

## MEDIA RELEASE

WEDNESDAY 25 OCTOBER 2023

### 2024 AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR AWARD NOMINEES FOR NORTHERN TERRITORY ANNOUNCED

Australian music legends, educators, community leaders, an ecologist and a 17-year-old medical student are among nominees for the 2024 Australian of the Year Awards for the Northern Territory.

The 2024 award nominees are:

#### 2024 Australian of the Year for the Northern Territory

Professor Alan Andersen - Ecologist and science communicator (Darwin)  
Sammy Butcher - Musician, composer, teacher and elder (Papunya)  
Benjamin Graetz - LGBTIQ+ advocate, leader and performing artist (Darwin)  
Blair McFarland - Founder, Central Australian Youth Link-Up Service (Alice Springs)

#### 2024 Senior Australian of the Year for the Northern Territory

Leony Bowey - Founding member, Multicultural Community Services of Central Australia (Alice Springs)  
Elizabeth Hart - Community fundraiser and volunteer (Katherine)  
Associate Professor Elaine L̄awurrpa Maypilama - Researcher, educator & co-founder, Yalu Aboriginal Corporation (Elcho Island)  
Yalmay Yunupingu - Teacher, linguist and community leader (Yirrkala)

#### 2024 Young Australian of the Year for the Northern Territory

Jordon Humphreys - Youth, disability, mental health and anti-bullying advocate (Alice Springs)  
Amy James - Singer, songwriter and disability advocate (Tennant Creek)  
Leela Kruger - Engagement officer, Gillen Primary School (Alice Springs)  
Peter Susanto - Medical student and community volunteer (Rapid Creek, Darwin)

#### 2024 Local Hero for the Northern Territory

Deborah Jones - Founder, Clubhouse Territory (Darwin)  
Witiyana Marika - Musician and filmmaker (Yirrkala)  
Ben Poveda-Alfonso - Co-founder, Kindness Shake (Darwin)  
Dr Mark de Souza - Chair, Sustainable Healthcare Committee (Top End Region) (Darwin)

*[\\*see detailed bios on following pages](#)*

The Northern Territory nominees are among 133 people being recognised across all states and territories.

The NT award recipients will be announced on Monday 6 November 2023 in a ceremony at the Darwin Convention Centre, which will also be available to watch online at [australianoftheyear.org.au](http://australianoftheyear.org.au).

They will then join the other state and territory recipients as national finalists for the national awards announcement on Thursday 25 January 2024 in Canberra.

National Australia Day Council CEO Mark Fraser AO CVO congratulated the Northern Territory nominees on their recognition.

“The nominees for the Northern Territory awards are passionate contributors to community and leaders who carve a path so others can also benefit,” said Mark.

“They are all great Territorians doing extraordinary things.”

**ENDS.**

Nominee [bios on the following pages](#) and can also be viewed from [australianoftheyear.org.au](http://australianoftheyear.org.au).

Nominee [photos can be downloaded](#) from this link: [NT Nominee Photos](#)

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## **2024 AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR FOR THE NORTHERN TERRITORY – NOMINEE BIOS**

### **Professor Alan Andersen**

Ecologist and science communicator

A world-leading ant community ecologist, Professor Alan Andersen's scientific and community endeavours in the Northern Territory have benefitted the land and its people.

Ants are considered key bioindicators of ecological change. That's why Alan's research has proved vital to understanding the effects of disturbances such as mining, burning, invasive species and climate change.

Alan's expertise has created a better understanding of the territory's biodiversity assets, improved management of fire and invasive species, deepened Indigenous engagement in land and water management, and helped develop economic opportunities in the emerging carbon economy.

The 66-year-old professor is also an engaging speaker with the gift of explaining complex science to laypeople. He frequently attends conferences, sits on advisory panels and speaks to the media.

Alan is the first Fellow of the Australian Academy of Science from the Northern Territory, the author of five books and over 260 scientific publications, and has over 20,000 career citations.

### **Sammy Butcher**

Musician, composer, teacher and elder

For 40 years, Sammy Butcher has used music to show how dedication and love of community can bring people of all cultures together.

Sammy, an elder in the Papunya community, was a founding member of the groundbreaking Warumpi Band, which brought the songs and issues of the members' homeland to global audiences. He also founded Papunya Recording Studio and still works there today.

A particular focus for Sammy over his life has been preventing suicide and substance abuse among young people.

