



40 Under 40 Most Influential Asian-Australians for 2021 announced

(7 September 2021) Vietnamese-Australian actor, comedian and writer, **Diana Nguyen**, has been named the overall winner of the **2021 40 Under 40 Most Influential Asian-Australian Awards**, for her leadership, creativity and humour in shining a light on inclusion and diversity in contemporary Australia. In a period of enormous upheaval and uncertainty for artists and entertainers, Nguyen reminds Australia of the power of authentic storytelling and community connections. Her renowned web series – *Phi and Me* – and podcast platforms including *The SnortCast*, have shown resourcefulness, great initiative and have had deep national resonance.

Amongst the 40 awardees this year are professional footballer and Olympian, **Samantha Kerr**, Captain of the Matildas and team member of the Chelsea Football Club in the Women's Super League; environmental engineer, **Qilin Wang**, who transforms wastewater treatment plants into carbon-neutral energy generators; **Frances Voon**, a refugee lawyer advancing the rights of forced migrants; and **Seiji Armstrong**, a trust and safety specialist leading a dedicated team at Google's headquarters to protect child safety and eradicate Covid-19-related racial vilification online.

"These awards shine the light on the extraordinary pipeline of Asian-Australian talent with a view to ensuring that the boards and leadership teams of Australia's most significant organisations are more reflective of our diverse population," says Jason Johnson, founder and Managing Partner of Johnson Partners and co-convenor of the Awards.

This year, an additional award category was introduced: **The Under 25 Rising Star**, in response to an abundance of submissions from high achievers under the age of 25. **Zahra**, an Australian of Palestinian-Iraqi heritage, is an international advocate for gender equality and refugee rights, who worked with the Australian embassies in France and Mexico to deliver the UN Generation Equality Forum in June this year.

"There is a growing awareness and confidence among young Asian-Australians to step up as leaders, be recognised and be role models for others. It is an exciting near future for Australia and for organisations, like Asialink, dedicated to driving meaningful creative engagement with our region," says Dr Pippa Dickson, Director of Asialink Arts and co-convenor of the Awards.

"Chronic under-representation will inevitably impact Australia's future success. The Awards broaden the diversity agenda and highlight the achievements of Asian-Australians. As a past recipient, it continues to inspire me to meaningfully contribute to the nation's most important issues," says Tuanh Nguyen, Director of Legal at PwC Australia and co-convenor of the Awards.

The Awards – now in their third year – were announced during a virtual presentation on 7 September. As an initiative of the **Asian-Australian Leadership Summit**, co-convened by **Johnson Partners**, **Asialink** at the University of Melbourne, **PwC Australia** and the **Centre for Asian-Australian Leadership at the Australian National University**. The Awards confront the serious under-representation of Asian-Australians in senior leadership positions across Australia's public institutions and private sector corporations by recognising the extraordinary achievements and accomplishments of Asian-Australians aged 40 years and younger in a variety of fields including the public service, corporate and entrepreneurship, sport, science and medicine, education and the arts, legal and professional services, not-for-profit and community advocacy.



“These awards are critical because it is a reminder of the need to advance efforts in elevating Asian-Australian representation in senior leadership roles across Australia’s public institutions and private sector corporations. To achieve cohesion and equality, leaders and decision makers are required to take a greater intersectional approach in our wider diversity and inclusion agenda at all levels of Australian society”, says Jieh-Yung Lo, Director of the Centre for Asian-Australian Leadership at the Australian National University and co-convenor of the Awards.

The full list of awardees of this year’s 40 Under 40 Most Influential Asian-Australian Awards can be found at www.asianaustrianleadership.com.au/40-under-40-awards

For media enquiries and requests to interview co-convenors or award-winners please contact Heather Chai on +61 423 035 277 or at heather.chai@asialinkbusiness.com.au

For more information about the Asian-Australian Leadership Summit and the 40 Under 40 Most Influential Asian-Australian Awards visit www.asianaustrianleadership.com.au

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The 40 Under 40 Most Influential Asian-Australians Category Winners:

OVERALL WINNER

Diana Nguyen, Actor, Comedian, Writer | Vietnamese-Australian

Smashing viewer numbers with her Vietnamese-Australian family comedy web series – an industry first regarding its concept – *Phi and Me* has won international awards. Spurred by its popularity, Nguyen founded the podcast *The ShortCast* in 2019, embracing line-up shows with balanced gender representation, and most importantly, a commitment to cultural diversity regarding casting policies.

ARTS & CULTURE

Juliet Catherina Widiasari Burnett, Dancer, Choreographer, Director, Writer and Activist | Indonesian-Australian

Widiasari Burnett is a member of Belgium’s Opera Ballet Vlaanderen. She is currently preparing to launch *A_PART*, an online studio and stage for Australian and Indonesian artists to collaborate through commissioned projects and live online performance in response to the pandemic and the long-term issue of accessibility to the arts.

