



The Centre for
Volunteering

Media Release

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Ocean swim fundraising legend named 2025 Northern Beaches Volunteer of the Year

Surf life saver Mirek Craney has been named the 2025 Northern Beaches Volunteer of the Year, for his decades long work running ocean swim events to raise money for vital cancer research through the Can Too charity.

Mr Craney was recognised today at Dee Why RSL Club as part of the 2025 NSW Volunteer of the Year Awards.

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:

Northern Beaches Young Volunteer of the Year: Holly Searles from Bilgola Plateau

Holly has been the driving force behind the successful Cricket Blast program for young players at the Peninsula Junior Cricket Club.

The young Manly cricketer gives her time each week during summer to lead fun, encouraging and supportive sessions. Her volunteer work helps young players learn about teamwork, training, and being a good sport.

Northern Beaches Adult Volunteer of the Year: Adrian Hill from Narrabeen

When North Narrabeen Surf Life Saving Club needed both physical upgrades and a boost in volunteer support, Adrian, the club's president, stepped up.

He's tackled the challenge of declining volunteer numbers by introducing innovative programs that have attracted younger members to the club. His determination has also put the club on track for a new state-of-the-art facility that will benefit the entire community.

Northern Beaches Senior Volunteer of the Year: Mirek Craney from Avalon

For fifteen years, Mirek has made a significant contribution to cancer charity Can Too's fitness programs, which help people set ambitious fitness challenges for themselves, while raising much needed funds for research.

He is also an active member of Whale Beach Surf Lifesaving Club, keeping people safe in the water and helping provide a valuable service for his local community on the Northern Beaches.



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Northern Beaches Volunteer Team of the Year: Cerebral Palsy Alliance Dental Team

The Cerebral Palsy Alliance Dental Team consists of dentists, dental assistants, hygienists, an orthodontist, a paediatric dental specialist and a practice manager, who are dedicated to providing free, quality dental care for people of all ages with cerebral palsy.

The volunteer team goes above and beyond to make the experience comfortable for patients, ensuring better health and wellbeing outcomes.

Northern Beaches Emergency Volunteer of the Year: Michael Gencher from Mona Vale

Michael Gencher's journey in Surf Life Saving began when his own life was saved by a volunteer surf lifesaver. That moment became the catalyst for a lifelong commitment to service, safety, and community, and he's been an active patrolling member of Mona Vale Surf Life Saving Club for over 30 years.

Michael has volunteered thousands of hours including as a trainer, assessor, club vice president, and 24-hour emergency response member.

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 Northern beaches 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."

Northern Beaches 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:

- 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 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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