



CITY OF PARRAMATTA CITIZEN OF THE YEAR AWARDS CEREMONY

OFFICIAL PROGRAM

Thursday 25 January 2024

Parramatta Park



| **PARRAMATTA**



WARAMI

Welcome to Burramatta, Dharug Land. Warami is a Dharug word meaning 'Good to see you'.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

City of Parramatta recognises the Dharug People as First Australians, peoples of the oldest continuous living culture in the world.

For more than 60,000 years, Parramatta has been home to the Baramadagal and Dharug peoples, the traditional custodians of the land we call the City of Parramatta today. The Baramadagal and Dharug peoples have cared for and nurtured the habitat, land, and waters for thousands of generations, and maintain an ongoing connection to Parramatta and its surrounding areas. Evidence of their presence is found in Parramatta Park, along The Crescent's ridge line and Domain Creek.

As a community, we can learn from the resilience and community spirit of First Nations people to best ensure a sustainable City for all. Parramatta has always been an important meeting place for our First Nations people, particularly the Parramatta River, which has provided life and vitality since the beginning of time (The Dreaming).

The name Parramatta is derived from the word Baramada/Burramatta or 'place where the eels lie down'

(breeding location for eels within the Parramatta River). City of Parramatta recognises the significance of this area for all First Nations people as a site of early contact between the First Australians and European Colonists, and Parramatta remains an important meeting place for the First Nations community.

First Nations people continue to play a vital role in the ecological, economic, social and cultural life of Parramatta, while maintaining a distinct culture built on the principles of Caring for Country, the primacy of family, and the dignity and governance of Elders.

At City of Parramatta, we aspire to a future where the cultures, histories and rights of all First Nations people are understood, recognised, and respected by all Australians. City of Parramatta is committed to playing an active role in making this future a reality. City of Parramatta is proud to acknowledge the ongoing stewardship of Country by Dharug and other First Nations people and to celebrate their enduring wisdom, strength, and resilience.



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LORD MAYOR'S MESSAGE COUNCILLOR PIERRE ESBER

Welcome to this year's Citizen of the Year Awards. We are here to recognise outstanding achievements in our community and to thank you for your valuable contributions.

As the Lord Mayor of Parramatta, I am extremely proud of all our nominees. Our City pays tribute to all of you for your outstanding work in making Parramatta the best place to live, work, study and visit.

At a time when many people are doing it tough, I commend your commitment to giving back to the community and serving neighbours, colleagues, friends and family

in the City of Parramatta. Your community service to the City of Parramatta is a genuine gift that lasts a lifetime.

I congratulate our outstanding citizens who are receiving an award today. Thank you for all that you do.

Cr Pierre Esber
Lord Mayor
City of Parramatta

AUSTRALIA DAY AMBASSADOR PROFESSOR VEENA SAHAJWALLA

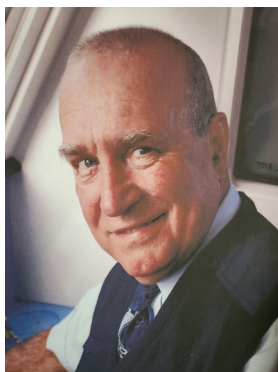
Internationally acclaimed materials scientist and engineer, Professor Veena Sahajwalla, is transforming recycling science at the UNSW Sustainable Materials Research and Technology Centre. As the Founding Director, she pioneered green materials production through high-temperature waste transformation. Notably, her groundbreaking invention, polymer injection technology or 'green steel,' uses recycled tyres in steel manufacturing. Veena introduced the world's first e-waste MICROfactorie™ in 2018 and later launched plastics and Green Ceramics MICROfactories™ in 2019, marking a recycling technology

breakthrough. Leading the ARC Industrial Transformation Research Hub for 'microrecycling,' she collaborates with industries to translate recycling science into tangible environmental and economic benefits. Hub leader for NESP Sustainable Communities and Waste Hub, Veena earned recognition as the 2022 NSW Australian of the Year and won prestigious awards, including the 2022 Australian Museum Eureka Prizes and ATSE Clunies Ross Innovation Award in 2022. In 2023, she received the Chemical Engineer Achievement Award for Engineering Australia and the Women in Design Award for Australian Good Design Awards.





