

MEDIA RELEASE

FRIDAY 27 OCTOBER 2023

**2024 AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR AWARD NOMINEES
FOR QUEENSLAND
ANNOUNCED**

A world-record-breaking shearer, the co-founder of a dinosaur museum, the most successful Australian Olympian of all time, advocates against domestic violence, a mental health charity founder and a community theatre organist are among nominees for the 2024 Australian of the Year Awards for Queensland.

The 2024 award nominees are:

2024 Australian of the Year for Queensland

Benjamin Bjarnesen BM - Speaker, educator and advocate against domestic violence (Brisbane)

Geraldine Blackwell - Founder, Youth Development Foundation (Strathpine)

Marco Renai - Founder, Men of Business (Gold Coast)

Adjunct Professor Adam Scott - Innovator in medicine and founder, White Cloud Foundation (Indooroopilly)

2024 Senior Australian of the Year for Queensland

Reverend Robyn and Reverend Dr Lindsay Burch - Founders, Havafeed Relief (Gold Coast)

Martin Corkery - Rotarian and philanthropist (Hendra)

Ted Kearney - Soccer referee coach (retired) (Brisbane)

Ronald West - Organist and former theatre owner (Cooran)

2024 Young Australian of the Year for Queensland

Toby Hendy - Science communicator, Youtuber and filmmaker

Emma McKeon AM – Olympian (Labrador)

Curtis Rayment - Founder, It's a Man's Issue (Townsville)

Grace Sholl - Mental health advocate and aspiring psychologist (Logan)

2024 Local Hero for Queensland

Laurie Bateman - Constable, Queensland Police Service and world-record-breaking sheep shearer (Palm Island)

Bradley Crosbie - Founder, WYLD Projects Indigenous Corporation (Bundaberg)

David Elliott OAM - Co-founder, Australian Age of Dinosaurs Museum of Natural History (Winton)

Vanessa Fowler OAM - Founder, Allison Baden-Clay Foundation (Ipswich)

**see detailed bios on following pages*

The Queensland nominees are among 133 people being recognised across all states and territories.

The Queensland award recipients will be announced on Wednesday 8 November 2023 in 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 Thursday 25 January 2024 in Canberra.

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

“The nominees for the Queensland awards come from all walks of life and many different areas of endeavour and contribution,” said Mark.

“They remind us all of what we can do when we make a decision to take action, make a stand, lend a hand or strive for a goal. They remind us we are all capable of being extraordinary.”

ENDS.

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

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

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2024 AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR FOR QUEENSLAND – NOMINEE BIOS

Benjamin Bjarnesen BM

Speaker, educator and advocate against domestic violence

Benjamin (Ben) Bjarnesen BM believes that everyone deserves the right to live a life free from domestic violence.

He became an advocate for better services for LGBTIQ+ communities after personally experiencing domestic violence in a same-sex relationship and discovering a huge gap in available support.

A former longtime operational police officer with Queensland Police Service (QPS), 39-year-old Ben was instrumental in helping QPS improve its response to domestic violence in LGBTIQ+ communities.

Internationally recognised, Ben advises government and non-government organisations and participates in international campaigns to support global LGBTIQ+ communities. He is a Churchill Fellow, has presented education sessions to over one hundred organisations on domestic violence and holds numerous volunteer positions, including founding director of the LGBTQ Domestic Violence Awareness Foundation.

Named a 'Human Rights Hero' by the Australian Human Rights Commission, Ben was celebrated as one of Australia's Outstanding 50 LGBTI+ Leaders by Deloitte & Google in 2020.

Geraldine Blackwell

Founder, Youth Development Foundation

Geraldine (Gerry) Blackwell founded Youth Development Foundation (YDF) in 2014. She wanted to create an organisation for at-risk young people that helped address their underlying issues, and to fill the gaps in other services offered to these young people and their families.

YDF takes an individual approach to each young person's program. It offers holistic services that include mentoring, education, skills development and vocational training.

YDF also aims to help participants develop the self-worth and confidence to improve their lives – and provides a safe and non-judgemental environment. More than 100 employers and community partnerships are involved to help place participants into work or education.

