

HIGH ACHIEVERS RECOGNISED FOR THEIR OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTIONS IN ACT AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR AWARDS 2014

Finalists in the Australian Capital Territory Australian of the Year Awards 2014 include disability and mental illness advocates, volunteers, film producer, sporting mentors and a software developer making a difference in healthcare.

The ACT award finalists are:

ACT AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR 2014

Matt Darling - Software Designer (O'Connor)
Associate Professor Zsuzsoka Kecskes - Neonatal Specialist (Fisher)
Caro Roach - Film Producer & Arts Advocate (Gungahlin)
Alasdair Roy - Children's Advocate (Campbell)

ACT SENIOR AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR 2014

Bob Buckley - Autism Activist (Ainslie)
Subhash Chandra Jalota - Community Leader (Bruce)
Bernadine Mulholland PSM - Physiotherapist (Chapman)
Graham Walker - Veterans' Campaigner (Curtin)

ACT YOUNG AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR 2014

John Bale - Humanitarian (Bruce)
Caroline Buchanan - Elite Sportswoman (Kambah)
Jake Floros - Cricket Mentor (Bonython)
Huy Nguyen - Disability Advocate (Isaacs)

ACT LOCAL HERO 2014

Gordon McAlpine ESM - Volunteer (Theodore)
Patricia Mowbray OAM - Disability Champion (Macquarie)
Richard Rolfe OAM & Deborah Rolfe - Philanthropists (Red Hill)
Catriona (Katie) Tonacia - Advocate for Mental Illness (Barton)

The ACT Australian of the Year, Senior Australian of the Year, Young Australian of the Year and Local Hero Award recipients will be announced on **Monday 4 November 2013**, at The National Arboretum in Canberra. The ACT award recipients will then join award recipients from all other States and Territories as finalists for the national awards, which will be held on 25 January 2014 in Canberra.

National Australia Day Council CEO, Mr Jeremy Lasek, said the ACT finalists were a diverse group of people whose achievements and contributions were truly inspiring.

"This year's ACT finalists are extraordinary people who are leaders in their field, leaders in our community and leaders in bringing about change," said Mr Lasek.

"They reflect the diverse range of people in the ACT and the many different faces of Australian society and they are all great Australians of whom we can be proud."

The Commonwealth Bank has been a Major Sponsor of the Australian of the Year Awards for more than 30 years. Chief Executive Officer Ian Narev congratulated the ACT finalists.

"On behalf of the Commonwealth Bank, I congratulate the finalists in the 2014 Australian of the Year Awards across all States and Territories. To emerge as a finalist from the thousands of nominated Australians is a great accomplishment. I wish you all the best of luck in the next stage of the program," said Mr Narev.

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

Ends.

Finalist bios attached with this media release or downloadable from www.australianoftheyear.org.au
Media contact: Zannie Abbott 0418 274 291

ACT FINALISTS - AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR**Matt Darling - Software Designer**

Matt Darling lost his beloved daughter, Jem, to a rare cancer when she was just nineteen months old. During the time that Jem spent in hospital, Matt observed overworked nurses struggle to administer drugs on time and maintain accurate records while meeting the other needs of their patients. After analysing contemporary nursing care, and with extensive input from healthcare professionals, Matt designed a system that generates real-time records, reduces errors in treatment, improves safety and enables nurses to spend more time with patients. Driven by a determination to make a difference to healthcare, Matt established *SmartWard* with the help of a small group of private backers and grants from Commercialisation Australia. Today *SmartWard* employs 12 dedicated staff who are working together to realise Matt's vision. *SmartWard* has already been trialed in two hospitals and Matt hopes Jem's legacy will be the humanitarian and economic benefits that *SmartWard* could spark around the world.

