

**MEDIA RELEASE**

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**WESTERN AUSTRALIA NOMINEES FOR  
2022 AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR AWARDS ANNOUNCED**

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Nominees for the 2022 Western Australia Australian of the Year Awards include a Noongar culture conservationist, a public safety expert, a man helping migrants settle, artists shining a light on disability and diversity and a man giving haircuts to the homeless.

They are among 16 WA residents in the running to be named the Western Australia Local Hero, Young Australian, Senior Australian or Australian of the Year.

The 2022 Western Australia award nominees are:

**Western Australia Australian of the Year**

Kirstin Butcher – Founder and CEO of genvis (Perth)

Julia Hales – Performance artist and disability advocate (Perth)

Dr Scott Hollier – Co-founder and CEO of the Centre For Accessibility Australia (Maida Vale)

Paul Litherland – Cyber safety educator and campaigner (Perth)

**Western Australia Young Australian of the Year**

Sukhjit Khalsa – Spoken word artist, writer and performer (Perth)

Tom Oliver – Activist for people with autism in the justice system (Fremantle)

Dr Hayley Passmore – Child health researcher in neurodisability (Perth)

Kendall Whyte – Founder/CEO of the Blue Tree Project (Claremont)

**Western Australia Senior Australian of the Year**

Professor Nigel Laing AO – Winthrop Research Professor at UWA (Kingsley)

Dante Maribbay – Community leader (Ballajura)

Emeritus Professor Cheryl Praeger AC – Emeritus Professor of Mathematics at UWA (Perth)

Janice Standen – President of Grandparents Rearing Grandchildren WA (Perth)

**Western Australia Local Hero**

Catrina Aniere – CEO of Millennium Kids (Perth)

Professor Leonard Collard – Professor at UWA's School of Indigenous Studies (Perth)

Kenneth (Ken) Gibbons – Founder of Telethon Community Cinemas (Perth)

Craig Hollywood – Founder/CEO of Short Back &amp; Sidewalks (Perth)

*\*see bios on following pages*

The nominees are among 129 people being recognised across all states and territories as part of the program, which began in 1960.

The four award recipients from Western Australia will be announced on the evening of Thursday 4 November in a ceremony at the Westin Hotel in Perth which will also be available to watch online via livestream.

They will then join the other state and territory recipients as national finalists for the national awards announcement on 25 January 2022.

National Australia Day Council CEO Karlie Brand congratulated the Western Australia nominees on being selected for consideration in this year's awards.

"The Western Australia nominees are achieving and contributing in many different ways," said Ms Brand.

"From grassroots community to global impact, they are making an impact."

For more information on the Australian of the Year Awards visit [australianoftheyear.org.au](http://australianoftheyear.org.au).

**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 (note all photos provided by nominees):  
<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/mi91caida98o7k2/AAA-Tr3G3IADh132-baDaZTJa?dl=0>

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## **WA AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR – NOMINEE BIOS**

### **Kirstin Butcher**

Founder and CEO of genvis

Kirstin Butcher has led vital innovations to drive Australia's successful response to COVID-19. Through genvis – the Western Australia-based technology company she founded to drive the effectiveness of public safety teams – she has had an incredible impact on the safety of the nation.

Her innovations have powered solutions that underpin Western Australia's police and health department led COVID-19 response. From protecting borders through G2G Pass, enabling at-home quarantine for more than 100,000 individuals through G2G Now, and reducing the impact and duration of lockdowns through the SafeWA venue check-in and contact-tracing platform, Kirstin delivers high-impact public safety software.

She works tirelessly with government agencies in high-pressure, mission-critical contexts. Her success in Western Australia has set the stage for a national contribution with genvis solutions adopted in Tasmania, the Northern Territory and trialling in Victoria.

In significant ways, the lives Australians enjoy today, particularly in Western Australia, is at least in part attributable to 45 year old Kirstin's vision, tenacity and practical leadership of tangible public safety outcomes.

### **Julia Hales**

Performance artist and disability advocate

Julia Hales is a theatre-maker and performance artist who has dedicated her career to sharing the experiences of people living with disability, in particular Down syndrome.

In 2018, Julia presented the world-premiere of *You Know We Belong Together* – an autobiographical play on love, relationships, acceptance and belonging experienced by a woman who also happens to have Down syndrome.

Since 2019, she's been mentored by Black Swan Theatre Company's artistic director Clare Watson. This has opened up opportunities to contribute to the theatre company and further develop her skills as a leader in the arts and disability space.

Now focused on creating artistic opportunities for other artists with disability, 42 year old Julia is collaborating with My Place WA on the development of a new arts bureau called My Studio.

