

**MEDIA RELEASE**  
**THURSDAY 24 NOVEMBER 2016**

## **FINALISTS FOR 2017 AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR AWARDS**

**Awards to be announced 25 January 2017**  
[australianoftheyear.org.au](http://australianoftheyear.org.au)

The finalists for the 2017 Australian of the Year Awards have now been announced.

The finalists for the 2017 Australian of the Year, Young Australian of the Year, Senior Australian of the Year and Australia's Local Hero have been drawn from nominations submitted by the public and recognised as State and Territory Award recipients, with the final round of State Awards announced in Brisbane last night.

National Australia Day Council CEO, Chris Kirby, said the 32 national finalists across four Award categories include educators, community volunteers, scientists, inventors, entrepreneurs and humanitarians.

"The finalists for the 2017 Australian of the Year Awards are a diverse group of people, reflecting the many ways in which people are contributing to improving our nation every day," said Mr Kirby.

"They come from country towns, from remote communities, from our suburbs and our city centres – they inspire us with their achievements, their commitment and with the difference they make to our community.

"From this extraordinary group of people will come our next Australian of the Year, Young Australian of the Year, Senior Australian of the Year and Australia's Local Hero."

The 2017 Australian of the Year Awards will be announced on 25 January 2017 in Canberra.

The national finalists for the 2017 Australian of the Year Awards are:

### **2017 AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR - FINALISTS**

Alan Tongue, NRL champion turned youth mentor and educator – ACT  
Andrea Mason, Indigenous leader and business woman of the year (2016) – NT  
Andrew Forrest, Businessman, philanthropist and anti-slavery advocate – WA  
Deng Adut, Child soldier turned successful Lawyer – NSW  
Kate Swaffer, Author and advocate for living beyond dementia – SA  
Paris Aristotle AM, Anti-torture and refugee rehabilitation advisor – VIC  
Rosalie Martin, Speech pathologist working to rehabilitate people in the Justice System – TAS  
Professor Alan Mackay-Sim, Biomolecular scientist treating spinal cord injuries – QLD

### **2017 YOUNG AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR - FINALISTS**

Abdullahi Alim, Social innovator – WA  
Arthur Alla, Reconciliation champion – NSW  
Bridie Duggan, Healthy living advocate – NT  
Heidi Prowse, Cystic Fibrosis champion – ACT  
Jason Ball, Diversity and inclusion champion – VIC  
Mitch McPherson, Suicide prevention leader – TAS  
Paul Vasileff, Fashion designer – SA  
Taj Pabari, Inventor and social entrepreneur – QLD

### **2017 SENIOR AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR - FINALISTS**

Dick Telford, Sports scientist and coach – ACT  
Dr John Knight AM, Doctor and altruist – NSW  
Lois Peeler OAM, Indigenous educator – VIC  
Margaret Steadman, Sustainable living advocate – TAS  
Patricia Buckskin, Educator – SA  
Peter Kenyon, Social entrepreneur – WA  
Professor Perry Bartlett FAA, Neuroscientist – QLD  
Sister Anne Gardiner AM, Community champion – NT

## **2017 AUSTRALIA'S LOCAL HERO - FINALISTS**

Anthony Edler, Youth worker – TAS  
Josephine Peter, Volunteer – NSW  
June Oscar AO, Anti-alcohol activist – WA  
Reginald George Heading, Agriculturist – SA  
Stasia Dabrowski OAM, Soup kitchen volunteer – ACT  
Tejinder pal Singh, Food van founder – NT  
Vicki Jellie, Community fundraiser – VIC  
Yasmin Khan, Diversity champion – QLD

Commonwealth Bank has proudly sponsored the Australian of the Year Awards for 37 years. Chief Executive Officer, Ian Narev, said it was an honour to acknowledge the finalists.

“Commonwealth Bank congratulates all the State and Territory Award recipients on becoming national finalists in the Australian of the Year Awards,” said Mr Narev.

“We are delighted to celebrate their achievements and we wish them all the best for the National Awards in January.”

The announcement of the 2017 Australian of the Year Awards will be held in the Great Hall of Parliament House, Canberra on Wednesday 25 January 2017.