WELCOME TO COUNTRY



Welcome to Country is a speech delivered by an Aboriginal Elder of the land we meet on, and is a sign of respect to acknowledge the traditional owners past, present and future. It is common protocol that a First Nations Custodian performs the Welcome to Country for businesses, local governments, conferences and forums, official openings and ceremonies, and other events.

The Welcome to Country enables Traditional Custodians to give their blessing and welcome everyone to their country.

Tonight's Welcome to Country is conducted by Dharug Elder, Uncle Bruce Gale.

Uncle Bruce Gale is widely respected by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal members of the community and has been a voice for his community through many committees and initiatives. Uncle Bruce was chairperson of City of Parramatta Council's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Committee for 14 years, and a committee member for 17 years. He was Secretary of the Sydney Region Aboriginal Legal Service for 10 years; a committee member of RailCorp Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Committee for 14 years and chairman for 4 years; and a board member of the (IDAS) Indigenous Disability Advocacy Service. Today, Uncle Bruce remains heavily involved in the community through his work as Secretary of Sydney Region Aboriginal Corporation and Secretary of the Aboriginal Housing Company Board.

ORDER OF PROCEEDINGS

Master of Ceremonies

Nathan Cassar, a Parramatta local and an award-winning Master of Ceremonies.

Welcome to Country

Uncle Bruce Gale, Dharug Elder

Australian National Anthem

Performed by Natasha Duarte

Verse 1

Australians all let us rejoice,
For we are one and free;
We've golden soil and wealth for toil;
Our home is girt by sea;
Our land abounds in nature's gifts
Of beauty rich and rare;
In history's page, let every stage
Advance Australia Fair.
In joyful strains then let us sing,
Advance Australia Fair.

Verse 2

Beneath our radiant Southern Cross
We'll toil with hearts and hands;
To make this Commonwealth of ours
Renowned of all the lands;
For those who've come across the seas
We've boundless plains to share;
With courage let us all combine
To Advance Australia Fair.
In joyful strains then let us sing,
Advance Australia Fair.

Welcome Address

The Right Worshipful, the Lord Mayor of Parramatta, Councillor Pierre Esber

Ambassador Address

Professor Veena Sahajwalla, Australia Day Ambassador

CITIZEN OF THE YEAR AWARDS

Awards Address

Julia Strykowski, 2023 Citizen of the Year

Presentation of Citizen of the Year Awards

The Right Worshipful, the Lord Mayor of Parramatta, Councillor Pierre Esber



CITY OF PARRMATT CITIZEN OF THE YEAR AWARDS JUDGING PANEL



Lord Mayor Councillor Pierre Esber

Lord Mayor Councillor Pierre Esber, who represents the Dundas Ward, has been helping shape Parramatta as a councillor for more than 20 years. This includes serving on the former Parramatta City Council from 1999-2016, including as Deputy Lord Mayor from September 2001 to September 2002. He was elected Lord Mayor in September 2023. Having lived in Parramatta all his life, Cr Esber is committed to continuing to make it the best place to live and raise a family, to work and build a business and a magnet for the smartest minds, most brilliant creatives and promising talent.



Deputy Lord Mayor Councillor Dr Patricia Prociv

Councillor Dr Patricia Prociv was elected Deputy Lord Mayor in September 2023, and was first elected to City of Parramatta Council in September 2017. She represents the Rosehill Ward and has lived there for more than 40 years. She has a doctorate in Creative Arts from Western Sydney University, has taught art at both tertiary and secondary levels and is a practicing artist who has exhibited in Sculpture by the Sea. Cr Prociv is a passionate advocate for more community and arts infrastructure. As a cyclist, she is a strong advocate for more active and public transport corridors.





Julia (Julz) Strykowski **2023 Citizen of the Year**

Julz has been a Parramatta local and active community volunteer for more than 10 years. She is a passionate environmental educator and coordinates and campaigns for a number of community groups. She is the co-founder of Boomerang Bags Parramatta, empowering local communities to tackle plastic pollution at its source with upcycled reusable cloth bags made from donated textiles. She is the co-founder of Friends of Toongabbie Creek, a group celebrating people, projects and places while taking action to care for waterways and bushland of Toongabbie Creek. She is also a passionate Riverkeeper Ambassador with Parramatta River Catchment Group. Julz drives waste-to-art collective PluckFastic, featuring colourful eco-art at community events, regional art shows and galleries in Sydney, winning numerous awards and prizes. Julz is dedicated to her local volunteering efforts extending to the Parramatta Women's Shed, The Plastic Pluckers litter clean group, Plastic Free Parramatta and numerous conservation-based executive committees.



