

MEDIA RELEASE

FRIDAY 21 OCTOBER 2022

NSW 2023 AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR AWARDS NOMINEES ANNOUNCED

Nominees for the 2023 NSW Australian of the Year Awards include a former Socceroo fighting for human rights, an Aboriginal Constitutional lawyer, a country fireman, a palliative care pioneer, a Sikh charity founder and the young woman who started the call for sexual consent education.

They are just some of the 16 people in the running to be named the NSW Australian of the Year, NSW Senior Australian of the Year, NSW Young Australian of the Year and NSW Local Hero.

The 2023 NSW award nominees are:

NSW Australian of the Year

Professor Megan Davis – Aboriginal constitutional and human rights lawyer (Sydney)
Craig Foster AM – Human rights and anti-racism activist, former Socceroo (Sydney)
Dr Barry Kirby AO – Founder, The Hands of Rescue, obstetrics and gynaecology specialist (Carool)
Professor Kelvin Kong – Surgeon and advocate for Aboriginal ear health (Newcastle)

NSW Senior Australian of the Year

Astrid Hocking – Foster care advocate and anti-violence campaigner
John Moriarty AM – Co-founder, Moriarty Foundation (Camberay, Sydney)
Teresa Plane – Palliative care pioneer and advocate (Narrabeen, Sydney)
Dr Bruce Whatley – Children's picture book illustrator and author (Vincentia)

NSW Young Australian of the Year

Chanel Contos – Founder, teachusconsent.com (Vaucluse, Sydney)
Lottie Dalziel – Founder, Banish and sustainability champion (Bondi Beach, Sydney)
Steve Dresler – Founder, What Ability and the What Ability Foundation (Bondi, Sydney)
Christopher McHughes – Fireman (Brewarrina)

NSW Local Hero

Mona Mahamed – Founder, Community Support Services Inc (Glen Alpine)
Christine Mastello – Founder, Southlakes Incorporated and Community Hair Project (Hamlyn Terrace)
Shiranee Pararajasingham – Pro bono Practice Executive and community champion (Enfield, Sydney)
Amar Singh – Founder, Turbans 4 Australia (Prestons)

**see bios on following pages*

The NSW nominees are among 131 people being recognised across all states and territories.

The four award recipients from NSW will be announced on the evening of Wednesday 2 November in a ceremony at Luna Park, Sydney which will also be available to watch via ABC iView from 6pm (local NSW time).

They will then join the other state and territory recipients as national finalists for the national awards announcement on 25 January 2023 in Canberra.

National Australia Day Council CEO Karlie Brand said this year's NSW nominees' contributions and achievements are exceptional.

"Congratulations to all the NSW nominees for this recognition," said Karlie.

"Each and every one of these exemplary Australians is making a difference and taking action to help others or bring about change.

"The people of NSW can be very proud of this year's nominees."

20 Years Of Local Heroes

The 2023 Awards also mark 20 years of the Local Hero category. Introduced in 2003, the award acknowledges extraordinary contributions made by Australians in their local community.

NSW recipients of Australia's Local Hero include:

- 2022 Shanna Whan - Founder and CEO, Sober In The Country
- 2021 Rosemary Kariuki - Advocate for migrant and refugee women
- 2020 Bernie Shakeshaft - Founder, BackTrack Youth Works Program
- 2018 Eddie Woo - Mathematics teacher
- 2016 Catherine Keenan - Youth educator
- 2013 Shane Phillips - Indigenous leader
- 2012 Lynne Sawyers – Foster mother
- 2011 Donald Ritchie OAM (In Memoriam) - Suicide prevention advocate
- 2010 Ronni Kahn - Food rescuer
- 2004 Donna Carson - Survivor of domestic violence
- 2003 Brian Parry AFSM - Bushfire fighter

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 provided by nominees):
<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/waaqvfi4ln9m46uwz21up/h?dl=0&rlkey=qattkkfw9eq8lanfht2o5qo75>

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NSW AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR – NOMINEE BIOS

Professor Megan Davis

Aboriginal constitutional and human rights lawyer.

When the Uluru Statement from the Heart was first read aloud publicly in 2017, it was the voice of Professor Megan Davis that carried it across the nation.

Having worked on constitutional change for over a decade, 47 year old Megan designed the First Nations dialogues that led to the Uluru Statement and continues to advocate for a constitutional First Nations Voice to Parliament.

Globally, the constitutional and human rights lawyer has served on two United Nations (UN) bodies and is one of six global experts on the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Megan was named the *Australian Financial Review's* 2018 Women of Influence winner and is a co-recipient of the 2022 Sydney Peace Prize for the Uluru Statement. She's currently University of NSW Pro Vice-Chancellor Society and the Balnaves Chair in Constitutional Law.