COMMUNITY & ADVOCACY/NOT FOR PROFIT

Frances Voon, Executive Manager, Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law, UNSW Sydney | Chinese-Australian

Voon has dedicated her career to advancing the rights of forced migrants. Having worked abroad for the UN, she now resides in Australia providing strategic leadership insights to promote principled policy making on refugee acceptance laws. She also serves on the Board of the Refugee Advice and Casework Service which provides free legal support to people seeking asylum in Australia.

CORPORATE

Seiji Armstrong, Head of Machine Learning, Trust & Safety, Google | Japanese-Australian

As a quantum physicist, Armstrong has progressed from developing AI-powered cyber security solutions to protect Fortune 100 banks and retailers to ensuring the internet is a safe place for all digital users for Google. His strategies counter abuse protections across a wide range of verticals such as violent extremism, child safety, and more recently, Covid-19 racial vilification.

EDUCATION

Stanley Wang, Principal, Abbotsford Primary School | Taiwanese-Australian

As an educational leader, Wang has led cultural shifts towards diversity and inclusion within language teaching teams, enabling students to engage with their language studies and appreciate the contribution mixed races make towards Australia’s cultural identity.



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ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Jeanette Kar Yee Cheah, CEO & Founder, Hacker Exchange (HEX) | Malaysian-Australian

Cheah runs multiple educational programs teaching crucial innovation and entrepreneurship skills to the next generation of global leaders, connecting Australians to Singapore and the broader APAC region. Her company highlights economic opportunities within these markets, helping foster global network relationships and placing the spotlight on Asian professionals, founders and investors.

LEGAL A PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

Jayr Teng, Barrister, Victorian Bar | Filipino-Australian

Teng is the first Filipino-born legal member of the Mental Health Tribunal and the first Filipino-born barrister to practice in Victoria. He currently advises the government on human rights issues arising from Covid-19, and acts on behalf of the Victorian Public Sector Commission in the Royal Commission, addressing violence abuse neglect and the exploitation of people with a disability.

PUBLIC SECTOR/GOVERNMENT

Celia Tran, Principal Adviser, Victorian Multicultural Commission | Vietnamese-Australian

Tran is considered a trusted advocate for cultural diversity, anti-racism and meaningful community engagement. She is recognised for her ongoing commitment to supporting multicultural communities. Using her voice within the Victorian Public Sector, she advocates for systemic change, more inclusive workplaces and a greater representation of culturally diverse employees within public service.

SCIENCE & MEDICINE

Qilin Wang, Associate Professor; FRSN; Australian Research Council (ARC) Future Fellow, University of Technology Sydney | Chinese-Australian

An award-winning environmental engineer, Wang is most recognised for his work in the technology sector turning wastewater treatment plants into carbon-neutral energy generators. He is the lead inventor on an international patent for a waste-to-energy technology which is in the process of global commercialisation.

SPORT

Samantha Kerr, Professional Footballer; Captain, The Matildas; team member, Chelsea Football Club | Indian-Australian

As of 2021, Kerr is the all-time leading scorer in the National Women's Soccer League (NWSL) in the United States and previously held the record in the Australian W-League. She currently plays for Chelsea in the English FA Women's Super League. A proven goal scorer throughout her career, Kerr is also the captain of the Australia women's national soccer team (the Matildas).

UNDER 25 RISING STAR

Zahra, Global Advocate for Gender Equality, UN Women | Palestinian/Iraqi-Australian

As a 21-year-old first generation Australian of Palestinian and Iraqi heritage, Zahra is a local, national, and international advocate for gender equality, equitable representation within decision making and refugee rights. She recently worked with the Department of Foreign Affairs in France and Mexico to deliver the Generation Equality Forum.

The 40 Under 40 Most Influential Asian-Australian Awards winners were selected with the help of leading executive search firm, Johnson Partners, and a panel of judges that included Director of Asialink Arts at Asialink, University of Melbourne **Dr Pippa Dickson**; Former Soccerroo Captain and humanitarian advocate **Craig Foster AM**; Founder and Chief Executive of iFLYflat **Steve Hui**; Founder and Managing Partner at Johnson Partners **Jason Johnson**; Founding Partner of Kabo Lawyers and CEO at Aksara Group **Konfir Kabo**; Director of the Centre for Asian-Australian Leadership at the Australian National University (ANU) **Jieh-Yung Lo**; Australia Consulting Leader and ASEANZ Consulting CEO at PwC Australia **David McKeering**; Barrister and Overall Winner of the 2020 40 Under 40 Most Influential Asian-Australian Awards **Lyma Nguyen**; Chair, Non-Executive Director, Fellow of AICD and member of Chief Executive Women **Katrina Rathie**; Managing Director, Small and Medium Business at Optus **Libby Roy**; Chief Innovation, Marketing and Technology Officer at Stockland **Sharmila Tsourdalakis**; Chairman of Mering Corporation, Investor and Philanthropist **Jason Yeap OAM**.