

MEDIA RELEASE
WEDNESDAY 24 OCTOBER

**NOMINEES ANNOUNCED FOR
2019 WESTERN AUSTRALIA AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR AWARDS**

A cave-diving rescuer, a mountaineer who overcame spinal injury, an advocate for Indigenous servicemen and women, a basketballer building kids' self-esteem, a young Indigenous activist and a woman saving bears from bile farms are among nominees for the 2019 Western Australia Australian of the Year Awards.

The nominees announced today are in the running to be named Western Australia Australian of the Year, Western Australia Senior Australian of the Year, Western Australia Young Australian of the Year and Western Australia's Local Hero.

The 2019 Western Australia Award nominees are:

2019 WESTERN AUSTRALIA AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR

Craig Challen - Cave-diver and rescuer (Wangara)

Dr Michael Levitt – Surgeon (Subiaco)

Steven Plain – Mountaineer (Burswood)

Dr Angus Turner – Ophthalmologist (Shenton Park)

2019 WESTERN AUSTRALIA SENIOR AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR

Dr Mary Hutton - Founder of Free the Bears (Stirling)

Frank Mallard - Elder, ex-serviceman and volunteer (Northampton)

Anne-Marie Widermanski - Surf lifesaving volunteer (Woodvale)

Lorraine Winchcomb - Community radio station founder (Joondanna)

2019 WESTERN AUSTRALIA YOUNG AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR

Jaimen Hudson - Drone photographer and tourism operator (Esperance)

Radheya Jegatheva - Film-maker, artist, poet and writer (Joondanna)

Noelle Martin - Feminist, activist and law reformist (Nedlands)

Clinton Pryor - Indigenous activist (Perth)

2019 WESTERN AUSTRALIA'S LOCAL HERO

Ed Croft - Teacher and ANZAC tour leader (Noggerup)

Mervyn Eades - Social justice advocate (Belmont)

Professor Cheryl Kickett-Tucker - Basketballer and researcher (Guilford)

Ronald Reid - Founder of Perth Homeless Support Group (Bayswater)

**see bios on following pages*

The Western Australia Australian of the Year, Senior Australian of the Year, Young Australian of the Year and Local Hero Award recipients will be announced on the evening of Tuesday 30 October 2018 at Government House in Perth.

The Western Australia Award recipients will join other State and Territory recipients from around Australia in the national awards, which will be held in Canberra on 25 January 2019.

National Australia Day Council CEO, Ms Karlie Brand said the Western Australia nominees are among more than 120 people being recognised in all States and Territories as part of the 2019 Australian of the Year Awards.

"The Western Australia nominees are diverse in their contributions and achievements but they all share passion and drive which is truly inspiring," said Ms Brand.

"Whether it be helping others, standing up for people in need, standing up for what is right or choosing to use their skills to bring about change, their stories show us the many ways in which we can all make a difference."

For more information on the Australian of the Year Awards visit australianoftheyear.org.au

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

Nominee photos can be downloaded from australianoftheyear.org.au

Information on the Australian of the Year Awards process can be found here:

<https://www.australianoftheyear.org.au/nominate/frequently-asked-questions>

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BIOGRAPHIES

WESTERN AUSTRALIA - NOMINEES - AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR

Craig Challen

Cave-diver and rescuer

In July 2018, respected cave diver and retired vet Craig Challen was about to go on a caving holiday in the Nullarbor Plains, when he was called to help on a rescue mission in Thailand. Craig was part of the international team that successfully rescued 12 boys and their coach from a flooded cave in Chiang Rai, Thailand.

Craig, who has dived some of Australia's deepest wrecks and has set depth records in diving, was chosen for the mission based on his technical expertise. Working 10 to 12 hours a day in extremely dangerous conditions, Craig repeatedly risked his life as the children were swum, one-by-one, through the dark and narrow flooded caves. Despite admitting he initially thought the rescue would be too difficult to accomplish, he played a leading role in this successful and heroic mission. Dr Challen was awarded the Star of Courage for his unwavering and selfless bravery following the successful rescue of the trapped soccer team.

Dr Michael Levitt

Surgeon

As a senior surgeon at St John of God Hospital in Perth, Dr Michael Levitt has helped more than 50 overseas doctors transition to life and work in Australia, through his mentoring and care.

Michael helps migrant doctors at the hospital with their educational and registration needs – and provides appreciated personal support as they adjust to a new country and culture.

In a profession that's been in the media spotlight for its harsh treatment of junior doctors, Michael is an advocate for fair treatment, career support and a workplace free from bullying and humiliation. A dedicated mentor, he has guided young medical practitioners with a deep sense of care and commitment.

