

Media Release

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Emergency volunteer leader and first responder named 2026 North Shore Volunteer of the Year

North Sydney SES Deputy Unit Commander Gabriel Dickinson has been named the 2026 North Shore Volunteer of the Year for his tireless commitment to community safety during storms and floods, and his dedication to his fellow volunteers.

Gabriel was recognised today at the 2026 NSW Volunteer of Year Awards at Norths at Cammeray.

The NSW Volunteer of the Year Awards are hosted by The Centre for Volunteering to help promote and support volunteering across NSW. The Awards are now in their 20th year and celebrate the work of thousands of individuals and volunteer teams from a diverse range of organisations across the state.

Other individual and team awards were also announced today:

North Shore Young and Emergency Volunteer of the Year: Gabriel Dickinson from Greenwich

Gabriel is a dedicated volunteer with the NSW State Emergency Service North Sydney Unit, as its youngest Deputy Unit Commander, Team Leader, Incident Controller, and Trainer.

He leads the unit's emergency response during storms, floods, land searches and other incidents; mentors and trains other volunteers; and builds community connections and education, and youth partnerships and engagement.

Gabriel is also a volunteer with the UNSW Outdoors Club and a coach for his local soccer club.

North Shore Adult Volunteer of the Year: Jeff Lewis from Riverview

Jeff Lewis is a volunteer boat builder and sailor with the Making Waves Foundation where he uses his technical skills and knowledge on the water to help disengaged youth and people with disabilities experience sailing.

He has sailed the Sydney to Hobart as part of the supporting crew for people with disabilities and also built a new volunteer management software program to save costs and improve efficiency.

North Shore Senior Volunteer of the Year: Carol Chaitowitz from Wollstonecraft

Carol has been volunteering with the Listening Ear Helpline for the past 35 years, providing phone support to people experiencing loneliness, isolation, grief, and personal distress.

She has mentored and supported generations of new volunteers, contributed to training and peer learning, and helped build the organisation's strong culture of compassion, connection and mutual support.

North Shore Volunteer Team of the Year: Gidget Angels from North Sydney

The Gidget Angels volunteer team are parents with lived experience of perinatal depression, who share their stories to support others.

Their volunteer work includes storytelling through events, media and campaigns, as well as supporting research and advocacy. The 36 team members have contributed more than 450 hours of their time over the past 12 months, helping to reach 4,000 parents and raising awareness with significant media impact.

The Centre for Volunteering CEO Gemma Rygate said volunteers from across Sydney's North Shore give so much to the local community.

"Volunteers help build strong and healthy communities across the state," Ms Rygate said.

"They are always there when we need them most, giving their time and support across all areas of life including health, emergency services, education and community sectors.

"Volunteers are role models for others, highlighting how volunteering can have such a positive impact on people and places. These awards celebrate the volunteering effort and impact."

The NSW Minister with responsibility for Volunteering, Jodie Harrison said:

"Congratulations to our everyday heroes, the winners of the North Shore Volunteer of the Year Awards.

"From the bush to the sea, volunteers are the true heartbeat of our communities. Thank you for your invaluable contributions. You make New South Wales the best state to live in.

"In partnership with the Centre for Volunteering, the NSW Government continues to build a sector that is strong and diverse, and to make sure volunteers like you are recognised for and supported in what you do."

North Shore award recipients will be invited to represent their region at the State Gala Award Ceremony at the end of the year, where the NSW Volunteer of the Year in each category will be announced.



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About the NSW Volunteer of the Year Awards

The NSW Volunteer of the Year Awards are in their 20th 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 is the principal partner for the awards.



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