The Awards announcement will be broadcast live on ABC TV, iview and Local Radio from 7:30pm AEDT. For more information on the Australian of the Year Awards visit [australianoftheyear.org.au](http://australianoftheyear.org.au)

## **ENDS.**

**Bios** of national Award finalists are [attached](#) and available from [australianoftheyear.org.au](http://australianoftheyear.org.au)

**For more information** on the Australian of the Year Awards or members of the selection panel visit [www.australianoftheyear.org.au](http://www.australianoftheyear.org.au) and <http://www.australianoftheyear.org.au/news-and-media/selection-panel-members/>

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## 2017 AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR AWARDS FINALIST BIOS BY AWARD CATEGORY

### 2017 AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR - FINALISTS

#### **Alan Tongue - NRL champion turned youth mentor and educator (ACT)**

After a stellar sporting career, Alan Tongue understands how to demand and inspire greatness in others. Since retiring from football in 2011, Alan began applying his talents to help young people at the Bimberi Youth Justice Centre make the most of the cards they'd been dealt. Alan created the Aspire program to rehabilitate young people and equip them with life skills to make positive choices. The program has since expanded to include prisoners at the Alexander Maconochie Centre, and disengaged youth in Canberra's schools. Determined to tackle family violence, Alan travels throughout the ACT and NSW to educate football players and High School students about how they can eradicate family violence, and he is partnering with Barnardos to teach young people how to build healthy and respectful relationships. A friendly face at the Early Morning Centre for homeless people, Alan regularly serves breakfast to help some of the community's most vulnerable.

#### **Andrea Mason - Indigenous leader and Business Woman of the Year, 2016 (NT)**

Working across a 350,000 square kilometre stretch of central Australia, Andrea Mason is helping Indigenous women to raise strong, healthy children. As the Chief Executive Officer of the Ngaanyatjarra, Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara Women's Council, Andrea brings together Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal thinking to create employment, support health and wellbeing, and tackle domestic violence and other social challenges. With deep respect for local language, law and culture, Andrea is leading innovative social enterprises, such as the Tjanpi Desert Weavers, building micro businesses, teaching valuable employment skills, and melding traditional healers with the best of western medicine to maximise healing and well-being. She is determined to help children and young people realise the same aspirations as their urban counterparts. A high achiever, Andrea has been awarded 2016 Telstra Australian Business Woman of the Year. She is also the first Indigenous Australian woman to have lead a political party, after the Family First Party chose her as its national leader in 2004. Today, Andrea's commitment, compassion and drive to support families in the vast NPY region is indefatigable

#### **Andrew Forrest - Philanthropist and anti-slavery advocate (WA)**

With self-made wealth, Andrew Forrest drives hands-on philanthropy, supporting Australian initiatives for some 250 community strengthening causes. He is the first Australasian to pledge to give away the overwhelming majority of his wealth. Never daunted by the scale of challenge, Andrew devotes his relentless energy to society's most vulnerable, tirelessly working to highlight Australia's Indigenous disparity and drawing attention to and liberating 45.8 million people trapped in modern slavery around the world. His highly successful Fortescue Metals Group is one of Australia's largest engagers of Aboriginal businesses and Aboriginal employees. Andrew publicly encourages 'honest failure' as key to any country's success and humility as crucial to sustainable leadership. He promotes that he failed his way to success and encourages us all to stay above the politics of small thinking. Andrew wrote 'Creating Parity' for Prime Minister and Cabinet, served on the Global Citizenship Commission to refresh the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights for the United Nations, and is widely considered as one of Australia's greatest philanthropists, business leaders and change agents.

#### **Deng Adut – Child soldier turned successful lawyer (NSW)**

At the age of six, Deng Adut was snatched from his mother and forced to fight in the war that eventually split his homeland of Sudan. Deng was eventually smuggled out of Sudan into Kenya before making it to Australia in 1998. Deng's life journey has taken him from an illiterate child soldier to a criminal lawyer making a difference in Western Sydney. His remarkable story has spread around the world and has inspired millions of people, thanks to a viral video made by his alma mater, Western Sydney University. Now studying for a second Master's degree, Deng co-founded AC Law Group and fights for members of the Sudanese community from his home in Blacktown. While his life is now a long way from the privations of his childhood, Deng inspires others with his story of triumph over tragedy, and of the contributions that refugees can make to Australia's rich community.

