

Australian
of the Year
➤ Awards

Reflect. Respect. Celebrate

Queensland

BRISBANE CONVENTION & EXHIBITION CENTRE

12 November 2025

20
26

MESSAGE FROM THE PREMIER

Millions of Australians make a positive difference in their community every day, giving their time to benefit others, and enriching our lives.

We may not know it, but we see them every day, because they live in our street and throughout our neighbourhood, quietly transforming how we live.

For 65 years, the Australian of the Year Awards have recognised their work, their kindness, and their support, and have celebrated their achievements and their outstanding contributions.

The Queensland Government is proud to support the National Australia Day Council to deliver the 2026 Australian of the Year Awards program.

I would like to thank Queenslanders across the state for submitting their nominations across the four categories — Australian of the Year,

Senior Australian of the Year, Young Australian of the Year, and Australia's Local Hero.

Every person nominated deserves to be honoured for their exceptional service in the Queensland community.

The nominees shortlisted would all be worthy recipients to represent Queensland at the national Australian of the Year Awards in Canberra on the eve of Australia Day 2026.

Enjoy the 2026 Australian of the Year Awards for Queensland.



David Crisafulli MP
Premier and Minister for Veterans



20
26

THE AWARDS PROCESS



1
It 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 the latest news and profiles of Australian of the Year Awards nominees, recipients and alumni.

For more information on Australia Day, our Ambassador Program, the free Aussie of the Month schools program, and the NADC, visit australiaday.org.au.

