

Media Release

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Disability rights advocate named 2026 North Western Sydney Volunteer of the Year

Disability rights legal advocate Rosemary Wever has been named the 2026 North Western Sydney Volunteer of the Year for her work supporting people in need in the justice system.

Rosemary was recognised today at the 2026 NSW Volunteer of Year Awards at Castle Hill 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:

North Western Sydney Young Volunteer of the Year: Maddox Howe from Castle Hill

Maddox is a volunteer with Foodbank NSW where he helps to sort, label and pack rescued and excess food and groceries to distribute to people in need throughout the region.

The TAFE student has racked up more than 200 hours of volunteering and gives his time up to three times a week, including extra warehouse duties whenever required.

North Western Sydney Adult Volunteer of the Year: Rosemary Wever from Oakville

Rosemary volunteers with the Justice Advocacy Service (JAS), the 24-hour service provided by the Intellectual Disability Rights Organisation.

She gives her time at the Penrith and Windsor courts, ensuring that clients with cognitive impairments, mental health challenges or highly disadvantaged backgrounds have access to legal and emotional assistance.

She has used her professional legal training to provide support to clients across 65 court matters over the past three years.

North Western Sydney Senior Volunteer of the Year: Joan Bruce from Richmond

Joan gives her time at local community services provider Peppercorn Services where she supports seniors' wellbeing and reduces social isolation through group activities and other social connection programs.

She has given her time over the past eight years helping to create safe, welcoming spaces where seniors can build friendships, strengthen social networks and maintain a sense of belonging.

North Western Sydney Emergency Volunteer of the Year: Doreen McCulloch from Windsor Downs

Doreen McCulloch has volunteered with Fire & Rescue NSW Community Fire Unit in Windsor Downs for the past 11 years where she has helped to expand firefighting resources, recruited over 130 volunteers, and led training, inventory, and safety initiatives.

She has also contributed to building community libraries, donated a defibrillator, and assisted with wildlife rescue and safety programs.

North Western Sydney Volunteer Team of the Year: Friendship Centre Counselling Services from Richmond

The 200 members of the Friendship Centre Counselling team offer free, accessible counselling for vulnerable people experiencing addiction and relapse, anger management issues, domestic and family violence, grief, trauma, and other significant life challenges.

The team supports vulnerable populations, reducing barriers like cost and location to promote early intervention and better community wellbeing, resilience, and mental health.

The Centre for Volunteering CEO Gemma Rygate said volunteers from across Sydney's North West 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 Western Sydney 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 Western Sydney 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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