



The Centre for
Volunteering

Media Release

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Half a century of giving earns Joy the 2025 Southern Sydney Volunteer of the Year

Playgroup founder and volunteering veteran Joy Cuthbertson has been named the 2025 Southern Sydney Volunteer of the Year, for a lifetime of dedication to young children and families at the Carlton South Full of Joy Playgroup

Joy was recognised today at Tradies Club, Gymea, 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:

Southern Sydney Young Volunteer of the Year: Jessica Farries from Illawong

Jessica has volunteered with St John Ambulance NSW Sutherland Combined Division since she was 12 years old and is now the leading training coordinator for new cadets across the region.

As the Cadet Leader, she develops lesson plans and skills-based training techniques for new recruits, ensuring the next generation of volunteer first aiders are fully equipped to respond and keep the community safe.

Southern Sydney Adult Volunteer of the Year: Robyn Mapleson from Kirrawee

Robyn teaches migrants from all over the world at her weekly English classes, before quickly swapping her notes to lead a growing band of singers in the choir at Gymea Community Aid & Information Services.

Her engaging and passionate teaching has inspired more than 170 newly arrived migrants and would-be corallers to find their voice, grow confidence and build close connections throughout the community.

Southern Sydney Senior Volunteer of the Year: Joy Cuthbertson from Carlton

Joy has been the welcoming smile for thousands of young children and their families over the last half a century at the Carlton South Full of Joy Playgroup – named in her honour.

At 83 years of age, she still leads a weekly playgroup session for around 30 children, providing a safe, caring and creative space for learning, friendship and play.

Joy's incredible lifetime of volunteering began in local parks and family homes, and has since expanded to the local hall, now organised through Playgroup NSW.



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Southern Sydney Emergency Volunteer of the Year: Neil Tinker from Caringbah South

Neil's commitment to saving lives on the water spans 10 years as a volunteer crew member and Boat Master for the Marine Rescue NSW Botany Port Hacking Unit.

The volunteer Coxswain and Watch Officer also trains new recruits for crucial marine rescues and is an essential unit member, dedicated to ensuring local waters are safe for the community.

Southern Sydney Volunteer Team of the Year: Grow, Restore, Connect Volunteer Program from Sutherland Shire

The Grow, Restore, Connect program brings together a team of almost 500 volunteers who lovingly care for more than 100 Bushcare sites.

They remove invasive weeds at the source, nurture naturally regenerating native seedlings, and collect and propagate local plant species — all to help protect and support environmental biodiversity.

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 Southern 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."

Southern 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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