

Media Release

The Hon Natalie Hutchins MP
Minister for Government Services
Minister for Treaty and First Peoples
Minister for Prevention of Family Violence
Minister for Women



Thursday, 27 February 2025

CELEBRATING YOUNG ABORIGINAL LEADERS

Four young First Nations leaders making their mark have been recognised for their outstanding achievements at the 26th Ricci Marks Awards, supported by the Allan Labor Government.

Minister for Treaty and First Peoples Natalie Hutchins congratulated the winners, aged between 16 and 25, making their mark in cultural tourism, leadership, the arts and mental health.

The Labor Government will award the three Ricci Marks Awards winners a \$5,000 bursary to continue their community work, and the Rising Star Award winner will receive \$1,500 to support their work.

Kobe Atkinson, a Bangerang and Wiradjuri man, received the award for his work in social justice and public policy, serving on the boards of several Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and advisory bodies. Kobe plans to pursue a career in public service advocating for First Nations peoples.

Tanisha Lovett, a Gunditjmara and Wotjobaluk woman, was recognised for her work as an artist and mentor. She leads projects including the Wotjobaluk Ceremonial Dance group and Wotjobaluk Youth Kinship Camps. She is passionate about protecting the interests of First Nations Victorians and supporting young leaders.

Braydon Saunders, a Gunditjmara man, is a tourism operator who creates chances for people to learn about Gunditjmara heritage including at the world-heritage listed Budj Bim Cultural Landscape. Braydon jointly created the Native Nations project which won a New Zealand Tourism Award.

This year's Rising Star Award went to Djakira Hope, a Gilgar Gunditj and Gunai Kurnai woman who is training in play therapy and works with children with autism. She is a qualified Mental Health First Aid facilitator and coordinates netball umpires at her local football and netball club.

The Ricci Marks Awards, supported by the Labor Government, were first held in 1997 as the Aboriginal Young Achievers Awards. In 2005, they were renamed after Ricci Marks, a Wotjobaluk man and recipient of the award who made an outstanding contribution to his community in his short life.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Treaty and First Peoples Natalie Hutchins

"The Ricci Marks Awards are a wonderful way to recognise outstanding young First Nations Victorians – empowering them to continue their work in their communities."

"These award recipients are inspirational role models – they should be enormously proud of what they've accomplished for their communities and for themselves."

Quote attributable to Parliamentary Secretary for First Peoples Christine Couzens

"This year's Ricci Marks awards recipients join a distinguished group of outstanding First Nations Young People. There is no doubt they will all have an amazing future and will play a significant role in our state's future."