

**MEDIA RELEASE**

**MONDAY 23 OCTOBER 2023**

**2024 AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR AWARD NOMINEES  
FOR SOUTH AUSTRALIA  
ANNOUNCED**

An environmental scientist and explorer, health advocates, a former Navy officer helping veterans, an SES volunteer and an elite athlete with Down syndrome are among nominees for the 2024 Australian of the Year Awards for South Australia.

The 2024 award nominees are:

**2024 Australian of the Year for South Australia**

Stella Braund - Mental health advocate (Trinity Gardens)  
Associate Professor Susan Evans - Co-founder, Pelvic Pain Foundation of Australia (Kent Town)  
Timothy Jarvis AM - Environmental scientist and advocate (Hyde Park)  
Commissioner April Lawrie - Changemaker for Aboriginal children and community (Kurna country/Kilburn)

**2024 Senior Australian of the Year for South Australia**

Professor Frances Baum AO - Health equity advocate (Henley Beach)  
Commander Stephen Dunning RAN (Ret'd) - Mental health and disability advocate for veterans (Mount Barker)  
Sister Meredith Evans - Sister of Mercy (Underdale)  
Glyn Scott - Founder, Love Hope & Gratitude Foundation (Mount Barker)

**2024 Young Australian of the Year for South Australia**

Tiahni Adamson - Wildlife conservation biologist (Adelaide)  
Qasem Bahmanzadah - Ambassador, mentor and volunteer (Pooraka)  
Kylan Beech - Fundraiser, Cancer Council (Adelaide)  
Hugo Taheny - Elite athlete and health ambassador, Down Syndrome Australia (Point Turton)

**2024 Local Hero for South Australia**

Chris McDermott - Founder, Little Heroes Foundation (Adelaide)  
Jack Nixon - Volunteer, state emergency services (Loveday)  
Pauly Vandenberg - Co-founder, Tjindu Foundation (Birkenhead)  
Rachael Zaltron OAM - Founder, Backpacks 4 SA Kids (Ridgehaven)

*\*see detailed bios on following pages*

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

The South Australia award recipients will be announced on Wednesday 1 November 2023 in a ceremony at Adelaide Oval, 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 South Australia nominees on their recognition.

“The nominees for the South Australia awards share a common thread of helping others and bringing attention to issues which need action,” said Mark.

“They are ‘doers’ – people who make a difference, who won’t be told they can’t do something, who want to bring about change, who take action. They provide great inspiration for us all.”

**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: [South Australia Nominee Photos](#)

**MEDIA CONTACT:** Nicole Browne 0414 673 762 or [nicole@mediaopps.com.au](mailto:nicole@mediaopps.com.au)

Old Parliament House,  
King George Terrace,  
Parkes ACT 2600

[australianoftheyear.org.au](http://australianoftheyear.org.au)

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

### **Stella Braund**

Mental health advocate

Stella Braund uses her lived experience of childhood family violence, sexual assault and trauma – at home and in institutional settings – to improve people's lives.

As a counsellor, Stella helped establish 1800 RESPECT, the national domestic violence and sexual assault helpline, enabling vulnerable individuals to access crisis counselling and begin their journey of recovering from violence.

She has worked across four psychiatric inpatient hospitals advocating for trauma informed care, ensuring people living with mental ill health – and their carers and families – have access to appropriate, person-centred support services.

Stella continues to seek improvements in mental health policy, planning, emergency services and service design throughout SA Health, campaigning for a greater lived experience workforce.

She's a powerful advocate for marginalised and vulnerable people, and holds numerous executive board appointments across government. For her commitment, 54-year-old Stella was recognised as a South Australian Citizen of the Year and is on the Women's Honour Roll.

### **Associate Professor Susan Evans**

Co-founder, Pelvic Pain Foundation of Australia

Associate Professor Susan Evans has dedicated her life to helping women and girls who experience pelvic pain and menstrual issues. A practitioner, researcher, philanthropist, volunteer, advocate and mentor, 62-year-old Susan is a true pioneer in women's health and gynaecology. Her book Endometriosis and Pelvic Pain has helped women who experience pelvic pain to understand their treatment options.

In 2015, she co-founded the not-for-profit charity Pelvic Pain Foundation of Australia, to promote education, advocacy and research in pelvic pain and endometriosis. The 'Periods, Pain and Endometriosis Program' – or PEP-Talk – is now available to schools in all Australian states.

Susan founded the bio-pharmaceutical company, Alyra Biotech, which produces intrauterine products to treat neuroimmune conditions, including chronic pelvic pain in women.