A passionate advocate within her community, Julia demonstrates through her art what she and others with Down syndrome are capable of. She's dispelling prejudice and creating opportunities for people like her.

**Dr Scott Hollier**

Co-founder and CEO of the Centre For Accessibility Australia

As the co-founder and CEO of the Centre For Accessibility Australia (CFA), Dr Scott Hollier is improving digital accessibility for people with disabilities – giving them equal access to technology and the internet.

The CFA drives impact through advocacy, research, training, auditing services and celebrations such as the Australian Access Awards. It's been instrumental in growing the accessibility movement in Australia, highlighting the people and organisations leading the way.

During COVID-19, the CFA has played a critical role in strengthening the need for digital access. Scott and his teams have worked hard to ensure no one is left behind.

Scott is also an Adjunct Senior Lecturer at Edith Cowan University. The 46 year old has been teaching the Professional Certificate in Web Accessibility course through the University of South Australia since its inception in 2011.

A great storyteller, Scott, who is also legally blind, helps people better understand accessibility issues – putting them in the shoes of those who struggle to access technology and the internet.

**Paul Litherland**

Cyber safety educator and campaigner

In the last five years of his career as a police officer in Western Australia, Paul Litherland worked in the force's Technology Crime Unit. While there, he became acutely aware of just how vulnerable kids were on the internet. He also felt frustration at the lack of legislation available to help fight internet crime.

In response, Paul began conducting cyber safety presentations at schools. By 2014, he'd turned his passion into a business – founding Surf Online Safe to educate teachers, students and parents about internet awareness and safety.

Today he's one of Australia's leading experts in the field. A highly sought-after speaker, 49 year old Paul has spoken at more than 550 schools and organisations across the country, sharing his cyber safety educational presentations with upwards of 250,000 people.

Paul experienced a terrible motorbike accident in 2004 where he was initially told he'd never walk or work again. Despite this, he defied the odds and has gone on to be an inspiration to many.

## WA YOUNG AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR – NOMINEE BIOS

### **Sukhjit Khalsa**

Spoken word artist, writer and performer

Spoken word artist, writer and performer Sukhjit Khalsa is passionate about diversity and visibility in the performing arts. Her extraordinary work provokes conversations around identity, feminism, cultural confusions, and the power of uncomfortable conversations.

Sukhjit has performed at the Sydney Opera House for the Australian Poetry Slam Competition. Her performance on *Australia's Got Talent* in 2016, an abridged version of her poem *To Advance Australia Fair*, made national headlines. One judge described the piece as “nation building” for confronting racism.

Sukhjit has toured Australia, Canada, South East Asia, the UK and the USA. The 27 year old also wrote and performed the poetry show *Fully Sikh* about growing up in the Perth suburbs.

Her sold-out project, *Saga Sisterhood*, brought together emerging female storytellers who identify as South Asian and come from non-performer backgrounds.

Sukhjit is currently working as a producer/screenwriter on projects with Screenwest and the ABC. Sukhjit and her partner were one of 10 teams to be selected for Imagine Impact Australia 2020 to develop their own rom-com series.

### **Tom Oliver**

Activist for people with autism in the justice system

As a 20 year old with autism, Tom Oliver is dedicated to helping the vulnerable, the incarcerated and people in the autistic community.

A passionate advocate for people with autism caught up in the justice system, in March 2021, Tom presented a TEDx talk on the topic. He then worked with lawyers across Australia and globally, sharing his presentation and inspiring them to care about this very important issue.

In a recent case, Tom's involvement helped ensure a person with autism received a non-custodial sentence and therapy rather than 15 years imprisonment – not only helping the individual but other autistic and neurodiverse people.

Tom has been the recipient of scholarships and awards, including a David Goldstone Scholarship in 2021, and the Dean's Letter of Commendation in 2019. On top of that, Tom lectures at Curtin University, volunteers as a mentor, speaker, and ambassador for CoderDojo WA, a not-for-profit reaching thousands of autistic young people, and plans to open a law firm dedicated to helping people with autism in the justice system.

**Dr Hayley Passmore**

Child health researcher in neurodisability

Leading child health researcher, Dr Hayley Passmore is a fearless advocate for some of Western Australia's most vulnerable young people.

Hayley was part of the Telethon Kids Institute's ground-breaking Banksia Hill Detention Centre Project, which identified the prevalence of neurodisability among young people in our justice system. In response, she pioneered and delivered Reframe Training – an evidence-based intervention that helps the justice workforce better understand neurodisability and work with those affected by it.