**Kate Swaffer - Author and advocate for living beyond dementia (SA)**

A humanitarian, advocate and activist for people with dementia, Kate Swaffer was diagnosed with the disease in 2008, just before her 50<sup>th</sup> birthday. Refusing to be defeated by the diagnosis, Kate has helped redefine the way the world views dementia and has driven improvements to services and outcomes for the 354,000 Australians currently diagnosed. Since then, Kate has completed three degrees and is currently undertaking her PhD. As Chair, CEO and Co-founder of Dementia Alliance International, Kate is a voice for the 47.5 million people worldwide living with dementia. She sits on numerous committees and councils, and was the first person with dementia to be a keynote speaker at a World Health Organisation conference. An accomplished author, Kate has written a number of books and articles, including *What the hell happened to my brain: Living beyond dementia*. By transforming tragedy into triumph, Kate is changing society for the better and showing others how to lead remarkable lives despite the obstacles.

**Paris Aristotle AM - Anti-torture and refugee rehabilitation advisor (VIC)**

A tireless advocate for refugees and asylum seekers, Paris Aristotle has made an enormous contribution by helping countless people rebuild their lives in Australia after surviving torture and trauma in their countries of origin. In 1988, Paris began building the Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture, also known as Foundation House. Now leading a team of more than 200 staff, he has helped refugees recover from unspeakable trauma, through a range of mental health, health, advocacy, educational and community services. Paris has worked closely with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in the field of refugee resettlement and has been instrumental in building a national network of torture and trauma services. For almost three decades he has advised both sides of politics on refugee and asylum seeker policy, and multicultural affairs. Currently the Chair of two federal government councils, Paris has demonstrated patience, personal integrity and practical skill as he navigates what is often an ethical and political minefield.

**Rosalie Martin - Speech pathologist working to rehabilitate people in the Justice System (TAS)**

Helping prisoners crack the code of reading, speech pathologist Rosalie Martin has developed a unique approach to literacy. For three years, Rosalie has visited Tasmania's Risdon Prison as a volunteer to deliver Just Sentences, a pilot project that is achieving astounding results. With specialist knowledge in the acquisition of language, and in the processing and production of speech sounds, Rosie is able to uncover hidden literacy problems and tackle them head on. As a result, many of the people in her program have learned to read in a matter of months, and Rosie is showing how many lives, currently on hold in prison, could be transformed.

The founding speech pathologist of Chatter Matters Tasmania – a charity building awareness and skills in human communication – Rosie also runs her own private practice specialising in services for children with autism spectrum disorder. With patience and persistence, Rosie is helping others to open new doors and explore new worlds.

**Professor Alan Mackay-Sim - Biomolecular scientist treating spinal cord injuries (QLD)**

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.

## **2017 SENIOR AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR – FINALISTS**

### **Dick Telford - Sports scientist and coach, 71 (ACT)**

Undoubtedly Australia's most dedicated marathon running coach, Dick Telford has coached distance runners to eight Commonwealth Games medals, four being gold, as well as coaching Australia's only Olympic marathon medallist, Lisa Ondieki. While his sustained coaching success has propelled him into the Sport Australia Hall of Fame, Dick's pioneering research into the 'physical literacy' of Australian children is equally deserving of a gold medal. As the director of the National Lifestyle of Our Kids Study, Dick's work has shown that quality physical education led not only to better health, but to better NAPLAN results. He's now working on a plan to implement physical literacy programs into state education systems. The first sports scientist appointed by the Australian Institute of Sport, Dick is currently a professorial fellow at the University of Canberra's Research Institute for Sport and Exercise and Adjunct Professor at the Australian National University, while volunteering endless hours to coach an elite distance running squad and Olympic marathon runners.

### **Dr John Knight AM - Doctor and altruist, 89 (NSW)**

Australia's first celebrity doctor, Dr John Knight AM has spent decades amassing a residential property portfolio that supports elderly Australians. John, also known as Dr James Wright, answered the nation's medical queries in print, radio and as a regular guest on Midday with Ray Martin for 30 years. In 1973, John and his late wife Noreen established Medi-Aid Centre Foundation, a charity that provides accommodation for the elderly, particularly those who are frail, have no family support and no home. Now at 89, John has battled through heartbreak, personal and financial loss and cancer, but he's kept buying property for Medi-Aid and now has almost 1,000 investments – including hundreds of Surfers Paradise waterfront apartments – that are rented out for a meagre sum. While John could afford to live in luxury, he chooses to live in the same un-renovated home where he raised his four children and has lived for the past 60 years.

