

MEDIA RELEASE

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**2025 AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR AWARDS
NOMINEES FOR QUEENSLAND ANNOUNCED**

Community leaders, charity founders, a Paralympian, health advocates and a wildlife rescuer are just some of the nominees for the 2025 Australian of the Year Awards for Queensland.

The 2025 award nominees are:

2025 Australian of the Year for Queensland

Roby Curtis - Founder, Emmanuel City Mission (Karalee)
Mirusia Louwerse - Musician and ambassador (Cleveland)
Geoffrey Smith - Co-founder, Australian Spatial Analytics (Yeronga)
Dr Leon Stensholm - Mental health advocate and founder, Lookout 07 (Mountain Creek)

2025 Senior Australian of the Year for Queensland

Jill Costello OAM - Co-founder, ManUp! Australia (Kholo)
Dr Bronwyn Herbert - Social worker and scholar (Wynnum North)
Uncle Glen Miller - Founder, Butchulla Men's Business Aboriginal Association (Maryborough)
Wayne Sticher - Founder, Cycling Without Age, Gold Coast (Hope Island)

2025 Young Australian of the Year for Queensland

Dylan Conway - Founder, Brothers and Books (Chermside West)
Alexa Leary - Paralympian (Gold Coast)
James Peterson - Founder, breakingFree (Wellington Point)
Dr Katrina Wruck - Scientist (Logan)

2025 Local Hero for Queensland

Elizabeth Gough - Lifeline volunteer (Silkstone)
Paula Pool & Demelza Gardem - Founders, Fuel for Schools (Townsville)
Claire Smith - Founder, Wildlife Rescue Sunshine Coast (Nambour)
Sue & Jasmine Tasker - Driving force behind Angels Community Group (Bundaberg)

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

The nominees for Queensland are among 137 people being recognised across all states and territories.

The award recipients for Queensland will be announced on the evening of Monday 18 November 2024 at a ceremony in Brisbane, 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 25 January 2025 in Canberra.

National Australia Day Council CEO Mark Fraser AO CVO congratulated the nominees for Queensland.

"The Queensland nominees for 2025 inspire us through their achievements and contributions," said Mark.

“They remind us of the importance of resilience, of taking a leadership role and thinking out of the box, along with the power of simply extending care.”

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 have been supplied by nominees):
[QLD Nominee Photos](#)

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2025 AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR FOR QUEENSLAND – NOMINEE BIOS

Roby Curtis

Founder, Emmanuel City Mission

Roby Curtis, 41, 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, 39-year-old 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, 35-year-old 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, 47, 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.

2025 SENIOR AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR FOR QUEENSLAND – NOMINEE BIOS**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, 67, 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 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.

Now 91, 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, 75-year-old 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, 66-year-old 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.

2025 YOUNG AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR FOR QUEENSLAND – NOMINEE BIOS

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, 30-year-old 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, 23-year-old 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, 30-year-old 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, 30-year-old 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.

2025 LOCAL HERO FOR QUEENSLAND – NOMINEE BIOS

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 Gardem
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 (47) and Demelza (43) 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, 59-year-old 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 (60) and her daughter Jasmine (32) 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 recent 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.

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