

Monday, 18 December 2023

## Class of 2023 delivers 40 Governor of SA Commendations

Forty high-achieving South Australian students have been awarded Governor of South Australia Commendations across the categories of South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) Excellence, Aboriginal Student SACE Excellence and Excellence in Modified SACE.

Among them are students who have volunteered to assist young trauma survivors, veterans, the homeless and women fleeing violence, have fundraised for childhood cancer research, published a book to save the black rhino and so much more.

The Governor of South Australia Commendations recognise excellence in Year 12 SACE subjects and student's personal achievements inside and outside of the school community.

This year's recipients include, seven country students from Berri, Gawler, Kadina, Littlehampton, Murray Bridge, Mount Gambier and Robe.

Students will receive their Commendation awards at an official ceremony at Government House on February 8, 2024.

**SACE Board Chief Executive Michaela Bensley said:** "This year's Governor of South Australia Commendation recipients are excellent ambassadors for the entire SACE class of 2023, which had shown creative thinking, community leadership, resilience, skill and passion for learning inside and outside of the classroom.

"The SACE Board congratulates the 2023 Governor of South Australia Commendation recipients, their loved ones and the educators and communities that have supported them through their 13 years of schooling."

A panel comprising the Governor, Her Excellency the Honourable Frances Adamson AC, and representatives from school, vocational education and training, and business sectors determine which nominated students receive the [Governor's Commendation awards](#).

A full list of Governor of South Australian Commendation recipients for 2023 is available [online](#) and included below.

## Governor of South Australian Commendation recipients for 2023

### Excellence in SACE Award

#### Chelsea Adams

Chelsea attended the National Youth Science Forum (NYSF) in Canberra and was subsequently chosen to take part in the NYSF Student Staff Leadership Program in 2024 where she will take on the role of the leader of next year's group of students. Chelsea is a talented singer and performing artist and mentors younger students at Homework Club each week. She is also studying two university subjects in the field of criminology. Outside of school, Chelsea is a member of the Waite Youth Advisory to Waite MP Catherine Hutchesson and has participated in the Duke of Edinburgh Program and the Commissioner for Children and Young People's South Australian Student Representative Council (SA SRC).

#### Rayhana Al Kilabi

Following a serious accident, Rayhana has overcome an acquired brain injury and mild hearing loss to complete her SACE studies to a high standard. Rayhana speaks and writes Arabic well and supports her family and community by translating between Arabic and English. Although English is her second language, her mastery of English is outstanding. Rayhana has a strong sense of social justice and a clear understanding of the importance of ethics.

#### Amy Anderson

Amy dedicated her summer holidays to a natural curiosity for biomedical sciences by volunteering for the Flinders Cancer Innovation Centre (FCIC) Bowel Health Service. She had previously undertaken work experience at FCIC, where she learnt about a range of fields within cancer research. Amy has also undertaken university studies in Molecular Basis of Life and Histology. In addition to her passion for medical sciences, Amy volunteered as a tournament official for Golf Australia at the Men's and Women's Pennant Finals in July. Amy also works part-time at a bakery where she strives to serve every customer with a smile and genuine care.

#### Chenuli Sakithma Basnayake

Chenuli has received school awards for excellence in English Literature and Philosophy. She excelled in the Australian English Teachers Writing Competition with a third place award for her short story on a young boy who has difficulty learning and speaking. The book lover is a talented member of the school orchestra and choir. She plays the viola. Chenuli has volunteered for the Red Cross and planted trees in the Adelaide Hills following the devastating bushfires in 2020. She is hoping to study medicine.

#### Stella Cozamanis

Stella is a gifted artist. She has worked with staff to develop their professional skills in video editing. As a boarder at her school, Stella took on the role of Boarding House Photographer and has created dozens of films, photo boards, news articles, and related media. Her family originates from England, Greece and the Ngarrindjeri from the Coorong and lower Murray River. After delving into her family history, Stella unearthed a rich tapestry of both her

Aboriginal and Greek heritage. Stella hopes to work abroad, particularly in Greece, and in a wildlife sanctuary in Africa.