Under 50-year-old Gerry's leadership, YDF has helped more than 8000 young Queenslanders. It has placed almost 3000 participants into work and helped 500 return to school or take on further study. It has a remarkable 96 per cent engagement rate, with 98 per cent of participants going on to improve their circumstances.

Marco Renai

Founder, Men of Business

Marco Renai, 48, is founder of Men of Business (MOB) Academy. The senior secondary school focuses on empowering at-risk-young men with the skills, knowledge and confidence to be happy, healthy and successful.

After experiencing troubles at school as a teen and later volunteering in youth justice, Marco realised there were no programs for young men who struggled to engage with life and education. Inspired by his Italian heritage, which holds that family, food and doing good can make a difference, he piloted the first MOB program in 2011.

Marco and his community raised \$1 million to open the MOB Academy in 2020. Young men participate in education, work pathways and social and emotional wellbeing programs. Meals are provided and they can also engage with community in real-world experiences.

Today MOB is a federal and state-funded accredited academy with two branches, 35 passionate staff, thousands of past graduates and 195 thriving students.

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Adjunct Professor Adam Scott

Innovator in medicine and founder, White Cloud Foundation

Adjunct Professor Adam Scott's work has changed the way healthcare is delivered to under-resourced areas of Australia.

As the director of cardiac sciences at the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital, Adam created the Cardiovascular Telemedicine Program in Rural Australia. This was developed in response to the long wait times for rural and remote patients who experience higher rates of cardiovascular disease.

The program was launched in 2017 using purpose-made remote control technology to investigate the cardiac health of these patients.

In 2011, Adam set up the White Cloud Foundation (WCF), a mental health charity that removes the barriers to accessing treatment for anxiety and depression. Through its many different services WCF has helped thousands of Australians.

Adam created the Tele-Mental Health service, offering free access to multi-disciplinary treatment to Queenslanders, and has partnered with 16 state and national sporting associations to offer this service. Adam, 48, also has a PhD in cardiology.

2024 SENIOR AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR FOR QUEENSLAND – NOMINEE BIOS

Reverend Robyn and Reverend Dr Lindsay Burch

Founders, Havafeed Relief

Reverend Robyn and Reverend Dr Lindsay Burch's not-for-profit organisation Havafeed Relief has fed more than one million people.

The couple started Havafeed in 1994 with a van and donated loaves of bread. It's now a regular fixture at the Mermaid Beach Community Centre. Six days a week, visitors can enjoy a hot meal, pick up a hamper, connect with others or talk with a local support service if they need help.

Robyn (72) and Lindsay (75) have dedicated their retirement years to Havafeed. They start before dawn to make sure they have enough food and volunteers for each day's work. The organisation receives no funding and relies entirely on donations from the community. The couple have never asked for wages, often using their own funds to keep their work afloat.

Havafeed Relief currently provides more than 300 meals a week and has raised almost \$2 million in donations over the last 30 years.

Martin Corkery

Rotarian and philanthropist

Guided by the Rotary motto of 'Service above self', Martin Corkery has dedicated much of his life – and his own funds – to community causes in Australia and internationally.

A longtime Ipswich Rotarian, Martin established a community crisis centre on the Gold Coast, which brought immediate and long-term benefits to the local community and helped struggling small businesses.

In 2019, Martin became concerned that farmers in drought-stricken areas of rural Queensland were struggling to survive. So he travelled across the region with a professional news camera man to interview locals for fundraising videos. He paid for the trip and the camera man himself.

More recently, 82-year-old Martin self-funded two visits to post-invasion Ukraine to establish links with local Rotary clubs and find out how Rotary Australia could offer support to Ukrainians in need.

Martin is also a businessman and co-founder of Children First Learning Centres, which he helped establish in 1991.

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Ted Kearney

Soccer referee coach (retired)

Ted Kearney has a second nickname: FIFA Factory. The now-retired soccer referee coach is a legend to soccer referees around Australia, having mentored 25 international-level match officials.

Ted started as an amateur soccer referee in the 1980s. He revolutionised coaching – partly by conducting fitness sessions for referees, which was unheard of at the time. Later, Ted coached for Football Brisbane and Football Queensland. He was invited to international FIFA Futuro seminars and always returned home eager to share the knowledge he'd gained.