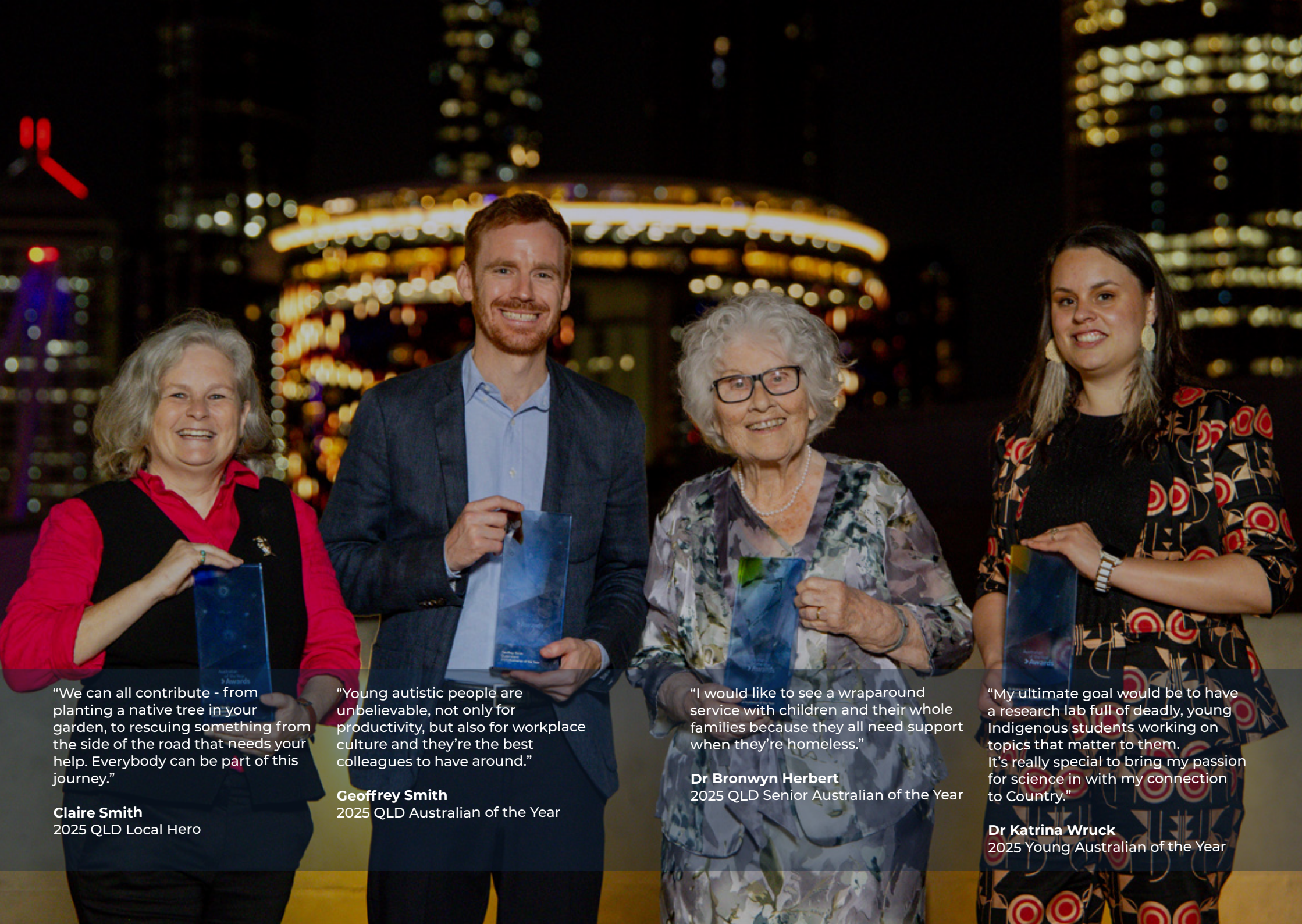


If our nominee stories bring anything up for you or you're concerned someone you know is at risk, please reach out to:

Lifeline on 13 11 14

Beyond Blue on 1300 22 4636 or

13YARN, a crisis line for Indigenous Australians



"We can all contribute - from planting a native tree in your garden, to rescuing something from the side of the road that needs your help. Everybody can be part of this journey."

Claire Smith
2025 QLD Local Hero

"Young autistic people are unbelievable, not only for productivity, but also for workplace culture and they're the best colleagues to have around."

Geoffrey Smith
2025 QLD Australian of the Year

"I would like to see a wraparound service with children and their whole families because they all need support when they're homeless."

Dr Bronwyn Herbert
2025 QLD Senior Australian of the Year

"My ultimate goal would be to have a research lab full of deadly, young Indigenous students working on topics that matter to them. It's really special to bring my passion for science in with my connection to Country."

Dr Katrina Wruck
2025 Young Australian of the Year

NICOLE DYSON

Entrepreneurial educator



Nicole Dyson is the driving force behind the award-winning educational provider, Future Anything. Through in-curriculum programs, student workshops, and teacher professional development, Future Anything nurtures the passion, potential and agency within every young person.

Each year the flagship Future Anything program, Activate, supports primary and secondary school students tackle real-world problems using entrepreneurial skills. The program culminates in a Grand Final where students from around Australia pitch their ideas to win a share in \$100,000 in funding and support to launch their ideas in the real world.

The program has been adopted by hundreds of schools across Queensland and Australia and Activate is one of the largest youth innovation and enterprise competitions in the southern hemisphere.

A former teacher, Nicole's vision and commitment to reimagining how entrepreneurial skills are taught in schools has engaged over 100,000 students and teachers in reimagining classroom learning to bring about meaningful change for the future.

MARK FORBES AND GAYLE FORBES

Eating disorder recovery



Mark Forbes and Gayle Forbes have dedicated their lives to helping families and individuals impacted by eating disorders. They are the founders of endED, a not-for-profit organisation that provides grassroots support, education and advocacy for people in eating disorder recovery.

A major initiative of endED is the pioneering Wandi Nerida residential recovery centre for eating disorders. Mark and Gayle worked tirelessly to enlist the support of local businesses and community organisations on the Sunshine Coast to fund and build this purpose-designed facility. Here, people recovering from eating disorders can find support, education and treatment in a caring environment.

Mark and Gayle have used their lived experience of eating disorders in their family as the impetus to address this critical illness, determined to create positive change for people in recovery. Their fundraising, counselling and education activities have had a direct impact on the lives of many people in South East Queensland and around Australia.

DR ROLF GOMES

Mobile health pioneer



When Dr Rolf Gomes was confronted with how differently cardiac patients were treated in rural and remote Australia, he decided to do something about it. He designed and launched the first Heart of Australia mobile 'Heart Trucks' to visit remote communities.