More than 400 justice employees have completed the training course. It's also led to fundamental changes across Western Australia's youth justice system – and sparked interest from local, national and international government departments.

After overcoming her own significant health challenges, 29 year old Hayley secured funding to deliver the project to regional areas. As well as regularly training and presenting to state community organisations and service-providers, she plans to travel to South Australia and Queensland in 2022 upon request from their youth justice agencies.

Hayley was awarded a Churchill Fellowship in 2020 in recognition of her extraordinary work.

**Kendall Whyte**

Founder and CEO of the Blue Tree Project

Kendall Whyte is the founder and CEO of Blue Tree Project, a grass-roots charity making an impact across Australia. Its mission is to help spark difficult conversations and break down the stigma of mental health, by giving dead trees 'a blue lease on life'.

The Blue Tree Project is inspired by the tragic loss of Kendall's brother, Jayden, after taking his own life in 2018. The blue tree that was once painted as a practical joke now acts as a beacon of hope for those struggling, with over 700 trees now painted across Australia and the world.

Within just two years, the Blue Tree Project has helped facilitate better understanding of mental health, while providing free education seminars and creating engaging community events within regional Western Australia.

Kendall's work is helping spread the message that "it's ok to not be ok". By speaking openly and authentically, the 28 year old is helping break down the fear of judgement that stops people seeking help for mental illness.

## **WA SENIOR AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR – NOMINEE BIOS**

### **Professor Nigel Laing AO**

Winthrop Research Professor at UWA

Professor Nigel Laing is an exceptional advocate for health, research and teaching. He has made major contributions to the field of rare genetic disorders, identifying the genetic cause for more than 30 diseases. Nigel has also driven national initiatives such as the pre-conception screening program.

Nigel began his career as a PhD and developmental neurobiologist, researching how motor neurons and muscles interact in the developing embryo. He then re-trained in molecular genetics.

Nigel developed molecular neurogenetic research at the Australian Neuromuscular Research Institute and molecular neurogenetic diagnostics at Royal Perth Hospital. His investigations into Australian families with dominantly inherited diseases saw him identify many genetic causes – including mutations in the SOD1 gene causing familial motor neuron disease.

In 2015, Nigel was elected a Fellow of the Australian Academy of Health and Medical Sciences, and appointed an Officer of the Order of Australia (AO). A wonderful teacher and mentor, 67 year old Nigel's unwavering desire is to improve the lives of people with genetic disorders.

### **Dante Maribbay**

Community leader

Since arriving in Western Australia from the Philippines in 1988 with his wife and family, Dante Maribbay has been a powerhouse in Australia's Filipino community.

From assisting newly arrived migrants as they settle, to helping set up and lead associations, chairing committees, volunteering and raising funds for worthy causes, 73 year old Dante has worked ceaselessly for migrants, refugees and overseas students.

As a Grant-in-Aid Welfare Officer, Dante has advocated with other welfare officers to ensure Centrelink gives equal benefits to husbands and wives. He's also helped exploited skilled workers approach the Fair Work Ombudsman to receive unpaid salaries from ruthless employers.

Dante was a foundation member of the Western Australian Multicultural Association Inc, and a board member of the Australian Asian Association and the Ethnic Communities Council of Western Australia. As president of the Filipino Communities Council of Australia from 2016 to 2018, he represented 300,000 Filipino migrants.

Always caring of others, Dante has even opened his home to those in need.

**Emeritus Professor Cheryl Praeger AC**

Emeritus Professor of Mathematics at UWA

Emeritus Professor Cheryl Praeger's 40-plus year career in mathematics at the University of Western Australia (UWA) has involved everything from modern computer cryptography and secure banking, to getting images captured in outer space back to earth.

She's only the second and youngest woman in Australian history to become a professor of mathematics – doing so at age 35 and with two young children in tow. In 2019, she won Australia's most prestigious science accolade, the Prime Minister's Prize for Science.

Cheryl's work as an international academic focuses on sophisticated theoretical research in group theory – making impossibly difficult problems manageable. Its far-reaching applications include helping search engines retrieve information efficiently from the internet.

Cheryl has received honorary doctorates from universities in six countries and published more than 410 journal articles. She also ranks among the world's top 200 most highly cited mathematicians.

Now 73, Cheryl is passionate about mentoring young scientists, especially women. She has also transformed school education, encouraging more girls to study maths.

**Janice Standen**

President of Grandparents Rearing Grandchildren WA

Janice (Jan) Standen is president of the volunteer-run charity organisation, Grandparents Rearing Grandchildren WA (GRGWA). In this role, she advocates passionately for grandparent carers – a crucial but often ignored community in Australia.

