

MEDIA RELEASE
11 NOVEMBER 2016

**FINALISTS ANNOUNCED FOR 2017 QUEENSLAND
AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR AWARDS**

A suicide prevention volunteer, the founders of a children's hospice, a whistle-blower policeman, a mathematician, a neuroscientist and an occupational therapist helping veterans overcome their injuries are among the finalists in the 2017 Queensland Australian of the Year Awards.

The Queensland Award finalists announced today are in the running to be named QLD Australian of the Year, QLD Senior Australian of the Year, QLD Young Australian of the Year and QLD Local Hero.

The 2017 Queensland Award finalists are:

2017 QUEENSLAND AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR

Dr Nora Amath – Humanitarian (Logan)
Michael Lyddiard – Occupational therapist (Townsville)
Emeritus Professor Alan Mackay-Sim – Biomolecular scientist (Sunshine Coast)
Aimee McVeigh – Human rights lawyer (Brisbane)

2017 QUEENSLAND SENIOR AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR

Professor Perry F Bartlett FAA– Neuroscientist (St Lucia)
Laurie Cowled – Philanthropist (Noosaville)
Dr Colin Dillon AM APM– Policeman and whistle-blower (Brisbane)
Dr Janet Hammill AM – Medical ethnographer (Fortitude Valley)

2017 QUEENSLAND YOUNG AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR

Elijah Douglas – Youth worker and leader (Doomadgee)
Sharell O'Brien – Family violence fighter (Townsville)
Taj Pabari – Inventor and social entrepreneur (Brisbane)
Ivan Zelich – Mathematician (Brisbane)

2017 QUEENSLAND LOCAL HERO

Yasmin Khan – Diversity champion (Kuraby)
Paul & Gabrielle Quilliam – Children's hospice founders (New Farm)
Kristy Sparrow – Internet warrior (Alpha)
John Whitten – Suicide prevention volunteer (Barney Point)

Queensland's Australian of the Year, Senior Australian of the Year, Young Australian of the Year and Local Hero Award recipients will be announced on Wednesday 23 November 2016 at Customs House in Brisbane.

The Queensland Award recipients will then join recipients from all other States and Territories as finalists for the national awards, which will be held in Canberra on 25 January 2017.

National Australia Day Council CEO, Mr Chris Kirby, said the Queensland finalists are among 131 great Australians being recognised as State and Territory finalists in the Australian of the Year Awards.

"The Australian of the Year Awards allow us to recognise and celebrate the achievements of outstanding Australians – people from all walks of life making extraordinary contributions to our society," said Mr Kirby.

"The Queensland Award finalists are remarkable individuals whose efforts are changing lives, changing communities and changing the future."

Commonwealth Bank has been a major sponsor of the Australian of the Year Awards for 37 years.

“We are proud to support the Australian of the Year Awards, a national program that showcases the Australian spirit,” said Mr Ian Narev, Chief Executive Officer of the Commonwealth Bank.

“Thank you to all of the State and Territory finalists, who have all made an important contribution to their communities through their achievements.”

ENDS.

Finalist bios attached with this media release or can be viewed from www.australianoftheyear.org.au

Finalist photos can be downloaded from <https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B3zfB7dMM-RmZGJvTWhpOGVuU1U>

For more information on the Australian of the Year Awards or members of the selection panel visit australianoftheyear.org.au

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BIOGRAPHIES

QLD - FINALISTS - AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR

Dr Nora Amath

Humanitarian

Building bridges is what Dr Nora Amath does best. Born in Vietnam, Nora belongs to the Cham people, a Muslim minority. Nora and her family fled their homeland when she was just four, after facing persecution from the communist regime. Finding refuge in the United States, and later settling in Australia, Nora has become an internationally-respected expert in Islamic studies. Passionate about human rights, Nora draws on her academic insight to share stories of the Muslim world, and to enhance interfaith understanding between all people. Nora has also served on many boards and committees, has founded women's shelters and youth groups and helped develop the first Muslim playgroup for mums in Brisbane. She's helped refugees learn leadership skills, published books, obtained a PhD, all the while raising three children. The chairperson of the Australian Muslim Advocates for the Rights of All Humanity, Nora is also the Board secretary for Islamic Relief Australia, the largest Islamic humanitarian aid agency in the world.

