



## MEDIA RELEASE

3 December 2020

### **Recipients - National Awards for Disability Leadership**

On International Day of People with Disabilities the National Awards for Disability Leadership have acknowledged the work of 14 outstanding disability leaders across 7 categories.

Recognising the work done by disabled people and our organisations to support the Australian disability community through several challenging events including the pandemic, and bushfires and other natural disasters. We asked what work has been done by disability leaders in these difficult times to advance equality for disabled people, and to protect and promote our rights in rapidly changing situations.

"These leaders have stepped up and shown us the way," said Christina Ryan, CEO of the Disability Leadership Institute.

The recipients illustrate the broad diversity of disabled people including Indigenous peoples, people from culturally diverse backgrounds, from the LGBTIQ communities, young and older people, and those from a range of genders. (see attached list with bios.)

These Awards reflect what is important to disabled people and the ways that we are effecting change and pursuing equality for our community. They recognise outstanding achievements by individuals, or disabled people's organisations, who have significantly contributed to advancing the status of disabled people.

The Awards were delivered across seven categories for outstanding achievement or outcomes by disabled people, reflecting the diversity of our community, and the intersectional nature of our lives, including The Arts, Change Making, Rights Activism, Innovation, Social Impact, Inclusion, Lesley Hall Award for Lifetime Achievement.

The National Awards for Disability Leadership are owned and run solely by disabled people, all nominees are disabled people and all those associated with the Awards Ceremony are disabled people.

For comment: Christina Ryan, CEO Disability Leadership Institute 0408218184

Please contact individual recipients directly.

<https://disabilityleaders.com.au/disability-leaders/national-awards/> #DisabilityAwards2020  
<https://disabilityleaders.com.au/disability-leaders/national-awards/recipients-2020/>

## National Awards for Disability Leadership Recipients 2020

### The Arts:

**Dan Graham** – is a trained Theatre Director and Disability Advocate. In 2018, Dan was chosen for the Future Leaders Program with The Australia Council for the Arts, and serves as Co-Chair of the MEAA's Artists With A Disability Committee. Dan's enthusiasm for empowering artists with a disability is contagious. As both a neurodivergent and queer-identifying man, he is passionate about amplifying ideas and perspectives that might otherwise be overlooked. He has been instrumental in assisting organisations to become more accessible to the disability community during the pandemic and to adopt ongoing practices which address disability rights.

**Brenden Borrelini** – is the Ambassador and Artist in Residence at Crossroad Arts where he has been performing for close to a decade. As Crossroad Arts' Ambassador and Artist in Residence, he has also travelled to Japan and the United States where he exhibited his 2D and 3D photographic works. Unable to travel in 2020, his continued leadership and advocacy for inclusion and access in Mackay and beyond has influenced other arts organisations, council and businesses to adopt initiatives that will ensure the whole community can benefit. Through his work with Crossroad Arts Brenden has represented regional inclusive arts practice nationally and internationally.

### Change Making:

**Julie Loblinz** - is an accomplished self-advocate with intellectual disability. Her lived experience, knowledge and skills, are critical in revising courses, delivering guest lectures, and co-producing research at UNSW Sydney, thereby contributing to inclusive research and education, nationally and internationally, ensuring the voice of people with intellectual disability are heard. Her work has contributed to evidence put before the Disability Royal Commission earlier this year, ensuring that Self-advocates have been heard.

### Social Impact:

*In 2020 the judges have decided that the National Award for Disability Leadership in Social Impact are awarded to all finalists in recognition of the importance of raising awareness of the lives of disabled people during emergencies and crisis situations.*

**Akii Ngo** - is a dedicated and fierce advocate for all people with disabilities, chronic illness and chronic pain. Akii a person of colour, from a migrant/refugee background who is also non-binary and LGBTQ+. Akii believes in equality and is an intersectional feminist who is dedicated to human rights. Akii has regularly contributed to communications regarding the Disability Royal Commission and COVID-19, sharing their experiences of how being disabled during COVID-19 has greatly impacted their care and rights.

**James Griffiths** - is an Aboriginal man who is Vision Impaired / Blind. He is a passionate disability self-advocate from the Gippsland region. James has undertaken many years of volunteer work and self-advocacy work to support people who are vision impaired/blind to advocate for themselves and live their best lives. James shared his story of surviving the bushfires for DARU's Disability and Disaster Resilience forum. Although the storytelling was difficult and personal, his motivations for sharing his story was to help people to understand the challenges faced by people with disabilities, particularly for those who are Blind/VI. As an ongoing resource for change, this video will continue to remind decision makers to leave no one behind.

**Lauren Watson** - during this difficult year Lauren has been honest and open on her social media about her struggles and how isolation may offer a degree of understanding to non-disabled people about what it feels like to live with a disability. Not being able to go anywhere or do things that are usually part of a "normal" life.

