

MEDIA RELEASE

TASMANIA 2023 AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR AWARDS NOMINEES ANNOUNCED

Nominees for the 2023 Tasmania Australian of the Year Awards include health workers and volunteers, community leaders, a citizen scientist and a marathon runner.

They are just some of the 15 people in the running to be named the Tasmania Australian of the Year, Tasmania Senior Australian of the Year, Tasmania Young Australian of the Year and Tasmania Local Hero.

The 2023 Tasmania award nominees are:

Tasmania Australian of the Year

Adjunct Professor Gillian Biscoe AM - Health sector leader and founding director, Tasmanian Leaders (Hobart)
Professor Peter Dargaville - Neonatal specialist and creator of the Hobart Method (Hobart)
John Kamara - Humanitarian and co-founder, Culturally Diverse Alliance & African Communities of Tasmania (Hobart)
Professor Brett McDermott - Director, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service Tasmania (Woodbridge)

Tasmania Senior Australian of the Year

Dr Scott Bell - Citizen scientist and environmentalist (Launceston)
Dr Frances Donaldson - Doctor, frontline COVID-19 worker and prisoner advocate (Hobart)
Trevor Snooks - Volunteer, Cancer Council Tasmania's transport2treatment program (Burnie)
Wendal Pitchford - Aboriginal Frontier Wars advocate (Hobart)

Tasmania Young Australian of the Year

Meriem Daoui - Humanitarian and marathon runner (Kingston)
Lewi Taylor – Rock climber and cancer fundraiser (Howrah)
Elizabeth van Dongen - Campaigner for cystic fibrosis support (Hobart)

Tasmania Local Hero

Kristine Bull - Psychologist and founder, Brain Boot Camp (Devonport)
Amanda French - Founder, Dress for Success Hobart (Kingston)
Babajide Omojola - Community mentor (Clarence/Howrah)
Keith Parker - Volunteer ambulance officer and ammunition technical officer (Sheffield)

**see bios on following pages*

The Tasmania nominees are among 130 people being recognised across all states and territories.

The four award recipients from Tasmania will be announced on Friday 4 November in a ceremony at the Crowne Plaza Hobart which will also be available to watch via ABC iView from 1:45pm (local TAS 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 congratulated this year's Tasmanian nominees, praising their leadership efforts.

“The 2023 Tasmania award nominees are leaders,” said Karlie.

“Some lead by example, some lead by helping others, some lead by using their skills and experience to forge new paths and improved services.

“They are an outstanding reflection of Tasmania’s heritage, diversity and future.”

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.

In 2005, Tasmanian Ben Kearney was named Australia’s Local Hero. The environmental campaigner is credited with making Coles Bay the first ‘plastic bag free town’ in Australia.

More details on Ben Kearney’s award here: [Ben Kearney, 2005 Australia's Local Hero](#)

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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/28kg4nnjcbj3bx6zrj4uv/h?dl=0&rlkey=f98qmaeid0ckn44f9jiexxk8h>

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TASMANIA AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR – NOMINEE BIOS

Adjunct Professor Gillian Biscoe AM

Health sector leader and founding director, Tasmanian Leaders

Adjunct Professor Gillian Biscoe AM is an outstanding health sector leader who has devoted decades to the health and social policy sectors.

She has been a leader in international, national and state government health departments, chief executive officer of the Royal Canberra Hospital, and accepted multiple board and advisory appointments nationally and internationally.

Gillian has consulted extensively to the Asian Development Bank, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, federal and state governments, the New Zealand Government and the private and not-for-profit sectors.

The 74-year-old has built national health strategies in developing countries, led multi-year health reform projects, provided strategic policy advice to the World Health Organization, worked on HIV/AIDS projects in China and promoted the importance of leadership.

Gillian prioritises developing our next generation of leaders, including as a founding director of the not-for-profit Tasmanian Leaders, to which she has made a significant pro bono contribution over the years

Professor Peter Dargaville

Neonatal specialist and creator of the Hobart Method

Less than two decades ago, the survival rate of premature babies in Tasmania was below Australian standards.

