experiences and challenges."

The ACT award recipients will join those from all other states and territories for the national awards, to be announced on the evening of 25 January 2027 in Canberra.

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

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PHOTOS: From the awards announcement event can be downloaded from this link: ACT Media Distribution photos - High res (credit NADC/Salty Dingo).

LIVESTREAM VISION: The ACT awards announcement event livestream via australianoftheyear.org.au. The vision is YouTube based and is accessible for media use.