As a former president of the Carmel School Board, a Modern Orthodox Jewish school in Perth, Michael has performed a pivotal role in the leadership within the Jewish community. With wisdom, compassion and good humour, he successfully led the school through numerous challenges.

Steven Plain

Mountaineer

In 2014, engineer Steven Plain suffered a life-threatening spinal injury during an early morning swim at Perth's Cottesloe Beach. Lying in hospital with a broken neck, and in a halo-brace for months to keep his spine and neck still, he conceived the dream to climb the Seven Summits – the highest mountains on seven continents – in just four months.

After three years of intensive training, including learning how to mountain climb, Steven commenced his '7in4' project. He reached his first summit, Vinson in Antarctica, in January 2018. He then climbed Aconcagua (South America), Kilimanjaro (Africa), Carstensz Pyramid (Australasia), Elbrus (Europe), Denali (North America) and finally, Everest (Asia), in just 117 days – well below the previous world record of 126 days.

With support from Rotary, Steven's project included climbing Australia's Kosciuszko with six children in wheelchairs, helping them achieve their own mountaineering dreams. Project 7in4 also raised funds for Surf Life Saving WA and SpinalCure Australia.

Dr Angus Turner

Ophthalmologist

As an ophthalmologist, Director of Lions Outback Vision and Associate Professor at The University of Western Australia, Dr Angus Turner strives to end blindness and vision loss across rural and remote Australia.

With blindness rates three times higher among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people than non-Indigenous Australians, Angus delivers specialist outreach services to communities across the state. A passionate advocate for closing the gap for Aboriginal patients and a mentor for young ophthalmology students, he sees medicine as a vocation.

Under Angus' leadership, in 2017 Lions Outback Vision conducted over 7,000 eye consultations across 20 communities, using innovative models of service delivery, including telehealth and a 'Vision Van' to transport the necessary equipment to each community.

In addition to his work at home, Angus regularly has volunteered his expertise to communities in South Africa, holding fundraising events to pay for the equipment and medicine he takes with him.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA - NOMINEES - SENIOR AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR

Dr Mary Hutton, 80

Founder of Free the Bears

In 1993, after her son Simon urged her to watch a program about the unimaginable suffering of bile farm bears, Mary Hutton took a clipboard to her local shopping centre to collect signatures opposing the practice. With no prior conservation experience, Mary founded the charity Free the Bears, organising raffles, film nights and garage sales to raise awareness and funding.

After rescuing three sun bears in 1997, Mary's organisation now rescues bears in several countries and has the world's largest sanctuary for sun bears in Cambodia. Free the Bears also raised money to provide alternative livelihoods for more than 500 Indian dancing-bear families, ending the centuries-old tradition in 2009.

Despite personal tragedy – her son Simon was killed by a car in Cambodia while helping develop the sanctuary – 80-year-old Mary relentlessly pursues freedom for bears, attending hundreds of events, giving talks, and travelling extensively to reach more people. In 2017, Mary received an Honorary Doctorate from the University of the Sunshine Coast.

Frank Mallard, 73

Elder, ex-serviceman and volunteer

Ex-serviceman and Yamatji elder, Frank Mallard, is a proud ambassador and advocate for the contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander servicemen and women.

Part of the Stolen Generation, Frank served in the Australian army from 1962 to 1985, and in the Army Reserves from 1986 to 1999. He saw active duty in Borneo and Vietnam – but on returning home, like other Aboriginal soldiers, was rejected by the RSL. This spurred him to promote the military service of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people within Veterans' Affairs and the broader community.

Today, despite PTSD and Parkinson's disease, Frank is Media Officer at Ellenbrook RSL and a dedicated veterans' issues volunteer. He is the Chairperson of Voice of the Voiceless Ministry that helps people with addiction, mental illness and social issues.

In 2015, he received a Republic of Vietnam Cross of Gallantry with Palm Unit Citation as a member of the 1RAR Group, and was City of Swan Citizen and Senior Citizen of the Year in 2018.

Anne-Marie Widermanski, 68

Surf lifesaving volunteer

Since 1987, Anne-Marie Widermanski has given her time, energy and expertise to the surf lifesaving movement as a volunteer. A passionate life member of the Mullaloo Surf Life Saving Club (SLSC) and Surf Life Saving Western Australia (SLSWA), Anne-Marie has mentored countless members and contributed to the successful operation of the Mullaloo SLSC.

