

## MEDIA RELEASE

MONDAY 23 OCTOBER 2023

### 2024 AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR AWARD NOMINEES FOR WESTERN AUSTRALIA ANNOUNCED

A bug-whisperer, the creator of Moodle, a nurse making chemo possible at home, a para-athlete, a scientist planting seagrass, and e-waste and STEM advocates are among nominees for the 2024 Australian of the Year Awards for Western Australia.

The 2024 award nominees are:

#### **2024 Australian of the Year for Western Australia**

Lorna Cook - Co-founder, Chemo@home (Edgewater)  
Dr Martin Dougiamas - Creator, open source learning platform Moodle (Perth)  
Dr Paola Magni - Forensic scientist, SmartInsects developer and RedShoes ambassador (Gwelup)  
Mechelle Turvey - Advocate for victims of crime (Perth)

#### **2024 Senior Australian of the Year for Western Australia**

Charles Bass - Founder, Centre for Entrepreneurial Research and Innovation (Applecross)  
Maggie Dent - Parenting author, educator and speaker  
Ronald Reynolds - Community leader (Esperance)  
Caroline Wood AM - Co-founder, Centre for Stories (West Leederville)

#### **2024 Young Australian of the Year for Western Australia**

Madison Heady - Para-athlete and disability advocate (Hillarys)  
Kate Kirwin - Founder, She Codes and women in STEM advocate (Perth)  
Kate Raston - Advocate and co-founder, We Are Womxn (Fremantle)  
Samuel Thomas - Co-founder, Sam's Spares and e-waste advocate (Gosnells)

#### **2024 Local Hero for Western Australia**

Geoffrey Bastyan - Marine scientist and seagrass champion (Albany)  
Nicholas Hudson - Founder, The Push-Up Challenge and mental health advocate (Wembley)  
Catherine MacDougall - Co-founder, Prepare Produce Provide (South Guildford)  
Adele Peek - Co-founder, The Cultural Intelligence Project and founder, Make It Happen HQ (Broome)

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

The nominees for Western Australia are among 133 people being recognised across all states and territories.

The Western Australian award recipients will be announced on Thursday 2 November 2023 in a ceremony at Government House in Perth, which will also be available to watch online at [australianoftheyear.org.au](http://australianoftheyear.org.au).

They will then join the other state and territory recipients as national finalists for the national awards announcement on Thursday 25 January 2024 in Canberra.

National Australia Day Council CEO Mark Fraser AO CVO congratulated the nominees for Western Australia on their recognition.

“The nominees for the Western Australian Awards are a diverse group of people leveraging their skills and experience to help and empower others,” said Mark.

“They are all leaders, showing us through their own actions what we can achieve and how we can forge a better future.”

## **ENDS.**

Nominee [bios on the following pages](#) and can also be viewed from [australianoftheyear.org.au](http://australianoftheyear.org.au).

Nominee [photos can be downloaded](#) from this link: [Western Australia Nominee Photos](#)

### **\*\*NOTE\*\***

The Australian of the Year Awards program is run by the National Australia Day Council.

It includes state and territory awards, including the Australian of the Year Awards for Western Australia.

The Australian of the Year Awards for Western Australia are NOT connected with an awards program known as the Western Australian of the Year, run by the Celebrate WA organisation.

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## **2024 AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR FOR WESTERN AUSTRALIA – NOMINEE BIOS**

### **Lorna Cook**

Co-founder, Chemo@home

Lorna Cook is an exceptional nurse, advocate, entrepreneur and innovator. As co-founder of Chemo@home, Lorna – alongside her business partner – has made it possible for patients receiving chemotherapy, to have their treatments at home. Despite facing initial resistance and gender discrimination, this now national health service has won multiple awards and provides about 85 per cent of Australia's home infusions. It eases the stress of travel and improves the experience for patients receiving chemotherapy.

Lorna collaborates with other healthcare professionals, researchers and policymakers to advocate for the integration of home-based chemotherapy services within the broader healthcare system. The 64-year-old regularly attends conferences and engages with the media about the value of providing more compassionate, patient-centred cancer care.

A graduate of the Edith Cowan University, Lorna completed her studies as a single mother and has a Master of Nursing, an MBA and is the current Edith Cowan University Alumni of the Year.

### **Dr Martin Dougiamas**

Creator, open source learning platform Moodle

Dr Martin Dougiamas is responsible for revolutionising online learning. In 2002, the computer scientist and educator launched Moodle, the world's most widely used, free open source learning management system.

