

**MEDIA RELEASE
9 OCTOBER 2013**



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

Finalists in the Victorian Australian of the Year Awards 2014 include an anatomist, mental health advocate, philosopher, social entrepreneur and animal rights activist.

The Victorian award finalists for 2014 are:

VICTORIAN AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR 2014

John Caldwell - Anti-Bullying Advocate (Melbourne)
Associate Professor Norman Eizenberg – Anatomist (Burwood)
David Jacka - Aviator and Disability Advocate (Fairfield)
Professor Paul Komesaroff - Social Innovator and Ethicist (Armadale)

VICTORIAN SENIOR AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR 2014

Dr Christine Durham - Teacher and Disability Advocate (Eltham)
Dr Rob Gordon – Psychologist (Yarra Glen)
Betty Kitchener OAM - Mental Health Advocate (Kensington)
Professor Peter Singer AC – Philosopher (St Kilda)

VICTORIAN YOUNG AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR 2014

Daniel Flynn - Social Entrepreneur (Blackburn)
Luke Owens - Musician and Advocate for Homeless People (Bendigo)
Benson Saulo - Youth Representative (Melbourne)
Joel Taylor - Mental Health Advocate (Doncaster East)

VICTORIAN LOCAL HERO 2014

Pam Ahern - Animal Rights Activist (Willowman)
Tim Conolan - Children's Charity Founder (Melbourne)
Julie Hoffmann - Charity Fundraiser (Emerald)
Dr Di Winkler - Disability Advocate (Blackburn)

The Victorian Australian of the Year, Senior Australian of the Year, Young Australian of the Year and Local Hero Award recipients will be announced on **Thursday 31 October 2013** at the **Arts Centre Melbourne**. The Victorian award recipients will then join 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 Victorian finalists were a group of people whose contributions to society and many achievements were inspiring.

"This year's Victorian finalists are fine examples of the varied range of outstanding work that Victorians are doing in their local, national and international communities," said Mr Lasek.

"We are thrilled to be able to recognise and celebrate their outstanding achievements which are all great examples of Australians following their passions to make a positive difference."

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 Victorian 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

WITH THANKS TO
OUR MAJOR SPONSOR

CommonwealthBank



BIOGRAPHIES

VICTORIAN - FINALISTS - AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR

John Caldwell - Anti-Bullying Advocate

A passionate anti-bullying advocate, John Caldwell was raised in caravan parks by parents whose lives were an endless cycle of dysfunction and despair. John was bullied at school for being gay, abused by foster parents and was present when his father committed suicide. John rose above his nightmarish childhood to become the Chief Executive Officer of *Retail World Resourcing*, a group of recruitment agencies with 16 global offices. Today, John commits many hours each week to his role as Corporate Ambassador for *Angels Goal Australian Anti-Bullying Organisation*. Building on his anti-bullying advocacy work, John has been signed by a talent agency for a reality TV show pilot that will showcase his life and the plight of *Angels Goal* to the USA market, sharing his compelling story of how he overcame bullying and tragedy and creating global awareness. John has also donated the entire profits of his autobiography, *Full Throttle*, towards *Angels Goal* projects, and has funded the charity's public relations campaigns.

Associate Professor Norman Eizenberg - Anatomist

For nearly 40 years, Associate Professor Norman Eizenberg has been one of the world's most innovative and productive anatomists. Norman has coordinated anatomy teaching programs to medical students and surgical trainees for more than 20 years at both the Melbourne and Monash universities, and is an anatomy examiner for the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons and the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiologists. He is also a general medical practitioner. Norman is leader of the revolutionary *an@tomedia* program, a comprehensive, computer-based learning platform that explores anatomy from multiple perspectives. He is loved by his colleagues and students for his ability to find the humour in everything he does. Despite his lengthy CV, Norman remains down to earth, and his 18 hour days teaching and writing are no obstacle to finding time for helping patients who are unable to visit a doctor. As one colleague says, "he is just a wonderful person who also happens to be a brilliant anatomist, doctor and educationalist."

