

## Melrose Drive Mural, Woden

### Biographies



#### **Jeff Brown BEM**

On 26 January 1971, following a torrential downpour, the Woden area was subjected to widespread flooding that swept away many local residents and their vehicles. It was particularly bad around the Melrose Drive, Yamba Drive and Yarra Glenn intersection.

A small group of local residents and Woden Police struggled to rescue those trapped and swept away. Whilst many were saved, at the end of the night, seven people had lost their lives.

Six months later, Her Majesty the Queen bestowed the British Empire Medal for Gallantry on Constable Jeff Brown for his 'outstanding courage and devotion to duty during the rescue operations'.

Constable Brown went on to be a shift supervisor at Woden Police Station and later acted as the Officer in Charge. He was in charge of police communications during the 2003 Canberra bush fires and has served as a peacekeeper in East Timor and Cyprus on two occasions. He is retired after a 35 year police career.



#### **Viola Kalokerinos**

Viola moved to Curtin from Greece in December 1975 to start a new life with her husband, Vince, who owned the local Milk Bar in Curtin. Viola looked after their three children while they were young and worked with Vince in the Milk Bar, including for 5 years after Vince's death in 2003.

Viola involved herself in a variety of activities in the local community, including the ACT Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing, a multicultural seniors group, the Queen Elizabeth II Family Centre Society, the Greek community and church, a local aged-care home and a palliative care group. She was also a member of the steering committee that set up the Bendigo Bank in Curtin, she cooked meals for L'Arche and was a member of Rotary.

Viola was a state finalist for the Australia's Local Hero award in 2015 which acknowledges her willingness to contribute to the community.



### **John Paul Janke**

John Paul Janke moved from far north Queensland to Pearce in the early 1970s. He was the first Indigenous student to attend Holy Trinity Primary in Curtin and also first to graduate from Marist College in Pearce.

In the early 90s he played representative Soccer for the ACT and in the mid 90s he played Futsal for the Australian Indigenous Squad.

Working almost 3 decades in Indigenous Affairs, John began work in the Australian Public Service in Woden, firstly in the Department of Social Security in Julianna House then in the Lovett Tower (formerly MLC Tower) with the former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC).

For some 30 years, he has worked to promote, and help create a greater awareness of the rich diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, history and society.

He is Deputy Chair of the Australian Indigenous Leadership Centre and Co-Chair of the National NAIDOC Committee.

John Paul has four boys (Jack, Will, Kye and Charlie).



### **Stasia Dabrowski AOM**

Stasia was born in 1926 in Poland and moved to Canberra in 1964 with her husband and two young sons.

Stasia Dabrowski has voluntarily run a mobile soup kitchen since 1979, providing hot soup, bread, drinks, clothes and blankets to the homeless and needy of Canberra. She is dedicated to the welfare of young people and the lack of love and security many experience.

She was the 1996 Canberra Citizen of the Year, and the 1999 inaugural Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Senior Australian of the Year.



### **Jim Johnson (1927 - 2017)**

Jim Johnson moved from Queensland to Chifley in 1967 with his heavily pregnant wife and 5 children. Jim developed strong community connections and became involved in numerous volunteer groups.

He was a founding member of the Sacred Heart Church in Pearce and was instrumental in fundraising for its construction.

Jim Johnson, was also known as Mr. Football for his undying love of Australian Rules football. He was one of the driving forces behind the formation of the St. Edmund's College and Tuggeranong Football Clubs, the publicity manager for the Manuka Football Club, an ACTAFL tribunal member and a co-presenter of the locally produced Football Show Grandstand. He was given the role of Umpires advisor in the 1970s and umpired into his sixties.

Jim was also involved in the World athletics and volunteered in numerous athletic and sporting carnivals as he was a trained sports medicine coach.

Jim worked with his local community, with charity organisations, serving as president of the St Vincent de Paul's Society for Canberra and the South Coast.

For many years he read to the residents at the Jindalee Nursing Home and on radio for blind people.



### **Don and Barbara Whitbread**

Don Whitbread OAM, and his pianist wife, Barbara, issued an invitation to local children to join the Woden Valley Youth Choir. Rehearsals began in their living room in Pearce in 1969.

