

Media Release

Embargoed until 4pm, Monday 31 August 2026

Jamberoo community champion named 2026 Illawarra Volunteer of the Year

Local volunteering legend Vivienne Marris has been named 2026 Illawarra Volunteer of the Year for her service and commitment to more than 15 community groups across the region.

Viv was recognised today at the 2026 Illawarra Volunteer of the Year Awards at Wests Illawarra.

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:

Illawarra Young Volunteer of the Year: Uthman Farache from Wollongong

Uthman is a volunteer wellness ambassador at the University of Wollongong Pulse Program, where he gives his time on free sports programs, the university breaky bar, kindness workshops and cultural events.

He has completed more than 100 shifts and 300 hours of volunteering, helping to foster meaningful student connections and wellbeing.

Illawarra Adult Volunteer of the Year: Scout Davis from Woonona

Scout Davis is the co-founder of Propel Project Dharawal, a community-led organisation focused on early intervention and mentoring of young people across the Illawarra.

She is a part of the Circle Sentencing panel, advocates for young people in court and in custody, assists police with community outreach, and actively engages with local schools and their leadership.

Her volunteering helps young indigenous people to re-engage with education, community and build trust.

Illawarra Senior Volunteer of the Year: Vivienne Marris from Jamberoo

Vivienne shares her volunteering across many community organisations, services and causes, helping people in need and building strong and healthy community connections.

She has been a driving force at the Jamberoo branch of the Country Women's Association, while also supporting fundraising for the NSW Cancer Council, Dress for Success and the Red Cross. She gives her time at the Kiama Garden Club, the Jamberoo Valley Ratepayers & Residents group and the Jamberoo Village Markets.

All up Vivienne has supported more than 15 local groups and causes, including local show societies, sports clubs, emergency response, and homelessness support services.

Illawarra Emergency Volunteer of the Year: William Lee from Thirroul

Group Captain William Lee has dedicated an incredible 55 years of volunteering to the NSW Rural Fire Service across the Illawarra region. He provides operations support, training, while also undertaking high-risk frontline work protecting life and property.

He's contributed 350 hours to develop national training around heavy plant, safety and crew awareness and is also President of the Austinmer Thirroul RSL Sub-Branch, supporting veteran welfare.

Illawarra Volunteer Team of the Year: Support Transition Assistance Response Service (STARS) Volunteers

The 15 members of the STARS Volunteer Program provide care and support to older people in Illawarra and Shoalhaven hospitals waiting to enter the aged care system. They provide companionship, reassurance and advocate for patient preferences.

The team has supported 86 older people and 66 family carers over the past 12 months, providing 244 hours of direct in-hospital and after-hours service.

The program is run by the Community Industry Group, the peak body supporting and advocating for not-for-profit community and human services in Southern New South Wales.

The Centre for Volunteering CEO Gemma Rygate said volunteers from across the Illawarra 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 also 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 Illawarra 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 they do."

Illawarra 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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