



## 2024 South Gippsland Australia Day Awards

South Gippsland Shire Council would like to acknowledge and thank all of this year's award nominees and congratulate our 2024 Citizen of the Year Kathryn Smith, Young Citizen of the Year Laila Witeveen and Community Event of the Year Southern Lights Festival Korumburra.

Kathryn and Laila were recognised for their significant community achievements along with four other Citizen of the Year nominees – Avis Tilley, Heather Butler, Noel Laing and Perry Neil – at an awards ceremony held at the Meeniyan Mechanics Institute Hall on Wednesday 17 January. There were no other nominees for the Young Citizen of the Year category.

Kathryn has been involved in 36 organisations and initiatives in the last 20 years since she and her late husband moved to Meeniyan. She is described as a reliable, hardworking and loyal woman who is always willing to put her hand up to help. Her love for Meeniyan and the people in it whether they be residents or visitors is never more apparent than when you see her in action. Baking goods for a church fundraiser, working at Lacy's Jewellery Studio and Gallery, emceeing the Meeniyan Australia Day celebrations or even sitting around a table talking about Meeniyan's future – Kathryn does it all with a smile.

Laila has been an active Girl Guide and volunteer in her local community for many years. Described as a considerate, kind and positive leader, Laila currently juggles completing a Certificate III in Child Care, pursuing her VCE, being a Junior Leader for Lyrebird Guides, and a part-time job. She exemplifies the traits of a Girl Guide, upholding the Promise and Law while nurturing younger guides into patient, fun and caring contributors for the future. Laila's selfless dedication significantly enhances the Girl Guide's role in her local community.

The Community Event of the Year category featured a broad range of events, highlighting the uniqueness of South Gippsland. The nominees were Art Connect South Gippsland Open Studio Art Trail, Biketoberfest, Meeniyan Community Plan and Vietnam Veterans Day.

The Southern Lights Festival was first held in 2019 and in 2023 was moved to Coal Creek Community Park and Museum. In June, over 5,000 people enjoyed the evening of entertainment, music and food with the event reaching capacity. A great showcase of multiple organisations

working together to create a really successful event for Korumburra, the Southern Lights Festival would not have been possible without the work of more than 50 volunteers. Over the weekend of the Festival, data for Korumburra showed visitor spending increased by 42 per cent, and even residents spending increasing by 22 per cent compared to the same weekend in 2022.

To read the achievements of all our nominees and to see upcoming Australia Day events near your please visit [www.southgippsland.vic.gov.au/australiaday](http://www.southgippsland.vic.gov.au/australiaday)

**Quote attributable to South Gippsland Shire Mayor, Clare Williams:**

*“Congratulations to our 2024 Citizen of the Year Kathryn Smith, Young Citizen of the Year Laila Witeveen and Community Event of the Year Southern Lights Festival Korumburra, and all the award nominees.”*

*“South Gippsland is extremely fortunate to have an abundance of people who love to help their community. Every year, we hear about a few more of these spectacular people. Thank you to those who put in nominations and please continue letting us know about those who go above-and-beyond for South Gippsland – we love to hear about them!”*

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