Thanks in part to the innovation and leadership of 61-year-old Professor Peter Dargaville, survival rates in Tasmania at every gestational age are now on par with or ahead of the national average, and the rates of chronic lung disease are consistently lower.

As the Director of Royal Hobart Hospital's Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, Peter was responsible for developing the innovative 'Hobart Method' – a less invasive way to deliver treatment to relieve respiratory distress in premature babies.

The method avoids the need for a breathing tube, reducing the risk of lung damage and improving outcomes for premature infants. It's now used in over 40 countries.

Peter has also been instrumental in developing an automated system for controlling oxygen therapy in preterm babies. It increases time spent in a safe oxygen range by up to 25 percent, potentially improving long-term outcomes.

John Kamara

Humanitarian and co-founder, Culturally Diverse Alliance of Tasmania and African Communities of Tasmania

John Kamara escaped war-torn Sierra Leone 19 years ago and started a new life in Tasmania in 2004. Now 38, he does all he can to assist migrants, refugees and people from culturally diverse communities. His own experiences and work in child protection mean he understands the challenges new arrivals and marginalised groups face.

Sitting on multiple boards and involved in many community groups, John highlights systemic disadvantages for migrants such as racism, labour exploitation and recognition of overseas qualifications. He also assists with migrants' resumes and their search for jobs and housing.

John co-founded the Culturally Diverse Alliance of Tasmania to support education and promote social cohesion, as well as the first ever African Communities Council of Tasmania. It strives to cement relationships among African Australians and the wider community.

He and his wife, Mavis, have also since established Kamara's Heart Foundation, a charity to assist children in Sierra Leone.

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Professor Brett McDermott

Director, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service Tasmania

Professor Brett McDermott is a researcher and psychiatrist specialising in young people with mental health challenges.

As head of Tasmania's Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, he completed a review of the state's support for young people. He also successfully lobbied the State Government for funding and now has \$41 million to drive reforms.

Brett pioneered in 1994 one of the first public health programs in the world to screen adolescents and children for anxiety, PTSD and depression following natural disasters.

He's now led eight major post-disaster programs in NSW, Queensland and Tasmania to better support young people experiencing the trauma of floods, cyclones, bushfires and storms. His approach has influenced post-disaster interventions globally.

Brett has long been committed to improving child and adolescent mental health service delivery. He established Australia's first child and adolescent eating disorders team and at 61 is currently creating services for children in out-of-home care and youth.

TASMANIA SENIOR AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR – NOMINEE BIOS**Dr Scott Bell**

Citizen scientist and environmentalist

Dr Scott Bell is so passionate about saving our wildlife and the planet he's been arrested nine times and convicted four times for peacefully protesting for what he believes in.

His dedication comes after a lifetime working as a GP in locations that require a lot from doctors, including regional Tasmania, remote Aboriginal communities in WA and the NT, jungle villages in Laos, and in Burundi.

Scott has focused on environmental causes since retiring and buying 260 hectares of bushland near the coast of north-eastern Tasmania in 2007.

A conservation covenant now covers 98 per cent of the property, with 24 hectares designated as a bio-secure breeding enclosure for Tasmanian devils. The property is also used for education, the release of rehabilitated wildlife, and as a monitoring site for aquatic and terrestrial wildlife.

Now 72, Scott is an active member, volunteer and benefactor of a range of social and environmental organisations.

Dr Frances Donaldson

Doctor, frontline COVID-19 worker and prisoner advocate

Dr Frances Donaldson began her lifelong commitment to health care as a young nurse in Hobart, rising to become Director of Nursing before switching to study medicine in her 40s. She's since spent four decades working to improve health care standards in Tasmania.

Dr Fran spent 12 years navigating Tasmania's under-resourced prison health service, advocating for better health outcomes for prisoners and other disadvantaged Tasmanians.

Most recently, the 80-year-old has served at the frontline of Tasmania's COVID-19 response and has been one of the lead doctors working in the COVID@homeplus service from the beginning. Working sometimes seven days a week, she's consistently shared her knowledge as the stalwart of the team.