Moodle, or Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment, allows students and teachers to collaborate through forums and sharing materials. Martin's creation has helped people across the globe access quality education, regardless of location or economic status.

Also founder of the Open EdTech Association, 54-year-old Martin fosters a global community of educators, developers and contributors who continually update and improve Moodle. He's aligned Moodle with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, helping tackle global challenges through education.

Perth-based Martin actively fosters digital literacy and online learning. He also partners with Indigenous communities to help address education gaps. Martin has a master's degree and PhD from Curtin University, and three honorary doctorates. In 2008, he won the Google-O'Reilly Open Source Award in the Education Enabler category.

### **Dr Paola Magni**

Forensic scientist, SmartInsects developer and RedShoes ambassador

Renowned forensic specialist and innovator Dr Paola Magni uses insects and other small creatures to help solve murders, suspicious deaths and cold cases. She also conducts research to enhance law enforcement's ability to resolve criminal cases.

The 'bug whisperer' developed the SmartInsects app, a practical tool for pathologists and investigators at crime scenes, enabling them to accurately collect even the tiniest evidence that can be effectively used in a court of law.

A sought-after corporate speaker, award-winner and author of numerous papers, 42-year-old Paola has significantly contributed to the fields of forensic entomology, aquatic forensics, education and technology. Inducted into the WA Women's Hall of Fame in 2022, Paola volunteers on numerous boards and works pro-bono investigating cases of animal cruelty.

She is nurturing the next generation of women in science by challenging stereotypes in STEM, and her efforts against gender-based violence led to her becoming the Red Shoes ambassador for Australia.

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## **Mechelle Turvey**

Advocate for victims of crime

In 2022, Mechelle Turvey's 15-year-old son, Cassius Turvey, was assaulted coming home from school. Tragically, the Noongar Yamatji schoolboy died of his injuries 10 days later.

Cassius' death sparked a national day of action across Australia, with rallies and vigils to express grief, anger, hurt and solidarity with his loved ones. Mechelle, still grieving the recent death of her husband Sam, led the march in Perth. She gave a powerful speech about her son, calling for calm and non-violence – and the need for proper care for victims of crime and their families.

In 2023, Mechelle began utilising her lived experiences by training Western Australia Police Force recruits in dealing with victims of crime with empathy and support.

Through her life, 57-year-old Mechelle has volunteered to support her community, including helping people in prison. She has donated much of the money raised for Cassius to youth organisations. Her courage, care and compassion for others are exemplary.

## **2024 SENIOR AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR FOR WESTERN AUSTRALIA – NOMINEE BIOS**

### **Charles Bass**

Founder, Centre for Entrepreneurial Research and Innovation

When Charles (Charlie) Bass founded the Centre for Entrepreneurial Research and Innovation (CERI) in 2015, he became a mentor for hundreds of start-ups and a powerful supporter of innovation and sustainability in Western Australia.

To date, CERI has provided over 600 aspiring entrepreneurs with the tools, mentorship and support needed to turn their ideas into successful businesses – including raising over \$7.5 million in funds. CERI also facilitates research commercialisation, particularly in medical technology and biotech.

Charlie worked in Western Australia's mining industries – very successfully – for decades. But he knows the state can't rely on its resources forever. CERI reflects Charlie's desire to see greater economic diversification in Western Australia. Through speaking engagements and CERI, 74-year-old Charlie advocates for the creation of high-knowledge, high-value, export-oriented businesses for the long-term sustainable growth of the state.

A notable philanthropist, Charlie created the Bass Family Foundation in 2006 to help provide disadvantaged children with a quality education.

### **Maggie Dent**

Parenting author, educator and speaker

She is the author of nine major books and the host of an award-winning podcast. But you might know Maggie Dent by her unofficial title: 'the queen of common sense'.

An unsuccessful suicide attempt as a university student influenced then-teenage Maggie to change her career path. She became an English teacher who was able to teach more than just the curriculum – she also taught her students that everyone had their own unique strengths and potential.

Maggie has volunteered in palliative care, suicide prevention and community bereavement education. She also became a celebrant, worked as a counsellor and travelled Australia working in schools and communities. Her ABC podcast Parental As Anything sees Maggie talking to parenting experts around the world; it won Gold at the Australian Podcast Awards in 2022.

Today, 68-year-old Maggie is an advocate for the healthy, common-sense raising of children and a passionate, positive voice for children of all ages.

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## **Ronald Reynolds**

Community leader

For more than 40 years, Ronald (Doc) Reynolds has helped integrate traditional culture with scientific research, community planning and tourism in the region of Esperance.