She helped secure government funding for the first National Action Plan for endometriosis, has served on multiple representative bodies and boards, and was the first woman elected to the Board of the Australian Gynaecological Endoscopy Society.

### **Timothy Jarvis AM**

Environmental scientist and advocate

An environmental scientist, author, filmmaker, philanthropist and speaker, 57-year-old Timothy (Tim) Jarvis AM seeks pragmatic solutions to climate change and biodiversity loss.

This includes South Australia's Forktree Project, which involves restoring degraded farmland back to nature and growing rare native plants to safeguard them from extinction. Tim is also vice-president at Fauna & Flora; a global ambassador and governor of WWF, ambassador to Koala Life and a board director of the Foundation for National Parks & Wildlife.

As an adventurer, Timothy re-enacted Douglas Mawson and Ernest Shackleton's Antarctic explorations and advocates for the protection of Antarctica. And this year, he helped secure 475,000 square kilometres of marine sanctuary off World Heritage-listed Macquarie Island.

In 2017, Tim was made a Bragg Fellow by the Royal Institution of Australia and has won multiple awards, including the Australian Geographic Society's 2016 Conservationist of the Year for his 25Zero project about melting equatorial glaciers.

Old Parliament House,  
King George Terrace,  
Parkes ACT 2600

[australianoftheyear.org.au](http://australianoftheyear.org.au)

## **April Lawrie**

Changemaker for Aboriginal children and community

Mirning and Kokatha woman April Lawrie is dedicated to creating generational change for all children. For more than 30 years, 55-year-old April has led systemic reform in Aboriginal health, justice, education and child protection.

As the inaugural commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People, April leads the work that promotes the rights, development and wellbeing of Aboriginal children and young people within South Australia.

April is also the co-founder of Tjindu Foundation, a not-for-profit organisation that works to promote wellbeing, cultural resilience and school retention for Aboriginal young people in communities across South Australia.

As director of the award-winning Far West Coast Aboriginal Corporation for two decades, April ensures local native title rights support generations to come by helping establish business ventures to enable self-determination and economic development for the far west coast people.

She is a passionate advocate for government service reform in child protection and for land rights within native title.

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

### **Professor Frances Baum AO**

Health equity advocate

Professor Frances (Fran) Baum AO has spent her professional life working to create healthy, equitable and sustainable societies. The 68-year-old public health social scientist is a past national president and life member of the Public Health Association of Australia and a member of numerous boards and committees, including the board of Cancer Council SA.

Fran is a powerful ambassador for social determinants for health: non-medical factors that influence health outcomes such as distribution of income and wealth, education, employment and housing.

She served as co-chair of the Global Steering Council of the People's Health Movement, a global network of health activists addressing determinants of health. Her five-year NHMRC Investigator Fellowship, 'Restoring the Fair Go', is providing strong evidence for policies that reduce inequality.

An author of numerous books and papers, Fran was made an Officer of the Order of Australia in 2016 for her service to the community and public health.

### **Commander Stephen Dunning RAN (Ret'd)**

Mental health and disability advocate for veterans

Commander Stephen Dunning RAN (Ret'd) has made a profound difference to veterans – especially those experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder – and people with a disability.

A survivor of a serious car accident, a qualified mental health practitioner and an Australian Defence Force (ADF) Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Trainer, 72-year-old Stephen has trained more than 600 ADF personnel, defence civilians and others in suicide prevention strategies.

As a board member, Stephen was instrumental in growing the Community Bridging Services, a leading services provider for people with a disability across South Australia. He was also the Navy Aide de Camp to four state governors in a volunteer capacity.

Medically retired from the Department of Veterans' Affairs since 2019, Stephen has been a volunteer advocacy and peer support person, helping serving and non-serving members access mental health rehabilitation and recovery services. Stephen's compassion and advocacy has provided life-saving help to countless veterans and serving members.

Old Parliament House,  
King George Terrace,  
Parkes ACT 2600

[australianoftheyear.org.au](http://australianoftheyear.org.au)

## **Sister Meredith Evans**

Sister of Mercy

Sister of Mercy Meredith Evans has dedicated her life to helping the vulnerable and inspiring others to do the same.

Through her vocation, 75-year-old Meredith has provided kind, non-judgemental care and assistance to many – including refugees, young people, women experiencing homelessness, women exiting violent relationships and women leaving prison.

In 2019, Meredith established the South Australian division of Young Mercy Links – a network of young people passionate about social justice, advocacy and education.