Before borders were reopened in December 2021 she volunteered to look after seasonal workers in hotel quarantine, requiring a significant on-call commitment.

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Wendal Pitchford

Aboriginal Frontier Wars advocate

Aunty Wendal Pitchford is a Palawa elder and advocate who is seeking recognition of the Frontier Wars and of the Aboriginal warriors who fought in the Black War in Tasmania.

The 64-year-old has quietly fought for many years for the Tasmanian Government to formally acknowledge the horrific conflict and its devastating impact on Indigenous peoples. She's headed multiple community campaigns and led peaceful protests each year at Anzac Day and Remembrance Day events in Hobart and Launceston for recognition of the war. Her efforts have resulted in a request from RSL Tasmania to work together to better understand and recognise the conflict.

The national veterans' organisation has also now supported Aunty Wendal's push for the establishment of Australia's first Frontier War Memorial in Tasmania to honour fallen ancestors.

In another national first, the Aboriginal community marched in the 2022 Anzac Day Parade as a group, rather than with their veterans' battalions.

Trevor Snooks

Volunteer, Cancer Council Tasmania's transport2treatment program

Trevor Snooks, a volunteer with the Cancer Council's transport2treatment program, has made the four-hour round trip from Burnie to Launceston every week for the past 16 years.

But he doesn't make the journey alone. He's driven thousands of cancer patients and their carers to important appointments since the program began in 2006. It's his way of giving back to the community after having to retire due to a prostate cancer scare himself.

He set a target from the outset, saying he'd be satisfied if he could 'stick it out' and volunteer until he was 80, a milestone he's already celebrated. Trevor made his last trip in 2022.

The 81-year-old is regarded as the backbone of the program in the state's north-west, maintaining vehicles and acting as the go-to person for any on-the-ground issues.

Countless people have benefited from Trevor's many volunteering roles between 1964 and 2022, including his decades of service to the South Burnie Football Club.

TASMANIA YOUNG AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR – NOMINEE BIOS

Meriem Daoui

Humanitarian and marathon runner

Meriem Daoui, a Tasmanian marathon runner and registered nurse, uses her love of running as a platform to do good. She ran her first marathon at age 16, raising over \$5,000 for displaced Syrians affected by their country's civil war.

Born in Morocco, Meriem relocated to Tasmania at age 10 where she experienced racism and was bullied for wearing a hijab. Anxiety, depression and eating disorders plagued her teenage years, but the support she received during her adversities inspired her to give back to the community.

Now 23, Meriem has also used marathons to raise awareness and funds for childhood cancer research. She most recently conquered the Everest challenge, running the Point-to-Pinnacle course – also known as the world's hardest half-marathon – every day for one week. The challenge raised over \$12,000.

In 2021, Meriem was awarded the Australian Peter Norman Humanitarian award for her community and philanthropic efforts.

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Lewi Taylor

Rock climber and cancer fundraiser

For 158 days straight, Lewi Taylor climbed and conquered 158 of Tasmania's most challenging mountains – the Abels – trekking alone through rain, snow and blistering sun.

He hiked through Tasmania's wilderness with a single-minded determination: to raise \$158,000 to improve the fighting changes of all Tasmanians with cancer. He was inspired by his mother, who'd been diagnosed with breast cancer for the second time.

Lewi started his '158 Challenge' in January 2022 and climbed the final peak, *kunanyi*, on 10 June, his 30th birthday. His goal was to raise \$1000 each time he reached the top of Tasman's 158 Abels – mountains that peak above 1,100 metres with sheer drops from the summit.

Working with Cancer Council Tasmania, Lewi has raised more than \$167,000 so far. The funds will stay in Tasmania and contribute to cancer prevention education, research and support services, including the Cancer Council's wig library and transport2treatment program

Elizabeth van Dongen

Campaigner for cystic fibrosis support

Physiotherapist Elizabeth van Dongen was born with cystic fibrosis (CF) – a genetic disease primarily affecting the lungs and digestive system.