Doc is a Wudjari Nyungar Mirning Ngudju man and knowledge holder who established Esperance's first Aboriginal Community Centre. He also started the Gabbie Kylie Foundation, which brings together different land and heritage management agencies to conserve the heritage of the region and re-connect Traditional Owners with country.

As the senior cultural advisor for the Esperance Tjaltjiraak Native Title Aboriginal Corporation (also now its director), 65-year-old Doc has worked on numerous research projects, contributing to project design, field data collection and cultural mentorship.

Doc also owns and operates the award-winning Kepa Kurl Enterprises, which runs cultural tours of Esperance as well as heritage surveys. In 2022, Doc was awarded the state's highest tourism honour, the Sir David Brand Medal for Contribution to Tourism in Western Australia.

## **Caroline Wood AM**

Co-founder, Centre for Stories

Caroline Wood AM has held a great many titles in her life – a co-founder, a board member, a publisher and a volunteer. But the uniting theme to Caroline's achievements and job descriptions is one of community engagement.

Raised with an appreciation for education, music, literature and a strong sense of community, Caroline went on to co-found Centre for Stories, Margaret River Press and the Australian Short Story Festival, promoting inclusion, diversity and social cohesion.

Working previously with Amnesty Australia and currently with PEN Perth both as an activist and as a director, 70-year-old Caroline has acquired first-hand experience in the power of stories to engage and influence. Her efforts have improved understanding and empathy between different communities, fostered a sense of belonging and empowered marginalised voices.

In 2023, Caroline was made a Member of the Order of Australia for her significant service to literature as a publisher and to the community.

## **2024 YOUNG AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR FOR WESTERN AUSTRALIA – NOMINEE BIOS**

### **Madison Heady**

Para-athlete and disability advocate

Madison Heady was diagnosed with ataxic cerebral palsy at birth and didn't walk unassisted until she was eight. She went on to become a national athletics silver medallist for the 1500m and set a new Australian record for her classification for the 5km race in 2020. Later that year, Madison was in a serious car accident and had to re-learn to walk a second time. With determination, hard work and a never-give up-attitude, 22-year-old Madison is now back training.

Madison is a passionate advocate, educating the community on disability and the importance of inclusion. For being a strong advocate, Madison received the 2023 Western Australian of the Year award in the Youth Category.

Her dream is for people with disabilities to be given the chance to show others who they truly are and for others to open the opportunity to see the ability, not the disability.

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**Kate Kirwin**

Founder, She Codes and women in STEM advocate

Kate Kirwin founded She Codes Australia in 2015 with the aim of teaching women coding skills, helping them enter technical careers and building a likeminded community.

As a country girl, 30-year-old Kate strongly believes in empowering women from some of Australia's most remote regions. So far, more than 6000 women from all over the country have learned to code through She Codes.

Kate's work is closing the gender gap in tech, where only 30 per cent of employees are women. She has sourced more than \$1 million from government and industry to support women in STEM.

Kate has also contributed to the growth of Spacecubed, a start-up hub in Perth, and since 2014 has played a pivotal role in building communities and coordinating programs such as Plus Eight and Startup Weekend. Her achievements have been recognised with the Business News 40 Under 40 Award and The West Australian's Rising Star Award.

**Kate Raston**

Advocate and co-founder, We Are Womxn

Kate Raston co-founded We Are Womxn in 2021 to help reduce the stigmas associated with being a woman and broaden the scope of womanhood. A victim of sexual harassment and assault, Kate chose to use her firsthand understanding of trauma to make a profound difference.

We Are Womxn provides a safe and inclusive space for education and honest conversation for women and non-binary individuals, empowering them to be brave and build their confidence. Through evidence-based and trauma-informed bespoke health programs, participants can learn about and discuss subjects that may be regarded as taboo. In just three years, We Are Womxn has worked with over 10,000 young women at 40 different schools, plus over 3000 university students and 2000 participants at various community groups across Western Australia.

At 28 years old, Kate is also a passionate public speaker and advocate who lobbies for change to improve sex positivity, consent understanding, and education around healthy relationships for all women.

**Samuel Thomas**

Co-founder, Sam's Spares and e-waste advocate

Samuel Thomas, who is autistic and has Tourette syndrome, co-founded Sam's Spares in 2022 so he could merge his three passions: computers, the environment and helping others.