Michael Lyddiard

Occupational therapist

As a bomb disposal technician in Afghanistan, Michael Lyddiard was severely wounded in 2007 when an improvised explosive device that he tried to render safe, detonated in front of his face. The former Sergeant lost his right eye, lower right arm and two fingers and thumb on his left hand. His face was shattered, his hearing damaged, and he only regained some sight in his left eye months later. But Michael was determined to prove that his disabilities didn't make him useless. Graduating from James Cook University with a Bachelor of Occupational Therapy, Michael now helps other veterans with their injuries. Michael pushes his body in triathlons, Adventurethons and open-water swimming, while being an ambassador with Soldier On, helping other ex-soldiers whose wounds may not be so visible. With courage and determination, Michael has overcome tremendous obstacles to show others that they have the capacity to live a full life, and to give back, even after trauma.

Emeritus Professor Alan Mackay-Sim

Biomolecular scientist

An inspirational scientist and international leader in stem cell research, Professor Alan Mackay-Sim has given hope to thousands of Australians with spinal cord injuries. A global authority on the human sense of smell and the biology of nasal cells, Alan led the world's first clinical trial using these cells in spinal cord injury. In 2014, Alan's research played a central role in the world's first successful restoration of mobility in a quadriplegic man. As the director of the National Centre for Adult Stem Cell Research for a decade, Alan's research has championed the use of stem cells to understand the biological bases of brain disorders and diseases such as schizophrenia, Parkinson's disease and Hereditary Spastic Paraplegia. Alan's pioneering work has led to collaborations with teams of health professionals who are translating his research into clinical practice. He has laid the foundation for the next generation of researchers and demonstrated the value of inquiry, persistence and empathy.

Aimee McVeigh

Human rights lawyer

A distinguished community lawyer and leading human rights advocate, Aimee McVeigh is devoted to empowering marginalised and vulnerable people across the legal system. Well-respected by her peers and clients alike, Aimee was a driving force behind the push for a Queensland Human Rights Act. Aimee raised awareness through the media, galvanised support for the campaign and helped the community write more than 500 submissions to a parliamentary inquiry. She recently worked together with a local disability support service to establish Disability Law Queensland. As a director of this service, she provides legal advice to people with disability and their families. Aimee has also worked as a gender advisor to the United Nations special rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous peoples and created a best practice guide to help survivors of child sexual abuse engage with the Royal Commission. She's also worked alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women to improve their ability to access justice.



QLD - FINALISTS - SENIOR AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR

Professor Perry F Bartlett FAA, 69

Neuroscientist

A pioneering neuroscientist, Professor Perry Bartlett has made ground-breaking progress in the discovery of how the human brain can be regenerated through stimulating the production of new nerve cells. Perry's work offers the potential to change the course of treatment and management of dementia and depression. Perry discovered the brain could produce new nerves in 1992, overturning traditional dogma and transforming the way we think of the brain. Once considered a static organ, the brain is now understood as an ever-evolving body part that can produce new nerve cells capable of altering learning, memory and mood. In 2003, Perry founded the Queensland Brain Institute at the University of Queensland, which has grown from 10 to almost 500 scientists. Perry and his team now have their sights set on slowing down dementia by activating stem cells to produce new nerves. With dementia currently affecting one in three adults over the age of 85, Perry's work has the potential to change the lives of many older Australians.

Laurie Cowled, 87

Philanthropist

A child of the Great Depression, Laurie Cowled was raised on a sheep farm and didn't have the opportunity to fulfil her own childhood career dreams. But now her generosity is helping others to achieve theirs – whether that's in medical research, engineering, education or the arts. A passionate philanthropist, Laurie established the Cowled Foundation in 2007 to foster the education of gifted, underprivileged and disadvantaged girls from regional and rural communities throughout Australia. Through a series of chance encounters and unexpected meetings, Laurie has spread her generosity across a wide array of projects and scholarships. She's helping budding stage designers find their feet, provides micro-finance for small businesses in West Timor and offers annual scholarships to aspiring ballet dancers. More than 50 young women have studied at the Queensland University of Technology alone, thanks to Laurie. The simple act of giving brings Laurie much joy, and her big heart and open hands are inspiring others to aim high and follow their dreams.