Ted's coaching style is known for its constructive feedback, positivity and inclusion. He has trained and developed men and women from all levels of ability. He encourages his proteges to think critically, be honest and stay humble.

Technically retired now, 72-year-old Ted still devotes much of his personal time mentoring and preparing match officials for a tournament. And he still assists with the fitness sessions he began 40 years ago.

Ronald West

Organist and former theatre owner

Ronald (Ron) West has provided the soundtrack at the Majestic Theatre in Pomona, Queensland – the world's oldest authentic silent movie house – for nearly 50 years.

One day in the 1980s, Ron and his wife Mandy, the then owners of the theatre, ran the movie *The Son of the Shiekh*. Ron provided the score himself with a restored pipe organ, making the music up as he went along. Word got around and within a few months, the Majestic only showed silent films.

After 30 years of preservation and restoration, Ron sold the Majestic to the Pomona community at below-market value, on an interest-free loan. Ron included everything inside the building at no cost. Now more than 100 years old, the Majestic is run entirely by volunteers – including organist Ron, now in his nineties.

Ron, now aged 90, won the Noosa Shire Australia Day Award in 2004 for his contributions to culture and community.

2024 YOUNG AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR FOR QUEENSLAND – NOMINEE BIOS

Toby Hendy

Science communicator, Youtuber and filmmaker

Toby Hendy, 28, is an award-winning science communicator who brings physics, mathematics and astronomy to millions.

A keen science student, Toby's love of science entertainment on television and YouTube led her to start her own channel in 2011, at age 15. It took five years for the channel, *Tibeas*, to reach 100 subscribers. Today, it has more than 1.1 million subscribers – and her videos have been watched more than 130 million times.

While Toby studied at university, she continued with her YouTube channel and completed other extracurricular projects that celebrate STEM and bring science and mathematics to the wider community. Eventually, Toby decided to put her PhD on hold to focus on the success and educational reach of her YouTube channel.

In 2022 Toby released *Finding X*, a stop-motion short film that she co-created and produced. The award-winning film tells the story of X looking for meaning in a mathematical world.

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Emma McKeon AM

Olympian

Emma McKeon AM is the most successful Australian Olympian of all time – a title she claimed before her 28th birthday. She comes from a strong family of Australian swimmers. In fact, her father, uncle, brother and mother have all represented Australia.

Back in 2012, Emma just missed out on being chosen for the London Olympics. She took a break, but rediscovered her passion and went on to make a splash at the 2014 Commonwealth Games, where she claimed six medals from six races.

At the 2020 Summer Olympics, Emma became the first female swimmer and the second woman in history to win seven medals in a single Olympics. She has also broken Commonwealth Games, Olympic and World records.

Now aged 29, Emma has other titles to her name. In 2022 she was made a Member of the Order of Australia, and in 2023 she was named Gold Coast Young Australian of the Year.

Curtis Rayment

Founder, It's a Man's Issue

When a close friend was sexually assaulted, Curtis Rayment channelled the helplessness and anger he felt into creating 'It's a Man's Issue'.

In the aftermath of his friend's assault, Curtis, born on his family's cattle property, reflected on the way he and his peers referred to women. He also realised that as a teen, no one had spoken to him about his emotions or broader societal issues.

'It's a Man's Issue' travels to schools and clubs around Queensland to help young people understand consent, rape culture, victim blaming and toxic masculinity – plus other social issues that they have questions about.

The program recently won funding from Project Speak Up!, a Townsville not-for-profit organisation that addresses domestic and sexual violence. This means 25-year-old Curtis – who is also a final year medical student and volunteer at his local rugby club – can reach more students and train other young men to deliver the program.

Grace Sholl

Mental health advocate and aspiring psychologist

Grace Sholl decided to become a psychologist in her early teens. She wanted to help people like her parents, who were both in the military, and later, people like herself who struggled with their mental health.

Now holding a Bachelor of Psychology and completing a Master of Suicidology, 21-year-old Grace is putting her lived experience of physical illness, mental illness and suicide at the service of others.