She successfully campaigned to have a drug that treats the underlying conditions of CF put on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS).

At a time when the medication cost about \$22,000 a month, Elizabeth shared her story on the CF Tasmania Facebook Page, spoke to media outlets and MPs, and helped publicise a petition to list the drug on the PBS. The petition gained 58,274 signatures and was presented to Federal Parliament.

On 1 April 2022, the treatment was made available for about \$42 a script. The national campaign means the 3,500 Australians living with CF can enjoy a better quality of life.

At 25, Elizabeth is passionate about helping others live a life unencumbered by disease or injury. She promotes the benefits of exercise for people with CF to maximise lung function and sustainably manage their wellbeing.

TASMANIA LOCAL HERO – NOMINEE BIOS

Kristine Bull

Psychologist and founder, Brain Boot Camp

Kristine Bull has been a practising psychologist for more than 20 years. She's now using that knowledge to build a strong support network for children and families in Devonport.

Kristine was instrumental in creating Pathway Shed, a youth and families outreach centre, and Pathway House, which she set up and manages.

Pathway House provides low-cost psychology, counselling and social work services to the community, with a particular focus on people living with Autism Spectrum Disorder. She also volunteers at both centres.

Kristine developed her own mental health program for children, 'Brain Boot Camp', which is a safe space for participants with disabilities, social difficulties, for those who have suffered trauma or come from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Through her paid and voluntary roles, 47-year-old Kristine has given the community access to mental health training, affordable counselling, and facilitated connection and understanding.

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Amanda French

Founder, Dress for Success Hobart

Amanda French has worked in the not-for-profit sector her entire career. Passionate about helping people achieve positive outcomes, she set up Dress for Success Hobart in 2019 to support women to achieve economic independence through employment.

Dress for Success is run by volunteers and empowers women to develop the right skills – and have the right clothes – to succeed at job interviews and ultimately, find work.

While the initiative helps these women achieve employment and financial independence, its broader goal is to empower women to overcome the barriers that prevent them from reaching their full potential.

Throughout her career, 35-year-old Amanda has had roles in the drug and alcohol sector, child protection, and contributed to the growth of the suicide prevention initiative SPEAK UP! Stay ChatTY during her time at Relationships Australia Tasmania.

She has been a volunteer with Make-A-Wish for nearly 10 years and is a director on the National Board of Make-A-Wish Australia.

Babajide Omojola

Community mentor

Babajide Omojola believes a person's past doesn't have to define their present or future. He helps others reshape their lives for the better.

Babajide came to Tasmania from Africa. He now assists other African migrants to adapt to their new home, become familiar with Australian culture and law, and find study and employment opportunities. He also encourages them to contribute to their new community, which he believes is key to a person feeling they are an asset.

In addition, 34-year-old Babajide works with prison inmates to identify skills they'd like to learn, or causes they can contribute to, so they can achieve a better quality of life in or out of prison. The aim is to redefine their situation and deliver a sense of dignity and purpose.

Babajide is changing lives, one conversation at a time, and in doing that he is strengthening community for all Tasmanians.

Keith Parker

Volunteer ambulance officer and ammunition technical officer

Keith Parker has specialised in explosive ordnance throughout his Army career, serving overseas and assisting the United Nations (UN) on several occasions.

He helped the UN modernise and improve its explosives storage when he managed an international explosives safety trial at Woomera, South Australia.

Keith also acted as an Australian representative to help negotiate weapons surrender during a period of conflict in the Solomon Islands.

Outside of his army role, since 2011 Keith has contributed more than 1,500 hours a year as a Volunteer Ambulance Officer (VAO) for Ambulance Tasmania in Sheffield. He has often been a first responder to the scene of medical emergencies in rural Tasmania and works alongside paramedics to provide patient care.

Keith, 66, has progressed to VAO-4 (the highest rank) and now assists in the training of new recruits, covers vacant night shifts and operates solo as a first responder if no paramedics are available.

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