The 2020 NSW Australian of the Year Awards have been announced this evening in a ceremony at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney.

The four NSW recipients will join those from the other states and territories for the national awards ceremony at the National Arboretum in Canberra on 25 January 2020 – the 60th anniversary of the awards.

The 2020 NSW Australian of the Year is Orthopaedic surgeon and human-rights advocate Professor Munjed Al Muderis. After fleeing the tyranny of Saddam Hussein’s regime in a leaking boat, Professor Munjed Al Muderis was detained in Christmas Island’s Curtin Detention Centre and several Western Australian jails. He overcame these extraordinary obstacles to become an orthopaedic surgeon, specialising in hip, knee and reconstructive surgery, and now advocates for the human rights of others. A compassionate ambassador for multiple organisations, including the Red Cross, Munjed is a powerful advocate for humanitarian work supporting people seeking asylum and refugees. Funded out of his own pocket, 47-year-old Munjed has taken a team to his former homeland of Iraq seven times, to help the victims of the conflict he fled, and has educated other orthopaedic surgeons in the osseointegration technique and in complex limb reconstruction. His surgical innovations and breakthroughs are helping Australians and people throughout the world. Munjed exemplifies the valuable and positive contribution that refugees can make – leading by example what it means to be Australian.

Environmental educator and social enterprise founder Sue Lennox is the 2020 NSW Senior Australian of the Year. As a teacher, Sue Lennox was concerned about young people’s anxiety and despair about the future of the planet. So, with her late husband Colin, she founded the award-winning social enterprise OzGREEN (Global Rivers Environmental Education Network Australia Inc). It teaches young people how to take positive environmental action through education, participatory leadership and community development. Sue’s initiatives with OzGREEN include the Youth Leading the World program, a learning and leadership course that creates sustainable communities. She teaches people to become ‘citizen scientists’ and to take action to improve the health of their waterways. Under Sue’s leadership, OzGREEN has developed sustainability programs in 1,600 locations across Australia, India, Papua New Guinea, East Timor and Pakistan. After stepping down as CEO this year, 67-year-old Sue is now focused on sharing OzGREEN’s multi-award-winning approach by training others as facilitators and citizen scientists. She remains on the board of OzGREEN. Her extraordinary work continues to empower individuals and communities by replacing despair with hope.
The 2020 NSW Young Australian of the Year is Indigenous mentor and fundraiser Corey Tutt. Through his organisation, Deadly Science, proud Kamilaroi man Corey Tutt gathers donations of science resources and sends them to remote schools around Australia. As well as receiving book donations from high-profile scientists such as Professor Brian Cox and Doctor Karl Kruszelnicki, 27-year-old Corey has raised more than $33,000 to purchase books and equipment, and distributed more than 4,300 books and 70 telescopes. He is engaged with more than 90 schools around Australia. In a recent survey, these schools showed a 25% increase in engagement in STEM-related subjects. Deadly Science has given 28 Deadly Junior Scientist Awards, encouraging young Indigenous kids to follow their dreams. Corey particularly wants to ensure that every remote Australian school has a copy of Bruce Pascoe’s book Dark Emu – a history of Indigenous science and agriculture – to help educate them about the real story of Australia’s past. Corey’s actions inspire Indigenous children to believe in themselves and understand their environment – for the benefit of Australia and all its people.

Bernie Shakeshaft, the founder of BackTrack Youth Works Program, is the 2020 NSW Local Hero. After seeing the plight of disadvantaged youth in his community, Bernie Shakeshaft decided to take action. Starting in 2006 with a shed and an idea, Bernie founded the BackTrack Youth Works Program, turning around the lives of some of Australia’s most vulnerable kids. Using the skills he developed growing up and as a jackaroo in the Northern Territory, learning from the Aboriginal trackers, 52-year-old Bernie has developed an award-winning program that uses animal-assisted learning, agricultural skills and a residential facility. He and his extraordinary team have helped more than 1,000 children reconnect with their education, training, families and community, offering them love and support to live out their hopes and dreams. The BackTrack program, now the subject of a documentary, Backtrack Boys, has the support of magistrates, police and mayors. It has helped decrease Armidale’s youth crime rate by more than 38 per cent, saving millions of dollars and keeping children out of correctional systems. Bernie’s kind, effective approach is life changing and inspiring.

National Australia Day Council CEO Karlie Brand congratulated the award recipients from NSW, noting their amazing contributions to our country.

“The 2020 NSW Australians of the Year are truly inspirational – they are making a huge difference to the lives of others and to the world in which we live,” said Ms Brand.

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

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PHOTOS: From the awards announcement event can be downloaded as available from australianoftheyear.org.au.

For more information on the Australian of the Year Awards visit https://www.australianoftheyear.org.au/nominate/frequently-asked-questions/