Megan continues to invite all Australians to walk with First Nations as they seek a better future based on justice and self-determination.

Craig Foster AM

Human rights and anti-racism activist, former Socceroo

Craig Foster AM is one of Australia's most powerful voices for the disadvantaged.

The 29-times-capped Socceroo and award-winning sports broadcaster has spent the past decade campaigning for refugee rights and marginalised communities. He also promotes anti-racism, allyship and what he calls 'active multiculturalism' – communities protecting each other.

Craig was influential in helping the Afghan Women's National Football Team, Paralympians, taekwondo athletes and many other girls and women escape Afghanistan as the Taliban took hold of the country in August 2021.

Two years earlier, Craig helped secure the release of refugee footballer Hakeem al-Araibi who faced extradition to Bahrain from Thailand. More recently, he led a campaign to free refugees still trapped off and onshore in Australia.

Patron of Australia's Indigenous football teams, 53 year old Craig works tirelessly for a better Australia including the 'Racism. It Stops With Me' and #RacismNotWelcome campaigns, and volunteers at the Addison Road Community Organisation and food pantry in Sydney's Inner West.

Dr Barry Kirby AO

Founder, The Hands of Rescue, obstetrics and gynaecology specialist

Dr Barry Kirby AO was a 40-year-old carpenter working in Papua New Guinea (PNG) when he witnessed the devastating preventable death of a young woman.

He decided PNG needed more doctors than carpenters. Two degrees and 12 years later, he returned as a rural doctor.

Barry investigated over 30 maternal deaths in PNG and undertook extra study in obstetrics and gynaecology to learn how to better deal with emergencies. And so grew The Hands of Rescue, a not-for-profit working to reduce maternal mortality.

Now 72, Barry's approach is holistic. His safe motherhood program trains staff; provides a flying doctor service; builds waiting houses; and encourages mothers to give birth in health centres. To also address the poor treatment of PNG women by men, Barry produced a PNG television drama, 'It Takes A Village' which shines a light on the plight of women and maternal health and educates men on women's needs.

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Professor Kelvin Kong

Surgeon and advocate for Aboriginal ear health

Professor Kelvin Kong is a proud Worimi man and Australia's first Aboriginal fellow of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons' (RACS).

The ear, nose and throat surgeon is dedicated to addressing and raising awareness of Indigenous ear health and the third world rates of ear disease seen in Australia, which has the worst recorded levels internationally.

Aboriginal children currently suffer ear disease rates and complications far greater than when compared with the general population, significantly affecting social and educational outcomes.

Kelvin's passion is to ensure all children have the same opportunities to hear well and achieve their potential. His dream is to reduce the disparity between health and learning outcomes for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

Kelvin, aged 48, is part of a national approach to the betterment of ear and hearing outcomes, ensuring Indigenous health is highlighted through a broad lens and that ear health is a priority for the RACS, academia and health services.

NSW SENIOR AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR – NOMINEE BIOS

Astrid Hocking

Foster care advocate and anti-violence campaigner

Astrid Hocking is so extraordinarily passionate about protecting vulnerable children that she fostered more than 90 children over 24 years, ranging from emergency stints to long-term stays.

The former teacher made herself available whenever care was needed and some of her charges remain part of her extended family.

Astrid knew that foster carers needed better training and support, so she helped lobby the State government. This led to the launch of Connecting Carers NSW in 2008.

Astrid worked with the organisation for many years, providing ongoing training and support across the Hunter Valley and the state.

While she's given up her paid role, 68 year old Astrid works just as hard as a volunteer. She's Chair of Hearts and Hands Community Development, raising awareness of violence and child abuse.

The not-for-profit partners with an orphanage in the Philippines to rescue children from trafficking and empower disadvantaged communities to earn an income to become self-sustaining.

John Moriarty AM

Co-founder, Moriarty Foundation

John Moriarty AM is a Yanyuwa man who was taken from his family, Borroloola Country and culture when he was just four years old.

One of the Stolen Generation, the 84 year old has dedicated his life to advancing Aboriginal rights.

John was a campaigner for citizenship in the 1967 Referendum and has been an Aboriginal voice to government for equality and engagement. He was also the first Indigenous soccer player to be selected to represent Australia.

In 1983, John and Ros Moriarty established Balarinji, Australia's foremost Indigenous design studio, famous for conceptualising Aboriginal artwork on Qantas aircraft.

