

-FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE-

15 JANUARY 2026

CELEBRATING AUSTRALIA DAY IN GUNDAGAI

Kicking off at 8.30am on Monday 26 January 2026 local band The Gundaguys will entertain the crowd in Gundagai. A program packed with free entertainment, catering by the Gundagai Lions Club, Carbery Park will be the perfect place enjoy Breakfast in the Park.

Five new residents will be receiving their Australian Citizenship, a very special inclusion in this ceremony will see young Riley Lott perform the National Anthem.

Mayor Abb McAlister will be assisted by Australia Day ambassador Corey Payne. As the Founder and Executive Chairman of the Future Direction Network (FDN), Corey works to increase university participation among students from low socio-economic backgrounds. Through mentoring, information programs and financial support, FDN has helped countless young people from Western Sydney aspire to and achieve higher education. In recognition of its impact, the organisation secured significant government funding, including \$500,000 from the Federal Government and \$72,000 from the NSW Government, to expand its mission.

Corey's journey began on the rugby league field, where he played for the Canterbury-Bankstown Bulldogs, Wests Tigers and St George Illawarra Dragons. His leadership and commitment off the field earned him the title of NSW Young Australian of the Year in 2013, acknowledging his efforts to create opportunities for disadvantaged youth. In 2012, Corey was awarded a Winston Churchill Fellowship, enabling him to research global programs that use sport to engage young people and keep them connected to education.

A graduate of the University of Sydney with a Bachelor of Commerce and a Master of Commerce, Corey has also completed the Australian Institute of Company Directors' courses, equipping him with governance expertise to lead impactful initiatives. His contributions have been recognised with the University of Sydney Young Alumni Award. Additionally, Corey has also spent time abroad studying at the Hasso Plattner dSchool in Berlin and at the Peoples Bank of China School of Finance (Tsinghua University) in Beijing, China. He is very fond of his time abroad and the impact it has had on his life.

FDN is set up to award up to three scholarships annually and to date has awarded 32 scholarships. Through this program FDN has provided more than \$500,000 in financial support to students from South West Sydney studying across various degrees and universities. Corey actively mentors these students to help build their confidence to unlock the power of further education. He also encourages all scholars to consider studying abroad and has supported students to take semesters in Singapore, Japan, China, Hong Kong and the United Kingdom. Corey's work reflects his belief in the transformative power of education and community support. For him, being an Australia Day Ambassador is about celebrating opportunity, resilience and the spirit of giving back. He looks forward to inspiring Australians to reflect, respect and celebrate the values that unite us.

The morning will conclude with the presentation of Australia Day Awards to Citizen of the Year, Wendy Anderson, Young Citizen of the Year, Zak Anderson and Sportsperson of the Year William

Edwards. Certificates of Acknowledgement will also be awarded to Gundagai Council in Exile and Paul Vercoe – Gundagai RSL Sub-Branch.

A pool party hosted by MAWANG will be held from 12 noon at the Gundagai Swimming Pool, with free entertainment and activities.

Picture and caption:

A highlight for Gundagai will be the Australia Day Ambassador, Corey Payne a former professional rugby league player turned social impact leader, dedicated to empowering young Australians through education.



Cootamundra-Gundagai Regional Council
www.cgrc.nsw.gov.au

For further media information contact:
Cootamundra-Gundagai Regional Council
on
1300 459 689