



The Centre for
Volunteering

Media Release

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Emergency volunteer and board stalwart named 2026 Riverina Volunteer of the Year

Wagga Wagga board stalwart and emergency volunteer Rory McKenzie has been named the 2026 Riverina Volunteer of the Year, for his deep commitment to community health and safety, inclusion, and stronger governance for not-for-profit and community organisations.

Rory was recognised today at the 2026 NSW Volunteer of Year Awards at the Wagga 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:

Riverina Young Volunteer of the Year: Sarah Smith from Wagga Wagga

Wagga Wagga teenager Sarah Smith is a leading advocate and volunteer for events and services for young people throughout the Riverina, helping to amplify voices, reduce barriers, and foster engagement.

She gives her time with Wagga Wagga Regional Council to support events and services as well as rolling up her sleeves with on the ground support. She also mentors young girls through the Turvey Park Girl Guides.

Riverina Adult Volunteer of the Year: Steven Ballard from Lavington

Steven is the co-founder and Chairperson of the Sunshine Ride Committee which has raised more than \$680,000 over the past five years to help local cancer patients with care and support.

His volunteer work includes event planning, community engagement, driving sponsorships, managing logistics, media promotion, and additional fundraising events.

Riverina Senior Volunteer of the Year: Margaret Hill from Junee

Margaret is a volunteer veteran, having given her time at the Coinda Court Aged Care facility for the past 40 years to win grants, keep records, manage archives and support the administration.

She also volunteers with the Junee Showground Trust and Junee Show Society, helping to source funding for infrastructure improvements, community projects and facility upgrades for the showground.



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Riverina Emergency Volunteer of the Year: Rory McKenzie from Wagga Wagga

Rory gives his time with the local branches of the NSW State Emergency Service, NSW Rural Fire Service, and Australian Red Cross.

He has also supported the Wagga Wagga Multicultural Council, The Leisure Company, and The Forrest Centre through his volunteer board roles and is the co-chair at the Wagga Wagga Local Health Advisory Committee.

His volunteer work improves community health and safety, inclusion and supports stronger governance across numerous not-for-profit and community organisations.

Riverina Volunteer Team of the Year: The Carevan Foundation Team from Albury

The 20 volunteer members of the Carevan Foundation Team include school students, retirees, working professionals and community leaders – all of whom go above and beyond to foster community resilience, reduce social barriers, and promote dignity in the community.

They provide more than 20,000 healthy meals each year and sewing bags for the Street Care Pack program. They help up to 80 people a day, as well as students at 13 schools.

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

Riverina 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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