

## PRIDE OF AUSTRALIA

## Leader of the future

Proud indigenous teen devotes his life to serving community

## YOUNG LEADER

BRITTANY STACK

MOST teenage boys are usually interested in playing video games and making plans for the weekend.

Not Mitchell Dahlstrom.

He is just two years out of high school and his resume is already three pages long — and growing rapidly.

While studying for his HSC in 2010 this dedicated young man was a co-ordinator for the Moree Plains Relay For Life, chairman of the Moree Plains Shire Youth Council and a member of the NSW Youth Advisory Council.



Mitchell Dahlstrom.

Mitchell, 19, continued to be a member of the youth advisory council until the end of last year, when his two-year appointment expired.

He has remained active in his community and is chair-

man of the Drug Action Team, treasurer of Moree Men's Shed and a member of the Crime Prevention Committee.

Mitchell also regularly attends a number of community meetings such as the Moree Aboriginal Intergency, Moree Youth Intergency, Moree Aboriginal Education Conservation Group and many more community forums.

He is also the town's community engagement officer and was one of six members of the first National Indigenous Youth Parliament in Canberra in May.

"Being part of the Youth Parliament in Canberra was a wonderful experience. I got to meet a lot of very interesting

people and it fuelled my desire to keep helping my community," he said.

In his current job he works tirelessly to assist other young indigenous people find employment. He said it was important for young people to have their voices heard and participate in the decision-making process.

Recognising the importance of education, he encourages other youngsters to remain in school or undertake further studies to increase their employability and give them a better start in life.

"I'm very happy with all of the opportunities that I've had because I've got to meet a great number of people and

some extraordinary people as well," Mitchell said.

"I guess I started when I was doing my HSC because I really wanted to help people.

"It was tough doing the HSC at the same time but it was very rewarding helping other people.

"I couldn't have done all the things I've achieved without the support of my family and friends and the community I live in."

Mitchell was proud to be awarded the Young Leader Medal yesterday. It followed the trend of what has been a good year for Mitchell. In January he was named a Young Citizen of the Year at the Australia Day Awards.

## The spirit to never surrender

## COURAGE

BORN with spina bifida and confined to a wheelchair by the age of 11, Shanon Bates spent the first five years of his life in a hospital bed.

He has also undergone more than 80 operations. But his indomitable spirit saw him win the courage medal at yesterday's Pride Of Australia ceremony.

Shanon has gone on to represent Australia in wheelchair racing, winning more than 100 gold medals.

He has worked as a peer support officer and educator for people with spinal cord injuries and works with people with intellectual disabilities.

He is also studying to become a personal trainer.

"This is just who I am, and if I can help anyone with a spinal chord injury to live an independent life as they should be, my job is done," Shanon said.

"I'm trying to make sure that anyone who has an accident or an illness that sees them wheelchair-bound doesn't give up. They can still go on to lead wholly productive lives and contribute a lot to society."

Shannon is also training to compete in powerlifting at the Rio Paralympics after missing out on London.



Shanon Bates.

## Hard years of struggling for every breath

## CHILD OF COURAGE

UNTIL she received a double lung transplant two years ago Ayla Sutherland didn't know what it felt like to take a deep breath.

The 15-year-old, who dreams of one day being a famous singer, couldn't climb the driveway to her house, run in the school athletics carnival or even hum her favourite tune without gasping for air.

Born with cystic fibrosis, Ayla's lungs began to fail in 2010 and she was placed on a life-support system for 57 days — a record in Australia — before receiving the double lung transplant she desperately needed.

"I remember being really embarrassed to do the cross country because I'd always be last, or I'd race as fast as I could and a quarter of the way through I'd stop and have a massive coughing fit. I used to get off the bus every afternoon and get to the top of my driveway and collapse," said Ayla, whose resilience won her this year's Child of Courage medal.

After two years of intense rehabilitation, Ayla is finally learning what fun it is to live like a normal teenager.

She recently started playing sport at school and is taking singing lessons.

"My new lungs haven't just given me a second life, they've given me a better life," Ayla said.

"I couldn't do anything my friends could and now I'm, like, fitter than them.

"When people hear about organ donation a lot of people think, 'I'm not giving my organs to some random' — but I'm that random. If just one person donates their organs it can save up to seven people."

Ayla dedicated her medal to her friends suffering from cystic fibrosis.

"I used to sit in the hospital corridors with them and we would sit up all night telling jokes, laughing our heads off until we were all having coughing fits," she said.



Jodi Gordon with Ayla Sutherland, who works to raise awareness about organ donation. Picture: Katrina Tepper

## A lifetime of helping homeless

## FAIR GO

STEVE Petras was shaking uncontrollably when he was awarded the Fair Go medal at yesterday's Pride Of Australia Awards.

"I'm used to working with homeless people. I'm not used to making speeches," he said.

"I'm really nervous. My wife will kill me," he joked.

Born in Egypt, Steve came to Australia at the age of 14. A community minded man, he volunteers two days a week at Mary Mac's Place in Woy Woy, helping provide meals and welfare support for the homeless and disadvantaged.

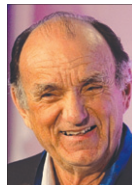
Mary Mac's Place is a charitable organisation that provides a midday meal, welfare referral and support and other facilities for the homeless.

Steve is often the first to arrive for duties and the last to leave at the end of the day.

For the past seven years he has also volunteered two days a week with Meals on Wheels.

"If anyone needs help I can sit down with them and find out what the problem is," he said.

"Volunteers are needed really badly. There is always someone who needs a helping hand and I just try to do what little I can."



Steve Petras.



William and Daniel.

## Fighting for great apes and Olympic glory

## ENVIRONMENT

DANIEL Clarke has two dreams — to save the orang-utans of Borneo and to follow in his father's athletic footsteps.

It is through his efforts to preserve the jungles of Borneo that Daniel, 15, and his brother William, 13, won the environment medal at yesterday's Pride Of Australia Awards in Sydney.

Daniel has cerebral palsy and is confined to a wheelchair but it hasn't stopped him striving to fulfil his ambition of saving the orang-utans.

Inspired by his brother's passion, William joined him on the crusade. Together they have already raised \$650,000, on the way to their goal of \$1 million.

The money has sponsored 11,000ha of Borneo jungle.

The boys also wrote a book called *Tears In The Jungle*, lobbied politicians, appeared on TV and plan to address the UN.

Their book is used as a learning resource in schools across NSW.

Proud mum Penny said she was amazed by her sons' perseverance: "They are so passionate. We are so proud of them both. They achieve so much and

they won't give up until they reach their goal."

While continuing to fight for the orang-utan, Daniel has his second dream to aim towards.

He would love to represent Australia at the 2016 Paralympic Games in Rio de Janeiro.

His dad Rodney tasted the Olympic spirit in 1988 at Calgary when he represented in the new sport of ice dancing.