Associate Professor Zsuzsoka Kecskes- Neonatal Specialist

Through the inspiring work of Dr Zsuzsoka Kecskes, babies born prematurely in Canberra are getting a better start in life. Zsuzsoka has pioneered the development of the award-winning *Neonatal Intensive Care Unit CAM (NICUCAM)* project - a web-based service which enables parents and families to watch their babies when they are unable to be at hospital. *NICUCAM* is the first of its kind in Australia. Clinical Director of Neonatology, Zsuzsoka was already an influential academic and practitioner when she embarked on a four year project to design and develop a world-class neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) at Canberra's new Centenary Hospital for Women and Children. Zsuzsoka consulted and collaborated with families who had experienced neonatal care at the hospital to develop a family-friendly, baby-focused facility. Today, the NICU provides critical care and support to hundreds of families each year. Zsuzsoka has been recognised for her work into perinatal asphyxia and her research continues to inform best-practice treatment of newborn babies in Australia and around the world.

Caro Roach - Film Producer & Arts Advocate

An energetic, creative and dedicated advocate for artists with a disability, Caro Roach is passionate about using the arts to foster social inclusion. In her role as the ACT Arts Inclusion Officer, Caro worked hard to ensure that artists with a disability were not only recognised but actively encouraged to reach their potential. Caro's innovative projects included Canberra's first annual disability arts exhibition which brought together the works of 40 artists. Caro also developed a physically, financially and socially accessible artists' hub, GENERATE. In 2011, Caro produced *Beautiful*, a short film about two young people with disabilities who find love in the face of prejudice and ignorance. Caro generated funding and gathered together a cast and crew of more than 60 people, including people with and without disabilities. Caro's work was visionary and far beyond the scope of her paid employment. She has brought into being a network for artists with disability that has changed the lives of many people.

Alasdair Roy - Children's Advocate

Providing children and young people with a voice is Alasdair Roy's passion. The ACT Children & Young People Commissioner since 2008, Alasdair has devoted his career to supporting the rights, interests and well-being of young people in Canberra. Over the past four years, Alasdair has spoken to thousands of children and young people in Canberra about a wide range of issues, from the practical – such as their views on parents smacking children - to the philosophical – such as what makes a happy childhood. While he's played a key role in developing legislation, policy and practice, Alasdair's proudest achievement has been increasing the participation of children and young people in government decision-making on the issues that affect them. A registered psychologist, Alasdair has served the community in voluntary roles from telephone counsellor to board member of the ACT Domestic Violence Crisis Service, and is a White Ribbon Ambassador for the ACT.



ACT FINALISTS - SENIOR AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR

Bob Buckley - Autism Activist

63 years old

Many people would find it impossible to devote the time and energy to advocacy activities while also caring for a child with a disability. For Bob Buckley, however, having a child with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) has driven his desire to raise awareness, attract funding and advocate for better opportunities for people living with ASD. After his son was diagnosed with the disorder, Bob began to apply his outstanding academic and analytical skills to become one of Australia's most formidable ASD activists. In 2002, Bob co-founded Autism Aspergers Advocacy Australia, which he convenes to this day. Bob has compiled countless submissions to government enquiries, authored dozens of academic papers and administers a number of websites. However, his contribution is not limited to advocacy. Bob has produced educational material and led training programs which have changed how emergency service workers and police respond to situations involving people with ASD. Bob's achievements and dedication have resulted in positive policy outcomes and better services for people with ASD.

Subhash Chandra Jalota - Community Leader

80 years old

With a teaching career spanning three continents, Subhash Chandra Jalota had devoted his life to education, community service and humanitarian issues long before he migrated to Australia in 1973. With many accolades for his teaching in Indian, Ugandan and Australian schools, Subhash's reputation in the classroom has been matched only by his reputation within his community. He has committed himself to a range of community groups and charities, from the Heart Foundation to the Lions Club – in which he was General Secretary and served for 25 years – to the India Australia Association of Canberra. Subhash was the co-founder of the Hindu Temple and Cultural Centre of the ACT, and served as the founding president for four years. Subhash and his wife Jyoti have an open door policy for friends and strangers alike, and countless newcomers to Canberra have been the recipients of their generosity, gaining assistance to find jobs, homes and schools, as well as valuable connections into their new community.

