

**MEDIA RELEASE**

**THURSDAY 2 NOVEMBER 2023**

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

A foster mum, educators, a firefighter battling for the health of his colleagues, a piano teacher, a reforestation pioneer, an animal welfare advocate and a man bringing communities together through a 'gnarly' neighbourhood program are among nominees for the 2024 Australian of the Year Awards for Victoria.

The 2024 award nominees are:

**2024 Australian of the Year for Victoria**

Janine Mohamed - Indigenous health leader (Gisborne)  
Anthony Rinaudo AM - Reforestation pioneer, World Vision Australia (Ringwood)  
Michael Tisbury AFSM - Firefighter, anti-PFAS campaigner (Healesville)  
Andrew-James Tchen - Social worker and founder, Girraway Ganyi Consultancy (Melbourne)

**2024 Senior Australian of the Year for Victoria**

Lyn Geer – Volunteer (St Helena)  
Glenys Oogjes - Animal justice advocate (Heidelberg)  
Daphne Proietto OAM - Piano teacher and pioneer of Music Thera-play (Bulleen)  
Guosheng Yang Chen - Life-long educator at RMIT University (Melbourne)

**2024 Young Australian of the Year for Victoria**

Bhakta Bahadur Bhattarai - Registered nurse and founder, Albury Wodonga Multicultural Community Events Inc (Wodonga)  
Jayden Sheridan - Founder, Gnarly Neighbours (Seymour)  
Ashleigh Streeter-Jones - Youth and gender equality advocate and founder, Raise Our Voice Australia (Kensington)  
Charlotte Young - Youth and disability advocate (Kew)

**2024 Local Hero for Victoria**

Ahmed Jamal Elsheikh - Anti-racism advocate and founder, Reflect Forward (Abbotsford)  
Kerryn Longmuir - Foster mum (Greensborough)  
Daniel Mancuso and Luke Mancuso - Advocates against family violence and co-founders, YiaYia Next Door (Reservoir)  
Betul Tuna - Co-founder, Point of Difference Studio (Shepparton)

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

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

The Victoria award recipients will be announced on Tuesday 14 November 2023 in a ceremony at the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne, 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 Victoria nominees on their recognition.

“The nominees for the Victoria awards are outstanding in their achievements and contributions,” said Mark.

“They are dedicated to making a difference – for others, for the future, for the land and those most in need.”

**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: [Victoria 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 VICTORIA – NOMINEE BIOS**

### **Janine Mohamed**

Indigenous health leader

Janine Mohamed is an exceptional leader, even if she sometimes jokes about being an ‘accidental CEO’. In her nearly five years leading the Lowitja Institute in Melbourne, and before that as CEO of the Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses and Midwives, she has created important platforms for Indigenous peoples and championed culturally safe health care.

A Narungga Kurna woman, 49-year-old Janine initially studied nursing at the University of South Australia, where she's now an Adjunct Professor and a celebrated Alumni of the Year.

For the next 25 years, she worked in nursing, health policy and research in the Indigenous Community Controlled Health sector. In 2020, she was awarded an honorary doctorate in nursing by Edith Cowan University.

Janine is committed to dismantling racism, expanding opportunities for the Indigenous health workforce, and to closing the gap in Indigenous health outcomes through the systemic integration of cultural safety.

### **Anthony Rinaudo AM**

Reforestation pioneer, World Vision Australia

Anthony Rinaudo AM believes that when you work with nature, miracles are possible. In 40 years, his ‘farmer-managed natural regeneration’ (FMNR) technique has contributed to the restoration of millions of hectares of degraded land in at least 29 countries across Africa and Asia.

With FMNR, farmers actively manage regrowth from living stumps, roots and seedlings in badly degraded land.

Anthony hit on the idea in the 1980s after a disappointing tree-planting project in Niger. He and 12 local farmers instead nurtured the straggly plants that remained. It inspired a farmer-led greening movement accounting for 200 million trees regenerated on five million hectares of farmland over a twenty-year period.

By partnering with World Vision, 66-year-old Anthony aims to eventually regenerate one billion hectares of land. The biggest change he can make, he says, is the restoration of hope. In 2019, he was awarded an Order of Australia for services to conservation.

