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Media Release

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2024 Australia Day Award Nominees

Mayor Ruth Fagan said that Council was delighted with the outstanding nominations for the 2024 Australia Day Awards.

“With a vast array of volunteers in the Cowra Shire, another wonderful group of individuals and organisations have been nominated for the Australia Day Awards. The nominations put forward each year continue to showcase the truly outstanding individuals and groups that we have living in the Cowra community,” said Cr Fagan.

Cowra’s 2024 Australia Day celebrations will start with a free community breakfast in Civic Square at 8am, followed by the official flag raising and World Peace Bell ceremony, before the awards presentation, citizenship ceremony and Australia Day ambassador address at the Cowra Civic Centre at 9am.

The nominees for the 2024 Cowra Australia Day Awards are as follows. Full biographies can be found attached.

Young Citizen of the Year

- Kai Fitzgerald
- Samuel Haeata
- Cohan Howden

Cowra Citizen of the Year

- Karren Cave
- Andrew Fisher
- Penny Smith

Community Group of the Year

- Cowra Amateur Musical and Dramatic Society
- Gooloogong Recreation Park Markets

Dr Warren Whiley Memorial Award

- Jan Munday

Ends

Cowra Young Citizen of the Year Awards Nominees 2024

Kai Fitzgerald

Kai Fitzgerald is a diligent and hardworking student, finishing Year Twelve at St Raphael's Catholic School in 2023. His position as school captain allowed him to showcase his superb leadership qualities and become a role model for younger students.

Kai is an active member of the Cowra Soccer Club, playing in the junior and third-grade competitions, as well as refereeing and coaching younger teams and developing their skills. In the recent season his accomplishments were recognised, and he received both the player's choice and referee's choice for referee of the year. His leadership in the sporting community was also recognised last year, when he was nominated as an Olympic Change Maker in The Australian Olympic Change-Maker program.

As well as physical health, Kai also promotes mental health awareness, raising close to \$500 for Lifeline whilst participating in the Push-up Challenge in June last year.

Samuel Haeata

Samuel Haeata is a positive, young role model in the Cowra community, whose achievements were recognised in 2023 as the winner of the Cowra Youth Peace Award. Peace often starts with a smile, and that is Sam in a nutshell!

Sam was the Vice-Captain of Cowra High School in 2022, a Youth Ambassador in 2022 and a member of the Cowra High School SRC from 2017-2022.

Samuel volunteers at the PCYC and Cowra High School, working with young people and displays empathy, respect and compassion to all people in the community. He also works two jobs locally – at Kendal St Cafe, where he is a dedicated and valued employee; and for disability provider, Inception Services, where he runs games nights for the clients, with many members of the community commenting on the amazing young man he is.

Cohan Howden

Cohan Howden was appointed as a Cowra Youth Council member in 2021, at the age of 12. He has served on the Youth Council since that time, and was elected by his peers as Chairperson in 2022 and 2023, remaining the youngest person elected to this role.

As Chairperson, he is responsible for leading the Youth Council's participation in events such as the Festival of International Understanding, Youth Week, NAIDOC Week and World Peace Day. He is a reliable and active participant, working hard to create a wide variety of events and activities for young people in the Shire.

Cohan is currently in Year 10 at St Raphael's Catholic School, where he has received several Academic Excellence awards and represented the school in spelling, soccer and athletics events. Cohan also plays drums in the school band and was nominated for the Cowra Youth Peace Award in 2023

Cohan helps his mother with her organisation for stillborn babies, Chance's Clothes Project, by sorting clothing and taking photos of the baby clothing and also assists with events for Neighbourhood Watch. Always willing to help anyone in need, Cohan is a very caring and considerate young man.

Cowra Citizen of the Year Awards Nominees 2024

Karren Cave

Karren is a shining example of unwavering dedication and selflessness in the Cowra community, making her a deserving nominee.

Karren has made a positive impact on her community by volunteering at Cowra Riding for the Disabled from 2017 – 2022, providing therapeutic horseback riding experiences to those in need, fostering physical and emotional well-being among participants. Karren also started the Cowra Riding for the Disabled Op Shop, raising over \$75,000 net profit in the first year of business and committing over 30 volunteer hours a week.

Karren's spirit of adventure and philanthropy shone as she embarked on an epic two month, 750km horseback journey from Cowra to Melbourne to raise funds for the charity, Little Wings. Her courageous effort not only highlighted the importance of supporting families facing medical challenges but also raised over \$5000 in donations.

Karren's visionary leadership was also instrumental in founding the Cowra Community Enterprise (CCE) in 2023. Through her dedication, she established a platform that has since become a cornerstone for community development in Cowra. Her role as the President/Community Engagement Coordinator has led to numerous community-building initiatives, youth mentorship programs, social welfare efforts, environmental stewardship campaigns, and successful grant acquisition, positively impacting the lives of many residents.

Andrew Fisher

Andrew Fisher has been an unwavering pillar of the Cowra community through his exceptional contributions, both professionally and personally, over many years.