### **Lois Peeler AM - Indigenous educator, 72 (VIC)**

A member of the Sapphires, Lois Peeler is also a political activist, passionate educator and principal at Australia's only Aboriginal girls' boarding school. Lois has worked in a range of roles in Indigenous affairs and currently chairs the Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee. At Worawa Aboriginal College in Victoria's Healesville, Lois welcomes students from some of Australia's most remote regions, many of whom have been exposed to trauma and dysfunction in their young lives. Lois oversees a holistic approach to education that brings together Aboriginal knowledge, values and pedagogy and Western academic leadership. A powerful role model for her students, staff and community, Lois instils pride and confidence in her students, and helps them gain a deep appreciation of their culture, encouraging the celebration of Aboriginal ways of knowing, doing and being. More than a principal, Lois is also an Elder of the Yorta Yorta people, with the abiding responsibility of nurturing Aboriginal culture, history and identity in an education framework.

### **Margaret Steadman - Sustainable living advocate, 72 (TAS)**

A climate and sustainable living advocate, Margaret Steadman finds practical solutions to many of our most challenging conundrums. While executive officer of Sustainable Living Tasmania, Margaret helped people understand the small steps that can make a big difference to the environment – from embracing energy efficiency to considering low-carbon footprint end of life options. A founding member of Climate Action Hobart and the West Hobart Environment Network, and a Council member of the Australian Conservation Foundation, Margaret has worked to influence the development of a climate action plan for the Tasmanian Government. She was the Hobart coordinator for the global People's Climate March in the lead-up to the 2015 Paris Climate Summit, and has organised local lobbying of banks to divest of climate-damaging investments. Margaret has led community initiatives from fire-ready forums to sustainable transport working groups. She also volunteers in the Migrant Resource Centre's refugee program and the Source Community Wholefoods Co-op. Quietly determined but never confrontational, Margaret works hard for people and planet.

**Patricia Buckskin – Educator, 67 (SA)**

A proud Narrunga Kurna woman, Patricia Buckskin grew up in a family of eight children in South Australia's Riverland. Her lifelong passion for Aboriginal education was sparked in 1972, when she was appointed to Mansfield Park Primary School as its first Aboriginal teacher aide. In 1987, following the formation of the South Australian Aboriginal Education Unit, Pat was appointed as the first Aboriginal state manager of aboriginal education workers – a position she held until her retirement in 2009. A strong advocate and sounding board for many, Pat drove the development of the first culturally-based education award in Australia, led committees and was instrumental in setting up the Kurna Plains Aboriginal School – the first public Aboriginal school established in an urban setting in Australia. After decades spent encouraging Aboriginal parents to have a voice in their children's schooling, Pat continues to contribute by working tirelessly on committees and councils to ensure all children have access to quality, enriching education.

**Peter Kenyon - Social entrepreneur, 65 (WA)**

A community enthusiast and social entrepreneur, Peter Kenyon has worked with more than 1,600 communities in Australia and 59 overseas to stimulate economic renewal. Motivated by the desire to create healthy, inclusive and enterprising local economies, in 1989 Peter started Bank of I.D.E.A.S (Initiatives for the Development of Enterprising Action and Strategies). Since then, he's helped communities spark their own ideas and invest in themselves to build a sustainable future. He's worked with communities to build economic strategies in locations as far flung as Kuwait and Kakadu, Somalia and Subiaco. A keen author, Peter has written 16 books on community and economic development, youth policy and enterprise. A master communicator, he is a sought-after presenter and speaker, and tirelessly supports other international thought leaders in the pursuit of community activation. Peter's passion and purpose has seen him traverse the globe over 35 years in his relentless ambition to enable communities to discover their strengths and transform themselves.

**Professor Perry Bartlett – Neuroscientist, 69 (QLD)**

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.

**Sister Anne Gardiner AM - Community champion, 85 (NT)**

As a 22-year-old member of the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, Sister Anne Gardiner was asked to move to Bathurst Island to live among the Tiwi people. In the 62 years since, Sr Anne has devoted her life to enriching community, enhancing opportunity and supporting the Tiwi culture. An advocate of peace, love and the traditional Tiwi way of life, Sr Anne has worked tirelessly to document and preserve the Tiwi language for future generations. The Principal of the local primary school, Sr Anne has educated generations of children while also establishing community clubs, from mothers' groups to Little Athletics. She runs regular prayer meetings, founded an op shop and established a café to raise funds to support her much-loved community. Sr Anne's museum shares valuable stories and traditional customs, while also bringing financial benefit to the people. The cornerstone of the community, Sr Anne has earned an enduring place in the hearts of the Tiwi people.