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In 2012, they established Moriarty Foundation. It delivers Indi Kindi – an early years health, wellbeing, education and development initiative for children under five, and John Moriarty Football – Australia’s longest running and most successful Indigenous soccer initiative for two-to-18-year-olds.

Moriarty Foundation reaches more than 2,000 Indigenous children each week in 19 remote and regional communities and is impacting 13 of the 17 Closing the Gap targets.

Teresa Plane

Palliative care pioneer and advocate

Former nurse Teresa Plane is recognised as a pioneer of modern palliative care in Australia.

Her devotion began late one night during a drive home from hospital as she listened to a life-changing interview with psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross. As she heard her discuss the five stages of dying, Teresa realised she’d always been a death-denying nurse.

She was inspired to study palliative care methods overseas before opening a hospice and palliative care unit at Mt Carmel Hospital in western Sydney in 1978.

Teresa admitted patients on a need’s basis rather than their ability to pay. She also launched a home care program, supported by a charity she’d established to advocate on behalf of the dying.

She later established Macquarie Hospice, a home care and day care centre and spoke many times at international forums, universities and national conferences.

Now aged 89, Teresa continues advocating and volunteering as she approaches 90 years.

Dr Bruce Whatley

Children’s picture book illustrator and author

Dr Bruce Whatley overcame a traumatic birth injury to become one of Australia’s most prolific and best-known children’s picture book illustrators and authors.

The tendons in Bruce’s right arm were severed at birth, presenting a life-long challenge. But he went on to a career as an illustrator and art director, and later as an artist, storyteller and writer.

Bruce has written and/or illustrated more than 90 children’s picture books since 1992, winning national and international awards and being published globally. His award-winning titles include *The Ugliest Dog in the World* and *Diary of a Wombat*.

The 68 year old also works to inspire creativity in children, regularly visiting schools and remote communities over the past 30 years to nurture creative writing and art. In the process, he’s helped build self-esteem and stimulated innovative thinking.

Bruce has completed a ground-breaking PhD, ‘Left Hand Right Hand: implications of ambidextrous image making’, exploring ties between art and neuroscience.

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NSW YOUNG AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR – NOMINEE BIOS

Chanel Contos

Founder, teachusconsent.com

In February 2021, Chanel Contos asked on Instagram if anyone had been sexually assaulted while at school. Within 24 hours, over 200 people had replied 'yes'. She then launched an online petition to make consent education mandatory in Australian schools. It attracted 45,000 signatures. One year later, education ministers from around the country unanimously agreed to the demand.

Chanel's actions spurred a movement to end rape culture in Australia. The platform, teachusconsent.com, allows people to anonymously share their sexual assault experiences. Thousands have done so.

Teachusconsent.com has received funding to create consent education materials in collaboration with not-for-profit Our Watch.

Chanel's work has inspired international activism on exposing and ending rape culture. Now aged 24, she works on structural policy as Director of the Centre for Sex and Gender Equality at The Australia Institute.

She won the Young People's Human Rights Medal in 2021 and a Diana Award for activism in 2022.

Lottie Dalziel

Founder, Banish and sustainability champion

Lottie Dalziel didn't realise how hard it was to get accurate information about recycling and waste when she made a New Year Resolution to be kinder to the planet.

Rather than be disheartened, Lottie saw an opportunity. She founded Banish the same year as her resolution – 2018 – and made it her aim to provide Australians with reliable information and methods to reduce waste.

The Banish website and social media account is full of sustainability information, from how-to guides on composting to advice on planet-friendly food choices.

Lottie, 29, also runs BRAD – the Banish Recycled and Disposal Program. People send in hard-to-recycle items, such as blister packs, and Banish uses its partnership with TerraCycle to have them recycled in Australia. The BRAD initiative recycled 11 tonnes of waste, or 150,000 products, from 11,000 households within its first 20 months.

Lottie delivered a TED talk in 2020 on the power of community to fight climate change.

Steve Dresler

Founder, What Ability and the What Ability Foundation

Steve Dresler was a 20-year-old working as a support worker on weekends in 2019 when he set up an Instagram account, What Ability, showcasing photos of awesome days out. Within two years, the organisation had over 150 support workers and more than 100 participants.

What Ability supports people living with autism, down syndrome and other disabilities to get out and have fun in the community. Support workers take participants bushwalking, swimming, to parks and restaurants to gain confidence and learn life skills.

Steve wants to share his vision for an inclusive Australia and engages current and retired athletes to get involved as support workers. He purposefully employs young people, too, so they see the disability sector as a worthwhile profession.

