



The Centre for
Volunteering

Media Release

Embargoed until 4pm Thursday 3 September 2026

Armidale volunteering virtuoso named 2026 New England and Northern Inland Volunteer of the Year

Armidale volunteer Jenny Bourke has been named the 2026 New England and Northern Inland Volunteer of the Year, for her work across three leading local community groups that support people living with cancer, vulnerable renters and older people in care.

Jenny was recognised today at the 2026 NSW Volunteer of Year Awards at the Armidale City Bowling 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:

New England-Northern Inland Young Volunteer of the Year: Brooke Everett and Samuel Browning - Joint winners from Tenterfield

Brooke and Samuel volunteer at the Tenterfield Railway Station Preservation Society where they give their time each Wednesday greeting visitors, compiling tourist information, helping events, and maintaining and restoring equipment.

New England-Northern Inland Adult Volunteer of the Year: Gai Buchanan from Uralla

Gai volunteers with the Justice Advocacy Service, the 24-hour service provided by the Intellectual Disability Rights Service.

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

She has volunteered with the service for the past three years and also gives her time at Can Assist Uralla.

New England-Northern Inland Senior Volunteer of the Year: Jenny Bourke from Armidale

Jenny shares her volunteering duties across three leading local community organisations - Can Assist Armidale, Care for Seniors, and the New England & Western Tenants Advice and Advocacy Service.

She prepares meals, activities and bus outings for older people; raises money and provides care and support for people living with cancer; and provides governance, strategic advice and advocacy that supports vulnerable tenants.



Principal Partner



Regional Awards Sponsor



Awards Supporters



New England-Northern Inland Emergency Volunteer of the Year: Fiona Johnson from South Tamworth

Fiona is the Local Commander of Peel Cluster at the NSW State Emergency Service where she oversees flood rescues, storm and disaster response, and helps to build community resilience.

She is a second generation SES volunteer with 15 years of volunteering under her belt, moving from the Hunter Valley to take on the volunteering role at Tamworth.

New England-Northern Inland Volunteer Team of the Year: Country Women's Association of NSW Armidale Branch

The 50 members of the CWA Armidale Branch help to raise funds, advocate for vulnerable people and deliver life changing community support and services.

They cook, run events, lead civic conversations and advocate on important issues affecting rural and regional communities, including health, education, infrastructure and community wellbeing.

The team supported the establishment of the inaugural Medical Scholarship at the University of New England, helping to increase access to education for students in rural and regional NSW.

The Centre for Volunteering CEO Gemma Rygate said volunteers from across the New England and Northern Inland regions 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 New England-Northern Inland 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.”

The New England-Northern Inland 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.



Principal Partner



Regional Awards Sponsor



Awards Supporters



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.



Principal Partner



Regional Awards Sponsor



Awards Supporters