Suzanne Fawcus

Suzanne has lived in the Parramatta area for more than 25 years and actively engages in local community affairs including as a dedicated SES member of the Parramatta unit. She is a sessional academic at Macquarie University Business School and the University of New South Wales. Suzanne is passionate about championing the remarkable endeavours of Parramatta's diverse community groups.



Shant Ohannessian

Shant has called Parramatta home for the past 37 years. Currently, Shant is a volunteer for the City of Parramatta (Community Care) and The Kookaburra Kids Foundation, a foundation that aids children living with mental illnesses of families of the Australian Defence Force and NSW Police. He has completed the following qualifications: Bachelor of Business & Commerce, Bachelor of Community Welfare, and has completed a Master of Research thesis at Western Sydney University, in which he conducted a world-first study in applied and developmental psychology.



CITY OF PARRAMATTA CITIZEN OF THE YEAR AWARDS NOMINEES



Image: 2023 Citizen of the Year Award recipients

The award categories are:

Citizen of the Year

A person who has made a noteworthy contribution to the City of Parramatta in one of three subcategory age groups including:

Young Citizen of the Year

in honour of David Shakespeare OAM
(16–30 years)

Citizen of the Year

(31–64 years)

Senior Citizen of the Year

(65 years and over)

Community Group Award

A local group or organisation, which has provided an outstanding contribution to the City of Parramatta community. This includes projects and events.



YOUNG CITIZEN OF THE YEAR NOMINEES

in honour of David Shakespeare OAM

Nass Aoun

Nass is responsible for a number of community initiatives aimed at fostering a stronger and more connected community. In the past year, Nass has played a pivotal role in assisting people who are experiencing homelessness by organising a shelter project with integrated support services such as counselling and job assistance to facilitate a holistic approach to rehabilitation. Through mobilising volunteers, securing donations, and collaborating with local businesses, Nass created a safe and welcoming space for those in need. This initiative addressed the urgent need for shelter, provided immediate relief to those experiencing homelessness and significantly increased the number of individuals who successfully transitioned from homelessness to stable housing. His commitment also extends to establishing a community garden and nurturing youth development through mentorship programs.

Lucinda Davies

Lucinda is a dedicated 22-year-old university student living with three disabilities and a Story Factory volunteer since 2021. In her volunteer position, Lucinda has contributed more than 100 hours to weekly creative writing workshops located primarily within the City of Parramatta local government area. Her impactful engagement has boosted students' confidence and literacy skills inspiring groups of students to explore their creativity and tell their stories. Beyond volunteering, Lucinda juggles a demanding master's program and tirelessly cares for a terminally ill family member, exemplifying her selflessness, kindness, and caring nature. Lucinda was nominated for the NSW Volunteer of the Year Awards, a testament to her unwavering dedication.

Ramalingam (Rama) Saravanan

Over the past two years, Rama has dedicated himself to the FitForLife program at the Parramatta Police Citizens Youth Club (PCYC), participating four days a week in activities that encompass fitness, educational awareness, community engagement, and fostering positive change. Following an unprovoked attack at a local shopping centre, Rama sought refuge in the program himself and has experienced notable physical and mental growth. Guided by police mentors, Rama has become a mentor to fellow youth and taken up a senior role within the FitForLife team. Rama leads by example, taking younger individuals under his wing and volunteering his time even during school holidays showing his commitment to the wellbeing of others.

CITIZEN OF THE YEAR NOMINEES

Neel Banerjee

Neel is the founder and Chief Executive Officer of Nautanki Theatre Company, a non-profit theatre company based in Parramatta. For more than 10 years, Nautanki Theatre Company has promoted the culture, stories and experiences of the South Asian-Australian community through live theatre. It provides opportunities for culturally and linguistically diverse creatives and audiences to connect, grow and tell alternative stories that appeal to Western Sydney audiences. Neel is responsible for the planning and execution of the South Asian Theatre Festival since its inception in 2016. He has also pioneered projects like 'Drama-Sutra' where South Asian-Australian playwrights can have their work performed and the 'Step in Saray' program, an initiative that supports creatives from the South Asian community. Beyond artistic endeavours, he tackles domestic violence issues within communities and amplifies diverse voices.