**Ricky Buchanan** - is passionate about disability and chronic illness. Her soapbox interests include people whose disability is caused by chronic illness, and those who are homebound and/or bedridden like her - two groups of people who are severely underserved by the current medical and disability systems. During COVID-19 able bodied people have needed to access medical services and have experienced isolation new to them. Due to her ongoing life experiences and years of advocacy, Ricky Buchanan has been an expert navigating 2020. She has been able to use multiple forms of media to talk about the issues and advocate for keeping accessible services once able-bodied people don't need them anymore. Ricky also gave evidence to the Disability Royal Commission at great personal cost.

**Tim Chan** - is an Autism Advocate, and a young Chinese Australian, diagnosed with autism at 3 years old, and have been non-speaking after 14 months of age. Tim has become pivotal to the self-advocacy movement to drive autism to a new level of relevance and inclusion.

Tim shared his story about life in public housing lockdown in Melbourne for DARU's Disability and Disaster Resilience forum. While it was difficult and personal to share his story Tim wanted to help people to understand the challenges faced by people with disabilities, particularly for those with complex communication needs. As an ongoing resource for change, this will continue to remind decision makers to leave no one behind.

### **Innovation:**

**Jeff Shaw** - is the CEO & Founder of Give a Care. Jeff established Give a Care to be a disability provider that empowers people to have choice over their care. Jeff has built 2 programs for the disability community this year:

1. Connecting Couches: virtual, accessible activities offered FREE to Australians of all abilities via Zoom.
2. Because We Care: deliveries of food packs to people with a disability in our community facing financial hardship due to COVID-19.

**FindABed** - is a collective of people, many of them disabled people, who popped up during the catastrophic 2019-20 bushfires & worked extraordinarily quickly & hard to find accommodation, generators, specific toys, disability aids & more, to meet the needs of individuals & families in crisis. Using digital platforms in this way is an innovation to be proud of. At times the collective grew to 150 people. The model FindABed developed for providing support was nimble & flexible, in a way other support services failed to be. FindABed is a perfect example of the power of disabled people to find solutions in a crisis. A large group of volunteers used their skills, expertise & online experience to fill individual gaps in support for people in need & bring the community into a big mutual aid project.

### **Rights Activism:**

**Mark Oakley** - hails from the East Gippsland region. On 30 December 2019, Mark lost his home and everything he owns in the bushfires. Mark contributed his story for DARU's Disability and Disaster Resilience forum and for the CFAs Preparing Vulnerable People project. Mark has undertaken significant work to advance the rights of disabled people, at a time when he has been living in a caravan that isn't fully accessible. His work will ensure that people with disabilities will be less forgotten in the future.

### **Inclusion:**

**Ramas McRae** - is a well-known Deaf Community leader in every sense of the term. He is a Deaf Lithuanian-Australian who is fluent in 4 different national Signed Languages. A Certified International Sign Language Interpreter, cinematographer, and actor. Mentor for Deaf children, and current Auslan Lecturer at Latrobe University.

Ramas is a role model not only to Deaf children and Adults, he also demonstrates a 'can do attitude' in disseminating key messages across multiple social media platforms. Particularly during a time of COVID where social platforms have played a pivotal part in increasing awareness around Sign language and Deaf Aboriginal minorities.

**Jody Barney** - is a Birri-Gubba/Urangan Deaf woman from Queensland. As a leading Aboriginal Disability Cultural Trainer and Consultant, she has worked for over 30 years in the disability space across Australia and internationally. Jody provides leadership by ensuring that community diversity is in mind from the start. For Indigenous people with disabilities she has learned 15+ community sign languages so their voices are heard. Jody has supported women with disabilities in Asia and Pacific Rim. Not able to travel to community in Covid times. Jody has been preparing and delivering meals to Elders and working to ensure communities in public housing lockdown had communication support.

### **Lesley Hall Award for Lifetime Achievement:**

**EI Gibbs** - is our national expert on disability & media. She's an award winning essayist, online community founder, sophisticated media & comms expert, board member & our best advocate in the national conversation, published on disability and the environment, NDIS, policy, & disability policy history.

During 2020's crises, EI was a media spokesperson for our community. She led her team of disabled workers to be the Covid disability response that the government wasn't providing. Because of her we had high impact interventions with government. She was a key media spokesperson during the pandemic in print, radio, new media & an expert witness before our royal commission. She led the disability mutual aid group which was set up rapidly in March and has provided accurate and timely information about the pandemic and disability supports right across Australia.

During this difficult year EI has also given evidence to the Australian Parliament and developed the live tweeting model that ensures Disability Royal Commission hearings are shared widely so that disabled people know what is happening.

EI's work has been consistently focussed on the needs of the disability community, and her energy has often been given when her reserves were low. She is a true giant in our disability rights movement.

## **Selection for media comment**

**Akii Ngo – Social Impact**

Contact: 0491746217



**Dan Graham – The Arts**

Contact: 0400828231



**EI Gibbs – Lesley Hall Lifetime Achievement**  
Contact: 0149290788



**Jeff Shaw – Innovation**  
Contact: 0417122123



**Jody Barney – Inclusion (working intersectionally across minority communities)**  
Contact: 040009837 - note Jody is deaf so texting is the best option to make contact



**Mark Oakley – Rights Activism**

Contact: 0427968876



**Julie Loblinz – Change Making**

Contact: 0419970204