Jessica Craig

In 2023, Jessica was engaged by the Norwood Women's SANFL league and development teams as the club statistician. In this role, she measures key performance indicators for all players. She was the only South Australian student selected to attend the James Cook University Engineering Futures Camp, during which some of Australia's brightest minds gained access to a camp program designed to inspire the next generation of engineering whiz kids.

Sienna Daniell (Murray Bridge)

Sienna is interested in pursuing radiography as well as child psychology and this was an area she focused on for her Research Project. She has a passion for sport and team building and she plays and volunteers in roles such as umpiring, coaching, and working in the canteen for her local netball club. Sienna also works at a local chemist and has completed a Certificate II in Pharmacy.

Emma Deering

Emma has undertaken some Year 12 studies while in Year 11 and is currently completing the Headstart Program at the University of Adelaide - a scholarship program giving high-achieving students the opportunity to study at university while still in Year 12 and have these university studies count towards their SACE and selection rank. Emma is involved in the United Nations SA and while in Year 12 reached the final stages of the Evatt Competition, which is Australia's most prestigious high school Model UN competition. She was among 1000 delegates who competed in the national finals in Melbourne in November and December.

Wendy (Wenshuo) Dong

In addition to her SACE subjects, Wendy has completed a Certificate III in Community Services. She participates in school ensembles and performances, where she plays the violin and sings. She is involved in many social justice initiatives within the school community, including serving meals, packaging birthing kits, and cooking for the homeless through Fred's Van. She also volunteers in the junior years OHSC, where she helps organise activities and assists the younger students with their homework.

Mia Eliseo

Her own experience with suffering and recovering from cancer was the stimulus for Mia's AIF project on how adolescent females' fertility might be impacted by chemotherapy. She is an advocate for the Childhood Cancer Association (CCA) and Variety Children's Charity. In 2021, she developed the idea of a fundraiser and hair donation event, 'Hair with Heart', at her school in support of the CCA and other organisations. The event has since grown to include a 'commUNITY' walk, the morning before the event. Since 2021, Mia has raised over \$10,000 and 50 ponytails. In recognition of her fundraising work, Mia received an Order of Australia Student Citizenship Award.

Olivia Harwood

A talented public speaker, Olivia took on the role of MC at the Catholic Schools Music Festival, the premier arts event for Catholic Education in South Australia showcasing the talents of 2000 students who spend seven months preparing for their moment on stage. In her Activating Identities and Futures (AIF) subjects Olivia explored the intricacies of international space law. Olivia is also a gifted musician and, outside of school, is band captain for the Woodville Concert Band.

Keeley Hurst (Gawler East)

In 2023, Keeley lobbied the local community businesses and sporting clubs for donations toward care packages to Catherine House, a not-for-profit organisation that provides accommodation and support services for women experiencing homelessness in South Australia. Keeley volunteers at her local football and netball clubs in a variety of roles, including working in the canteen, providing sales assistance, and acting as scorer and umpire for both senior and junior grades.

Jesse Isaac

Jesse is an exceptional public speaker and has represented his school at a number of speaking events. He also writes articles for the school newsletter. Outside of school, Jesse is a nationally recognised and awarded field hockey umpire. He has also achieved the highest rank as an Air Force Cadet, and through being an active trainee at Glider Training School, he has also become an assistant training officer and training operations officer, where he mentors, leads and plans activities including airport visits and gliding experiences for junior members.

Caitlin Kalms (Berri)

Caitlin excels in STEM, plans to study biomedicine and is the recipient of a Children's Week Minister for Education Award for her outstanding academic achievement, community service and student leadership. As a member of the school's environmental student action team, Caitlin was responsible for regular composting of food scraps for the worm farm and drove awareness of the team's environmental initiatives beyond the school community. In addition to her SACE studies, Caitlin tutors Year 11 Chemistry students and has helped raise awareness of the impacts of cancer on people in the community through various fundraising efforts.

Simeen Khan

Simeen is an exceptional mathematician. She has represented the school in a range of STEM initiatives, the most notable being the MASA math competition, NASSSA Math Olympics, and the metro and regional STEMiE showcase. Simeen was also the recipient of a STEM scholarship from the SA Department of Education. Simeen and her family were refugees from Pakistan. She strongly believes that 'living in the north and being a refugee should not define you, and that everyone has a right to be successful'. Her background has been marked by sacrifice and hardship and highlights the struggles faced by many immigrants in their quest for a brighter future, yet her determination to succeed academically and to pursue her dreams is inspiring.