Sam's Spares takes donated e-waste, repairs it and then passes items on to people in need or community organisations – completely free of charge. In just one year, Sam's Spares has taken in 46 tonnes of donated e-waste and diverted nearly 29 tonnes from landfill. Over 1000 items have been repaired, refurbished and redistributed.

A self-taught IT repairman, 19-year-old Samuel is also passing on his skills to other neurodivergent young people. His training program will create long-term employment opportunities for participants.

Samuel is often asked to speak at events and to the media on e-waste and building a more sustainable world. He has been recognised with several awards, including WA Young Volunteer of the Year and the WA Individual Waste Champion in the recent Waste Sorted Awards.

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## **2024 LOCAL HERO FOR WESTERN AUSTRALIA – NOMINEE BIOS**

### **Geoffrey Bastyan**

Marine scientist and seagrass champion

Pioneering seagrass transplantation techniques, Geoffrey Bastyan restored a degraded marine environment to health – and taught countless others how to do the same.

After monitoring Albany's Oyster Harbour and Princess Royal Harbour in the 1970s, Geoffrey found almost all the seagrass in these areas had disappeared. In its place, green algae had built up and marine biodiversity was low. The marine scientist discovered how to transplant seagrass to these areas, then enlisted community members to help revive these vital ecosystems.

Since 1994, Geoffrey has invested his own time, money and resources to transplant two species of seagrass, restoring hectares of seagrass meadows. Geoff's seagrass and fish monitoring program was adopted as part of Great Southern Grammar School's science curriculum and by other local schools.

Now aged 65, Geoff's work has been recognised with the Southseas Oceans Hero Award at Oceans Community 2014 and the Great Southern Development Commission Medal 2016.

### **Nicholas Hudson**

Founder, The Push-Up Challenge and mental health advocate

Nicholas (Nick) Hudson and his friends had started a push-up challenge in 2017 to get fit and motivate each other. In 2018, Nick extended the challenge to more friends to raise awareness and funds for mental health. Then Nick experienced depression himself following open heart surgery. While recovering, he focused on making The Push-Up Challenge a public event.

Fast forward to 2023 and The Push-Up Challenge has become an annual event. Individuals and teams across Australia aim to meet set push-up targets, learn facts about mental health and, if they choose, raise funds for mental health charities. To date the event has raised \$40 million.

In 2023 alone, over 200,000 participants completed 315 million push-ups, making them fitter, raising \$14.6 million for mental health and getting people talking and thinking about mental health.

Now an inspiring public speaker and aged 46, 'Chief of Push-ups' Nick was awarded Mental Health Advocate of the Year WA 2021.

### **Catherine MacDougall**

Co-founder, Prepare Produce Provide

Catherine MacDougall is a chef, educator and trainer who co-founded Prepare Produce Provide (PPP), a not-for-profit organisation helping young people pursue careers in education, food and hospitality.

Committed to creating meaningful change, Catherine is adopting a multi-faceted approach in addressing the complex issues facing youth. The '5000Meals' program addresses wastage and food insecurity by bringing together chefs, students, volunteers and donated food to create nutritious meals for people experiencing homelessness. Since its 2012 inception, it has provided more than 100,000 meals and 45,000 meals during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The 'Djinda Ngardak' culinary program offers Aboriginal students across Western Australia the opportunity to train with top chefs and cultural leaders, inspiring careers in the hospitality and tourism industries. It supported the first two Indigenous youth to participate in Germany's Culinary Olympics.

Catherine's efforts are testament to the power of local engagement. The 57-year-old's selfless efforts are fostering community spirit and empowering Indigenous young people.

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**Adele Peek**

Co-founder, The Cultural Intelligence Project and founder, Make It Happen HQ

Yawuru and Bunuba woman Adele Peek is determined to address the lack of capital and resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander entrepreneurs.

With her sister, Cara Peek, she co-founded The Cultural Intelligence Project – a multi-award-winning platform that assists organisations to increase diversity and inclusion with conscious business solutions. Adele also founded Make It Happen HQ, a dynamic, first-of-its-kind innovation hub and think tank providing mentorship, funding and services for First Nations entrepreneurs in the start-up and scale-up stages.

A specialist in Aboriginal strategic engagement and advice, 37-year-old Adele's leadership skills have enabled her to secure support from major organisations. She has helped grow local Indigenous businesses, which contribute a social return on investment of \$4.41 for every \$1 invested, promoting self-determination and economic independence.

Adele volunteers as vice chairperson for the not-for-profit Saltwater Country and was the former vice chairperson for Nagula Jarndu Women's Resource Centre.

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