### **Andrew-James Tchen**

Social worker and founder, Girraway Ganyi Consultancy

Andrew-James (AJ) Tchen, who has Wiradjuri and Wotjobaluk heritage, is respected across the community for his work in mental health training, reconciliation and Aboriginal cultural mentoring programs.

He set up his Girraway Ganyi Consultancy in 2008 with a vision to inspire cultural change and mental health leaders. In 2020, AJ began the *YarninBlack* podcast and *Black Yarns* YouTube channel for Aboriginal people to promote storytelling as a way to share truth.

Additionally, 51-year-old AJ runs cultural awareness training for many organisations and mentors Indigenous students at some of Victoria's independent schools. He has also delivered over 790 mental health first aid courses to over 8400 participants nation-wide.

AJ shares his own story about mental ill health and Stolen Generation issues, emphasising how recent this history is for contemporary Aboriginal people. A qualified nurse and careers counsellor, AJ was named 2021 Aboriginal Social Worker of the Year by the Australian Association of Social Workers.

Old Parliament House,  
King George Terrace,  
Parkes ACT 2600

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

## **Michael Tisbury AFSM**

Firefighter, anti-PFAS campaigner

Michael Tisbury AFSM has a saying: Firefighters never give up. For more than a decade he's worked to expose the dangers of PFAS contamination for firefighters, which is linked to cancer and other conditions.

As a union delegate, it took him three exhausting years to force a Victorian parliamentary inquiry in 2014 into PFAS chemicals in fire-fighting foam. He also devised a way to decontaminate firetrucks and, remarkably, to reduce levels of these dangerous 'forever chemicals' in people's blood.

Michael's 'aha' moment was in 2016, after blood tests showed he had higher PFAS levels than his colleagues. He wondered if his colleagues had given blood/plasma. He then developed a clinical trial, which confirmed donating plasma could reduce PFAS levels by 30 per cent in a year.

In 2019, Michael was awarded an Australian Fire Service Medal for his efforts. The 55-year-old is now Assistant Chief Fire Officer at Fire Rescue Victoria.

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

### **Lyn Geer**

Volunteer

Lyn Geer believes that while one person cannot help everyone, everyone can help someone. As a volunteer for more than two decades, Lyn has put this belief into practice. She's worked for numerous not-for-profits including the Banksia Palliative Care Service, The Smith Family, VIEW Clubs of Australia and Leith Park Retirement Village.

Lyn's compassion, energy and commitment has improved the lives of hundreds of people in need – whether that person is a child from a disadvantaged family, a neighbour in need or a stranger grappling with terminal illness.

Volunteering in palliative care has taught 76-year-old Lyn to cherish each day, listen deeply to others and to value life as a precious gift.

Lyn has gone above and beyond the expectations of volunteers to make a difference in the lives of others. In 2015, she was a highly commended nominee for the Dame Elisabeth Murdoch Award for her work with The Smith Family

### **Glenys Oogjes**

Animal justice advocate

Glenys Oogjes started work at Animals Australia in 1983 as its sole employee. She is now CEO of the organisation, which is one of Australia's most effective animal advocacy groups, and has been putting animal welfare on government and community agendas for four decades.

Glenys has been a quiet force behind historic changes in Australian animal policy, including some of our current animal protection laws. She was one of the instigators behind the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy – first endorsed in 2004 – and the more recent Australian Animal Welfare Standards for Poultry, which will see battery cages for egg-laying hens phased out across the country.

Even when faced with distressing evidence or vehement opposition, 67-year-old Glenys remains a calm bulwark for animal justice.

Highly regarded internationally, Glenys is also a board member of the World Federation for Animals and works with other leaders to build a kinder world on a global scale.

Old Parliament House,  
King George Terrace,  
Parkes ACT 2600

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

### **Daphne Proietto OAM**

Piano teacher and pioneer of Music Thera-play

Daphne Proietto OAM has been teaching the joy of music to neurodivergent children for decades – for free.

The Melbourne piano teacher started giving lessons to students with diverse learning needs and disabilities at her home in 2000. She didn't charge for the sessions and produced amazing outcomes, especially for children with autism.

After she was featured on a *60 Minutes* program in 2015, Daphne was inundated by requests to teach. A group of parents realised that one person couldn't possibly answer the demand, so they started the Keys of Life Foundation.