David Jacka - Aviator and Disability Advocate

Life changed forever after a motorcycle accident in 1988 left David Jacka with high-level quadriplegia, with just six per cent of normal physical function. David re-learnt how to feed himself, returned to full time work, established a charity, married, and is now a well respected aviator. David has become a master of finding solutions to seemingly insurmountable obstacles. David designed and developed novel modifications to enable him to fly a powered hang glider, becoming the first person with quadriplegia to do so. He re-engineered the controls of a fixed-wing aircraft, qualified to fly and became the first person in the world with quadriplegia to fly solo around the coast of Australia – a feat he achieved in 2013. An educator, David aims to smash disability stereotypes. David founded the charity *On a Wing & a Chair* to raise the public's expectations about what people with disabilities can achieve. He inspires both disabled and able-bodied people to reach their full potential.

Professor Paul Komesaroff - Social Innovator and Ethicist

A doctor, medical researcher, teacher, ethicist, writer, humanitarian and intellectual, perhaps Professor Paul Komesaroff's greatest skill is his ability to bring people together to work collaboratively towards a better and more just society. A profound thinker, Paul's work ranges from promoting ethical standards in professional life to fostering reconciliation in Australia and overseas. Paul created *Global Reconciliation* in 2002 to re-establish trust and community strength in settings of stress or crisis; the non-profit organisation now has projects in more than 40 countries. Paul also founded the *International Health Workforce Society of Australasia* to ensure all health workers gain access to adequate protection and support. He makes unique connections between diverse groups to find areas of strength – such as introducing Israeli and Palestinian health workers to remote Indigenous communities to explore shared challenges. Paul is the embodiment of many Australian values: openness, generosity, acceptance of diversity, creativity and readiness to take on the world to make it a better place.



VICTORIAN - FINALISTS - SENIOR AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR

Dr Christine Durham - Teacher and Disability Advocate

68 years old

The life of gifted teacher Dr Christine Durham was turned upside down after she sustained a severe brain injury in a horrific car accident. Christine was determined to return to teaching – a decision that took enormous courage and perseverance. She employed her experience of acquiring a brain injury to inspire her students to think, and her pioneering approach and book, *Chasing Ideas*, led her to gain an international reputation as a professional learning presenter. Christine's autobiography, *Doing Up Buttons*, is a deeply personal yet practical account of acquired brain injury, and has had a profound effect not only on those who share her experience, but also on professionals working in health care. At age 67, Christine completed a Doctor of Philosophy at RMIT University, examining ways to empower people with acquired brain injury. Christine is currently completing a book and learning resource from her PhD findings, which will have a significant impact on both the medical and caring staff and patients themselves.

Dr Rob Gordon – Psychologist

67 years old

A clinical psychologist, Dr Rob Gordon has spent the past 30 years working with people affected by emergencies and disasters. Rob was there in the aftermath of the Bali bombings and Christchurch earthquake, Black Saturday, the Canberra firestorm and, most recently, the Tasmanian bushfires, as well as many other large-scale disasters. He has advised the Red Cross and governments on how to assist individual people and whole communities as they rebuild and recover. His first-hand experience has helped many people affected by disasters to understand their reactions to trauma and grief, while his academic papers have contributed to new approaches to community engagement during the critical stages of recovery. Rob's empathetic presence instils hope, while his stories and practical examples have supported thousands of people as they come to terms with their situation and their emotions. Years later, many people can still recount the reassuring words from Rob that helped them through the most difficult time of their lives.

Betty Kitchener OAM - Mental Health Advocate

62 years old

According to Betty Kitchener, mental health is everyone's business – and everyone in the community can learn skills to help people with mental health problems. As a young woman, Betty trained as a teacher and worked in special education. She later studied and worked in psychology, counselling and nursing. After experiencing several episodes of depression in which she was not well supported, Betty was motivated to expand community understanding and to develop programs that better support people with mental health issues. Betty established the world's first *Mental Health First Aid* program, a training course which provides initial help for people developing mental illness or experiencing a mental health crisis. The Chief Executive Officer of charity *Mental Health First Aid Australia*, Betty is also an Adjunct Professor at Deakin University and the author of many first aid manuals on mental health. Today, Betty's program is helping people in 20 countries around the world.

