

Media Release

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Community leader named 2026 Inner Western Sydney Volunteer of the Year

Sydney Community Connect founder Joumana Menzalji has been named 2026 Inner Western Sydney Volunteer of the Year, for 30 years of service supporting newly arrived migrants, the elderly and multicultural communities.

Joumana was recognised today at the 2026 NSW Volunteer of the Year Awards at Club Burwood.

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:

Inner Western Sydney Young Volunteer of the Year: Isla Costin from Chiswick

Isla volunteers at Kids Giving Back and has also volunteered with the Australian Red Cross and the Asylum Seekers Centre.

She helped establish 4GreaterGood, an organisation led by young people that is focused on supporting people experiencing homelessness, financial hardship, displacement, and social disadvantage.

She gives her time with the group's meal programs, care pack initiatives, donation drives, fundraising campaigns, and community outreach activities that provide practical support to those in need.

Inner Western Sydney Adult Volunteer of the Year: Joumana Menzalji from Greenacre

Joumana founded Sydney Community Connect to support people experiencing financial or social hardship, including women, youth, the elderly, refugees and newly arrived migrants.

The organisation provides emergency support, guidance and social connection through cultural and sporting programs. She has volunteered for over three decades, overseeing youth soccer and archery programs, running guided tours of Sydney, and providing sewing and tailoring skills.

Inner Western Sydney Senior Volunteer of the Year: Tony Finneran from Padstow

Tony gives his time as a StrokeSafe Speaker for the Stroke Foundation, assisting with community education, particularly among culturally and linguistically diverse groups.

He is a member of 14 local, district and state health committees and has participated in clinical studies, co-founded the Bankstown Stroke Support Group, provided advice to Bankstown Hospital's project development group, and advocated for accessibility through the Accessible Product Design Alliance.

Inner Western Sydney Emergency Volunteer of the Year: Patrick Quinane from Tempe

Patrick joined the NSW SES in Erskineville in 2023 and has since completed more than 230 hours of skill-intense emergency response during storms, floods and other incidents.

He has cleared fallen trees and managed flood hotspots, and helped communities prepare in the lead up to significant weather events. His expertise in disaster response supports impacted residents and strengthens community resilience.

Inner Western Sydney Volunteer Team of the Year: Community Support Services Volunteers, Bankstown

The 20 members of the Community Support Services Volunteers run the Village Pantry Kitchen and contribute to the Nourishing Our Neighbours outreach program, preparing food hampers so vulnerable people and those facing homelessness receive warm meals.

They also support the Digital Sisters initiative to assist older members of the community with digital literacy, run sewing classes, offer counselling and art therapy sessions, collect, sort and donate clothing; and support a local op shop to raise funds for community programs.

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

Inner 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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