Jason Lim

Jason has received numerous distinctions in various maths and science competitions. He has taken on a proactive role in leading whole school improvement projects, demonstrated a commitment to growing his own leadership capacity and that of his peers. Jason received a high distinction in the Australian Math Competition this year and Helen Brooke Prize for Mathematics at his school. The Badminton player in his spare time has raised funds for the World's Greatest Shave and the Big Freeze for research into MND and Leukaemia.

Seonghan (Matthew) Lim

A passionate mathematician, Matthew was the top student in the South Australian Math Investigation Competition this year, run by the Mathematics Association of SA. He was also placed first in his school's Math Competition. Matthew volunteered his lunchtimes mentoring middle school children as part of the school's Math's Help Sessions. He has played tennis and soccer for his school and his plans for the future including a career in medicine.

Zoe Lin

Zoe created menus and programs of events for the Food Fiesta for Destiny Rescue and World Vision Program. Both within and outside of the school, Zoe is involved in multiple fundraising efforts, whether it be raising funds for World Vision, The 40 Hour Famine, Cold for a Cause Day, victims of east coast floods, or church mission trips. She is also a valued member of the school's concert and stage bands and has won numerous awards in competitions such as the Balaklava Eisteddfod and Generations in Jazz.

Maesie MacGillivray

Maesie received the ZONTA Club of Gawler Women in STEM Award/Scholarship highlights her innovative thinking. As a mentor, Maesie has shown remarkable interpersonal skills, empathy, and the ability to support and guide others. Her involvement in the Senior Concert Band, Securely Found (Christian Fellowship) group, and leadership in a discipleship group reflects her strong social capabilities, teamwork, and spiritual connectedness to others. She has highly developed collaboration skills that allow her to connect effectively with a diverse range of individuals. The challenge of partaking in Snow Venture through Scouts and leading a team of ten Venturer Scouts on an adventure hiking the Overland Track in Tasmania further illustrates her resilience, leadership, and ability to work cohesively in a team setting.

Kye McDonald (Littlehampton)

Kye is a recipient of the ANZAC award, which recognises the core values of respect, resilience and the Anzac spirit. A respectful member of the community, Kye advocates for the establishment of community green spaces, such as the Glebe in Littlehampton, and around his home in the Adelaide Hills. Kye helps to nurse animals back to health when he finds them in need on his property and is proud of his Vietnamese and South African heritage. He ensures he is inclusive of others regardless of social status or ethnicity. He has shared his own experiences of racism to highlight its impacts. Kye plays soccer for the Adelaide Hills Hawks and was also selected for the Hills regional team.

Ashton Monson

Ashton is a compassionate leader and advocate for cultural understanding. He is proud of his culture and has contributed significantly to, and promotes awareness of, his school's

Reconciliation Action Plan. He is a key leader in the school Media Club, which is responsible for recording and live-streaming whole school formal assemblies, and 'The Show', a topical and humorous recap of school events, which is live streamed to students twice a term.

#### Devika Kim Mukherjee

Devika is a gifted debater. She has received the Todd Golding Medal for greatest contribution to the South Australian debating team this year and in 2021. Devika has also been a member of the Australian Debating Team. She has achieved a swathe of school prizes and academic awards including for Legal Studies and Biology. Devika hopes to study medicine, while serving as an Officer in the Australian Army Reserve.

#### Darren Nguyen

Throughout his senior schooling, Darren has received numerous subject prizes across math and science. The school house vice-captain has also received awards in the Australian Mathematics Competition and the Australian Science Olympiads. A keen badminton and soccer player for his school, Darren also enjoys playing the piano and guitar. He had volunteered to assist those in need through organisations such as Foodbank and took part in a camp as a carer for a child with special needs, which he says was one of his most rewarding volunteer opportunities at school. Darren is hoping to study medicine.