Michael Campbell

As the Executive Director of WestWords in Parramatta, Michael has made substantial and diverse contributions to the community. Under his leadership, he has expanded WestWords nationally and internationally, establishing it as a pilot for the proposed Western Sydney Centre for Writing, and won numerous awards. During the pandemic, he successfully steered WestWords to digital platforms, ensuring the continuity of literary and creative endeavours. He serves as a role model by championing literature, fostering community engagement, and promoting inclusivity in Western Sydney. Michael passionately believes in the power of literature in written, oral and visual formats to change lives and communities.

Julie Crane

As the president of Melrose Park Football Club, Julie's leadership has transformed the club into a vibrant hub of inclusivity and positive community engagement. Julie has created a welcoming environment, particularly for newly-arrived refugees from Afghanistan, providing an opportunity to play soccer and fostering a sense of belonging. Julie's efforts to integrate refugees from Afghanistan into Australian society through soccer have been exceptional, forming three dedicated teams and providing a platform for skill development and belonging. Julie's visionary approach is further evident in the annual 'Street Football World Cup', an event bringing together players from diverse backgrounds, fostering unity and a shared love for soccer.



CITIZEN OF THE YEAR NOMINEES

Mihaela Cristescu

Mihaela is an award-winning poet and artist residing in Parramatta. She is the founder and editor of the annual publication Romanian/Australian Anthology, soon to mark its eighth volume in 2024. Over the past decade, she has self-funded and published more than 400 unique works of poetry and prose, creating a literary legacy now housed in libraries across the country, including the National Library of Australia. Mihaela also fosters cultural exchange through her decade-long partnership with the State Library of NSW and facilitating connections with Romanian communities across the world. Mihaela is also a board member at New Writers Group Inc where she champions and nurtures Western Sydney writers.

Jaya Deep Dontula

Jaya owns and runs a Parramatta-based training centre, offering essential courses for locals and Centrelink-supported customers qualified to work across different fields. He empowers the community by delivering training and nationally-accredited courses in healthcare, hospitality, business, cleaning, and essential services. Jaya's aim is to bridge the gap between education and employment and he has helped numerous community members secure jobs in and around Parramatta. Jaya is a positive role model who is committed to helping the community through his passion for education.

Sanjay Deshwal

Sanjay is a key figure to the Parramatta community in particular with the Little India Harris Park Business Association (LIHPBA) and Australian Visa & Migration Consultancy Services (AVMCS). As LIHPBA president, Sanjay has established Harris Park as a thriving cultural hub, securing funding for community infrastructure and enhancing residents' lives. As AVMCS owner, Sanjay's migration expertise contributes to workforce diversification, with personalised services making him a trusted migration agent. Sanjay's dual roles exemplify his commitment and dedication to community service, cultural understanding, and economic growth to Parramatta.

Samah Hasham

Samah returned to the Parramatta Community Corrections Office two years ago and since then has built a more diverse, inclusive, and culturally aware workplace. The team, once lacking in varied backgrounds, genders, and minority representation, has flourished into a united and supportive team. Samah initiated the creation of interview rooms to cater to First Nations, LGBTQ+ and cultural and linguistically diverse communities, enhancing client comfort and communication. This initiative has benefited the community as clients feel comfortable meeting with the staff or even entering the office for an interview.

Mathew James Hutton

Mathew is an occupational therapist with a decade of experience and focused on aiding individuals with disabilities and spinal cord injuries. As a Parramatta local, he is a voice for people with accessible needs and disability friendly environments, vigilantly assessing local spaces. Mathew's commitment extends beyond his professional role as he actively collaborates with the local government to enhance Parramatta's accessibility. His dedication and leadership also shine at Nepean Hospital, where his occupational therapist team have achieved excellence. Mathew's unwavering passion for improving disability-friendly public facilities underpins his commitment to the community.

Lailei Huang

Lailei is an extended reality and artificial intelligence technologist, artist and educator and is passionate in promoting technology literacy and creative expression. Founding the Australian Immersive Education Academy, a local not-for-profit organisation, Lailei imparts knowledge across 10 local councils, introducing communities to extended reality technologies such as virtual reality painting and artificial intelligence driven virtual reality world creation. During the pandemic, Lailei collaborated with Multicultural NSW and four local councils, including City of Parramatta Council, to develop virtual reality games delivering vital health messages to help families learn how to stay COVID-safe and hosted dedicated virtual reality workshops. Lailei creates positive connections and inspires everyone by promoting inclusivity with emerging technologies through painting workshops and cultural celebrations.