Known for her vivacious personality, Anne-Marie has held a variety of roles within surf lifesaving, including as a group manager, trainer and assessor; club president of Mullaloo SLSC; chief trainer and assessor of First Aid for SLSWA; and visiting trainer and assessor for Broome (WA) and Mindil Beach (NT) SLSCs during the winter season. Anne-Marie's willingness to share her time and knowledge has been recognised at the Surf Life Saving Australia National Awards of Excellence, which named her Assessor of the Year in 2016. She has also received numerous other awards including the 2000 SLSWA Volunteer of the Year award and the National Service Medal.

Lorraine Winchcomb,

Community radio station founder

For 25 years, Lorraine 'Lol' Winchcomb worked as a radio operator for the Royal Flying Doctor Service in the Eastern Goldfields, providing support to remote communities throughout the region.

A migrant who came to Australia from Sri Lanka in 1948, Lol retired from the Royal Flying Doctor Service in the early 1990s, relocating to Perth. It was here that she co-founded Capital Community Radio in 2000 – a radio station dedicated to providing music and information to the senior citizens of Perth and its surrounds.

Lol continues to perform the role of programming manager, as well as managing over 120 volunteers who give their time to help keep the station going. With great dedication and care, she ensures that the radio station is there to help many aging and lonely people.

Lol was a founding member of the Rotary-affiliated community organisation "Inner Wheel" in the Eastern Goldfields in 1989 and has helped organise numerous fund-raising activities for her local golf club and church.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA - NOMINEES - YOUNG AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR

Jaimen Hudson, 28

Drone photographer and tourism operator

After a 2008 motorbike crash rendered 17-year-old Jaimen Hudson a quadriplegic, he pledged to make the most of his life. Fast-forward to 2018: Jaimen is a renowned drone photographer, with clients including National Geographic, Greenpeace, and Discovery Channel. Jaimen is self-taught in all aspects of drone use, videography, photography and post-production. He has over 250 million views on videos he has created

Also owning a successful marine-tourism business, which accompanied by his photography has been responsible for a significant increase in Australian and overseas visitors to Esperance. This saw him win “Esperance’s best Tourism Business in 2017”

Two film companies are making documentaries about Jaimen’s life, reflecting his resilience and inspirational character. His achievements have also been recognised through several awards, including the 2018 Western Australian Young Achiever awards, in the Diamond Club Online Achievement and People’s Choice categories. Jaimen donates much of his time giving motivational talks at schools, the Clontarf Organisation, Rotary Groups and Spinal Cord Injury organisations.

Radheya Jegatheva, 19

Film-maker, artist, poet and writer

At just 19 years old, multi-talented Perth student Radheya Jegatheva is already an internationally acclaimed filmmaker, artist, poet and writer. His films have appeared at more than 400 film festivals around the world and won more than 200 international awards.

Radheya’s 2017 short film iRony, about the rise of technology and social media’s influence, launched his international career, winning him 122 awards across 6 continents throughout 2017 and 2018. iRony was developed from Radheya’s poem, Seven Billion, which in 2016 was chosen from over 30,000 entries to win *The Young Australian Writer’s National Award for Poetry*.

His 2016 short film, The Tyger, based on William Blake’s 1794 poem of the same name, is used as a teaching tool in schools and universities around the world.

A second-year Arts student at Curtin University who achieved an ATAR of 99.15, Radheya represented *Australia at the 2015 and 2016 World Youth Scrabble Championships*. He was also the overall winner of the 2018 West Australian Young Achiever Award.

Noelle Martin, 24

Feminist, activist and law reformist

At the age of 18, Noelle Martin, now aged 24, discovered that sexual predators had stolen images of her from social media, editing them onto pornographic images and videos, adding her name and details of where she lived. The feminist, law graduate and activist has courageously taken action, helping provide avenues for justice for victims of image-based sexual abuse.

Despite the abuse escalating after she shared her experience publicly and being told that nothing could be done about the images, Noelle continued to speak out. Her actions were a major factor in new laws being introduced and passed in New South Wales in 2017, in 2018 at the Commonwealth level and in Western Australia, making it a criminal offence to distribute non-consensual intimate images.

An inspiring and courageous speaker and expert on image-based sexual abuse, Noelle regularly speaks to the media, and travels the country as a TEDx speaker, educating people on the harmful impacts of this type of abuse.

Clinton Pryor, 29

Indigenous activist

In 2016, in response to the Western Australian Government’s program of forced closures of Indigenous communities, Clinton Pryor, a proud young Wajuk, Balardung, Kija and a Yulparitja man, began a walk of 6,000 kilometres from Perth to Canberra, with the blessing of local elders. On the way, Clinton travelled through remote towns, collecting stories from Indigenous Australia.

