

Media Release

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Young St John Ambulance volunteer awarded 2024 Western Sydney Volunteer of the Year

St John Ambulance first responder and trainer Usha Makkena from Edmondson Park has been named 2024 Western Sydney Volunteer of the year for her critical first aid response and training throughout the community.

The award was announced today at the Liverpool Catholic Club as part of the 2024 NSW Volunteer of the Year Awards. Recipients in other Western Sydney regional award categories were also announced, including young, adult, senior and volunteer team of the year.

The NSW Volunteer of the Year Awards celebrate the work of thousands of individuals and volunteer teams from a diverse range of organisations across the state.

The Awards are hosted by The Centre for Volunteering, whose mission it is to promote and support volunteering across NSW.

Western Sydney Young Volunteer of the Year: Usha Makkena from Edmondson Park

Usha has been an emergency medical technician, first responder and incident control team member with St John Ambulance since 2019, providing critical first aid at major events and managing emergency logistics. She also gives her time to other important causes with Headspace, Beyond Blue and the Butterfly Collective.

Western Sydney Adult Volunteer of the Year: Mary Nguyen from Fairfield East

Mary is a dedicated St John Ambulance NSW volunteer who has excelled in event planning and acute care for major events like Sydney's New Year's Eve and the ATP Tennis Cup. As a mentor and teacher at the Hills Division, she has empowered many volunteers with life-saving skills, significantly improving first aid services.

Western Sydney Senior Volunteer of the Year: Nicolaas Starrenburg from Moorebank

Nic volunteers at Whiddon's Men's Shed, where he runs weekly classes in woodworking, gardening, and furniture restoration. His enthusiastic and patient approach creates a safe and inclusive environment, helping seniors stay active, build friendships and new skills.

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Western Sydney Volunteer Team of the Year: Holsworthy Girl Guides Leaders

Holsworthy Girl Guides Leaders volunteer their time each week to run programs for girls aged 6 to 15, focusing on leadership, teamwork, and adventure. They organise regional camps, mentor new leaders, and inspire the Guides to give back to their community through projects like supporting the RSPCA and participating in ANZAC Day services. Their fundraising efforts help to keep the group active and thriving.

The Centre for Volunteering CEO Gemma Rygate said:

"These awards recognise the exceptional effort of volunteers across Liverpool and surrounding regions.

"Whether it's in the local sports club, in health care, education and cultural centres, legal support or emergency response, volunteers are essential for the ongoing health and viability of local communities.

"It's important for volunteers across the region to know that their commitment is recognised and valued."

The Awards are supported by Principal Partners the NSW Department of Communities and Justice and ClubsNSW.

The NSW Minister with responsibility for Volunteering, Jodie Harrison said:

"Congratulations to the recipients of the Western Sydney Volunteer of the Year Awards. Thank you for the incredible contributions you make to NSW and your local community.

"Volunteers are the lifeblood of our communities, and the NSW Government is pleased to be partnering with the Centre for Volunteering to recognise volunteers and the valuable role they play in making NSW the best state to live and work in."

ClubsNSW CEO Rebecca Riant said:

"The awards are a tribute to the vital contributions made by volunteers across the state. Volunteers are the backbone of the NSW club industry, and their efforts are crucial in uplifting local communities.

"We're delighted to have a special Club Volunteer of the Year Award category, and I can't wait to see who takes home that honour."

Western Sydney award recipients will be invited to represent their region at the Gala State Ceremony in Sydney at the end of the year, where the NSW Volunteer of the Year will be announced across each category.

More information at media@volunteering.com.au

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About the NSW Volunteer of the Year Awards

2024 marks the 18th year of these high-profile Awards, which have honoured hundreds of thousands of volunteers for their community service, while highlighting the value and benefits of volunteering.

Anyone who volunteers in NSW can be nominated for an award.

The Award categories are:

- Young Volunteer of the Year
- Adult Volunteer of the Year
- Senior Volunteer of the Year
- Volunteer Team of the Year
- Employee Volunteer of the Year
- Club Volunteer of the Year
- 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 the Year is announced. Recipients for the NSW Volunteer of the Year are also announced across the eight categories.

The Awards are run by the Centre for Volunteering and proudly supported by our principal partners the NSW Department of Communities and Justice and ClubsNSW.

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