She was also instrumental in re-establishing Justice for Refugees SA and the Young Christian Workers Movement in South Australia. In 2014, Meredith partnered with like-minded people to start a new Circle of Friends in Adelaide, providing on the ground support for refugees.

Meredith's care has extended abroad, engaging people to contribute to the work of the Jesuit Refugee Service in Siem Reap, Cambodia. The service provides newly built homes for people with a landmine injury and their families.

## **Glyn Scott**

Founder, Love Hope & Gratitude Foundation

Glyn Scott survived years of violence and sexual abuse – first as a child and later in her first marriage.

In 2006, Glyn gave evidence to the Children in State Care Commission of Inquiry about her childhood experience of sexual abuse. Her personal experience led to what became legal history in 2012 when a High Court decision ruled that there was no marital exemption to rape. This changed Commonwealth law nationally and set a precedent, paving the way for other women who had a similar experience to come forward.

In 2015, Glyn founded the Love, Hope & Gratitude Foundation. The organisation provides counselling, advocacy and educational programs to domestic violence survivors, and shelter for adults, children and pets.

With courage and compassion, 78-year-old Glyn continues to devote her own time, money and skills to support and advocate for other domestic violence and sexual abuse survivors

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

### **Tiahni Adamson**

Wildlife conservation biologist

A proud Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander woman descended from the Kaurareg Nations, Tiahni Adamson is passionate about sustainability.

She graduated from University of Adelaide with a Bachelor of Science (wildlife conservation biology) and is now the lead community engagement officer at climate change solutions company CH4Global, where she ensures Indigenous knowledge is embedded into CH4Global's projects.

Tiahni has worked with the CSIRO on Indigenous education programs, trained under Al Gore as a Climate Reality Leader in 2019 and fostered relationships between First Nations communities and government.

A regular speaker on the intersection of Indigenous justice, climate change and environmental conservation, 28-year-old Tiahni is also on the national leadership team with Seed, Australia's only First Nations-led youth climate justice group, and a youth dialogue member for the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

She was recognised as one of Science and Technology Australia's Superstars of STEM and an InDaily South Australian 40 Under 40 for 2023.

Old Parliament House,  
King George Terrace,  
Parkes ACT 2600

[australianoftheyear.org.au](http://australianoftheyear.org.au)

**Qasem Bahmanzadah**

Ambassador, mentor and volunteer

Qasem Bahmanzadah spends much of his time mentoring young people and giving back to the wider Australian community.

Qasem came to Australia as a refugee from war-torn Afghanistan with no possessions and no English.

Now an ambassador for the Australian Refugees Association, he educates the community on the challenges that refugees face and raises money to support people fleeing persecution.

As the coordinator of the Rotary Youth Program of Enrichment and the Rotary Youth Leadership Awards, he helps young people develop leadership skills.

Qasem has mentored Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students through the Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience and the Trek program at Mercedes College, actively promoting cultural understanding and mutual respect. The 26-year-old also volunteers for a range of causes including St John Ambulance.

Qasem's courage, dedication and empathy are inspirational. He dedicates his achievements to the immense support he has received from his mentors, teachers and, most importantly, his family.

**Kylan Beech**

Fundraiser, Cancer Council

At age 14, Kylan Beech lost his mother Tammy to cancer. Kylan has made it his mission to help others avoid the same loss by supporting the Cancer Council.

In 2019, the then-Year 11 student rode his bike 220km from Adelaide to Barmera to raise money and awareness for the Cancer Council. Enlisting the help of his older brothers, Kylan co-ordinated the event, organised sponsors and held a dinner with music and auctions, raising \$30,000.

In 2022, 20-year-old Kylan and his brothers completed a 2,220km ride from the Gold Coast to Adelaide for The Cancer Council. He organised a crew, videographer and media interviews and spread the word through social media.

The two-week ride culminated in a huge fundraiser with entertainment. Later, Kylan showed a documentary about the ride, raising even more money. All up, 21-year-old Kylan's selfless efforts have raised more than \$100,000 for the Cancer Council.

**Hugo Taheny**

Elite athlete and health ambassador, Down Syndrome Australia

Hugo Taheny is an elite athlete living with Down syndrome. He's the current world-record holder for shot put, discus and the 4x100m relay in the Virtus Global Games and International Athletics Association for Persons with Down Syndrome. Hugo also lives with intellectual, vision and hearing impairments.