Today the Heart Trucks bring regular specialist clinics to over 30 towns in rural Australia, providing early diagnostic services that would otherwise be out of reach. Since 2014, the trucks have treated more than 20,000 patients and saved countless lives. The truck fleet will expand to 11 trucks by 2027 to provide services nationally, adding new diagnostic services for a wide range of early intervention health screenings, including for lung cancer.

Rolf's vision, ingenuity and tenacity have had a far-reaching impact on rural health and medicine in Australia, helping to save lives and ensure that rural patients have access to clinical services without having to travel long distances.

DISTINGUISHED PROFESSOR BEN MATHEWS

Child abuse researcher



Distinguished Professor Ben Mathews is regarded as one of Australia's leading experts on how to prevent, detect and respond to child abuse and neglect. Through his work at Queensland University of Technology he has presented groundbreaking research into child maltreatment in Australia.

Ben led the research team behind the pioneering Australian Child Maltreatment Study in 2023 that interviewed 8,500 Australians about their childhood experiences of maltreatment. The project identified how many Australians had been exposed to abuse and neglect, and the consequences for them and society at large.

Ben's research has played a vital role in determining how governments and legal systems can best identify and combat child abuse. His work has influenced major reform of legislation, policy and practice in multiple jurisdictions in Australia and overseas.

Ben's invaluable research and expertise continue to offer a guiding light to help navigate discussions about child abuse in Australia.

GERALD GARARD

PTSD recovery supporter



Gerald 'Gerry' Garard is helping Australian military and first responder personnel recover from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and related mental health issues. It's the latest project in a lifelong dedication to community service.

Gerry is the co-founder of the 4 Aussie Heroes Foundation which supports anybody from the military, police, fire and emergency services and correctional services, past or present, who may be experiencing the debilitating effects of PTSD. The foundation hosts 11-day Triumph over Trauma residential courses for participants and their families, delivering guided support programs to help with recovery.

Gerry was instrumental in raising more than \$7 million to build a permanent rural retreat called Camp Courage, which will host future Triumph over Trauma courses. He also project-managed the building of the facility.

Gerry's commitment and drive – even into his eighties – is undiminished, continuing to devote all his time and energy to helping others.

CHERYL HARRIS OAM

Champion for volunteers



Cheryl Harris has been instrumental in driving volunteer engagement and championing the important work that volunteers perform on the Sunshine Coast.

Cheryl's passion for helping community began when she was just 20 years old. Her advocacy and strong relationships throughout the Sunshine Coast community has seen volunteering in the region increase significantly. Today, thousands of volunteers actively support the Sunshine Coast community in various roles from charity work to disaster relief. As former CEO at Volunteering Sunshine Coast, Cheryl and her team collaborated with her community networks to initiate the innovative Pathways to Employment program, which helps people seeking paid employment to update their skills and build self-esteem through volunteering.

Cheryl is the current chair/president of Healthy Ageing Partnerships, which aims to empower older Australians to make informed decisions about their health through knowledge sharing.

Cheryl's contribution to community service highlights her selfless dedication to helping others in a manner that is always compassionate, informed and caring.

HABIB MAHOMED JAMAL

Multiculturalism advocate



Habib Jamal has dedicated over two decades to promoting multicultural harmony, interfaith collaboration and social justice. His work brings together diverse and underrepresented groups in society to give them a voice.

Habib has worked on many advisory bodies advocating for social cohesion, interfaith unity and inclusion. He previously served as president of the Islamic Council of Queensland and is currently president of Queensland Muslims Inc., which represents 45 organisations promoting social justice, inclusivity and diversity.

Within the Muslim community, Habib has worked to overcome the stigma associated with mental health. He is also active in raising support in times of need, whether it's a bushfire emergency or the COVID pandemic.

Habib's leadership has empowered Queensland's diverse multicultural communities and inspired social change. To mark this achievement, the Queensland Human Rights Commission recently named a room at its new premises after him in recognition of his contribution to inclusivity and diversity.

