

Media Release

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Veteran flood recovery volunteer takes out 2025 Northern Inland Volunteer of the Year

Moree flood responder and SES emergency volunteer Kamala Wheeler has been named the 2025 New England and Northern Inland Volunteer of the Year for her selfless dedication to community safety and training over the past four decades.

Kamala was recognised today at the 2025 NSW Volunteer of the Year Awards ceremony at the Armidale City Bowling 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, including the inaugural Emergency Volunteer of the Year:

New England-Northern Inland Young Volunteer of the Year: Caitlin Blanch from Tamworth

Caitlin has been a driving force behind the grassroots disability advocacy group We Are Not Alone.

Her volunteer work as co-president helps to amplify the voices of young people with a disability in regional NSW. She also gives her time with youth mental health advocacy and education group Orygen.

New England-Northern Inland Adult Volunteer of the Year: Kamala Wheeler from Moree

Kam has been a leading Moree SES rescuer, trainer and leader for almost 40 years across the North West region.

She is a Leading Senior Operator at Moree SES and has led flood recovery operations in Moree and Garah, supported frontline crews during Cyclone Alfred and been role model to young and female volunteers in the service.

New England-Northern Inland Senior Volunteer of the Year: Margaret Lenord from Inverell

Margaret has dedicated more than 50 years to supporting older people in the Inverell community through her leadership with Inverell Community Support and the Inverell Senior Citizens Association.

As Chairperson and Treasurer, she has played a key role in sustaining vital services like Meals on Wheels, transport, and social outings.

New England-Northern Inland Volunteer Team of the Year: Ruby Mae's Wish

Kim and Nick Peake have been a formidable fundraising team across Barraba through Ruby Mae's Wish, a charity they established to honour their daughter who tragically passed away in 2022.

Their tireless volunteer fundraising, education and advocacy supports vital life saving equipment for children's hospitals, as well as medical training for health workers.

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 New England-Northern Inland 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."

New England-Northern Inland 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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