## **2017 YOUNG AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR– FINALISTS**

### **Abdullahi Alim - Social innovator, 24 (WA)**

He graduated from his honours degree in finance last year, but Abdullahi Alim has already co-founded an innovation lab to solve issues of contemporary concern. Abdullahi came to Australia as a Somali refugee at the age of five. At 24, he is pursuing studies through Stanford University. Now, through the Lighthouse Strategy, Abdullahi runs 'hackathons' – fast-paced and intense exercises that bring bright young innovators together to develop solutions to global challenges. Abdullahi's approach has attracted partners from the Australian Government to Google and the US Department of State. For example, MYHACK, an anti-extremism hackathon he coordinates, has seen young Australians create cutting-edge digital solutions to undermine the influence and pervasive appeal of violent extremist propaganda. Abdullahi's goal is to create hubs or 'lighthouses' around the world to promote social impact and youth entrepreneurship. He's set his sights on innovation challenges to empower more young Australians to solve international issues including the global refugee crisis and Indigenous disadvantage in the West.

### **Arthur Alla - Reconciliation champion, 27 (NSW)**

While volunteering for a year in Cape York, Arthur Alla listened to the wisdom of Aboriginal elders and wanted other young people to gain the same opportunity. So in 2011, Arthur set up Red Earth, an organisation that gives Indigenous Australians from remote homelands a way to host young people from the city. For two weeks, high school students live with traditional owners and local kids, volunteering on projects and learning about the world's oldest enduring culture. Arthur's work is deeply rooted in reconciliation: elders show their country with pride, telling their stories with their own voice, and choosing the projects that will add the most value to their homelands. Aboriginal children make friends and gain insights into life in the city, while visiting high school students open their hearts to first Australians. Arthur's work has connected 1,100 students who have contributed 25,000 hours to projects and raised more than half a million dollars for communities.

### **Bridie Duggan - Healthy living advocate, 24 (NT)**

Shocked by the suicide of a close friend in her hometown of Katherine, Bridie Duggan decided to take action. Setting herself an extreme challenge, Bridie travelled around Darwin each day for a month, and raised \$27,000 for the Livin Foundation in the process. Determined to raise awareness and funds to support the one in four Australians who will suffer from mental illness during their lives, Bridie wants others to know that speaking up and out is not weak. A qualified life coach and personal trainer, with a degree in exercise and sports science, Bridie inspires people to strive for healthy mind, body and spirit. She devotes countless volunteer hours to her community – helping people to lose weight and gain self-esteem, volunteering as a strapper for football clubs of all codes, and instructing fitness classes for children with autism. With a reputation as superwoman within her community, Bridie draws on an endless supply of energy to encourage others.

### **Heidi Prowse - Cystic Fibrosis champion, 29 (ACT)**

When the man she loved told her he had cystic fibrosis, Heidi Prowse didn't shy away. Instead, Heidi put her positive attitude and problem-solving skills to great use, volunteering for Cystic Fibrosis ACT, and, together with husband Andrew, organised the inaugural Santa Speedo Shuffle. The event, which started with seven friends braving chilly conditions to circle Lake Burley Griffin in speedos and Santa hats, has collected \$360,000 in just four years. In 2016, a record 101 people participated, with funds raised providing practical support services, such as equipment, nutritional supplements and sport and recreation grants. Today, as the organisation's Executive Officer, Heidi divides her time between administration, fundraising and meeting with families and medical staff. A woman of enormous capacity, tenacity and integrity, Heidi supports parents of newborns diagnosed with CF and consoles those suffering. Learning first-hand the debilitating effects of CF, Heidi is determined to make a difference to people living with this chronic genetic condition.

### **Jason Ball - Diversity and inclusion champion, 28 (VIC)**

When he came out in 2012, Australian Rules player Jason Ball was surprised by the splash his announcement made, as he was a country player at the time. With no openly gay players at the elite AFL level coming out in the male-dominated team sport, Jason's story captured the media's attention and the public's imagination. While Jason was met with overwhelming support, his personal story shone a light on the prevalence of homophobia in sport. Since then, Jason has marched in Pride March Victoria alongside his teammates from the Yarra Glen Football Club. He kick-started the Pride Cup – an event that celebrates diversity and inclusion in sport and which was the inspiration for the AFL's Pride Game between St Kilda and Sydney. He's trained AFL draftees on inclusive language, and has represented beyondblue and the Safe Schools Coalition Australia, speaking at schools, sporting clubs and conferences about mental health and inclusion. With tremendous courage and conviction, Jason has elevated the conversation about homophobia in sport.