KARYN WALSH AM

Social justice campaigner



Karyn Walsh is a dedicated advocate working to eliminate social inequality in Queensland by supporting people experiencing homelessness and marginalisation.

As CEO and co-founder of Micah Projects, she has led delivery of housing, healthcare and social supports addressing homelessness and related issues including domestic violence, mental illness and substance use.

Karyn has contributed to policy and sector leadership through roles on advisory bodies, including serving as president of the Queensland Council of Social Services.

Her four decades of service have been recognised by the University of Queensland with an honorary Doctor of Social Work and Nursing in 2016 and an honorary Professorship of Social Work in 2025.

Known for empathy, strategic thinking and principled leadership, Karyn has driven practical, compassionate solutions that break down barriers and create more equitable pathways to housing, health and social inclusion for vulnerable Queenslanders.

JARIB BRANFIELD-BRADSHAW

Youth worker and mentor



Jarib Branfield-Bradshaw, a proud Kooma man and youth worker, has made a huge difference to the town of Cunnamulla by opening a youth neighbourhood centre. As a local himself, Jarib knows what it's like to live in a quiet town where there's not a lot for young people to do outside the home.

At the heart of Jarib's project is showing young people in places like Cunnamulla, that their stories matter. Since Jarib founded the centre two years ago, almost every young person in town has come through its doors seeking support, food and connection.

Jarib draws on his own lived experience to ensure they feel safe and seen and he has personally case managed 200 young people. It is a place where they can be themselves and receive the support they need to manage complex and traumatic situations in their lives.

Jarib's ability to listen, guide and offer hope is making a genuine difference to young people in Cunnamulla.

KATURA HALLEDAY

Education equality champion



As a young teenager, Katura Halleday visited Mozambique and witnessed the challenges that girls faced accessing education. That sparked her interest in educational equality, inspiring her to start the 8x8 to Educate program to provide long-term support and vital school supplies.

8x8 to Educate raises funds to provide scholarships to girls in Mozambique and Tanzania who might otherwise miss out on educational opportunities. The fund has supported 15 girls through high school to graduation and recently celebrated its first university graduate, Celia, who completed a nursing degree. Katura has expanded the program to provide manufacturing opportunities for girls to make reusable menstrual pads, so girls no longer miss school due to a lack of sanitary products, and has launched a girls literacy program.

Katura also serves her community as an active member of the Lions Club and has advocated for educational equality at the United Nations and global youth forums.

KURT JONES

Conservationist and community builder



Kurt Jones is the driving force behind the youth-led movement Co-Exist Australia, which connects people through environmental conservation.

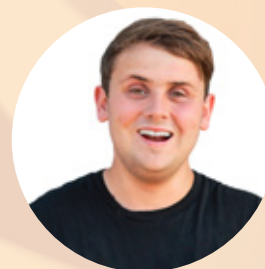
Kurt originally developed the idea for Co-Exist while he was at school as a way of bringing together young people to participate in community action. Today, the movement is active in six states and engages with thousands of young Australians every month through 11 local collectives. Each Co-Exist collective hosts conservation events such as bush regeneration and beach clean ups as well as social activities such as hiking and campouts, encouraging participants to connect through nature.

In three years, Co-Exist Australia collectives have planted more than 25,000 trees, and removed 3.2 tonnes of rubbish over 300 community events.

Kurt is actively spreading the message to get young people involved in conservation, speaking at conferences and schools and giving a voice to young people.

THOMAS PIRIE

Recycling entrepreneur



Thomas Pirie, known as '10-cent Tom', has turned a simple idea into a powerful social enterprise.

What began as collecting bottles and cans for pocket money has grown into 10-cent Tom—a community recycling program that now collects from over 200 local businesses and households. The proceeds fund employment for people living with disabilities, with more than 3.5 million containers recycled and six team members now employed.

Living with an intellectual impairment and overcoming major spinal surgery for scoliosis, Tom has shown extraordinary resilience. His drive, humour, and unwavering enthusiasm have made him a much-loved figure in his community.

Through 10-cent Tom, he is not only reducing waste and promoting sustainability but also creating opportunities and dignity for people with disabilities. Tom's story is one of leadership, inclusion, and determination—an inspiring example of how one person's vision can spark lasting change.