#### Adrian Niculescu

Adrian is heavily involved in debating, public speaking and policy advocacy. He was selected as one of twelve SA representatives at the 2023 National Schools Constitutional Convention in Canberra and as the recipient of The Advertiser Teen Parliament in 2022, was awarded a \$10,000 scholarship. Adrian represented SA in the national finals of the United Nations Youth Voice competition in 2022. He volunteers for a major political party, which includes phone canvassing, booth management and letterboxing, data collection and analysis. He is also the recipient of the Australian Army Cadets SA Brigade Student of Merit. And was selected as the sole SA representative for the SA Army Cadets for the National Tri Service Leadership Summit.

#### Henry Nitschke

Henry's dedication and passion for his future study and career goals are evidenced through his extracurricular activities, volunteer work, and personal projects. He received a gold service award for more than 100 hours of community service. This year, Henry volunteered at a War Veterans RSL Care facility. He also worked as a volunteer receptionist at a general practice, and he celebrated his 18th birthday by volunteering at the Variety SA Children's Party for children with special needs at the Adelaide Zoo. He is a CFS cadet and a certified firefighter.

#### Ruby Pearce

Ruby aims to enter medicine and focused on gender inequity in the medical field for her Activating Identities and Futures (AIF) subject. Ruby also works tirelessly within the greater community to fundraise for charity and those in need and also supports and mentors young burns and trauma survivors at the KIDS Foundation, which supports children who have experienced horrific injuries and trauma.

### Aleah Poole

Aleah represented the state in gymnastics at the national gymnastics' championships in 2023. She has created a range of educational multimedia resources including videos, Instagram posts, TikTok posts, Power point lessons, and interactive quizzes around bullying for middle school students. Aleah has been heavily involved in NAIDOC and Harmony weeks and is a role model for Aboriginal students at the school, which is testament to her ability to inspire others and promote academic excellence.

### Tigerlily Santry

Tigerlily aspires to enter the field of mechanical engineering after school. She has a passion for linguistics and communication, as is evidenced in her A+ for Japanese. Through her research of the Japanese language, and the way it has impacted the rapidly changing Japanese society, Tigerlily was able to make connections to her own Aboriginal culture and the significant relationship that exists between languages and ongoing cultural identity.

### Melson Shi

Melson has represented the school at Anzac Day ceremonies. He presented to the local council to rally support for a new hockey stadium. Melson has also won the Oliphant Science Award for an inquiry into the iodine clock reaction - an experiment which is renowned for its dramatic and sudden colour change and which is often used to explore the effect of reagent or catalyst concentration on reaction rates. Melson was the only student at the school to complete the Premier's Reading Challenge during his 13 years of schooling.

### Vaughan Stonestreet (Kadina)

With a passion for mathematics, Vaughan started a tutoring business when he was in Year 10. Throughout his SACE studies, Vaughan has tutored a primary student every single week. Seizing the opportunity to be more valuable and employable, he independently sought and obtained his RSA, which allowed him to take on extra responsibilities at his part-time workplace. Vaughan participates in the MASA quiz nights each year, and has always won either best maths team, or best overall team.

### Max Thomas

As well as being an accomplished musician, especially on the trumpet, Max has represented Australia in debating. In 2023, he was voted best mooter at the Bond University National Mooting Competition, and while in Year 11, Max was accepted to the Apollo Fellowship - a summer program in the UK designed to teach debating skills and complex concepts relevant to the present and future of humanity, across a wide variety of philosophical and technological issues, including artificial intelligence, long-termism and existential risk, utilitarianism and more.

### Lachlan Tripodi

In the after school 'Homework Club', Lachlan mentors students from Years 6 to 12 in a wide range of subjects. He designed and ran his school's Blue Week, which helps raise awareness of men's mental health, including depression and anxiety, through activities that help create positive change in how students approach mental health, encouraging them to check in with others and reducing the stigma attached to asking for help. He has volunteered for a range



of initiatives including SA School Sport Disability Soccer World Cup days, the Loreto Pink Day assembly, and Vinnie's Men's Crisis Centre Morning and Lunch BBQs.