### **Mitch McPherson - Suicide prevention leader, 29 (TAS)**

When his younger brother took his own life in 2013, Mitch McPherson turned his devastating loss into a successful suicide prevention charity. Mitch has channelled his energy and ideas into SPEAK UP! Stay ChatTY, which honours his brother Ty and spreads the message that it's OK to not be OK. Starting with bumper stickers, Mitch has since raised more than \$250,000 through running events, golf days and gala balls. He has more than 19,800 followers on Facebook, and has spoken to more than 300 school groups, workplaces and sporting clubs to help people understand that nothing is so bad that it can't be shared. Now working full-time as a youth suicide prevention project officer with Relationships Australia Tasmania, Mitch's vision is that SPEAK UP! Stay ChatTY will become a national charity. Demonstrating personal resilience, care for others, and a deep understanding of how to turn adversity into opportunity, Mitch has personally helped hundreds of Tasmanian students and families.

### **Paul Vasileff - Fashion designer, 26 (SA)**

With a passion for fashion, Paul Vasileff stitched his first dress at the tender age of 11, created countless formal dresses for friends in his teens and was just 16 when he showcased his first fashion collection. The young boy who learnt to sew with his grandmother graduated from Milan's prestigious Europeo Istituto di Design and is now the brains behind couture label Paolo Sebastian. At just 26, this down-to-earth designer operates a growing business in Adelaide with thirteen staff. Paul's luxurious hand-made creations are favourites on the world's runways, are stocked in boutiques in New York and around the globe, and are worn by celebrities walking the red carpet at the Oscars and Logies. Determined to create a local brand, all Paul's designs are stitched in South Australia, and he has proven that there's no need to relocate to succeed in the high-octane world of fashion. Paul's recipe for success? Perfectionism, stubbornness and an enduring belief that there's no place like home.

### **Taj Pabari - Social entrepreneur, 17 (QLD)**

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.

## **2017 AUSTRALIA'S LOCAL HERO - FINALISTS**

### **Anthony Edler – Youth worker (TAS)**

A community leader and positive role model, Anthony Edler is driving a program that helps disadvantaged and at-risk young people in his community, while also expanding the possibilities for people in Namibia. The program coordinator of the Risdon Vale Bike Collective, Ant combines his knowledge and skills of mountain biking and youth work to help young people fix broken-down bikes while developing life and employment skills and making a positive contribution to society. Over the years the bikes have either been given away or sold to fund community projects – an upgrade to the local BMX track and the development of bush trails among them. Since Ant kick-started the program, more than 440 bikes have been repaired and donated to people in Namibia, creating jobs, helping children get to school and supporting nurses to care for the sick. With patience and passion, Ant has built links with funding bodies and businesses, schools and charities. He's helped young kids gain support and confidence, as well as the satisfaction of giving to others in need.

### **Josephine Peter – Volunteer (NSW)**

Seven decades of volunteer work began in 1940, when seven-year-old Josephine Peter knitted her first pair of socks for Australia's troops. Over the course of World War II, Josephine made 450 pairs of socks, starting a lifetime of dedication to others. Since then, she's been a stalwart on parents' committees and arts societies. She's handed out how to vote cards at elections for 54 years. She sat on the board of Broken Hill's Robinson College for 25 years, with seven years as president, and she was a volunteer tutor for more than a decade. She's listened to people's problems as a telephone counsellor, coordinated 22 debutante balls for Rotary and has supported the VIEW Club and Smith Family for 27 years. She's driven thousands of kilometres in car rallies to raise funds for kidney health and to build a children's cemetery in her hometown. At 83 years of age, Josephine's volunteer efforts have not diminished, and her influence on the community of Broken Hill is unmatched.

