



The Centre for
Volunteering

Media Release

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Community fire stalwart named 2025 North Western Sydney Volunteer of the Year

Hawkesbury Community Fire Unit volunteer Doreen McCulloch has been named the 2025 North Western Sydney Volunteer of the Year, for her decade long work to keep her bushfire prone community safe.

Ms McCulloch was recognised today at the 2025 NSW Volunteer of the Year Awards at Castle Hill RSL.

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:

North Western Sydney Young Volunteer of the Year: Mackenzie Woodbury from South Windsor

Mackenzie is a training and radio communication officer with Hawkesbury Communications Rural Fire Brigade and Hawkesbury RFS headquarters. She has given her time over the past seven years providing training support, equipment checks and also helps with public awareness as a community engagement officer.

Mackenzie has cerebral palsy and is also an Airforce cadet at Richmond RAAF.

North Western Sydney Adult Volunteer of the Year: Ubah Gabris from Gables

Ubah is a strong advocate for domestic violence prevention and awareness, respectful relationships and inclusivity in her volunteer role with Westpac's RESPECT employee resource group.

Ubah, who came to Australia as a young Somali refugee, is also the NSW Director of the Australian Professionals of Multicultural Communities, leads the membership and youth projects team at Castle Hill Rotary and serves on the Home Affairs Women's Reference Group.

North Western Sydney Senior Volunteer of the Year: Doreen McCulloch from Windsor Downs

Doreen has been a volunteer with Hawkesbury City Council's Community Fire Unit for the past decade, raising awareness on fire prevention and building bushfire resilience across the community.

She has given her time to create a district wide database of vital property and community firefighting assets such as static water, access permissions and fire hydrant locations.

Her work training volunteers and sourcing assets has been a key to building community resilience in one of Sydney's bushfire prone regions.



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North Western Sydney Emergency Volunteer of the Year: Dennis Lavender from Hobartville

Dennis has dedicated 28 years to volunteering with the Hawkesbury City Division of St John Ambulance NSW, beginning as a basic first aider and is now a fully trained First Responder.

His life saving skills and volunteer work has been key to helping the community stay safe and healthy when facing emergencies, hardship or injuries. He has given more than 500 duty hours over the past 18 months with both frontline, training and back office support.

North Western Sydney Volunteer Team of the Year: Hills Relay for Life Volunteer Team

The 21 volunteers at Hills Relay for Life helped raise more than \$320,000 over the past 12 months, the second highest fundraising effort for any team with the NSW Cancer Council.

The volunteers give their time planning and running events, organising community education and engagement, and promoting the work of the NSW Cancer Council in supporting cancer research, as well as people and their families living with cancer.

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 North Western Sydney 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.”

North Western Sydney 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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