Kathryn Kaur

As the founder of Rights Respect Independence Connect (RRIC) Australia Association, Kathryn provides support to domestic violence victims and families. As a Parramatta local, Kathryn organises 'coffee clubs' and other events within the community, providing a platform for disadvantaged women and families to showcase their talents. As a positive role model, she courageously shares her personal experience as a mother who faced domestic violence, highlighting the importance of speaking up about this subject. Despite facing personal challenges herself, Kathryn remains dedicated to making a difference.



CITIZEN OF THE YEAR NOMINEES

Lachlan Liao

As a dedicated volunteer, Lachlan has devoted more than two decades to his local army cadet unit, located at Lancer Barracks, Parramatta. He organises overseas trips to destinations such as New Zealand and the WWI battlefields of Europe, earning endorsement from the Australian Defence Force. Lachlan is currently serving as Acting Officer Commanding and mentors both junior officers and cadet non-commissioned officers with humility and patience. With nearly 100 active members and an annual influx of 50 recruits, he efficiently coordinates communication with parents and manages logistics for various activities, embodying a remarkable commitment to the youth of the community demonstrating his leadership.

Khushboo Mathur

Khushboo has been a dedicated professional with the Police Citizens Youth Club (PCYC) for the past eight years and has served as the club manager in Parramatta for the past two years. Leading a small team, Khushboo is known for her unwavering commitment, caring nature, and exemplary leadership. She is the conduit that connects the multicultural communities, internal and external partners and other government bodies in Parramatta to PCYC. Khushboo's dedication makes her an exceptional role model, enriching the club and contributing significantly to community development in Parramatta.

Jakub Mazerant

Jakub is an accomplished visual artist and curator who is passionate about supporting creative communities. He is the founder of the IllustrateYourself Gallery which has provided a launchpad for nearly 300 emerging artists worldwide. Another project, 'PIECES' achieved two Guinness World Records and he recently launched his 'Illustrated City' documentary series. In the past, he has engaged and supported local artists through workshops and cultural events such as the Comic Con-versation Festival. His dedication to advance the arts and cultural diversity across the globe is further demonstrated by his most recent "Illustrated City" documentary series.

Bhumika Mayur Mhatre

As co-founder and President of Temple of Humanity Inc. Bhumika is passionate about community engagement, community service and forming connections with others. Hailing from Maharashtra, she actively participates in community outreach programs and volunteering including organising workshops, mentoring programs, scholarship initiatives and coordinating relief efforts during natural disasters and times of crisis. Her two key community projects are the 'Temple of Humanity', a multifaith sanctuary for diverse communities, and 'Cyber Rangers Academy', which offers cyber security education to children and families to help them become resilient.

Charmaine Nowland

Charmaine is a Biripi woman living on Dharug land. She is a volunteer and advocate who supports young children in the community in a number of ways. She is involved in a transition to school project empowering families to navigate the primary school system. Charmaine has helped children grappling with acute behavioural issues and aids Department of Education support staff in comprehending local needs. She is involved with the Huddle Initiative which is a collective effort by community members and service providers to supporting Constitution Hill communities. She was key in launching the website which houses valuable information and resources on early childhood development to local families. Charmaine recently completed Diploma in Community Services, so that she can continue to support and build her community.

Seema Patara

Seema has been a Story Factory volunteer since 2022 and in that time contributed more than 128 hours to the City of Parramatta. Focused on weekly creative writing workshops for students from under-resourced backgrounds, Seema has formed strong connections with her students, boosting their confidence and amplifying their voices. Her commitment to the same students throughout the year showcases her genuine dedication. Seema's remarkable achievement lies in community engagement and civic responsibility, as she selflessly invests time in nurturing students, fostering their confidence, and enhancing literacy skills.

Mahsa Shirmohammadi-Seysan

Mahsa arrived in Australia as a refugee at 17-years-old and faced adversity with her father's passing and the challenges of a new language and culture. Despite her struggles, she became a caretaker for her mother, pursued education, and emerged as a vital support for fellow refugees. Proficient in Persian, she served as a translator and career counsellor, advocating the benefits of knowledge acquisition and the Australian way of life. Actively involved in community initiatives, Mahsa revived cultural and religious activities, fostering connection while embodying Australian values. Currently pursuing a psychology degree at Macquarie University, she volunteers tirelessly, offering translation services, supporting students, and earning accolades for transformative contributions to refugee families.