The Choir initially performed in school halls and similar venues in the local area, then extended their performances to both national and international tours, significant commemorative events, several music albums and a television special. Don directed the Choir for 28 years, while Barbara accompanied for 20 Years.

Don was also the first President of the Woden Community Service and became an Honorary Member of the Rotary Club of Woden. He pursued his other passion, hockey, which he enjoyed for over 40 years. He represented Australia in the Senior Masters team from 1986-90, and in 1993 in Canberra, he captained the ACT over 55's, which was the first ACT team to win an Australian Veteran's Championship.

In 1980 Don received the Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) and in 1997 the Canberra Citizen of the Year for his work with the Woden Valley Youth Choir.



### **Betsy Gallagher**

Betsy worked for Woden Community Service for 25 years – 10 years in the family day care program and then 15 years as the Service's Director.

Betsy was instrumental in establishing the Family Day Care Award in the ACT. She was also elected Chairperson of the Canberra Association for Community Based Child Care. Betsy defended the rights of the home based child care workers and championed their cause.

Betsy was a vocal member of the community sector on many issues, particularly in relation to ensuring the provision of appropriate services for people who are seen as having a disability. She went to extraordinary lengths to ensure that migrants and refugees could access services they needed to settle in the ACT.

Betsy had very strong principles that valued social justice and human rights on both a personal and professional level. As a result WCS became and remains a highly principled, values based organisation that is strongly aligned to its community and its members.

The Betsy Gallagher Park in Phillip was named in recognition of her contribution to the community



### **Jeanette Purkis**

Jeanette Purkis lives in Mawson and is a passionate advocate for autistic people and their families.

Jeanette is the author of a number of books and frequently gives talks about a variety of topics including employment, resilience, self-advocacy and living well with autism and mental health issues. She facilitates a support group for women on the autism spectrum and is a regular guest presenter on Canberra Radio 2CC's Talking Disability program.

Jeanette was the 2016 ACT volunteer of the year.



### **Robyn Eaton**

Robyn moved in to Curtin with her family in the late 1960s.

As there were limited established sporting networks in Woden, Robyn formed the BullAnts Netball Club in the early 1970s and was the coaching director for the South Canberra Netball Association. Robyn has coached all levels of netball teams, including club, district, state and Australian Development Squads. She was the inaugural, and longest serving, coach of the ACT Intellectually Disabled Netball team.

Robyn also founded P-FLAG, the ACT's first support network for Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays.

In 2000, Robyn was awarded the Australian Sports Medal for her contribution to Australian Sport.



### **Matilda House**

Matilda, a Ngambri-Ngunnawal elder, has a long-established connection to Canberra and its surrounding regions as one of the traditional custodians of the land.

Matilda moved into Pearce in 1966 and her four children attended Melrose High School. Matilda has had a long association with Aboriginal justice and helped to establish the Aboriginal Legal Service in the 1980s. As chair of many Canberra and Queanbeyan Indigenous committees and organisations, and in her role performing welcoming ceremonies (including the first 'Welcome to Country' at the opening of the 42nd Federal Parliament in 2008), Matilda is tirelessly involved within the community.

Matilda is passionate about Aboriginal history and traditions and believes it is possible for the wider community to work together to respect the land, achieve justice, equity and unity for all Australians.

She enjoys telling her grandchildren about their ancestors and country through stories and painting with five picture books titled 'Tales from Ngambri History', written and illustrated by five local Indigenous families, including her own, distributed throughout the ACT's public primary schools.

In 2006, Matilda was named Canberra Citizen of the Year. The award acknowledged her as a person:

“who has devoted her life to promoting the interests of Canberra’s Indigenous people on a host of formal committees, councils and advisory groups and helping to guide policy-making on issues as diverse as heritage, justice and the environment. Matilda embodies the living, thriving and evolving culture of this region’s Aboriginal people and is an advocate for the well-being and rights of Indigenous people everywhere”.

In 2017, Matilda was awarded an Honorary Doctorate from the ANU for her contribution to society.



### **Connor Barber**

Connor Barber won the open class at the inaugural Australasian Scooter Association ACT titles at the Woden Skate Park on 3 March 2018.

On 21 April 2018 he competed at Cherrybrook, NSW and came 2nd in the 15s and over section.

Scooter riding is one of the fastest growing action sports in the world and Connor demonstrates to young people at the park the joy of learning scootering skills.