### **June Oscar AO - Anti-alcohol activist (WA)**

A senior Bunuba woman from Fitzroy Crossing, June Oscar upset businesses and even members of her own extended family when she began the tough work of securing alcohol restrictions in her community in 2007. But those restrictions acted as a circuit-breaker for a town in crisis. Frequent alcohol-fuelled violence and suicide had cast a shadow over Fitzroy Crossing in the Kimberley when June enlisted the support of West Australian Police Commissioner Karl O'Callaghan to lobby for a ban on full-strength takeaway alcohol. Since then, June has overseen the nation's first study of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD), discovering what many suspected: that her community has one of the highest rates of permanent brain damage from maternal alcohol abuse in the world. With remarkable strength and an extraordinary commitment to collaboration, June has brought about constructive discussion between often conflicting groups to support Indigenous families affected by FASD, and to build a safe and healthy future for the generations ahead of her.

### **Reginald George Heading – Agriculturalist (SA)**

Few people can claim to have coined a phrase, but Reginald George Heading can. In 1976, George was involved with air freighting hundreds of stud dairy cattle to India after they were gifted by the Australian Government to aid herd improvement. George reported to the media that the Friesians travelled "cattle class" – creating the well-worn phrase that jetsetters know today. During his long career, George spent 25 years working in Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Oman, Bahrain and Bhutan to equip local farmers with technical and practical knowledge, helping them apply modern Australian dryland farming techniques to improve the sustainability of their pastures and the health of their livestock. He has lectured at colleges and universities around the world, making a tremendous impact on the viability of entire industries. George has also given his time in service to local community organisations around South Australia. He's planted football ovals in Whyalla, established bowls clubs in Port Germein and rolled up his sleeves for the Rotary Club in Port Pirie.

### **Stasia Dabrowski OAM - Soup kitchen volunteer (ACT)**

Best known as the 'soup kitchen lady', Stasia Dabrowski has been serving Canberra's neediest for nearly four decades. Despite passing the 90-year milestone, Stasia shows no signs of slowing down. Born in 1926 in Poland, Stasia's family lost everything during World War II. Arriving in Canberra in 1964 with her husband and young family, Stasia remembered her own experiences when her teenage son came home talking about a homeless family needing food. They cooked pizzas for them and that began the helping of others. Stasia is up at 5am six days each week, driving her van around Canberra to collect donated food from companies, then distributes it. Stasia runs a mobile soup kitchen in Civic – something she's done relentlessly, rain, hail or shine since 1979. She peels and cooks 180 kilograms of vegetables Thursday nights, feeding up to 500 people on a busy Friday night. A Canberra icon, Stasia gives not only food, but love, kindness and compassion to all.

### **Tejinder pal Singh - Food van founder (NT)**

For the past four years, Tejinder pal Singh has dedicated the last Sunday of each month to feeding poor and needy locals of northern Darwin. After a gruelling 12-hour shift driving a taxi, Tejinder spends five hours cooking up a storm in his kitchen, preparing 80 kilograms of vegetarian curry and rice, which he then serves as a free lunch. After arriving from the Punjab region with his family in 2006, Tejinder endured a racist tirade of abuse while transporting a passenger which inspired the humble man to break down the negative prejudice associated with turbans. Funding the feast each month from his own pocket, Tejinder attributes his generosity to his deep Sikh faith. His work has inspired three other groups to take up the cause to distribute free food to the homeless on Sundays. And the hungry and thirsty come flocking when they see Tejinder's van, emblazoned with the sign "free Indian food for hungry and needy people."

### **Vicki Jellie - Community fundraiser (VIC)**

After her husband Peter died of cancer in 2008, Vicki Jellie found his plans for a local cancer fundraising event. His dream had been to bring radiotherapy services to the South West of Victoria. During treatment, Peter spent weeks away from home in Warrnambool, travelling to Melbourne for radiotherapy treatment. Peter's dream became Vicki's passion. In 2009, Vicki brought together local leaders to initiate Peter's Project – a community group dedicated to fighting for better cancer services. Despite being told that a cancer centre in Warrnambool would "never happen", Vicki relentlessly lobbied governments, rallying the community and raising funds. In May 2014, Vicki announced that the dream had been achieved: \$5 million raised by the local community, \$25 million to be funded by state and federal governments. In July 2016, the new South West Regional Cancer Centre opened, offering radiotherapy treatment for regional patients. Vicki's persistence has proven that 'nothing is impossible' and will continue to support "all the Peters" who are facing their own cancer battles.

### **Yasmin Khan – Diversity champion (QLD)**

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.