CITIZEN OF THE YEAR NOMINEES

Patrick Soosay

As the Harris Park Community Centre Manager, Patrick has dedicated seven years to supporting single mothers and domestic violence survivors. Going above and beyond, he has collaborated with agencies, secured local authority support, and provided legal representation, resulting in the miraculous attainment of full custody and a secure residence for a family in need. Beyond crisis intervention, Patrick initiated psychological wellbeing programs, counselling, and financial aid. Recognised for his steadfast commitment, he empowers individuals to rebuild their lives and foster a safe environment at the community centre. Patrick extends his support to various individuals, including men, single mothers, and newcomers, making Harris Park Community Centre a safe and welcoming space for all.

Moses Vedamuthu

Moses is the founder of the Support Organisation for Homeless and Asylum Seekers (SOHAS). Along with a small team of volunteers, he has provided support to vulnerable and disadvantaged local community members. Moses and his team have distributed more than 10,000 boxes of food including weekly grocery boxes to 45 families during the COVID-19 pandemic and 850 food boxes to aid flood victims. Moses drives through rain or shine to deliver food, groceries and other essential items to those in need. Moses has a holistic approach to helping others, embodying mateship and an unwavering dedication to community service.

Merven Virueda

Merven is the Marketing and Programs Manager for the not-for-profit educational institution, Parramatta Community College. Merven is passionate about improving community bonds and has sponsored cultural events, pageants, and launched initiatives, such as the 'Seniors' Art Therapy and Craft Hub' and 'Tech Savvy Seniors Programs'. These projects combat social isolation and foster an environment of support and engagement. Merven also hosts free art classes for vulnerable groups, including the elderly, youth, and children. This enriches individual lives and strengthens the bonds of community, fostering a sense of caring and connection.



SENIOR CITIZEN OF THE YEAR NOMINEES

Balachandran Dandapani

Balachandran (Bala) is a dedicated community member who has significantly impacted the local community and surrounding areas as leader of the Indian Welfare Association (IWA). Over the past five years, he successfully navigated the IWA through challenging times, notably during the COVID-19 pandemic, steering the organisation to flourish and continue to deliver services to the community. Bala is known for his compassionate and approachable leadership style, and his strategic event planning skills. Many of Bala's events are hosted at PHIVE, and actively involve and benefit the Parramatta community. His positive influence fosters inclusivity and motivates others to take up leadership roles.

Ronda Gaffey

Ronda is one of the few exceptional individuals who are dedicated to the vital work of Parramatta heritage protection. Despite her age and health challenges, Ronda dedicates her time to preserving history through participation in neighbourhood organisations such as the Parramatta and District Historical Society and the Parramatta Female Factory Friends. Using her theatrical storytelling skills, she engages audiences with captivating narratives of colonial Sydney, portraying her Irish ancestor Sarah Scott with remarkable flair. Ronda is a passionate advocate for heritage preservation for the future generations, regularly writing submissions on the value of our local history. Ronda also volunteers her time to help organise and run various events and tours around the Parramatta Female Factory and Hambledon Cottage.

Beverly Grace

Beverly is a dedicated Meals on Wheels volunteer at City of Parramatta Community Care, showcasing 22 years and more than 4,000 hours of unwavering commitment. Beverly coordinates the delivery of meals to elderly, isolated, and disabled individuals unable to cook for themselves. Beyond her impeccable punctuality, reliability, and professional communication skills, Beverly's compassionate nature and mentoring role make her a standout volunteer. Notably, Beverly's quick response during a participant's fall, demonstrating care and humanity. As one of the most experienced volunteers, she is only happy to impart her skills and knowledge by mentoring new volunteers.

Leslie (Les) Liddell

Les has been a dedicated and committed volunteer proudly serving the Dundas community through his work as a Justice of the Peace (JP) at Dundas Library since 2015. Les is highly sought after as the sole JP at Dundas Library. He efficiently manages sessions, assisting an average of 12 people per hour with their various documents. Despite being 90-years-old, Les' unwavering commitment serves as an inspiring example. His calming personality and humour diffuse tense situations, and his extensive local knowledge as a Dundas resident earn him respect and popularity.



