

# Media Release

EMBARGOED UNTIL 3.30pm Thursday, 9 September 2015

## Mt Colah, Windsor, Dural locals win Volunteer of the Year Awards

Mt Colah’s Mark Rushton received the State’s top volunteering award when he was named Hornsby-North West 2015 Volunteer of the Year at a ceremony at Castle Hill RSL Club today.

As founder and key driver of The Blowfly Cricket Club in Hornsby, Mark was joined by other category winners including 13-year old Cassidy Strickland of Windsor, Savannah Zwerus of Quakers Hill and Christopher Thomas of Dural.

CEO of The Centre for Volunteering Gemma Rygate, who runs the NSW Volunteer of the Year Awards, said volunteers improve people’s lives by helping out and keeping people connected.

“New research on volunteering in Australia shows that people give more than 743 million hours of their time each year – they’re the backbone of our community,” Ms Rygate said.

**Ms Rygate said Mark Rushton won the Hornsby North-West 2015 Volunteer of the Year Award for his dedication to creating opportunities for children with autism and special needs to play cricket.**

“Mark founded The Blowfly Cricket Club in 2011 and now more than 20 children with special needs play cricket every Saturday at Hornsby, cheered on by their parents,” Ms Rygate said.

“Blowfly Cricket has so many benefits – the children get to enjoy playing sport, they develop physical and emotional skills by playing the game, and it gives parents a chance to share their experiences and support each other every week.

Mark has set up sister Clubs such as Camp Breakaway on the Central Coast and he drives from Hornsby to Campbelltown every week to deliver a Cricket program at Mary Brooksbank Special School for 40 children.

**The Winners of the 2015 Riverina NSW Volunteer of the Year Awards are:**

Award Category	Winner
<b>Overall Winner</b> <b>Volunteer of the Year</b>	<b>Mark Rushton</b> from <b>Mount Colah</b> Blowfly Cricket Club for autistic children, Cricket NSW
<b>Student Volunteer of the Year</b>	<b>Cassidy Strickland, aged 13</b> from <b>Windsor</b> Hawkesbury Helping Hands
<b>Youth Volunteer of the Year</b> (up to 24 years)	<b>Savannah Zwerus</b> from <b>Quaker’s Hill</b> North West Disability Services
<b>Adult Volunteer of the Year</b> (25 – 64 years)	<b>Mark Rushton</b> from <b>Mount Colah</b> Blowfly Cricket Club for autistic children, Cricket NSW

Principal Partners:



Family & Community Services



Sponsor:



<b>Senior Volunteer of the Year</b> (65+ years)	<b>Christopher Thomas</b> from <b>Dural</b> Dural Men's Shed
<b>Volunteer Team of the Year</b>	<b>The Blowfly committee</b> <b>The Blowfly Cricket Association</b> – providing cricket for children and young people with special needs and/or intellectual disabilities

ClubsNSW CEO Anthony Ball said the industry was proud to sponsor the Awards Program in order to help recognise volunteers across the state.

“With almost 50,000 volunteers engaged in our industry, clubs across NSW know how vital and valuable volunteers are to their activities and operations,” he said.

“We appreciate the inspirational role volunteers play in our communities to help others.

“These Awards are an opportunity to put a spotlight on our volunteers and say thank you.”

NSW Minister for Multiculturalism Mr John Ajaka , who is responsible for volunteering, said the awards were an opportunity to uncover and celebrate the great achievements of volunteers across NSW.

“The NSW Government is proud to sponsor these awards because we understand the profound social and economic value of volunteering. Volunteers are remarkable people who deserve our recognition,” Mr Ajaka said.

Twenty regional Volunteer of the Year Awards ceremonies are being held around the state.

All regional winners will be in the running for the overall NSW Volunteer of the Year Awards, which are announced at a gala event on Friday 4 December 2015 to coincide with International Volunteer Day.

The Volunteer of the Year Awards are generously supported by principal partners the NSW Department of Family and Community Services, and ClubsNSW, the industry body which represents the state's 1400 not-for-profit clubs, as well as Bupa Aged Care.

For information visit [www.volunteering.com.au](http://www.volunteering.com.au)

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## BACKGROUND



The **NSW Volunteer of the Year Awards** is an annual program run by The Centre for Volunteering – the State's peak body for volunteering - to recognise the outstanding work of volunteers in every region across NSW. Twenty one award ceremonies are held across NSW in September and October where nominees are recognised with certificates and winners announced. Regional winners will be entered into the overall State 2015 Volunteer of the Year

For more information go to [www.volunteering.com.au](http://www.volunteering.com.au)