Olivia Turner

Olivia was a state finalist in the National History Challenge for the category 'Australian Wartime Experience'. This involved researching and writing an essay analysing different experiences women faced in WWI and the Vietnam War. A keen debater, Olivia won the First Year Flinders Mooting Competition and volunteers as a debating coach at the school, for the Year 7 and Year 12 teams. She is also a member of the Commissioner for Children and Young People's Advisory Panel and the SA Student Representative Council. Olivia has also volunteered at WOMADelaide.

Keagan Wallace

Keagan has published the book, 'A Crash of Rhinos', to raise awareness and support conservation of the black rhino in Africa. He is an ambassador for international campaign 'Read to me Day' which encourages children to remind adults to read to them. Keagan has been selected as a United Nations Youth Voice South Australian delegate for three years running. In 2022, he was the keynote speaker at a Young Changemakers conference in SA. He is a youth member of the Australian Red Cross Leave it to Z Project Steering Committee and earlier this year he participated in a voluntary trip to Indonesia with the Overseas Specialist Surgical Association of Australia Inc to provide surgical and reconstructive rehabilitation services for children and disadvantaged people.

Ruby Wallace (Mount Gambier)

Ruby demonstrates a deep understanding and command of language and excels in all forms of literacy actively. She assists her peers and younger students in enhancing their literacy skills. Her Research Project focused on the effectiveness of prisons in rehabilitation and reducing recidivism, and her association with AC Care gave her unique insights into the lives of prisoners and those recently released. She is a keen up-cycler and up-cycles much of her own clothing. She contributes to the 'Recycled Runway' fundraiser organised by AC Care for local homelessness services. As well as completing her SACE subjects, Ruby has completed two university courses.

Hayley Wilkinson

Hayley participated in the National ABC Titration competition and the International Chemistry Quiz. She organised a teacher talent show and always includes special education students in group projects to ensure their voices are heard and they participate in various activities. She often coaches junior volleyball and teaches choreography to younger and older members of her local dance studio and has volunteered at the Vinnie's Women's Shelter to decorate and remodel a children's play space.

Maddie Wirth (Robe)

In addition to her SACE studies, Maddie is an active member of the Robe community, where she participates in pilates, the run club, and plays netball for the Robe Netball Club. She has also been involved in the surf life-saving club, Kingston and Millicent basketball clubs, yoga, dance, and calisthenics. She works at a local restaurant, babysits, and volunteers at the childcare on wheels service. As a result of her community involvement and spirit, and in



In addition to her academic success, Maddie was the recipient of the 2023 Robe District Council Young citizen of the Year Award on Australia Day.

#### Mia Worth

For her Research Project, Mia developed a website to address the discrimination faced by Asian students in schools, in particular the stereotype of Asians being academically successful. Beyond her academic studies, Mia is actively involved in Tournament of Minds. She mentors younger students in the STEM category, sharing her passion for girls to develop an interest in the science and mathematics field. Mia is also the recipient of the ADF Future Innovators Award 2023, which recognises recipients' science and mathematics abilities while highlighting the value the Navy, Army and Air Force place on STEM skills and STEM career opportunities within Defence. She also received a Governor's Civics Award in 2022 and attained her Duke of Edinburgh International Gold Award in 2023.

#### **Aboriginal Student SACE Excellence Award**

##### India Bament-Sitowski

An active member of her school's Reconciliation Action Plan Committee for the past three years, India also led a group of staff and students on a walk to mark the anniversary of the Apology to the Stolen Generations and participated in the Thriving People initiative. As part of her Outdoor Education studies, India participated in a camp on the land of her ancestors – Narungga Land – and has been learning the Kaurna language over the past two years. In addition to her SACE studies, India works part-time in hospitality where she trains and inducts new staff. She is also a talented netballer and represents her local team.

#### **Excellence in Modified SACE Award**

##### Matt Heath

Matt, who lives with Down's Syndrome, has relished ongoing work experience at a local hospitality business where he has excelled with Barista and culinary skills, including making muffins, taking orders and making a range of barista coffees. As part of his transition to independence, Matt has compiled a book of selected and tested recipes, also tested at his own 18th birthday celebrations with his home class and leaders from his school. He also created and edited a video of his Year 12 experiences. Matt's determination and wonderful desire to strive for his best and to be independent, coupled with his wonderful sense of humour, makes him a much-loved and respected member of the school community.

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