Professor Peter Singer AC – Philosopher

67 years old

One of the world's best-known and most widely-read contemporary philosophers, Professor Peter Singer's contribution has influenced the way we think about a range of issues, including animal rights and global poverty. Peter specialises in applied ethics and approaches ethical issues from a secular perspective. Peter has been recognised as the *Australian Humanist of the Year* by the *Council of Australian Humanist Societies*, nominated as one of Australia's 10 most influential public intellectuals, and was named a Companion of the Order of Australia in 2012 for his services to philosophy and bioethics. Co-founder of the Monash University's Centre for Human Bioethics, Peter is currently Professor of Bioethics at Princeton University, and is Laureate Professor at the Centre for Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics at the University of Melbourne. Peter's work sparks important moral and ethical debates about the issues of our age.



VICTORIAN - FINALISTS - YOUNG AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR

Daniel Flynn - Social Entrepreneur

25 years old

At the age of 19, Daniel Flynn discovered the alarming fact that while 900 million people around the world did not have access to safe drinking water, Australians spent \$600 million on bottled water each year. As a result, Daniel founded *Thankyou Water* – a social enterprise that would sell a bottled water product to fund safe water projects in developing nations. Daniel harnessed the energy of a team of friends, who worked with him on the project while juggling university degrees and part-time jobs. Despite many setbacks, just five years later, *Thankyou Water* evolved into *Thankyou Group*, expanding its product range to include food and body care products in order to fund food and hygiene projects. With its products now available in 4,000 outlets, including major supermarkets, to date *Thankyou Group* has contributed to more than 100 water projects across nine countries and has helped over 56,000 people to gain safe water access. Daniel's motto is "Impossibility is only someone's opinion, not a fact".

Luke Owens, - Musician and Advocate for Homeless People

20 years old

A talented musician, Luke Owens understands the power of music to inspire change and transform lives. After years of entertaining people in pubs and on the streets of Bendigo, Luke decided to use his passion for music to make a difference to the lives of homeless young people in his town. Luke established the *Bendigo for Homeless Youth* campaign to address the fact that up to 700 children and young people in Bendigo have no safe place to sleep at night. Luke hoped to raise \$100,000 by Christmas 2012 to contribute to a community housing project. Harnessing a team of more than 100 volunteers, Luke staged charity fundraising dinners, concerts and pub gigs, produced a mini-album and even collected money at traffic lights. *Bendigo for Homeless Youth* raised \$500,000 and with the support of corporate donations, charitable foundations and government funding, \$6 million was raised in total. Luke's generosity of spirit has helped to give young people in Bendigo a second chance in life.

Benson Saulo - Youth Representative

25 years old

As a vocal representative of young Australians, Benson Saulo travels the country engaging young people in schools, universities and youth organisations, and inspiring them to work for an equal, just and unified Australia. A descendent of the Wemba Wemba and Guditjmarra people of Western Victoria and the New Ireland Province of Papua New Guinea, Benson was the first Indigenous Australian to be appointed the Australian Youth Representative to the United Nations, and was the lead negotiator on the Rights of the Child Resolution in 2011. In 2012, Benson was appointed the Director of the *National Indigenous Youth Leadership Academy*, an initiative which aims to develop the next generation of young Indigenous leaders from communities across Australia. Benson sits on a number of boards, is Youth Representative to the National Commission for UNESCO, and is passionate about inspiring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to reach their potential. "It is possible to be successful and still strong in the community," he says.

