



The Centre for
Volunteering

Media Release

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Ulong public school champion named 2025 Mid North Coast Volunteer of the Year

Dedicated canteen worker, fundraiser and event organiser Tania Hrbacek has been named the 2025 Mid North Coast Volunteer of the Year for her support for teachers, students and their families across seven schools in the Orara Learning Community.

Ms Hrbacek was recognised today at the 2025 NSW Volunteer of the Year Awards ceremony at the Westport Club in Port Macquarie.

The NSW Volunteer of the Year Awards are hosted by The Centre for Volunteering to help promote and support volunteering across NSW.

They are now in their 19th year and celebrate the work of thousands of individuals and volunteer teams from a diverse range of organisations across the state.

Recipients of other individual and team awards were also announced today, including the inaugural Emergency Volunteer of the Year:

Mid North Coast Young Volunteer of the Year: Toby Mitchell from Coffs Harbour

12-year-old artist, author and marine conservationist Toby Mitchell gives his time with the Coffs Coast Wildlife Sanctuary where he raises awareness and funding for the care and conservation of sea turtles.

Toby has created his own original artwork, including painted coasters, plant pots and bookmarks, and has written several books for sale at the sanctuary to support its sea turtle rehabilitation program.

Mid North Coast Adult Volunteer of the Year: Tania Hrbacek from Ulong

There is almost nothing that Tania won't turn her hand to in support of the seven schools and their students and staff with the Orara Valley Learning Community.

She creates the menus, shops for supplies, cooks the meals at canteens, organises school events, celebrations and sports carnivals, and helps raise funds through stalls, raffles, baking sales and sponsorships.

Her tireless work supports a better learning and caring environment for local public school students.

Mid North Coast Senior Volunteer of the Year: Kristine Simeon from Black Head

Kristine gives her time with the Justice Advocacy Service through the Intellectual Disability Rights Service, where she supports people in need to navigate the court and justice system in the Forster and Tuncurry region.

She attends court two to three times a week to ensure all people can get support within the justice system.



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Mid North Coast Emergency Volunteer of the Year: Robert Britten from Port Macquarie

Rob is a skipper at Marine Rescue Port Macquarie where he trains and leads volunteers, helping to keep people safe on the water off the coast and across inland areas.

He has been deployed in floods across the region as well as in western and northern NSW, where he has performed life saving rescues in dangerous conditions.

Mid North Coast Volunteer Team of the Year: Shine for Kids - Belonging to Family Elders

The 16 volunteers with the Kempsey based Belonging to Family Elders group give their time with SHINE for Kids to mentor and support indigenous parents in custody at the Mid-North Coast Correctional Centre.

This pre- and post-release program aims to reconnect families and strengthen family ties to enable a successful transition back into the community. They teach children significant symbols of their culture, tell stories, they listen and offer emotional support. They also travel around NSW to visit youth justice centres.

The Centre for Volunteering CEO Gemma Rygate said in difficult times, volunteers often come forward to meet a crisis with compassion.

“Volunteers are the quiet force, whether helping ease cost of living pressures, supporting those in crisis or responding on the front line of floods, fires and emergencies,” Ms Rygate said.

“Their dedication isn’t just admirable; it underpins a more resilient and compassionate society. These exceptional individuals give selflessly - often while juggling careers, study, and family life - yet they still choose to show up for others when it matters most.”

The NSW Minister with responsibility for Volunteering, Jodie Harrison said:

“Congratulations to the recipients of the Mid North Coast Volunteer of the Year Awards. You’ve been recognised as heroes by the people in your communities who know you best.

“Thank you for your ongoing contributions, which make New South Wales the best state to live and work in. These awards are an important way we recognise your passion and dedication to your local communities.

“The NSW Government is continuing to work with The Centre for Volunteering to build a more diverse and inclusive volunteering sector so that all our volunteers feel respected and acknowledged for their work.”

Mid North Coast volunteer award recipients will be invited to represent their region at the Gala State Ceremony at the end of the year, where the NSW Volunteer of the Year is announced across each category.



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About the NSW Volunteer of the Year Awards

The NSW Volunteer of the Year Awards are in their 19th year and have grown to become one of the largest celebrations of volunteering across Australia.

They are an annual program run by The Centre for Volunteering to recognise the outstanding work of volunteers and Leaders of Volunteers in every region across NSW.

Individuals or teams can be nominated in one of seven award categories.

The Award categories are:

- Young Volunteer of the Year – sponsored by the Minister for Youth – Hon Rose Jackson
- Adult Volunteer of the Year
- Senior Volunteer of the Year
- Volunteer Team of the Year
- Emergency Volunteer of the Year – sponsored by the Minister for Emergency Services – Hon Jihad Dib
- Not-for-Profit Voluntary Governance Award
- Volunteer Leader of the Year

Twenty-five regional ceremonies are held in towns and suburbs throughout NSW from mid-August until November.

The regional finalists will be invited to a Gala State ceremony in December in Sydney where the NSW Volunteer of the Year is announced. Recipients for the NSW Volunteer of the Year are also announced across the seven categories.

The Awards are run by the Centre for Volunteering. The NSW Government are the principal partners for the awards.



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