Dr Colin Dillon AM APM, 72

Policeman and whistle-blower

While he never set out to be Australia's first Indigenous police officer, Colin Dillon dreamt of joining the force from the age of four. In 1965, two years before the referendum that led to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders being counted in the census, Colin fulfilled his ambition. Colin's father had taught him to act with honesty and integrity, and it was this ramrod refusal to be influenced by corrupt cops around him that led Colin to become one of Australia's best known whistle-blowers. Colin's evidence at the 1987 Fitzgerald Commission of Inquiry changed the political and policing landscape in Queensland. However, his honesty cost him dearly, and he suffered years of threats, harassment and health problems. But standing firm in his conviction, Colin stands tall as the quintessential honest cop committed to serving his community. A grandfather today, Colin continues to give back as a director on a number of boards, and has recently published a memoir of his experience, *Code of Silence*.

Dr Janet Hammill AM, 76

Medical ethnographer

Studying the foetal origins of health and disease, Dr Janet Hammill has spent more than 20 years building evidence to demonstrate how the past experiences of Indigenous people has contributed to family violence and substance abuse. As a registered nurse, Jan has worked in many settings from city hospitals to Indigenous communities, as well as in Papua New Guinea. As a medical ethnographer, Jan closely studies people, culture and health, recording the often-harrowing family histories of illness, violence, abuse and addiction to better understand the intergenerational challenges faced by Indigenous people, and the invisible effects of alcohol on babies in the womb. Today, Jan coordinates the Collaboration for Alcohol Related Developmental Disorders, and has shone a spotlight on how Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) can affect every aspect of an individual's life from academic achievement to criminality. Refusing to retire, Jan continues to work tirelessly in research and advocacy to support people living the effects of FASD.



QLD - FINALISTS - YOUNG AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR

Elijah Douglas, 19

Youth worker and leader

While he hopes to become the first Indigenous prime minister of Australia, Elijah Douglas has made his community his first priority. A senior youth worker with Save the Children in his home town of Doomadgee on the Gulf of Carpentaria, Elijah is engaging children in a learning journey focused on developing community pride. Elijah's enthusiastic leadership has led to many achievements – from being school captain at Spinifex State College in Mount Isa, where he boarded, to representing Queensland in the 2014 Australian Youth Parliament. He also participated in the National Indigenous Youth Parliament in Canberra and later attended a United Nations forum in New York to discuss Indigenous peoples' rights. In 2013, Elijah was selected to travel to Gallipoli and the Western Front to play his hand-crafted didgeridu on the beach at Gallipoli Cove and as part of a ceremony at the Menin Gate. Elijah is striving to improve the lives of his people while maintaining the cultural practices and language of his ancestors.

Sharell O'Brien, 29

Domestic and family violence fighter

Determined to play a part in ending domestic violence, Sharell O'Brien provides free legal advice to vulnerable women throughout north Queensland. The supervising solicitor at the North Queensland Women's Legal Service, Sharell takes on the toughest cases, visits schools to teach girls about human rights, healthy relationships and self-esteem, and is currently developing legal education programs to help schools support families experiencing domestic violence. Sharell developed Ask Nola, a website that provides free legal education – from fact sheets to monthly webinars – for community support staff in rural and remote locations throughout Queensland. Partnering with the North Queensland Cowboys and the Townsville Fire, Sharell helped coordinate the Tackle Domestic Violence Campaign, speaking at games, attending expos and spreading the simple message that domestic violence must stop. One woman is killed each week in Australia as a result of domestic and family violence. Sharell is ensuring many women gain the support and services they need to break free from violence.

Taj Pabari, 17

Inventor and social entrepreneur

The mastermind behind game-changing social enterprise Fiftysix Creations, Taj Pabari is a young inventor and social entrepreneur taking the world by storm. Describing his idea as the 'LEGO of the 21st century', Taj cleverly combines hardware, software and education, enabling children to not just consume the world we live in but to create it. The Fiftysix build-it-yourself tablet and coding kit is as easy as a puzzle and as engaging as a computer game, and is being used in schools around the world. Taj has partnered with the Foundation for Young Australians to build capacity in disadvantaged communities, and Taj and his team have educated more than 43,000 students in Australia and internationally. Balancing his education and entrepreneurial endeavours is not easy, and Taj wakes up at 4am every day before heading off to high school. Taj has big dreams to expand his social enterprise and has set a goal of educating one million kids by 2020.