An exceptional athlete and young person, he's achieved outstanding results through hard work and dedication. He's totally self-funded and travels thousands of kilometres most weeks to train and compete. Hugo has broken many world records – including his own. In 2019, he was awarded the Australian Sports Medal for representing Australia at the Virtus Global Games.

A health ambassador for Down Syndrome Australia, 22-year-old Hugo lectures university medical students about inclusive communication with his mentor Natalie Graham.

An exceptional role model for all young athletes, Hugo is also a volunteer coach for young athletes and children and speaks at schools, encouraging people to be active.

Old Parliament House,  
King George Terrace,  
Parkes ACT 2600

[australianoftheyear.org.au](http://australianoftheyear.org.au)

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

### **Chris McDermott**

Founder, Little Heroes Foundation

As the inaugural captain of the Adelaide Crows, Chris McDermott is a household name in South Australia. He's also the founder and board chair of Little Heroes Foundation, a not-for-profit organisation supporting the mental and physical wellbeing of South Australian children.

Chris and footballer friend, Tony McGuinness, set up the organisation that became Little Heroes Foundation in memory of Nicholas Berry and Nathan McClean, two young boys who died of cancer.

In the last 27 years, Chris has helped the foundation raise and contribute almost \$40 million towards major pieces of equipment and facilities at Adelaide's Women's and Children's Hospital.

Currently, the foundation is working closely with Breakthrough Mental Health Research Foundation to raise funds for child and adolescent mental health. It is also raising awareness of and funds for childhood dementia.

As well as his commitment to Little Heroes Foundation, 60-year-old Chris is a radio presenter and sports commentator.

### **Jack Nixon**

Volunteer, state emergency services

Since arriving in South Australia's Riverland region in 2016, Jack Nixon has helped protect his community and the people of South Australia.

Jack began as unit training coordinator and a member of the SA State Emergency Service Dog Operations Unit at Loxton's State Emergency Service (SES).

In 2018, while still a member of Berri SES, Jack also joined Glossop Country Fire Service (CFS) because its membership was low. Here, he's served as training coordinator, equipment coordinator, lieutenant and from 2022, brigade captain.

During the 2019-20 bushfire season, Jack completed two deployments to Kangaroo Island and was awarded the National Emergency Medal for his contributions. He also took on extra responsibilities during the 2022 Riverland floods.

Jack has coordinated joint training efforts among Riverland emergency services including CFS, SES, SA Ambulance and St John Ambulance. A selfless, enthusiastic and patient volunteer, the 30-year-old is currently working to address skills shortages in local emergency units

### **Pauly Vandenberg**

Co-founder, Tjindu Foundation

Growing up within the Wirangu and Kokatha people of the far west coast of South Australia was a driving force behind Pauly Vandenberg's passion for creating opportunities for Aboriginal young people.

An influential cultural educator, 47-year-old Pauly instils strength in identity, pride in culture and country, and works to achieve better health and wellbeing outcomes for his people.

He co-founded the Tjindu Foundation that provides culturally responsive education, sporting and cultural awareness activities to help students succeed at school, gain career opportunities and become future leaders. A former elite basketballer for the Canberra Cannons, Paul also founded the Aboriginal Basketball Academy, helping Aboriginal children achieve excellence in basketball and school.

He's now forged an acclaimed career in Australian football as Port Adelaide Football Club's director of Aboriginal programs and is the national diversity talent manager for the AFL. Pauly also started the fully Indigenous-owned and operated businesses Wanna Mar tuna fishing and Munda Wines.

Old Parliament House,  
King George Terrace,  
Parkes ACT 2600

[australianoftheyear.org.au](http://australianoftheyear.org.au)

**Rachael Zaltron OAM**  
Founder, Backpacks 4 SA Kids

In 2013, Rachael Zaltron OAM and another family began collecting donations and putting them into backpacks to help a few vulnerable and neglected children.

This was the start of Backpacks 4 SA Kids. Commencing in Rachael's carport, the organisation now has its own warehouse and volunteers helping vulnerable children across the state.

Under Rachael's leadership, the organisation provides backpacks with age-appropriate emergency clothing, toiletries and other necessary supplies for children aged 0 to 16 years who are taken into care, need to quickly leave their homes due to family violence or experiencing homelessness.

Backpacks 4 SA Kids also provides home starter packs for families starting again after domestic violence, and anchor packs for young people aged between 12 and 25 who are experiencing homelessness. They also provide Christmas presents for 0- to 18-year-olds entering emergency care.

Since 2012, 50-year-old Rachael and her team have helped more than 86,000 South Australian children.