SENIOR CITIZEN OF THE YEAR NOMINEES

Larry Mervin

Over the past two decades, Larry has devoted his time as a volunteer at Westmead Children's Hospital, offering a comforting presence during challenging moments. He has demonstrated dedication beyond the ordinary, taking the initiative to learn greetings in a wide range of languages to warmly welcome patients and their families. Larry approaches families from diverse backgrounds with genuine compassion. Larry's endeavours have resulted in securing laptops for hospitalised children, fostering connectivity and inclusion. Larry's positive impact extends to the community, as seen in his secret Santa donation to the Child Life Therapy unit and his ongoing support for families in need. Larry also dedicates his time to Banana Cabana, a primate sanctuary.

Glen Ole

Glen has made exceptional contributions as a passionate Bushcare volunteer over the past 35 years. For decades he dedicated his spare time to clearing fallen trees, garbage, and environmental debris from local bush areas, and generously offering assistance to others. Glen's unwavering commitment to the community and the environment establishes his efforts as a legacy, inspiring both current and future generations. Now retired and residing in a Carlingford nursing home, he continues community service by sorting recycle items and cleaning up his surroundings.

Phillip (Phil) Russo OAM

Phil is a long-standing member and the current President of North Parramatta Residents' Action Group, which works to draw attention to Parramatta's rich built heritage and find ways to preserve it. Phil also championed Parramatta's historical significance, urging recognition and promoting tourism potential. He has been a tireless worker in retaining the character of the Fleet St Heritage site, which contains the Female Factory, the Childrens Orphanage, the Parramatta Gaol and other heritage buildings that had come under threat from proposed developments. Until recently, Phil also actively contributed to the Council's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Committee. As a former City of Parramatta Councillor and Deputy Mayor, he has demonstrated a commitment to community service and social equity.

Dennis Thorne

Dennis is a humble and dedicated volunteer from Greystanes, and a silent force in the City of Parramatta Community Care. For over 15 years, he has devoted over 1,000 hours to Social Inclusion and Meals on Wheels, embodying a person-centered approach. Community Care Staff commend his ability to provide tailored support to elderly participants during local club activities, showcasing compassion without imposition. Despite his reserved nature, he ensures extended trips for less mobile participants, maximising their outdoor experiences. Dennis exemplifies humility, loyalty, and generosity, making him a positive role model. His unwavering commitment to improving lives within the Parramatta community is truly admirable.



COMMUNITY GROUP AWARD NOMINEES

Arts and Cultural Exchange (ACE)

Arts and Cultural Exchange (ACE), positioned in Parramatta and rooted in First Nations values, works for cultural engagement and equity through impactful programs and initiatives. Their range of programs span diverse pillars, including First Nations, Youth Engagement, Multicultural Women, Neurodivergent Artists and Aged Care, and Screen. ACE's initiatives have made significant community contributions, from the groundbreaking SWANA Film Festival – the first of its kind in Australia – to the transformative Barbershop for Change, Australia's inaugural school barber shop. The Sonic Souls Syndicate, nurturing gender-diverse talent, and Club Weld, supporting neurodivergent musicians, showcase ACE's commitment to inclusivity.

The City of Parramatta RSL sub-Branch

The City of Parramatta RSL sub-Branch, situated on Macquarie Street, stands as a pillar of support for veterans and their families in the Parramatta Local Government Area. With a strong focus on commemorating the sacrifices of the veteran community, the sub-Branch conducts poignant services on ANZAC Day, Remembrance Day, and other significant occasions. Their dedication is underscored by a commitment to values such as loyalty to Australia, democracy, respect for law and order, practical compassion, and a profound duty to support servicemen and women. The sub-Branch serves as a positive role model to others, embodying values that contribute to Parramatta's identity as a multicultural and welcoming community.

North Rocks Rural Fire Service (RFS)

North Rocks Rural Fire Service (RFS) is making a significant impact on the community, emphasising fire safety through active engagement at local events and with community groups such as local Scouts organisations and local rotary clubs. With a commendable achievement of assisting numerous members interstate and across NSW and a unique training model that attracts stations from afar, the North Rocks RFS influence extends beyond geographical boundaries. Their growing social media presence is evidence of their positive influence in the local community. Continual collaboration with various community groups exemplifies their dedicated service to the City of Parramatta.