The Pitjantjatjara/Luritja/Warlpiri musician has spent decades teaching and encouraging the young people of central Australian communities to play, record and tour their music as a way to connect with their culture and find confidence in their own voices.

Sammy has quietly fostered hope, pride and confidence in generations of young and at-risk people. And through this work, the 61-year-old's contribution to greater understanding and reconciliation has been immensely significant.

### **Benjamin Graetz**

LGBTIQ+ advocate, leader and performing artist

Benjamin (Ben) Graetz is a trailblazer in the performing arts, First Nations and LGBTIQ+ communities. A multiskilled performer and leader, Ben's work has amplified often-unheard voices – particularly those of the First Nations LGBTIQ+ community.

As a queer Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child in 1970s Darwin, life wasn't easy. But Ben found where he belonged when he followed his creative dreams to study in Western Australia and then Sydney, where he first performed in drag as Miss Ellaneous when he was 25.

Since those early days, 46-year-old Ben has become an icon of Australia's First Nations and LGBTIQ+ arts scene. He started the First Nations arts festival 'Garmalang' and drag competition 'Miss First Nation'. He was the first Indigenous creative director of Sydney WorldPride and founded BRG Productions, a 100 per cent Indigenous-owned performance services business.

Ben's work has not only raised the profile of Australian First Nations queer performers around the world but has forged pathways for future talent and stories.

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**Blair McFarland**

Founder, Central Australian Youth Link-Up Service

Blair McFarland has spent decades fighting to improve the health and lives of some of the most disadvantaged youth in Australia.

Blair moved to Central Australia in 1986, and over the next two decades he gained a deep understanding of the lives of Indigenous people in the region. The petrol-sniffing epidemic of the 90s caused him to set up Central Australian Youth Link-Up Service (CAYLUS) in 2002.

CAYLUS was instrumental in developing youth programs, orchestrating the roll-out of Low Aromatic Fuel (LAF, or Opal) and implementing the Federal Low Aromatic Fuel Act. The combination of these activities resulted in a 95 per cent reduction in volatile substance misuse.

Now 66, Blair's passion and commitment to Central Australia is reflected in his participation in politics, advocacy, local radio and community services. In 2008, he received the Prime Minister's Award for Outstanding Contribution in Drug & Alcohol Endeavours by the Australian National Council on Drugs.

**2024 SENIOR AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR FOR THE NORTHERN TERRITORY – NOMINEE BIOS****Leony Bowey**

Founding member, Multicultural Community Services of Central Australia

For more than 40 years, 69-year-old Leony Bowey has shared her heart of gold with newcomers to Alice Springs from around the world.

As a long-time volunteer with the Migrant Resource Centre, now the Multicultural Community Services of Central Australia, Leony has provided practical assistance and social connection for people far from their homeland and family.

Leony grew up in the Philippines and came to Alice Springs with her husband in 1984. She saw a need to help other female migrants feel less isolated, especially those looking after children who were missing their extended families and the bustle of a big city. She and others started a multicultural playgroup, then a women's group, dance and craft groups before the incorporation of the existing Migrant Resource Centre in 1992.

Leony's decades of care and support for Alice Springs' vibrant community was recognised in 2023 when she was named Centralian Citizen of the Year.

**Elizabeth Hart**

Community fundraiser and volunteer

For 13 years, Elizabeth (Bess) Hart has been an amazing support for community fundraising in Katherine. Her annual Newhaven Biggest Morning Tea for Cancer Council NT is a high point in the town's calendar. She started off inviting family and neighbours, then it grew. Over 13 years of morning teas, she's raised a total of \$103,000.

Bess has always done whatever she can to help others. As well as fundraising for cancer research, she's assisted Rural Aid to support farmers doing it tough. She is also active with the Salvation Army and the National Trust.

Bess and her late husband, Ted, moved to Katherine's outskirts in 2008, after they sold Hodgson River cattle station, their home of 35 years.

These days she's a local, regularly entering her cooking in the Katherine Show, and wouldn't live anywhere else. It's the community spirit in Katherine that motivates 81-year-old Bess to keep giving back.

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### **Associate Professor Elaine L̄awurrpa Maypilama**

Researcher, educator and co-founder, Yalu Aboriginal Corporation

Working between cultures is challenging, but Associate Professor Elaine L̄awurrpa Maypilama has a rare ability to navigate this space to the benefit of her Yolngu community.