Jan joined GRGWA in 2013 when her three grandchildren came to live with her. She knows the day-to-day battles that grandparents experience as primary carers, having lived them herself.

Against significant obstacles, Jan has driven the rapid expansion of GRGWA. She created a structure for the organisation and secured a fit-for-purpose premise, raising GRGWA's profile and increasing membership and outreach by more than 40%.

More than two-thirds of grandparent carers live in poverty. So under Jan's stewardship, GRGWA offers free legal and counselling support, a food bank pick-up centre, a donations distribution service and an op shop providing free clothing and toys. GRGWA also connects new grandparent carers to services and community.

Authentic, passionate and egalitarian, 73 year old Jan has made an outstanding contribution to the Western Australian community.

## WA LOCAL HERO – NOMINEE BIOS

### **Catrina Aniere**

CEO of Millennium Kids

For more than 25 years, Catrina (Cat) Aniere has empowered young people to use their voice to tackle the big issues the world is facing – including climate change, education, racism, sustainability or plastic waste.

As CEO of Millennium Kids, a youth-led empowerment organisation based in Western Australia, Cat recognises that young people have the creative ideas, innovative thinking and problem-solving skills needed to face the challenges of the 21st century. However, they sometimes need a little support to be the innovators they are born to be.

From a foundation group of only a few school students and teachers in 1999, Millennium Kids has grown to involve several dozen schools and thousands of students around Australia. It now also has two branches overseas.

Adopting an approach of teaching ‘skills for life’, 59 year old Cat has inspired young people to become leaders; to activate change and use their voices within their communities to create a fairer, better future for us all.

### **Professor Leonard Collard**

Professor at the UWA’s School of Indigenous Studies

A Whadjuk Noongar elder, Professor Leonard (Len) Collard is a professor and Australian Research Council Chief Investigator with the School of Indigenous Studies at the University of Western Australia (UWA).

Len’s academic work has put Noongar cultural research on the local, national and international stage. In 2011, Len conducted a three-year study of Noongar place names and created a public website, using a database which includes 25,000 Noongar words for different places around the south-west of Western Australia.

In 2014, one of Len’s biggest achievements was being a key academic helping lead the creation of the first Australian bilingual Aboriginal Wikipedia. This innovation is helping to preserve Noongar Culture in the digital domain. It also directly impacts how the nation addresses key issues within the government’s Closing the Gap strategy.

Len's research has encouraged communities to broaden their understanding of the unique characteristics of Australia's Aboriginal people. Now 61, Len’s work has contributed enormously to improving the appreciation of Aboriginal culture and the heritage of the south-west of Western Australia.

**Kenneth (Ken) Gibbons**

Founder of Telethon Community Cinemas

For 20 years, Kenneth (Ken) Gibbons and Telethon Community Cinemas have delivered a unique cinema-going experience while also raising money for children's charities. His initiative has been supported by many sponsors and 700-plus volunteers who've dedicated their time to helping the cause.

Growing up with a stutter and experiencing bullying at school ignited in Ken a passion to help children living with disability. He first established Movies by Burswood before rebranding to Telethon Community Cinemas. The updated name reflects the ongoing patronage of Western Australia's biggest children's charity fundraising event.

Over the years, the cinema has raised more than \$10.3 million for over 60 children's charities and community groups. Despite the impact on screenings in 2020 due to COVID-19, the organisation still raised \$673,568 for major charities including Cahoots, HorsePower Australia, Rebound WA and bushfire relief.

Through his work, 67 year old Ken continues to put the wants and needs of the community first while bringing back the magic of the movie-going experience.

**Craig Hollywood**

Founder and CEO of Short Back & Sidewalks

In 2015, Craig Hollywood pitched the idea of offering free haircuts to the homeless to the team at Westons Barbershop in Perth. Calling it Short Back & Sidewalks, it has since grown into a national initiative that's gone from strength to strength.

Since the days of heading to car parks in the Perth suburb of Northbridge with a couple of barbers, Short Back & Sidewalks now has around 250 volunteers on its books. Over the years it's given out around 6,400 free haircuts, regularly operating alongside some of Australia's largest service providers.

Initially set up to help members of the community experiencing homelessness, Short Back & Sidewalks has now expanded its reach. It also supports young people at risk, women with lived experience of domestic violence, and remote communities where a haircut isn't easily accessible.

By giving free haircuts, 38 year old Craig is creating positive connections with vulnerable and marginalised community members – ultimately building a stronger and more inclusive community.