Growing up in Carnarvon, Halls Creek, Kununurra and Mulan Community before moving to Perth at 7 years old, Clinton has first-hand experience living in a community, and the benefits of living under traditional law. Having experienced homelessness himself as a young man, he is concerned about the impact that forced community closures could have on his people – including an increase in homelessness.

Arriving in September 2017, 353 days after leaving Perth, Clinton met with the Prime Minister, with other activists and elders, to deliver his message about injustices suffered by Indigenous people all over the country, and to call for a treaty.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA - NOMINEES - AUSTRALIA'S LOCAL HERO

Ed Croft

Teacher and ANZAC tour leader

In 2006, after negative press about the town's youth caused distress to his students, Collie Senior High School teacher Ed Croft decided to help demonstrate the commitment and motivation of the town's youth. Since 2007, Ed has led groups of up to 20 students and 12 adults to commemorate the ANZAC soldiers on bi-annual tours of Turkey, France and Belgium.

To join a tour, students and their families must commit to actively raise the funds themselves to cover the cost of the tours through activities like raffles, cake stalls, car washes, tree-planting and roadside clean-ups.

Thanks to Ed's efforts, the Collie community has rediscovered its ANZAC history – and the town now has huge turnouts to ANZAC ceremonies. In 2017, The Collie Senior High School ANZAC Tour Group's achievements were formally recognised by the Collie Shire, and community groups, at a presentation ceremony. Ed is now supporting the next round of students to prepare for the 2019 ANZAC tour.

Mervyn Eades

Social justice advocate

After losing both his parents at age 10, 48-year-old Noongar man, Mervyn Eades, was in and out of juvenile detention and prison from 13 until 31 years old. The year he was released, his younger brother Donald committed suicide in jail – devastating Mervyn and making him determined never to return to prison again.

In 2014, Mervyn founded Ngalla Maya Aboriginal Corporation, a not-for-profit organisation that actively prevents recidivism and suicide, by helping the poorest and most vulnerable to turn their lives around. The organisation provides one-on-one mentoring and psychosocial support, education opportunities, employment assistance and help with finding identity documents. Mervyn and members of Ngalla Maya visit juvenile detention facilities and adult prisons, engaging inmates and informing them about their services. They offer intensive support with post-jail training and employment, helping ex-inmates build financial independence and self-worth.

Mervyn's work earned him the 2016 National Indigenous Human Rights Award Eddie Mabo Social Justice Award and 2017 National Indigenous Human Rights Dr Yunupingu Human Rights Award

Professor Cheryl Kickett-Tucker

Basketballer and researcher

Wadjuk traditional owner, Curtin University Professor, children's author and mother-of-three, Cheryl Kickett-Tucker, is passionate about helping children build their confidence and improve their social, physical and emotional wellbeing – through sport.

In 2015, the ex-state and Women's National Basketball League player launched the basketball lifestyle program Kaat, Koort and Hoops. Translating as head, heart and hoops, the after-school basketball lifestyle program aims to build sporting confidence – providing a boost to participants' self-esteem. By 2018, 250 children had participated in the program.

A highly accomplished woman committed to social development, Cheryl completed a PhD in 2000 at Edith Cowan University, exploring urban Aboriginal children's self-identity and self-esteem in the school sporting setting. She is a voluntary member of not-for-profit Koya Aboriginal Corporation, an Aboriginal-controlled and owned organisation, which provides services including training, employment, professional development and cultural security audits. In 2014, she founded Pindi Pty Ltd Centre for Research Excellence in Aboriginal Wellbeing in 2014, where she is executive director.

Ronald Reid

Founder of Perth Homeless Support Group

In 2014 during a heatwave, hair stylist Ron Reid noticed the only free water accessible to homeless people came out of the tap warm. With the idea to provide Perth's homeless with free water bottles and cards to access chilled water, he set up a Facebook group inviting others to help.

Within two weeks more than 800 people had joined the online group. At the same time, Ron and his partner Michael Edwards wrote to ProAcqua water services, who donated 300 free water bottles and reusable smartcards.

Now with more than 12,000 members, the Perth Homeless Support Group (PHSG) has expanded its activities to collecting food, toiletries, clothing and bedding and distributing them to people in need.

The group has received support from businesses, including a grant from P&N Bank and a van from Ruah Community Services in 2016. Ron's kind, practical and non-judgemental attitude makes a difference to those in need and inspires all he works with.