A researcher and educator, 70-year-old Elaine has been involved with Charles Darwin University and Menzies School of Health for more than 20 years. She's skilfully guided non-Indigenous researchers to engage with Yolngu for a positive exchange of knowledge. In 2013, Charles Darwin University awarded her an Honorary Doctorate.

Elaine connects to Yirrkala lands through her mother, and Galiwin'ku on Elcho Island through her father's family. In 2002, she helped set up Yalu Marnngithinyaraw Indigenous Corporation, now the Yalu Aboriginal Corporation, as a research hub in Galiwin'ku to support health research and deliver community education. Its traditionally appropriate social programs have become central to lifting Yolngu wellbeing.

Elaine continues to work on projects that positively impact her people through the core values of harmony, sharing and respect.

### **Yalmay Yunupingu**

Teacher, linguist and community leader

Gentle, generous and funny – Yalmay Yunupingu touches many lives in north-east Arnhem Land. As a teacher and linguist, she guided teaching at Yirrkala Bilingual School for four decades, retiring in March 2023.

Often called the mother of the school, Yalmay started by translating Dr Seuss books at the community library into her local Yolngu Matha language. She qualified as a teacher and, with her husband (of Yothu Yindi fame), forged a bilingual teaching approach to make young people strong in their Yolngu language and culture.

A respected elder, 67-year-old Yalmay is in constant demand for consultations, projects and her traditional healing work. She helps everyone, always with a smile on her face.

In 2005, she was awarded a 'Teacher of Excellence' by the Northern Territory Department of Education and was an Honorary University Fellow at the Charles Darwin University. Since retiring, she has been teaching the next generation about traditional healing.

## **2024 YOUNG AUSTRALIAN OF THE YEAR FOR THE NORTHERN TERRITORY – NOMINEE BIOS**

### **Jordon Humphreys**

Youth, disability, mental health and anti-bullying advocate

The workload of completing Year 12 at St Philip's College in Alice Springs didn't stop Jordon Humphreys from advocating for young people across the Northern Territory. The 18-year-old has used his own experience of living with a disability and being bullied to improve life for others.

His advocacy is already being heard at the highest levels. In 2022, he was a member of the NT Youth Round Table and co-chaired the project reference group for the Northern Territory Youth Strategy. In 2023, he took up a youth advisory role with Alice Springs Town Council to make sure youth concerns were properly considered.

Jordon's main goal is to provide more opportunities for youth in his community, and in 2023 he was named Centralian Young Citizen of the Year.

He has encouraged other students to join forums to make their voices heard and is endlessly optimistic that change can happen.

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**Amy James**

Singer, songwriter and disability advocate

Amy James is a proud Warumungu woman living with cerebral palsy and investing her huge heart and endless enthusiasm in connecting people, changing perspectives and making the Barkly region better for all.

As a disability advocate, educator and singer/songwriter, Amy is 'famous' for literally leading the parade. Most people in Tennant Creek recognise her face from events including the Do It For Dolly anti-bullying campaign, RU OK Day and International Women's Day celebrations.

She also makes 'quieter' contributions to Women With Disabilities Australia, the Northern Territory's Disability Advisory Committee, and Tennant Creek Transport Inc. She takes part in many information-gathering sessions, including those convened by the NDIS and Department of Social Services.

Amy always speaks up for what she believes to be fair, honest and supportive to and for her community. In 2023, 26-year-old Amy won the prestigious Somerville Community Service Award at the Northern Territory Young Achiever Awards.

**Leela Kruger**

Engagement officer, Gillen Primary School

Leela Kruger is a champion of education and health for young people in Alice Springs. As a school-based engagement officer at Gillen Primary School since 2021, she is helping turn around a decline in attendance and giving youngsters more opportunities to grow.

Leela's commitment to families from socially diverse communities – and belief that young Aboriginal people need and deserve quality education – has made her a role model. She aims to understand children's barriers to engaging with school and to build links between the school and their families.

As a champion of Learning on Country, Leela's calm, culturally safe approach has assisted many children to become happy school attendees.

In 2023, Leela was named the Northern Territory Young Achiever of the Year and also took home the Northern Territory Government Young Aboriginal Educator Award. The 30-year-old is dedicated to her community, embracing every opportunity to learn, and strives to assist anyone she can.

**Peter Susanto**

Medical student and community volunteer

When he was two years old, Peter Susanto astounded his parents by translating words from Bahasa Indonesia into English. In 2022, he started a medical degree at Charles Darwin University, aged just 15.