Bernadine Mulholland PSM - Physiotherapist

81 years old

Every day, Bernadine Mulholland contorts and confronts her physiotherapy patients with the challenge to be as fit and active as she is at the age of 81. A leader in her field of physiotherapy for 58 years, Bernie devoted her early career to working with children, particularly those with Cerebral Palsy, and was instrumental in establishing the much-loved *Hartley Street Centre for Physiotherapy for Disabled Children*. In 1982, she shifted her focus to rehabilitation of the aged care population. She established the first *Falls Prevention Clinic* in the ACT, and, as senior physiotherapist for a number of healthcare institutions, has made many significant improvements that have reduced patients' average length of stay. It is not just that Bernie is still working full-time in a very physical, hands-on job, but that her daily energetic, enthusiastic and experienced contributions inspire her colleagues, her patients and their families, who all marvel that age does not weary her.

Graham Walker - Veterans' Campaigner

74 years old

Graham Walker's 21 years in the Australian Regular Army included active service during Indonesian Confrontation and the Vietnam War. He was Mentioned in Despatches and awarded the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with Silver Star. After retiring from the Australian Army in the early 1980s, Graham shifted his focus to the domestic battleground of returned servicemen and women. In his work with the Vietnam Veterans Federation of Australia, Graham has assisted thousands of veterans to receive their entitlements, advised governments, authored research and campaigned for the official history of Agent Orange to be rewritten. Passionate about music and the arts, Graham has acted as a military and curatorial advisor on projects ranging from Bryce Courtney novels and David Williamson plays to music video clips, museum exhibitions, theatrical dance productions and the Australian TV mini-series, *Vietnam*. Graham's outstanding contributions have carved out a well respected place in Australian arts history, and will ensure that the Vietnam veterans' story is faithfully captured in arts and culture for future generations.



ACT FINALISTS - YOUNG AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR

John Bale - Humanitarian

29 years old

John Bale joined the Australian Army in 2002 with a schoolmate who was later killed by an improvised explosive device in 2008. Wanting to give something back to his mates and colleagues who had been wounded – physically or psychologically – during military operations, John co-founded *Soldier On* in 2012. *Soldier On* inspires, enhances and empowers wounded soldiers to move on with their lives. John drives *Soldier On*'s activities with enthusiasm and endeavour – whether that's engaging wounded soldiers to tackle physically challenging activities such as walking the Kokoda Track, supporting rehabilitation or negotiating new employment, training and education opportunities. As Chief Executive Officer of this growing charity, John has provided the focus and inspiration to a large and expanding volunteer base. Those involved with *Soldier On* speak of regaining their sense of purpose. As one wounded soldier says, "John has given me and others like me a platform to voice our experiences – this voice has given me back my sense of empowerment."

Caroline Buchanan - Elite Sportswoman

22 years old

A self-confessed adrenaline junkie, Caroline Buchanan has been competing on the BMX track since she was just five years old. Bikes – both mountain and BMX – are Caroline's favourite things. Caroline holds a total of five Elite World Championships in three separate cycling disciplines. She also made history in 2013 by claiming world titles in BMX and four cross mountain biking just two months apart. Caroline is also seven times *Australian BMX and Mountain Bike Rider of the Year*, and represented Australia in BMX at the 2012 London Olympics. Disappointed with placing fifth in London, Caroline set herself the challenge of competing at the highest international level at three World Championship events in 56 days. In July 2013, she achieved a lifetime goal, being named Elite Women's BMX World Champion. Caroline gives back to her sport by coaching and mentoring young riders at her local club, around Australia and internationally. An impressive ambassador for her sport, Caroline is an inspiration to riders worldwide.

Jake Floros - Cricket Mentor

18 years old

In 2010, Jake Floros' promising career in cricket was cut short by a life-threatening infection. Jake spent a week in intensive care, a month in hospital and subsequently required a hip replacement. When Jake was told that an elite sporting career was likely out of his reach, he turned his attention to coaching junior players. Two ACT indoor cricket teams have gone from floundering to flourishing under Jake's leadership, while the ACT's intellectual disability cricket side has also benefitted from Jake's time and effort. With determination and a positive attitude, Jake has recently recommenced playing cricket, and was selected as vice-captain of his Under 20s side for the national championships. Jake is a remarkable, inspiring leader, respected for his ability to overcome adversity and achieve high levels of performance, even when life throws him a challenge. Whether or not Jake achieves his personal sporting dreams, his team mates consider him to be an Australian champion in life.

