

Rania's Story

By Rania Saab, 2022 Libby Harricks Award Winner

Thank you to Rebecca Stewart and Hearing Matters Australia for inviting me here today. I am honoured to be this year's recipient of the Libby Harricks Achievement Award. It is a privilege to be recognised in the footsteps of a dynamic woman who was a pioneer in paving the way for advocacy and support for people with a hearing loss.

I was diagnosed with a hearing loss at the age of three. I was fortunate enough to experience support throughout my schooling years. When I completed my HSC and got the marks I needed to be able to undertake a law degree, I really believed that I could do anything. And what I wanted more than anything was to be a lawyer representing disadvantaged people.

Going to university was an eye opener. I felt lost and really struggled to get the support that I needed to be able to hear and participate in the learning environment. The defining moment for me was when, part way into my degree, I went to see an Ear, Nose and Throat specialist about my deteriorating hearing. When I told the ENT that I was studying to become a lawyer, he said to me: *"Why? You're not going to be able to hear in a court room."*

This comment, coupled with university difficulties and personal struggles, made me seriously consider quitting. I thought about walking away from my degree because it was just so hard. However, at the end of the day, I decided that I just could not quit and disappoint my family. I realised that my life is my own to live how I please and that while I may always come up against barriers in the way of people's attitudes, discriminatory treatment of me and inequitable policies and procedures, this is not a reason to give up on my dreams.

While still at university, I was fortunate to come across a mentoring program being run by the Australian Network on Disability. I was still plagued by doubts about how I could actually be a practising lawyer, and participating in this mentoring program gave me the confidence to know that I could practice law one day. After



2022 Libby Harricks Award winner, Rania Saab (right), receiving her award from HMA President, Bec Stewart.

I graduated from university, I did a four week placement with a top tier law firm (again, through the Australian Network on Disability) and this gave me practical, on the job training that also increased my self-confidence. I am so passionate about the work that the Australian Network on Disability does in helping organisations to become disability confident that I became an Ambassador and later accepted a position on the Board of Directors, where I remain today.

For the past two decades, I have been an advocate. Not just for myself, but for my clients and for people with disability generally. For the past 15 years, I have been a lawyer. I have held onto my law degree with both hands because I think it is really important that people with disability are seen everywhere in the community. We need to be woven into the rich fabric of Australian society. We should not be segregated and dismissed or considered as less than and it is our duty to challenge those stereotypes when we come across them.

I would love to tell you that life has been smooth sailing since I graduated from university. It hasn't been – and that is okay. Another realisation that I have had over the past two decades is that – whether you have a disability or not – life is not easy for anyone. As people with disability, we are placed in the unique position of being forced to advocate for a better Australia. We owe it to ourselves and we owe to the people that come after us. We deserve a place at the table. We need to continuously demand for our rights to be upheld and for our voices to be heard.

I have spent my career as a lawyer with Legal Aid NSW, representing and advocating for the rights of disadvantaged people. More recently, I have been

working at Your Story Disability Legal Support, providing legal advice and assistance to people with disability, their families, carers and supporters about how to share their story safely with the Disability Royal Commission. I am happily married, with three beautiful children. Two of my children have a disability. I am not just a person with a disability, I am also a parent and carer of children with a disability. I have even more reason now to continue to advocate for a fairer Australia – we are all different and we all deserve to be accepted on our own merits.

Thank you again for this incredible award and for your time today.

THE LIBBY HARRICKS ACHIEVEMENT AWARD 2023

HMA is calling for nominations for the 2023 Libby Harricks Achievement Award. This annual award was established by HMA (previously SHHH) in memory of the late President, Libby Harricks OAM to acknowledge Libby as a friend and a woman who through determination and spirit achieved more than she ever thought possible, both for herself and for many others.

This award is not limited to HMA members. If you know someone who is over 25 years old, deaf or hard of hearing, living in Australia, and who is a significant role model in the deaf and hard of hearing community, please send your nominations including the following information:

1. Name, address and email / mobile number of the person making the nomination;
2. Name, address and email of the person nominated;
3. A short description (approx. 500 words) of why you have nominated this person, what they have achieved, challenges they have faced, and opportunities that have been made use of.

For more information about the award and past recipients, please see our website:

[Libby Harricks Award \(hearingmattersaustralia.org\)](https://hearingmattersaustralia.org)

Nominations must be received by the Executive Officer by **30 January 2023**. Nominations are welcomed by mail or email to:

Hearing Matters Australia Inc.
Ground Floor, Suite 600
Australian Hearing Hub
6 University Avenue,
Macquarie University NSW 2109

Email: admin@hearingmattersaustralia.org

The HMA committee will consider all nominations, with the winner being announced at the 2023 Annual General Meeting. The recipient's story will be published in a subsequent issue of **HEARING MATTERS**, the HMA website, and social media.

