

Media Release

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Liverpool pharma student named 2025 Western Sydney Volunteer of the Year

Youth advocate Sonja Vujanic has been awarded the 2025 Western Sydney Volunteer of the Year for her exceptional and relentless advocacy for education and mental health services for young people.

Sonja was recognised today at the 2025 Western Sydney Volunteer of the Year Awards at the Liverpool Catholic Club.

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:

Western Sydney Young Volunteer of the Year: Sonja Vujanic from Liverpool

Sonja is a uni student, carer and exceptional volunteer across a number of organisations, programs and causes. She is a leading advocate for young people to gain better access to education, mental health support and to better manage the impact of technology.

Her volunteering has spanned organisations such as Teach Learn Grow, the NSW Youth Advisory Council, the eSafety Youth Advisory Council, the Sydney University Academic Board, the Starlight Express Room, and the Western Sydney Local Health District.

Western Sydney Adult Volunteer of the Year: Ngan Nguyen from Edmondson Park.

Nursing unit manager Ngan Nguyen is a busy mum to three children, dog lover and a Community Visitors Scheme volunteer at Sydney Multicultural Community Services.

She gives her time to regularly visit two elderly people from CALD communities who are at risk of isolation, loneliness and ailing mental health. She builds her volunteering around her busy work and family life, creating strong, healthy connections for older people who may have limited family support or language barriers.

Western Sydney Senior Volunteer of the Year: Russell Edwards from Fairfield West

Russell gives his time as a JP for the NSW Justices Association, an everyday helper for the Fairfield Garden Club, and as a self-taught blacksmith for the Fairfield City Museum & Gallery.

In the past year alone, he has helped more than 3,200 people with legal and JP services in Fairfield - one of Australia's most culturally diverse and underserved communities.

Russell's local museum needed a volunteer with blacksmith skills to keep a display open, so he learnt how to be a blacksmith. The museum and JP Association needed website help – so he taught himself coding.

Western Sydney Emergency Volunteer of the Year: Michael Needham from Mount Pritchard

Michael has been a volunteer with St John Ambulance's Fairfield and Sydney University Divisions for the past three decades where he has improved training methods, mentored new members, and provided vital first aid medical care to the public.

He has extended his outstanding service to the State Operations Support Group and Paddington Division, helping to lead logistics and as an operations and logistics officer, and clinical educator.

Western Sydney Volunteer Team of the Year St John Ambulance NSW - Fairfield Cadet Division

The 12 members of St John Ambulance NSW Fairfield Cadet Division include young cadets and the leaders who help to train, mentor and inspire the next generation of community first aiders.

They give their time between school commitments to learn the techniques and skills, and build knowledge that helps keep their local community safe and healthy at events – big and small.

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 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."

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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