Joel Taylor - Mental Health Advocate

23 years old

Passionate about changing the stigma surrounding mental health, Joel Taylor aims to see suffering and silence replaced with community understanding and help. Joel's passion for people and connecting with the community is evident in all that he does. A support worker to young people with acquired brain injuries, a full time student completing a Bachelor of Social Work, and a mentor and role model to young men, Joel also directs a non-profit national project, *Gravity Tour*. Joel founded *Gravity Tour* in 2009 after struggling with depression, self-injury and suicide in his younger years. Today he hosts presentations and workshops in high schools, using film, music and conversation to connect youth to existing help and break the silence that often surrounds mental health issues. Since 2009 *Gravity Tour* has reached thousands of young people. Joel has transformed his earlier struggles into an organisation that encourages young people to uncover their own personal value, and to acknowledge the significance of their life story.



VICTORIAN - FINALISTS - AUSTRALIA'S LOCAL HERO

Pam Ahern - Animal Rights Activist

Ten years ago, Pam Ahern's heart was touched after rescuing Edgar Alan Pig from a piggery. Pam decided that the best ambassadors for changing the way people think about farmed animals were the animals themselves. And so, Pam established *Edgar's Mission* as a sanctuary for abused and abandoned farm animals. Today, *Edgar's Mission* provides life-long love and care to more than 250 rescued animals. Pam travels to schools, shopping centres, markets and community events in her 'Kindness Van' which takes farm residents out and educates the public about animal welfare. Without imposing her values on others, Pam motivates and inspires people to change their behaviour for the better to support animals and the environment. Her efforts to keep *Edgar's Mission* running are superhuman – with food, maintenance and veterinarian costs requiring a team of volunteers and ongoing fundraising efforts. Pam gives animals a voice and is working to create a just and humane world for all creatures great and small.

Tim Conolan- Children's Charity Founder

Since establishing *TLC for kids* in 1998, Tim Conolan has assisted more than four million sick children and their families. After a fearless entry into the world of entrepreneurship at age 20, Tim was asked to attend a cancer support group camp as a motivational speaker. It was there that he met some seriously ill children who were to change the course of his life. Wanting to make a difference, Tim established *TLC for kids* with his long-term partner, Ana. With passion and an infectious positivity, Tim has spearheaded the charity's remarkable growth. Tim was instrumental in developing the *TLC's* national *Distraction Box* program which benefits more than half a million children every year in 400 Australian hospitals. *Distraction Boxes* include therapeutic toys and items used by healthcare professionals to guide children through frightening and painful procedures, with preliminary research suggesting they reduce procedure time and hospital waiting lists. Tim's mission is to ensure every child in every hospital in Australia has the emotional and practical support they need.

Julie Hoffmann - Charity Fundraiser

After losing her dad, her 13 year old niece and a close friend in close succession, Julie Hoffmann was suffering from depression. She was morbidly obese and, in her own words, her life "consisted of smoking, drinking and talking on the phone". Just a few years later, the mother of three has lost 50 kilograms and has become a motivating and inspiring force for women across Victoria. Julie is now a personal trainer and raises money for *HeartKids*, the charity that supported her beloved niece Stacey while she waited for a heart transplant. Setting her sights on a gruelling physical test known as the 'burpee', Julie has used world record attempts to bring in cash for *HeartKids*, raising more than \$130,000 in just three years. In 2013, Julie completed 7,684 burpees in a 24 hour period, raising \$80,000 for *HeartKids* and inspiring many to embrace a fit and healthy lifestyle. She is expected to enter the *Guinness Book of World Records* for her achievements.

Dr Di Winkler - Disability Advocate

As an occupational therapist, Dr Di Winkler has worked in the disability sector for more than 20 years, and specialises in the field of acquired brain injury. Through her clinical work and PhD research, Di has met many young people living in aged care facilities that are not suited to their needs. Determined to find solutions, Di established the *Summer Foundation* to help the estimated 3,500 people under the age of 60 living in nursing homes – many of them socially isolated and forgotten. Under Di's passionate leadership, the *Summer Foundation* conducts research and consults widely with people with disability, their families and carers. The *Summer Foundation* has recently completed its first housing demonstration project in inner-Melbourne and is scoping potential sites to replicate this model. A role model for many, Di's innovative approach encourages people with disability to share their journey, empowering them and others to recognise their inherent value in our community.