Andrew has been an invaluable asset to the Cowra Guardian over the past three decades, where his dedication and passion for journalism have shone through in every piece he produces. His commitment to delivering accurate, insightful and compelling stories has not only kept our community informed, but also fostered a sense of unity and understanding among its members.

Not only is Andrew the voice of knowledge in Cowra, but his contributions elsewhere are easily recognisable as the Regional Editor for several newspapers across the Central West.

Beyond the office, Andrew's impact extends further. His active participation in the triathlon scene in Cowra has been outstanding and his involvement in the Meals on Wheels program in Cowra, exemplifies his deep-seated care for our community's vulnerable members.

Penny Smith

Penny is a Cowra girl born and bred and throughout her life has contributed in various ways to make Cowra a great place to live. Penny has been active committee member in various sports clubs, directs the Mobile Truck School service for Cowra Early Childhood Services, leads the Cowra Early Childhood Services (CECS) Reconciliation Action Plan program with the local Wiradjuri community, and played a key role in establishing the Cowra Nature-Based Adventure Playground on Bellevue Hill.

Penny volunteers with Cowra High School on various initiatives, including being a long-standing parent volunteer with the Schools Spectacular. She has also spent 11 years organising and directing the Mulyan Debutante Ball.

She advocates tirelessly for the Cowra township across all the facets of life and with stakeholders across the community and with local and State Government.

Penny is a well-respected and much-loved member of our community and her broad reach across the community puts her in a very deserving nominee position for Citizen of the Year.

Cowra Community Group of the Year Awards Nominees 2024

Cowra Amateur Musical and Dramatic Society

Since 1963 the Cowra Amateur Musical and Dramatic Society (better known locally as the Cowra M&D) has been entertaining Cowra Shire residents with a variety of stage productions and concert shows. The group's aim is to provide good quality, family-friendly and affordable entertainment to the widest possible audience. Over six decades, there is no doubt that they have achieved this aim!

In addition to stage productions, the M&D and its associated choir The Cowra Vocal Ensemble, which celebrated its own 30th Anniversary in 2023, has also been involved in numerous concerts, community fundraisers and performances for special events such as the Cowra Railway Centenary in 1986, the 50th anniversary of the end of WW2 in 1995, Cowra's own 150th anniversary in 1999 and the 125th Anniversary of local government in 2013. Add to that regular performances at Cowra Eisteddfods, the Festival of International Understanding and many community events and it's not hard to see how the M&D has been able to welcome over 2,000 people to its ranks. Some have stayed for just one or two shows, some have stayed for much longer and some have formed long-standing connections that have seen multiple generations of families perform across the decades.

The M&D encourages performers of all ages and levels of ability. All M&D performers are volunteers who do what they do for the love of entertaining other members of the Cowra community. There may be no monetary reward but there can be no better feeling than receiving the applause of the audience at the end of a show, or the laughter that accompanies a well delivered funny line.

Gooloogong Recreation Park Markets

The Gooloogong Markets are a community market held at Recreation Park in the village of Gooloogong on the second Sunday of every even month. The markets committee is made up of a group of volunteers that raises money to go back into the Gooloogong community, taking the fundraising strain off other village groups.

In December 2023, the markets committee presented a donation of \$1000 each to representatives from the Gooloogong War Memorial Club rooms, Gooloogong Log Cabin Hall, Gooloogong Public School and the Gooloogong Historical Society.

While the group are always at the mercy of the weather and its activities were severely curtailed during the 2022 floods, this latest presentation takes the total of donations made from the markets over the past five years back into the community to \$12,225. This much needed money has allowed other community groups in Gooloogong to purchase much needed equipment, such as Defibrillator units, first aid kits and school equipment.

Gooloogong Public School principal Nick Doyle said the school would use the latest donation, along with monies provided by the school's P and C, for five new outdoor tables for the students. Allocation of the funds for the Gooloogong Hall representative Ann Maree Watson said, would likely go towards landscaping while the historical society will consider using the funds for a disabled ramp.

Dr Warren Whiley Memorial Award

Jan Munday

Jan Munday is one of Cowra most recognisable individuals. With 57 years of volunteering with the Cowra Eisteddfod, Jan has played an integral role in advancing Cowra's artistic life over an extensive period.

Jan was awarded the Cowra Community Service Medal in 2016. This Award recognises the ongoing achievements of inspirational and outstanding people who make Cowra a better place to live and recognises a nominee's past achievements over a period of time and their continued contribution to the Cowra community.

Jan's extensive volunteering efforts reach beyond the Cowra Eisteddfod. While tending to her family business, the Cowra Ballet School, Jan has also been involved in the former Cowra Cultural Council, the

Festival of International Understanding for approximately 40 years and the Australian Chapter of the World Peace Bell. Jan's involvement to these groups spans many years, some as a founding member.

Jan was awarded Life Membership of the Cowra Eisteddfod in 1991 and the Dr Warren Whiley Memorial Award in 2011.