

Media Release

UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL 3.00pm, Friday, 4 December 2015

Cricket coach with a difference wins NSW Volunteer of the Year

Blowfly Cricket Club founder Mark Rushton, of Sydney’s Mt Colah, has been crowned the 2015 NSW Volunteer of the Year for giving autistic children the opportunity to play competitive sport.

The NSW Volunteer of the Year Awards are run by The Centre for Volunteering – the State’s peak body for volunteering – to highlight the contribution 2.1 million volunteers make in NSW.

Centre for Volunteering CEO Gemma Rygate said Mark Ruston topped the 7,000 nominees because of the widespread impact of his volunteering which had improved the wellbeing of autistic children, their families, and created a new way to play club cricket.

“Mark created the Blowfly Cricket Club in 2011 after a friend lamented that his profoundly autistic son would never experience the joy of competitive weekend sport,” Ms Rygate said.

“Thanks to Mark’s vision and hard work, every Saturday, 20 children with autism, Asperger’s and cerebral palsy play cricket at a park in Hornsby with their families cheering from the sidelines.

“Small meltdowns and unusual bowling actions are no big deal because in creating the team, it created a strong support network among the families who all have special needs children.

“The effect has been profound - largely non-verbal kids talk more, their motor skills have improved, and the children enjoy the physical, emotional and social benefits of sport.”

Mark’s dream was for his team to play at the Sydney Cricket Ground (SCG). In 2012, they lived the dream and ran onto the SCG at the Australia v India game in front of 40,000 spectators.

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

Award Category	Winner
Overall Winner 2015 NSW Volunteer of the Year	Mark Rushton from Mount Colah , Blowfly Cricket Club for autistic children <i>(full winner profiles attached at back)</i>
Student Volunteer of the Year	Tegan Butts from Newcastle (aged 17), St John Ambulance NSW
Youth Volunteer of the Year (up to 24 years)	Joshua Osborne from Armidale . Armidale Dumaresq SES
Adult Volunteer of the Year (25 – 64 years)	Mark Rushton from Mount Colah , Blowfly Cricket Club
Senior Volunteer of the Year (65+ years)	Eleanor Blows from Broken Hill , Far West Local Health District
Volunteer Team of the Year	Sailors with disABILITIES , Sydney
Excellence in Volunteer Management	Managers of the DigiVol team, The Australian Museum , Sydney

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Principal Partners:

Sponsor:

Corporate Volunteer of the Year (Individual)	Melissa Booth from Surgical Specialties, Frenchs Forest
Corporate Volunteer Team of the Year	The Atlassian Foundation, Sydney
Lifetime Achievement Award	The Holocaust Survivor Volunteer Guides, Sydney Jewish Museum

Note: Profiles of winners attached

NSW Minister for Multiculturalism Mr John Ajaka, who is responsible for volunteering, said the awards were an opportunity to recognise and celebrate the great achievements of outstanding people in our communities.

“The NSW Government is proud to be a founding partner and principal sponsor for these awards because it recognises the importance of volunteering to individuals and communities across NSW.

Volunteers in NSW provide more than 240 million hours of support each year, conservatively valued at \$5 billion. This incredible effort cannot be understated. I congratulate the winners and nominees and I applaud the wonderful example of volunteering they represent,” Mr Ajaka said.

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.

“Mark’s contribution to our society through giving children with disabilities the opportunity to do what so many others take for granted is inspiring and extremely worthy of recognition.”

Almost 7,000 individual volunteers were nominated for the 2015 NSW Volunteer of the Year Awards. They were recognised at 21 regional ceremonies, where the winners went into the running for the overall State Awards, announced in Sydney

