

Media Release

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Warriewood mental health stalwart named 2026 Northern Beaches Volunteer of the Year

Mowana Safe Space founder Melani Kypri has been named the 2026 Northern Beaches Volunteer of the Year, for her deep commitment to greater mental health services and support for people feeling depressed, lonely, isolated or anxious.

Melanie was recognised today at the 2026 NSW Volunteer of Year Awards at Dee Why RSL Club.

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:

Northern Beaches Young Volunteer of the Year: Tilly Cooper from Mona Vale

Teenager surf rescuer and author Tilly Cooper is a constant presence at the Mona Vale Surf Life Saving Club where she works on the sand and water with young nippers, drives fundraising and promotes inclusion.

Her passion for helping others, initiative and leadership spurred her to establish the Fijian Clothes Drive, a campaign to help collect and deliver clothes and swim wear to Fijian communities. Tilly is also an Ambassador for the Kimaya Brighter Minds Program in Fiji, which promotes the intellectual development of students.

Northern Beaches Adult Volunteer of the Year: Kerry Gleeson from Mona Vale

Kerry gives her time with Northern Beaches Council, Lifeline Northern Beaches and Wayahead, providing support for mental health, suicide prevention, and for people at risk of homelessness and domestic violence.

Her volunteer support extends across the Avalon Youth Hub Steering Group, the Homeless interagency, facilitating free anxiety support groups, and as Chair of Northern Beaches Mental Health Month.

Northern Beaches Senior Volunteer of the Year: Melani Kypri from Warriewood

Melanie helped establish the Mowana Safe Space in Narrabeen to provide a safe place for people feeling anxious, bullied, depressed, lonely or suicidal.

The free mental health support service accommodates 1,000 visits a year where 45 volunteers meet with and listen to people in need. Melanie trains volunteers, develops programs and builds strong community connections.

Northern Beaches Emergency Volunteer of the Year: Christian Young from Frenchs Forest

NSW SES Commander Christian Young has provided more than 17 years of volunteer service, helping communities and people to stay safe during storms and major events.

He oversees the Canterbury, Bankstown and Fairfield Units, while also volunteering his time as a Chief Inspector. He coordinates the emergency response to floods and storms, mentors fellow volunteers, supports training, and drives strategic planning and inter-agency collaboration.

Northern Beaches Volunteer Team of the Year: Warrior Woman Foundation Wise Women Mentors

The 65 volunteers at the Forestville based Warrior Woman Foundation Wise Women Mentors help young women facing disadvantage with training, one-on-one mentoring, and community activities.

They have provided more than 13,000 volunteer hours in the past 12 months, helping young women with issues like housing insecurity and family violence, and building confidence, financial understanding and engagement in employment and education.

The Centre for Volunteering CEO Gemma Rygate said volunteers from across the Northern Beaches 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 Northern Beaches 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.”

Northern Beaches 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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