

MEDIA RELEASE

NOTE: EMBARGOED UNTIL MONDAY 14 JUNE 2021

FIGHTING CHANCE CEO & CO-FOUNDER RECOGNISED IN QUEEN'S BIRTHDAY HONOURS

Fighting Chance co-founder and CEO Laura O'Reilly has today been awarded a Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) for outstanding service to the disability sector.

Ms O'Reilly's award was announced this morning as part of the Governor General's Queen's Birthday Honours List. Ms O'Reilly was nominated for the award as a result of her hard work, dedication, and considerable contribution to empowering people with disability since 2011.

Ms O'Reilly co-founded the social enterprise Fighting Chance in 2011 with her brother Jordan, after noticing that society didn't view their younger sibling Shane the same way they did.

"Our youngest brother Shane had a profound physical and moderate intellectual disability. We were really lucky to grow up in a family with parents who took the view that whatever was good enough for Jordan and I, was good enough for Shane - that we were all equal and we should all have access to the same experiences and opportunities.

"Growing up, we knew what Shane was capable of, yet society was saying 'you're not going to do anything', and that seemed like a tragedy for him and such a waste for society. Society should be supporting every person to be their maximum selves. Instead of waiting for that to happen, we decided to do something about it and founded Fighting Chance," Ms O'Reilly said.

Since then, Fighting Chance has been building and scaling social enterprises in the disability sector, and striving to set higher expectations for service providers and participants in the NDIS. Fighting Chance now provides services to over 1,000 people with disability in 13 locations across Australia.

Laura's uncle, TV and radio personality James Valentine provided support for her Award nomination, and is impressed by his niece's focus on the contemporary.

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“She saw, very early on, where the gaps were in providing for Australians with disability; and moved on very quickly from traditional models. Laura foresaw what would be needed in the new environment of the NDIS. In this, she has been way ahead of many others with longer experience,” Mr Valentine said.

Northern Beaches Mayor Michael Regan also congratulated Ms O’Reilly, noting that the Council has been a proud supporter of Fighting Chance since 2011.

“This is a fantastic acknowledgment of Laura and Fighting Chance’s incredible contribution to our community. From small beginnings providing a work-based training program to eight people in a tiny office in Brookvale, Fighting Chance now provides employment and training, social and community participation, and accommodation services to around 450 people across six locations within our LGA,” Mayor Regan said.

Ms O’Reilly said she is proud of the award because it speaks to Fighting Chance’s innovative approach.

“Despite one in five Australians having a disability, and significant investment in sector reform, this cohort still experiences higher rates of unemployment, social exclusion, abuse, and poverty than most Australians. This is simply not good enough.

“The NDIS is a once-in-a-lifetime sector reform. We are in the middle of a huge opportunity to transform the landscape of the disability sector and the economy to be truly inclusive, and I encourage service providers, other social entrepreneurs, people in the community, to think differently and not settle for the status-quo.

“The Disability Royal Commission has highlighted the ongoing and systematic abuse and marginalisation of Australians with disability. This just isn’t good enough and along with the team at Fighting Chance, I’ll keep going until people with disability have unbridled access to opportunity, dignity and prosperity as part of a truly inclusive economy,” Ms O’Reilly said.

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ABOUT FIGHTING CHANCE

Fighting Chance designs, builds, and scales social enterprises which move the dial for Australians with disability and their families. Read our origin story [here](#).

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ABOUT THE MEDAL OF THE ORDER OF AUSTRALIA (OAM)

The Order of Australia recognises Australians who have demonstrated outstanding service or exceptional achievement.

There are four levels of award. The **Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM)** is the highest level awarded, for service worthy of particular recognition. For more information, go to <https://www.gg.gov.au/australian-honours-and-awards/order-australia>