Peter's intelligence is phenomenal and he's proudly represented the Northern Territory at many competitions. At age 12, he won a second place in the RoboCup National in Melbourne, competing against Year 11 and 12 students. He was also the first Territorian to represent Australia in the International Brain Bee Olympiad, a competition about the brain and neuroscience, and came third in the world.

Peter has a generous spirit and love for his community. Since 2015, he and his sister, Eva, have sold Indonesian snacks at Nightcliff foreshore to raise money for charities, including The Fred Hollows Foundation and Indonesian orphanages. Peter, who turns 17 this week, also volunteers with several community groups and is an active member of the Nightcliff Swimming Club.

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## **2024 LOCAL HERO FOR THE NORTHERN TERRITORY – NOMINEE BIOS**

### **Deborah Jones**

Founder, Clubhouse Territory

Deborah (Deb) Jones (61) originally created Clubhouse Territory in 2013 so she could make sure everyone, regardless of ability, could play sport. That goal quickly evolved into encouraging people from all walks of life to participate and get involved in all aspects of a community.

Clubhouse Territory's community events and projects promote and educate locals on inclusion, and aim to get participants moving and creating in the world around them.

Today, Clubhouse Territory has a reputation for being a primary advocate and supporter for inclusion in the Northern Territory. The not-for-profit's programs, recently opened to NDIS participants, are based on five themes: sports participation, the arts, health, education and social inclusion. Events include the 'Be-Inclusive Games', 'A Day in the Life Workshops' and the 'All-Abilities Come-N-Try' program. About 4000 attendees participate each year.

Clubhouse Territory won the Zip Print Sports in the Community Award at the Northern Territory Community Achievement Awards in 2022.

### **Witiyana Marika**

Musician and filmmaker

Witiyana Marika has lived his life celebrating and teaching his culture. The 62-year-old Rirratjingu (Yolngu) elder is best known as one of the founding members of famous rock band, Yothu Yindi. Witiyana is also celebrated for his acting roles, other musical projects, cross-cultural education and being a leader of his people.

Most recently, Witiyana was the senior cultural advisor to the film *High Ground*, which he also co-produced and starred in. Although the movie's story is fictional, its roots are fact and portray the stories of the massacres of Indigenous people. Witiyana's involvement in the film reflects his strong belief in truth telling and sharing Indigenous and Australian colonial history.

A senior Dirritay and Dhalgarra (ceremonial leader) and a teacher of songlines and ceremonies for his clan, Witiyana is known for being generous and inclusive with his cultural knowledge and continuing the practice of Yolngu Nation Cycle and Rom (lore).

### **Ben Poveda-Alfonso**

Co-founder, Kindness Shake

An advocate for international education, empowering young people and multiculturalism, 31-year-old Ben Poveda-Alfonso is the co-founder of the award-winning not-for-profit, Kindness Shake.

Kindness Shake, created during the Covid-19 pandemic, is Darwin's first NGO to focus on supporting international students and temporary visa holders. Not limited to those experiencing financial difficulty, the charity also offers social engagement and wellbeing support, providing meals, employability workshops, wellbeing programs and social events. In just a few years, it's helped thousands of people, recruited hundreds of volunteers and raised over \$400,000.

Also a senior policy officer with the NT Government's Office of Youth Affairs, Ben speaks at events to motivate young newcomers to Australia. His achievements are remarkable given that he is a relatively new Australian citizen and spoke no English when he first arrived from Colombia in 2015.

Ben has been recognised with several awards, including the 2021 Minister for Youth Excellence in Youth Leadership Award.

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**Dr Mark de Souza**

Chair, Sustainable Healthcare Committee (Top End Region)

A specialist emergency physician at Royal Darwin Hospital (RDH), 50-year-old Dr Mark de Souza has dedicated personal funds, time and effort to green the RDH campus for the benefit of both people and wildlife.

It began five years ago. Mark realised that climate change was taking a noticeable toll on locals – and that RDH, a concrete building, could feel uncomfortable and unwelcoming. So, he bought some trees and grabbed a shovel.

Mark's guerilla gardening inspired the RDH executive and a sizable army of volunteers. Local Larrakia Indigenous elders and knowledge holders were asked to choose plants of significance. And the RDH Greening Project was officially born.

Today, the project has planted over 980 native plants and created cooling, restorative spaces for staff, patients and visitors – including native animals and birds.

Mark also initiated and chairs the Sustainable Healthcare Committee (Top End Region), which advises NT Health on opportunities for sustainability in healthcare.

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