Keys of Life trains music teachers in 72-year-old Daphne's approach to teaching – now known as 'Music Thera-play' – so more children could have a quality music education. Besides running courses for teachers, the foundation puts on concerts and runs social music classes.

Daphne was awarded a Pride of Australia Medal in 2015 and in 2022 she won a Westfield Local Hero grant.

### **Guosheng Yang Chen**

Life-long educator at RMIT University

Guosheng Yang Chen is a committed life-long educator who's taught hundreds of local and overseas students.

A renowned leader in the Australian Chinese community, Guosheng has lived in Australia for 40 years. She's dedicated much of this time to building multilingual and multicultural education throughout the country.

When Guosheng joined RMIT in 1993 she developed the language department, then led the development of four national TAFE language curricula (Chinese, Japanese, Indonesian and Thai). This strengthened the foundation for language and cultural education in Australia today.

Guosheng also led extensive community language teacher training programs and consulted with various strategic advisory groups.

Since retiring, 74-year-old Guosheng has continued to support community and multicultural events across the state and is director of the Museum of Chinese Australian History. In 2015, she was awarded the prestigious Ralph McIntosh Medal for over two decades of outstanding service to students and leadership in language and culture education.

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

### **Bhakta Bahadur Bhattarai**

Registered nurse and founder, Albury Wodonga Multicultural Community Events Inc

Better known as Durga, 28-year-old Bhakta Bahadur Bhattarai's selfless actions are a constant source of care and connection among Wodonga's multicultural community.

Born and raised in a Bhutanese refugee camp in Nepal, Durga came to Australia with his family in 2012. He completed high school and then trained as a pharmacy assistant and registered nurse. Feeling lonely and isolated during his studies, Durga founded the Albury Wodonga Multicultural Community Events Inc in 2014. The organisation advocates for and showcases multicultural communities and organises help during difficult times.

On top of his work as a nurse, Durga supplied homemade masks to the elderly and emergency food relief during the COVID-19 lockdowns. He also arranged multiple community wellbeing and entertainment programs, and has raised thousands of dollars for sick young people and disability support.

Among several awards recognising his contributions, Durga was awarded the Meritorious Service Award from the Government of Victoria in 2019.

Old Parliament House,  
King George Terrace,  
Parkes ACT 2600

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

**Jayden Sheridan**

Founder, Gnarly Neighbours

Jayden Sheridan wanted to give his son better opportunities than he had. Seymour's 'king of the kids' has come a long way from a troubled childhood. As a teenager, Jayden experienced homelessness and substance abuse – but the skateboard park was always a safe place to escape to.

When he discovered he was going to be a father at just 17, Jayden realised things needed to change.

In 2021, Jayden started Gnarly Neighbours, a not-for-profit youth group in Seymour. The group gives free skateboarding lessons and provides creative workshops to young people. Its aim is to foster community building, inspire creativity and individuality and encourage safe risk-taking behaviour.

The group also has its own streetwear label, which children can get involved with to learn about design.

Jayden was chosen as one of ABC Heywire's 2022 Trailblazers. The 29-year-old is now formalising his workshops so they can be run in other disadvantaged rural towns.

**Ashleigh Streeter-Jones**

Youth and gender equality advocate and founder, Raise Our Voice Australia

Ashleigh Streeter-Jones is an internationally recognised advocate for youth and gender equality. Her work as a speaker, writer, advisor and activist has shaped domestic, national and international conversations.

Involved in youth advocacy and campaigns since she was a teenager, Ashleigh focuses on closing societal gaps, especially for women and young people from marginalised backgrounds. She has been an integral part of multiple successful campaigns, including Girls Take Over Parliament.

In 2020, Ashleigh founded Raise Our Voice Australia, a volunteer-run social enterprise that is amplifying the voices of young women and gender diverse people in politics and policy. The organisation runs training and campaigns, conducts research on gender equality and fosters communities to advocate for and create positive change.

Forbes chose Ashleigh as one of the 30 Under 30 in 2018. Now 29, she is also a Global Shaper, an initiative of the World Economic Forum that is inspiring young people under 30 to address local, regional and global challenges.

**Charlotte Young**

Youth and disability advocate

Charlotte Young is an advocate and emerging leader whose goal is to build an Australia that truly reflects the rights and diversity of our communities.