Parramatta Queer Forum

For the past 15 years, the Parramatta Queer Forum has organised the renowned Parramatta Pride Picnic, marking it as Western Sydney's largest LGBTQIA+ gathering. Amid the backdrop of Western Sydney's sometimes challenging landscape for the LGBTQIA+ community, the picnic has emerged as a beacon of inclusivity, evolving from a modest gathering to a bustling celebration featuring food trucks, stalls, and performances, drawing thousands from across NSW. The lasting impact on the local queer community is evident. The Parramatta Queer Forum, backed by ACON Health, exemplifies resilience and community support, persistently challenging discrimination. Their commitment to Parramatta's local government area demonstrates a vital service for the community.



COMMUNITY GROUP AWARD NOMINEES

Rights Respect Independence Connect (RRIC)

Rights Respect Independence Connect (RRIC) organisation, deeply acknowledges the profound impact of family on mental health. Committed to supporting families in challenging times, particularly in the context of domestic violence, RRIC strives to create a safe haven for victims. RRIC fosters community through its inclusive Coffee Club, uniting people from diverse backgrounds, and the Little Kids Champs program emphasizing holistic development, instilling confidence, responsibility, and cultural appreciation. Through partnerships with accommodations, RRIC addresses the critical need for safe spaces for survivors of domestic violence, mental health issues, and homelessness, aiming to rebuild lives with community support.

The Street Level Christian Community

The Street Level Christian Community, based in Parramatta, works to facilitate impactful engagement with the local community at Centenary Square. The group orchestrates a week-long multifaceted event for Homeless Persons Week, featuring live entertainment, speeches, lunch, and a blanket run for donations. The annual event delivers a vital service, uniting diverse resources for the betterment of the community. Beyond the event, they also support individuals grappling with challenges like drug and alcohol addiction. The group actively collaborate with other services to raise awareness about homelessness, contributing to a safer future for the Parramatta community.

Support Organisation for Homeless and Asylum Seekers (SOHAS)

Support Organisation for Homeless and Asylum Seekers (SOHAS) is a charitable force committed to enhancing the quality of life for people of marginalised and vulnerable communities in Parramatta and surrounding Western Sydney. The organisation supports people in need including seniors, asylum seekers, international students, temporary visa holders, people experiencing homelessness, and refugees. SOHAS champions various initiatives, from distributing essential groceries and aiding victims of domestic violence to collaborating with emergency services during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. SOHAS also provides free counselling and employment assistance to immigrants and refugee communities, helping them to find jobs and integrate into their communities.

Temple of Humanity Inc. (TOHI)

Founded in 2020, Temple Of Humanity Inc. (TOHI) seeks to create a positive community impact in Australia. Founded by Bhumika Mhatre and Prabir Saha, TOHI operates as a multi-faith temple and not-for-profit organisation, fostering interfaith understanding, cultural exchange, and community welfare. The temple's sustained efforts include educational programs on cyber safety, sustainable initiatives, and youth empowerment, shaping a resilient and inclusive community. TOHI's outstanding achievement in community engagement resonates through lasting impacts, promoting social cohesion. Serving Parramatta through diverse initiatives like interfaith events, cultural programs, and outreach activities, TOHI showcases the transformative power of collective community efforts.

WestWords

WestWords, a not-for-profit arts organisation based in Parramatta, is a cultural catalyst for Greater Western Sydney, advocating for the power of literacy, self-expression, and creativity to change lives and transform communities. Their Living Stories Western Sydney Writing Prize has engaged over 500 participants through free workshops, transcending cultural nuances in a multicultural region. With programs like the Parramatta Writers' Room, WestWords contributes to a thriving cultural environment while acting as a haven for new and old writers. WestWords highlights the route to community enrichment by celebrating and promoting the stories of the people, places, and cultures at the core of Western Sydney.

Yabadoo Community Group

Yabadoo Community Group has been delivering a comprehensive range of services to the Parramatta local government area for over two years, including a charity food shop, support for those who are experiencing homelessness, a no-interest loan scheme, free English and dancing classes, medical examinations, and aid for victims of domestic violence. Yabadoo Community Group's outstanding achievements are marked by hard work, extreme patience, and efficient problem-solving skills. The group is able to provide invaluable community services seven days a week thanks to tireless work of volunteers. The group's commitment to multiculturalism, anti-discrimination, and community support makes Yabadoo a shining example for all.



AUSTRALIA DAY

PARRAMATTA PARK

FREE EVENTS & ACTIVITIES
THU 25 & FRI 26 JAN



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