The NSW 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

Media inquiries: Kylie Yates 0418 607 575

BACKGROUND ATTACHED: Winners’ profiles

BACKGROUND – Winners – 2015 NSW Volunteer of the Year Awards

2015 Award Category	Winner
<p>Overall Winner 2015 NSW Volunteer of the Year</p> <p>Mark Rushton of Mount Colah Blowfly Cricket Club for autistic children - Founder</p>	<p>While Mark Rushton was recovering from an accident in 2007 which left him wheelchair-bound, a conversation with a friend who had an autistic child sparked an idea.</p> <p>Mark’s friend was lamenting that one of the hardest things for him as a parent was that his profoundly autistic son would never experience the joy of competitive weekend sport.</p> <p>In response, Mark established the Blowfly Cricket Club in 2011 and now, every Saturday, 20 children with autism, Asperger’s and cerebral palsy play cricket in Hornsby with their parents cheering from the sidelines. The concept has expanded and Mark coaches special needs children in Campbelltown and in the Central Coast. After working with Cricket NSW and Cricket Australia, a new resource has been developed based on the Blowfly model, to help clubs establish teams for special needs children.</p>
<p>Student Volunteer of the Year</p> <p>Youth Volunteer of the Year (up to 24 years)</p>	<p>Tegan Butts from Newcastle (aged 17), St Johns Ambulance volunteer</p> <p>Growing up in a violent household and experiencing homelessness at age 13 makes Tegan’s volunteering efforts even more impressive. In addition to her high school studies, Tegan volunteers with St John’s Ambulance to help achieve her goal of becoming a paramedic. Tegan is also volunteers with the White Ribbon Day campaign, the Samaritans and is an advocate and speaker for the SHINE program for vulnerable students. Tegan shows how volunteering not only helps others, but is also a pathway to future employment.</p> <p>Joshua Osborne of Armidale, Armidale Dumaresq SES volunteer</p> <p>Josh is the Local Area Controller and Unit Controller for the Armidale-Dumaresq NSW SES Unit. He is one of the youngest ever controllers in SES history. Josh manages volunteer members of the Unit who provide community support in the form of temporary repairs, flood mitigation, tarping, access, evacuation, resupply and chain sawing. Josh's passion, professionalism and dedication has boosted morale and made the Armidale-Dumaresq SES Unit a highly effective team.</p>
<p>Adult Volunteer of the Year (25 – 64 years)</p>	<p>Mark Rushton of Mount Colah, Blowfly Cricket Club (See main winner)</p>
<p>Senior Volunteer of the Year (65+ years)</p>	<p>Eleanor Blows of Broken Hill Far West Local Health District and other organisations</p> <p>Eleanor has been tirelessly volunteering for her community for 30 years. Most notably Eleanor was instrumental in getting the mobile breast cancer bus to Broken Hill to provide free screenings for all women in the remote region. Eleanor supports people experiencing domestic violence, and organises annual events including White Ribbon Day and International Women’s Day.</p>
<p>Volunteer Team of the Year</p>	<p>Sailors with disABILITIES (Winds of Change & Winds of Joy team)</p> <p>This volunteer team has provided programs to 3,000 children and disadvantaged youth each year for 21 years. The team focuses on what participants <i>can</i> do. It teaches teamwork, empowerment, trust, opportunity, self-esteem, and communication to help participants more actively participate in their communities.</p> <p><i>(continued over page)</i></p>

Excellence in Volunteer Management	DigiVol program, The Australian Museum, Sydney The innovative DigiVol program began in 2011 and has now grown to 80 volunteers who work both onsite and online to capture scientific data and import it into the Museum's collection database. The Volunteer Managers at DIGIVOL have demonstrated excellence in volunteer management in recruitment, induction, training, engagement, communication, and recognition and reward programs.
Corporate Volunteer of the Year (Individual)	Melissa Booth from Surgical Specialties, Frenchs Forest Melissa's extensive volunteering efforts and incredible passion have made a huge impact on the Cerebral Palsy Alliance. She has commissioned artwork from Cerebral Palsy Alliance clients, organised fundraising challenges, organised many events and opportunities.
Corporate Volunteer Team of the Year	The Atlassian Foundation Team Atlassian volunteers with Good360 Australia by providing IT support and technology to maximise website functionality, provides Photoshop and image editing support to catalogue products for redistribution, and provides regular assistance in their warehouse to sort, pack and label boxes to donate goods to a charities nationwide.
Lifetime Achievement Award	The Holocaust Survivor Volunteer Guides, Sydney Jewish Museum The Holocaust Survivor Guides, now aged between 70-95 years, were the foundation of the Sydney Jewish Museum when it began 23 years ago and remain the centre of the Museum's activities. Every visitor who has the opportunity to hear a Survivor's account of their wartime experience is left with an indelible emotional and historical imprint.



About the NSW Volunteer of the Year Awards

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. Almost 7,000 individual volunteers were nominated in 2015 and they were recognised with certificates at 21 award ceremonies held across NSW in September and October. All Regional winners went into the running for the overall NSW Volunteer of the Year Awards which were announced at a gala event on Friday 4 December 2015 at 99 on York, Sydney. For more information go to www.volunteering.com.au

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