Huy Nguyen - Disability Advocate

29 years old

A humanitarian engineer, advocate for people with disability, entrepreneur, traveller and portrait artist, Huy Nguyen was born in Vietnam and contracted polio when he was 18 months old. Since then he's used a wheelchair to get around. His own physical challenges have given him a unique perspective when approaching real world engineering problems, and he lectures engineering students on the importance of inclusive design. Huy is passionate about international development work, has facilitated disability programs in the Solomon Islands and Timor Leste, and is the founder of a social enterprise called Enable Development, which brings together passionate professionals to tackle the challenges of disability in our global community. Huy is also the founder of *EnableCanberra*, an online resource which helps people with access needs to plan their visits to Canberra's national institutions. Huy understands that physical environments can exclude people, and he is determined to play his part in breaking down the barriers to a more inclusive society.



ACT FINALISTS - AUSTRALIA'S LOCAL HERO

Gordon McAlpine ESM - Volunteer

Through flood and fire, Gordon McAlpine is there. A volunteer with the ACT State Emergency Service for nearly two decades, Gordon has reached the highest office within the Service, and has commanded his local unit for the last eight years. Under his leadership, his volunteer unit is trained, equipped and available to respond to any emergency in the ACT. Gordon has responded to countless calls for assistance from the community following natural disasters, but also in the search for missing persons. Gordon served with distinction during the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires in Victoria, the 2011 floods in Brisbane and in the aftermath of Cyclone Yasi. Gordon also supports dozens of community activities and events each year, undertaking coordination, first aid, traffic marshalling, and raising the profile of the Service through community education programs. Admired by his colleagues for his professionalism, dignity and compassion, Gordon does not let his age get in the way of his volunteering.

Patricia Mowbray OAM - Disability Champion

Few people have the compassion and commitment to adopt one child with special needs, much less four. But for Patricia Mowbray, her chosen career in disability has become her life's work. After training as a special education teacher, Trish and her husband Glenn learned they could not have children biologically, and decided to offer their love to a child with a disability. The couple adopted Luke, who was born with Down syndrome, and Trish gave up full time work to care for their new son. Shortly after, they added to the brood with Peter and Paul, who also have Down syndrome, and Emmalee, who had a medical condition which has since been resolved. Along with raising her children, Trish has worked as a volunteer in various community organisations, and more recently as a disability projects officer. While she admits life has its challenging moments, Trish says her children have taught her patience, resilience and to focus on the unique gifts that reside within us all.

Richard Rolfe OAM & Deborah Rolfe - Philanthropists

While their careers – Richard as a successful businessman and Deborah as a partner in a law firm – keep them extraordinarily busy, it never prevents Richard and Deborah from giving back to the community. When charities and sporting teams in Canberra are looking for sponsorship or support, one of their first calls is to Richard and Deborah Rolfe. The couple has worked selflessly for an impressive range of charities and causes to raise awareness and funds, from local schools to the Special Olympics, from the Heart Foundation and Canberra Hospital Foundation to the Canberra Raiders and Canberra Capitals. Richard and Deborah have embraced a unique approach to philanthropy, using their intelligence, expertise and exceptional network to forge new connections between Canberra charities and sporting teams and help them work more effectively together. Richard and Deborah have demonstrated how a powerful network, business acumen and passion for their community can deliver even bigger results.

Catriona (Katie) Tonacia – Advocate for Mental Illness

In Catriona Tonacia's own words, the husband she farewellled to serve as a peacekeeper in the Solomon Islands was not the same man who returned. With her background in nursing, Katie knew something was wrong, but it took nine months for David to be formally diagnosed as suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Since then, Katie has worked tirelessly to break down the stigma attached to mental illness and PTSD. In 2007 she founded the support group, *Picking up the Peaces*, to raise national awareness and funds to help people suffering from the disorder. She's been the driving force behind a program to educate frontline first responders on the signs, symptoms and strategies to recognise PTSD in themselves and others. In 2012, Katie was awarded a prestigious Churchill Fellowship to undertake international research into methods of combating the stigma that exists in frontline emergency service cultures, and this work, together with her advocacy and fundraising, is supporting hundreds of first responders and their families.

