

Media Release

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Quakers Hill first aider named 2025 Outer Western Sydney Volunteer of the Year

St John Ambulance first aid logistics officer Richard Bernecic has been named the 2025 Outer Western Sydney Volunteer of the Year, for his work keeping the community safe and healthy across the region.

Mr Bernecic was recognised today at St Marys Band 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:

Outer Western Sydney Young Volunteers of the Year: Mikaylah Bater from Marayong and Hannah Cooper from Blacktown

Joint award winners Mikaylah and Hannah began volunteering together at Riding for the Disabled Tall Timbers as part of the Duke of Edinburgh Awards program.

They have continued to volunteer on a weekly basis as part of a program which provides a safe and supportive way for people living with disability to engage with their community and build new skills through horse riding.

Outer Western Sydney Adult Volunteer of the Year: Richard Bernecic from Quakers Hill

Richard has given more than 2,000 hours of his time as a logistics officer and mentor to new volunteers at the State Operations and Blacktown Divisions of St John Ambulance.

He helps prepare, maintain, and transport essential operational equipment, uniforms and medical kits for first aid responders at events and emergency incidents across Western Sydney and NSW.

Outer Western Sydney Senior Volunteer of the Year: Helen Knobbs from Riverstone

Helen has volunteered every week for the past 35 years at the Hawkesbury Community Kitchen, helping to prepare, cook and serve meals to the homeless and people in need throughout the region. She has also served on the organisation's board for the past decade and supported and mentored new volunteers and student volunteers undertaking their Duke of Edinburgh awards.

Outer Western Sydney Emergency Volunteer of the Year: Michael Edmonds from Cranebrook

Michael's volunteer work with the NSW Rural Fire Service is crucial to the safety and training of emergency service volunteers throughout the region.

His meticulous methods and mentoring as an Equipment and Training Officer are matched by his commitment to emergency response to fires and road accidents, as well as public safety education for the wider community.

Outer Western Sydney Volunteer Team of the Year: Street Side Medics - Blacktown Volunteer Team

The 26 members of the Blacktown Street Side Medics include nurses, paramedics, GPs, specialists and allied health professionals who give their time each week, providing care for our most vulnerable people.

Their street-based healthcare delivery includes everything from basic check-ups and prescriptions, to chronic disease management and minor procedures, across the region.

The impact of their volunteering is immense, with many of their patients having gone without treatment for years. Their care improves the health of people without a home and is often a first step to other life changing support.

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 Outer 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."

Outer 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:

- 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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