ROSS BLANCH

Rural Lifeline counsellor



Ross Blanch has helped many farmers through tough times in his role as the inaugural telephone counsellor on the Farmer to Lifeline Farmer support line.

Ross is a dairy farmer at Lower Mount Walker, west of Brisbane, but he has also volunteered for 27 years with the Ipswich Lifeline Crisis Support Centre.

Out of this grew the Farmer to Lifeline Farmer service, which allows farmers to speak to another farmer when they want to talk to someone or need mental health support. Being a farmer himself, Ross understands many of the issues farmers face and can connect with them by speaking the farmer language.

In addition to telephone support, Ross also visits farmers and rural events to spread the word. Such is the demand for Ross's time that more farmers have been added to the service.

Ross's empathy, patience and understanding is bringing hope to those on the land when they need it the most.

IAN GAY

Disabled surfing volunteer



Ian Gay has dedicated more than 20 years to helping people with disabilities enjoy the surf in a fun, safe way. As a volunteer with the Disabled Surfers Association Gold Coast (DSAGC), Ian has held many roles and was branch vice president until 2015 and then branch president from 2015 to present.

The DSAGC now runs six summer events at Flat Rock Beach, Currumbin, supported by a large volunteer group from all walks of life. Under Ian's astute and compassionate leadership, the sophistication and safety of DSAGC events have continually improved, enhancing the quality and reach of the experience for all involved. The DSAGC events have a profound impact on participants and volunteers alike, helping to foster greater community spirit and inclusivity.

Since 2021, Ian has also held the role of national president of the Disabled Surfers Association of Australia, lending his expertise and leadership to disabled surfing branches around the country.

VANESSA SEEKEE OAM & ARTHUR LIBERTY SEEKEE

WWII historians



Vanessa Seekee and her husband, Arthur Liberty Seekee, have spent decades investigating and documenting the role that Horn Island in the Torres Strait played in defending Australia during World War II.

Their research has highlighted the history of the volunteer Torres Strait Light Infantry Battalion, Australia's only Indigenous battalion. As a result of their research and lobbying, hundreds of veterans and their families have received government recognition and support in honour of their service.

Thanks to Vanessa and Liberty's endeavours, many World War II historical sites on Horn Island have been preserved, and memorials to the soldiers who served there installed throughout the Torres Strait. Vanessa and Liberty's Torres Strait Heritage Museum and tours have educated thousands of Horn Island visitors about the role the island played during World War II, making a huge contribution to the local community.

Their tremendous dedication has not wavered with Vanessa's recent breast cancer diagnosis.

HELEN YOUNGBERRY

Homelessness charity worker



Helen Youngberry has been supporting homeless people in the Ipswich region for the past 10 years through her Goodna Street Life charity. This grassroots organisation run by local volunteers provides a wide range of services for people in need including emergency accommodation, a food bank, healthcare, personal hygiene services, skills training, counselling and rehabilitation support.

The organisation also runs an op shop to raise funds, a tool library and recycling centre, and has its own real estate agency that helps homeless people find secure long-term accommodation.

Helen's leadership and energy in fundraising and campaigning on behalf of the homeless has helped deliver essential services to many vulnerable people in her community. She has faced many obstacles, including the threat of closure, but remains committed to helping others, building ties in the local community and delivering positive outcomes to ensure no one is left behind.

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 2026 Australian of the Year Awards recognising the outstanding service to the community that many Australians make.

This year we have developed original artistic and musical works to recognise Australia's highest achievers for the National Australia Day Council. The trophies for the 2026 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.



RECOGNISING THE STATE'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



- 2025** Geoffrey Smith – Co-founder, Australian Spatial Analytics
- 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



- 2025** Dr Bronwyn Herbert – Social worker and scholar
- 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



- 2025** Dr Katrina Wruck – Scientist
- 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



- 2025** Claire Smith – Founder, Wildlife Rescue Sunshine Coast
- 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

* 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



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.

The Australian of the Year Awards is a program of the National Australia Day Council, managed in Queensland by the Queensland Government.



Queensland
Government