The co-founder and president of the Australian National University Auslan Club, Charlotte uses her experience as a person with hearing loss to help drive change. The dancer and full-time university student works as an inclusivity consultant to national and international organisations including the Australian Government, Children and Young People with Disability Australia, UNICEF and the U.S. Embassy.

Charlotte is a fellow with the Clinton Global Initiative University, advocating for young people with disability in the justice system.

As an executive member in the Global Network of Young People with Disability, and United Nations delegate, the 21-year-old provides sustainable and intersectional advocacy on an international scale. She also works on initiatives and campaigns, including the National Youth Disability Summit, and is a board director at Burgmann College.

Old Parliament House,  
King George Terrace,  
Parkes ACT 2600

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

## **2024 LOCAL HERO FOR VICTORIA – NOMINEE BIOS**

### **Ahmed Jamal Elsheikh**

Anti-racism advocate and founder, Reflect Forward

Ahmed Jamal (or Jamal) Elsheikh is a Sudanese Australian who believes sport – and kindness – can transform the lives of young people and unify communities.

When Jamal was a child, he experienced a violent racist attack. The kindness of a stranger saved his life – and sport and athlete role models helped him recover from the experience. This is when he understood the powerful influence that athletes and sport could have on school-aged children.

Today, innovator Jamal fights racism with over 23,000 Victorian students through his award-winning, sports-based racial literacy program, Reflect Forward. The program uses the influence of sports and athletes at a local, national and international level to help students to be anti-racism champions and say no to racism in schools, sports and communities.

Jamal, 31, has been recognised for his achievements several times, including with the (Victorian) ABC Kindness Hero in 2020. He was selected as a Churchill Fellow in 2022.

### **Kerryn Longmuir**

Foster mum

Kerryn Longmuir and her husband Stephen have provided care and love for more than 400 children over the last 39 years. Kerryn is the proud foster mum of babies, children and teenagers in need – regardless of background, disability, race, religion or gender.

Kerryn, who has two biological adult children, was inspired to become a carer after reading a flyer about fostering at a local community fair. After the first experience was a success she continued – sometimes looking after up to seven children at a time. The couple has continued to foster children even after Stephen was badly injured in a work accident a decade ago.

Now in her 70s, Kerryn's days can include nursing babies through drug withdrawal, doing school drop-offs and taking kids to sports and community events. Some children only stay for a night, while others have stayed for their entire childhoods. Many still come back to visit.

### **Daniel Mancuso and Luke Mancuso**

Advocates against family violence and co-founders, YiaYia Next Door

Daniel (33) and Luke (30) Mancuso turned an unlikely friendship with their kind neighbour into a social enterprise.

The brothers have known 'Yiayia', the Greek grandmother next door, for most of their lives. It was Yiayia who called for help when she heard their mother scream the night she was murdered by her ex-husband. And it was Yiayia who kept them fed afterwards, passing home-cooked Greek dishes over the fence.

When Daniel and Luke started the social media channel YiaYia Next Door to celebrate their relationship with Yiayia, they didn't expect its message of neighbourly love to resonate as strongly as it did.

Today, YiaYia Next Door is an organisation that encourages people to build communities where everyone feels safe, connected and cared for. It advocates for 'love thy neighbour' as a powerful antidote to violence.

The brothers also fundraise through the organisation for charities and services that support families experiencing violence.

**Betul Tuna**

Co-founder, Point of Difference Studio

Betul Tuna is deeply committed to humanitarian and community causes. The Turkish Muslim-Australian – who was born, raised and lives on Yorta Yorta Country – has been instrumental in supporting local and international communities during emergencies and making the district a safe, supportive place.

During the 2022 floods in her local community and the 2023 earthquake in Turkey, Betul helped ensure affected communities received necessary supplies and access to essential services.

She also coordinated the design and implementation of a state-funded program that aims to prevent violence against women in migrant and refugee communities and created a bold and successful campaign against female genital mutilation.

Betul co-founded the 'Hijack'd' mobile food van, which provides culturally appropriate food and creates jobs for local young people. The 38-year-old also co-founded the Point of Difference Studio which champions arts, culture and identity and advocates for culturally safe, respectful and accessible environments in regional Victoria.

Old Parliament House,  
King George Terrace,  
Parkes ACT 2600

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