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Advertising Associates and Thinkerbell win Pitch-Chella

By **AdNews** | 31 July 2026

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Advertising Associates and Thinkerbell have taken joint first place in Independent Media Agencies Australia's (IMAA) 2026 Pitch-Chella competition.

Slingshot placed third, and Reload Media was highly commended.

Twenty-four teams competed this year, the most since Pitch-Chella launched three years ago.

The eight finalists pitched national media campaigns for anti-bullying charity You Can Sit With Me to a judging panel of Audience360 managing director Jenny Parkes, TrinityP3 business director and global media lead Steven Wright, Orand founder Adam Hickey, and You Can Sit With Me founder and chief executive Sophie Sparks.

Sparks said the organisation's vision was simple.

"To ensure every child walks through the school gates knowing they are safe, accepted and able to reach their full potential," she said.

"We were overwhelmed with the way this year's Pitch-Chella participants responded to our mission.

"Every team had taken the time to thoroughly understand our mission and our pain points, and to create media campaigns that would not only boost awareness but ensure You Can Sit With Me was part of the national conversation."

The Advertising Associates team of Jeremy O'Connell, Emily Dunne, Sam Christie-Sherill and Brigh Robinson pitched a partnership with the Matildas.

They uses the soccer team's profile to carry You Can Sit With Me's message beyond schools.

The pitch centred on the line "one team, one cause, one colour and one message: you belong here," delivered across radio, outdoor, digital, social and school activations.

Thinkerbell's Eduarda Cuadros Marquez and Erin Beers pitched taking the charity's message out of the classroom, targeting school leaders and parents at stadiums, during the school commute and via parenting podcasts.

Ideas included adding a You Can Sit With Me pledge to Ticketek's checkout process, and using yellow seating in schools to signal educators' commitment to the cause.

Slingshot's Neha Sharma and Anna Nagpaul placed third. Reload Media's Cleo Cox-Lawson, Drew Hart, Yashi Wadiwala and Harriet Wing were highly commended.

IMAA CEO Sam Buchanan said the standard of this year's winning pitches was exceptional.

"Each team brought a unique perspective and a truly outstanding level of preparation and professionalism to their pitches," he said.

"It's encouraging to see our emerging industry talent committed to making a meaningful impact. The continued success of the IMAA's Pitch-Chella initiative is a sign of the strength of our indie sector and the calibre of the next generation of media professionals."

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