She is involved in government and non-government advocacy programs including Headspace, Beyond Blue, Roses in the Ocean and Queensland Health. Grace is also a youth advocate with the Queensland Family and Child Commission and sits on the Queensland LGBTIQ+ Roundtable.

Grace was appointed as a Millenium Fellow for the Class of 2020 by the United Nations Academic Impact and Millennium Campus Network. She is a recipient of the Out For Australia - BCG 30 Outstanding Individuals Under 30 award, celebrating contribution to the LGBTIQ+ community.

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2024 LOCAL HERO FOR QUEENSLAND – NOMINEE BIOS

Laurie Bateman

Constable, Queensland Police Service and world-record-breaking sheep shearer

Kamilaroi man Laurie Bateman is a third-generation sheep shearer. His talent for it was so strong that his Guinness World Record remains unbeaten.

But it was when Laurie began teaching shearing to struggling high school students after 26 years on the clippers that he discovered a passion for helping others. Laurie decided to become a police liaison officer so he could work more with the young people of his home district of Southwest Queensland.

Now Laurie is a sworn police officer and a constable with the Queensland Police Service (QPS). He works with at-risk children and local Aboriginal people to make a positive difference in the community.

As well as passing on what he learned in the shearing shed to local kids, 53-year-old Laurie was also responsible for helping QPS produce a cultural awareness booklet on protecting Aboriginal cultural sites and artifacts after he noticed cultural items being sold on auction sites.

Bradley Crosbie

Founder, WYLD Projects Indigenous Corporation

Bradley (Brad) Crosbie founded Where Youth Live Dreams (WYLD) Projects Indigenous Corporation so he could make sure young Indigenous people had a grassroots, community-based agency to help them connect to their culture.

Today, WYLD helps at-risk Indigenous youth of the Wide Bay Burnett Region by connecting them with employment and education opportunities, including the 'Better to Give' and 'Rites of Passage' programs.

Better to Give is an upskilling program that's connected hundreds of young people to country and culture. The program has seen about 50 participants enrol in a Certificate II training in Ecosystem and Conservation.

Rites of Passage provides cultural initiation for young men on Butchulla Country.

Bradley, 55, is also a youth worker. His work with WYLD has been recognised in Bundaberg and the Fraser Coast. Bradley was a finalist in the Outdoor Queensland Award and was nominated for the 2023 Australia Charitable Foundation Mental Health and Wellbeing Award.

David Elliott OAM

Co-founder, Australian Age of Dinosaurs Museum of Natural History

David Elliott's chance discovery of a dinosaur fossil during routine sheep mustering in 1999 led to the revival of Australia's palaeontology field – and the creation of a palaeo-tourism industry that put outback Queensland on the map.

David's initial fossil discovery was followed by others. As palaeontologists began to return to the region to investigate, David and his wife Judy founded the Australian Age of Dinosaurs Museum of Natural History in 2002 as a not-for-profit charity.

The Museum first operated on the couple's property, where they conducted dinosaur digs and built an impressive collection of fossils. Later, it was moved onto donated land.

Today, it houses Australia's most significant collection of fossils from the country's largest dinosaurs. A major tourist attraction, it serves as a centre for Australian paleontological research and discovery in Australia.

David, now 66, was recognised for his contributions to science with an Order of Australia Medal (OAM) in 2015.

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Vanessa Fowler OAM

Founder, Allison Baden-Clay Foundation

Vanessa Fowler has personal experience of the devastating consequences of family and domestic violence. Her sister, Allison Baden-Clay, was murdered by husband Gerard Baden-Clay in 2012.

Turning her grief into a force for good, Vanessa established the Allison Baden-Clay Foundation in 2014 to share Allison's story and educate people about family and domestic violence. The Foundation also began Strive to Be Kind Day, held each July to foster positive behaviour.

She also founded Allison's Gift, a national training workshop program created to educate the community to recognise the signs of family and domestic violence and give people the skills to assist friends or loved ones in abusive relationships.

Vanessa, 57, was appointed co-chair of the Queensland Government's Domestic and Family Violence Protection Council in 2021 and has been recognised with numerous awards, including an Order of Australia Medal (OAM) in 2021.

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