He also started the What Ability Foundation in late 2021 to unlock ticketed experiences for people with a disability and their families. Now aged 24, his goal is to provide 1 million experiences across Australia by 2026.

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Christopher McHughes

Fireman

Christopher McHughes knows the local children look up to him, but he doesn't see himself as a role model. He says it's more that he'll always try a challenge and has a good work ethic.

Christopher is a proud Murriwarri Ngemba Yuwaalaraay man and in 2020 was a founding member of the first Indigenous State Mitigation crew in the NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS) in Brewarrina and Bourke. These crews care for kin and country affected by bushfire.

For Christopher, it's not just a job, it's a bridge to build trust between cultures.

He hopes to show young people in different communities that they can be Aboriginal and in the mainstream, setting up programs to help them succeed. For example, the Girls on Fire camp showed local girls aspects of working with the RFS.

The 25 year old also helped deliver food during COVID-19 and assisted the Wilcannia community during lockdown.

NSW LOCAL HERO – NOMINEE BIOS

Mona Mahamed

Founder, Community Support Services Inc

Mona Mahamed, a 49 year old mother of six and high school teacher, founded a community program that connects people, giving them a path to financial independence.

Mona saw a need in her community for the sort of support she received as she recovered from depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. She used her own money to start Community Support Services Inc (CSS) in Western Sydney in 2018.

Now more than 50 people visit the services hub every day. CSS partners with different philanthropic and government bodies to supply mental health, education, employment and practical support. Everyone is welcome.

CSS offers tutoring assistance for school kids, educational seminars, English classes and skills courses. It even supplies non-perishable food, toiletries and vouchers to those in need – crucial during the pandemic. They distributed nearly 150,000 kgs of food to 25,000 people in 2021 alone.

CSS has also furnished many houses for homeless individuals and women fleeing domestic violence relationships.

Christine Mastello

Founder, Southlakes Incorporated and Community Hair Project

Christine Mastello started a food bank in Lake Macquarie in 2013 with her own savings. At the time, her 15-year-old child was recovering from a stroke and her five-year-old with autism had four appointments a week. That didn't stop Christine from seeing a need in her community and meeting it.

Christine's not-for-profit, Southlakes Incorporated, now runs two walk-in food banks with three home delivery areas and supplies breakfast clubs at six schools. Southlakes hands out hundreds of hampers, pre-cooked meals and essentials every week – including clothing.

Southlakes delivered free food to 26,000 people during the first two years of COVID-19. It also donated \$1.2 million to homeless groups all around New South Wales when lockdowns meant volunteers couldn't help in person.

Christine, 52, also founded Community Hair Project, which is now nationwide. Volunteer hairdressers offer free haircuts and a toiletry kit to those in need. The program passed its 50,000th cut in 2022.

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Shiranee Pararajasingham

Pro bono Practice Executive and community champion

Shiranee Pararajasingham's colleagues call her the soul and engine of Ashurst's pro bono legal practice, where she has worked as a Practice Executive for more than 34 years.

Her quest to help extends beyond her job. Shiranee has spent every Saturday of the school term for the past 18 years teaching English at the Sudanese Australian Integrated Learning program and is now a coordinator. She was instrumental in expanding this program to Sri Lankan Tamil refugees and creating a tutoring program for children.

On top of this, Shiranee provides cultural, emotional, and practical support for new migrants, who often struggle with culture shock, trauma and financial stress.

As a member of organising committees of the Sydney Tamil Christian Fellowship and Australian Medical Aid Foundation, the 62 year old is also involved with fundraising efforts through her church; professional and personal networks for various charities in the North and East of Sri Lanka; and advocates for refugee rights in her personal capacity and as a member of Grandmothers Against Detention.

Amar Singh

Founder, Turbans 4 Australia

Amar Singh believes helping others should not be limited by religion, language or cultural background. Amar, 41, founded a charity after experiencing racial slurs and insults because of his Sikh turban and beard. He wanted to show people they didn't need to be afraid and began helping struggling Australians.

Every week, Turbans for Australia package and distribute up to 450 food and grocery hampers to people experiencing food insecurity in Western Sydney.

They also raise awareness and funds for important causes while promoting multiculturalism and religious tolerance. But the organisation is best known around Australia since its founding in 2015 for transporting emergency goods to those in need.

Turbans 4 Australia has delivered hay to farmers experiencing drought; supplies to flood victims in Lismore and bushfire-impacted people on the South Coast; food hampers to the isolated and vulnerable during COVID-19 lockdowns; and supplies to the Salvation Army in central Queensland in the devastating wake of Cyclone Marcia.

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