Ivan Zelich, 18

Mathematician

With an IQ higher than Albert Einstein or Stephen Hawking, Ivan Zelich was always ahead for his age. But at just 17, Ivan and another teen developed a ground-breaking mathematical theorem which could pave new insights into the structure of the universe. Six months' work with Xuming Liang, another teenager whom he met online, resulted in the Liang Zelich Theorem. The main application of their theorem is to understand certain structures in geometry which relate to the mathematics of the universe. A paper on the pair's theorem, 'Generalisations of the Neuberg cubic to the Euler pencil of isopivotal cubics' was published in the International Journal of Geometry, and the teenagers are the youngest ever contributors to the journal. Ivan has since stood in front of some of the world's greatest mathematical minds at conferences to explain and test his theory. Aside from his passion for numbers, Ivan is a swimming state champion, speaks six languages, has represented Queensland in chess and is currently completing his Licentiate in Music on piano.



QLD - FINALISTS - AUSTRALIA'S LOCAL HERO

Yasmin Khan (Kuraby)

Diversity champion

With an Australian heritage stretching back 130 years, Yasmin Khan creates connections and breaks down barriers to show how Muslims have made a great contribution to our nation. In 2005, Yasmin founded Eidfest – the largest Muslim gathering in Queensland to celebrate the end of Ramadhan and to showcase Muslim diversity and cultures. A well-known speaker, Yasmin works with schools, the media and community groups to share insights into her religion and her life experiences. Yasmin represents her community on multiple reference groups, recently being elected as the Chair of the Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland, and is a multicultural ambassador for the AFL and Asian Cup, and was one of the first female cricket umpires in Queensland. A vocal commentator on domestic violence in multicultural communities, Yasmin has established a support centre for Muslim women and women from the Indian sub- continent, regardless of their religion. At the helm of many highly-successful events and community activities, Yasmin continues to demonstrate why diversity makes Australia a stronger nation.

Paul and Gabrielle Quilliam (New Farm)

Children's hospice founders

The founders of Queensland's only children's hospice, Hummingbird House, Paul and Gabrielle Quilliam describe themselves as ordinary Australians. But what they've done for families in their state is nothing short of extraordinary. After fostering children with serious health issues, the couple became advocates for families caring for children with life-limiting conditions. With a shared determination, the former school teacher and nurse founded Queensland Kids in 2011. They have since spoken at parliamentary inquiries, met with politicians, shared stories to secure \$11 million in government funding, and raised over \$7 million through generous philanthropic and corporate donations. Hummingbird House officially opened in October this year to provide everything from short break stays to end of life care. Determined to make their dream a reality, the couple are always the first to unload a removalist's van with donated clinical supplies or turn sausages at a fundraising barbecue. Humble and warm, Paul and Gabrielle have inspired their community to work together to bring Hummingbird House to life.

Kristy Sparrow (Alpha)

Internet warrior

An internet warrior of the bush, Kristy Sparrow is working hard to end the data drought in Australia's rural, regional and remote communities. The founder of Better Internet for Rural, Regional and Remote Australia, Kristy is mobilising a movement to help bush businesses grow and rural kids get the best educations. While running a beef cattle operation and home schooling her twins, Kristy noticed unexplained excessive usage on her mobile broadband data. Together with her friend Kylie Stretton, Kristy set up an online forum which today has more than 8,000 supporters. Kristy is a tireless trouble-shooter and advocate, talking to the media, politicians and technology experts to help thousands of individuals and businesses get better internet service. Through successful lobbying, Kristy secured unmetered education sites through Telstra for distance students, and facilitated Australia's first large scale survey on bush internet access. With selfless dedication, Kristy is helping to build better bush telecommunications for the 21st century.

John Whitten (Barney Point)

Suicide prevention volunteer

A veteran volunteer who has spent 20 years working with Rotary, John Whitten has developed an innovative solution to the high rate of teenage suicide in the Gladstone community. John has spent the last six years raising funds and developing Project We Care to educate principals, teachers, guidance officers and other community members in how to spot and support teens struggling with suicidal thoughts. 205 people in the Gladstone region have received this training, conducted by a qualified psychologist, and John has now set his sights on educating students, putting 700 high school students through a suicide safe talk. As the Rotary Club of Gladstone Port Curtis Director of Special Projects, John stages monster auctions, sausage sizzles and barbecues to raise much-needed cash. He also handles numerous media enquiries to get the message out. A firm believer that everyone has a role to play in creating a suicide-free community, John is working hard to save lives.

