

Media Release – Embargo 4pm, Tuesday, 13 November 2012

Topic: 2012 NSW Volunteer of the Year Award
Source: The Centre for Volunteering
Date: Tuesday, 13 November 2012

Sydney City East recognises local volunteers in Award ceremony

Volunteers from the Sydney City East region gathered today for the **2012 Sydney City East Volunteer of the Year Award Ceremony**, co-hosted by the Junction Neighbourhood Centre.

The Centre for Volunteering was honoured to have **Councillor Tony Bowen, Mayor of Randwick**, present the individual certificates at the Ceremony, as well as **Councillor Irene Doutney, representing Lord Mayor Clover Moore**, presenting the team certificates.

The annual NSW Volunteer of the Year Award program recognises the efforts and achievements of the State's millions of volunteers.

Andrew Heslop of Double Bay was named the **2012 Sydney City East Volunteer of the Year** for his outstanding contribution to the community during a ceremony at Coogee Diggers Club on Tuesday, 13 November 2012.

Andrew is the founder of Neighbour Day, Australia's annual celebration of community. It is supported through a wealth of community, local government and media partnerships that run the length and breadth of the country. Andrew started this event in 2003 when the body of an elderly woman was discovered in her home two years after she had passed away. While Andrew did not know the deceased he was appalled by the apparent ease in which the world had left her behind. Neighbours had watched piles of mail, store catalogues and newspapers build up at her front door but they did nothing.

Widespread local and national media interest followed and it was this coverage that prompted Andrew to suggest a 'National Check on Your Neighbour Day' in a Letter to the Editor in *The Age* published on 17 March 2003.

On Sunday, 30 March 2003 the first Neighbour Day was observed. It generated surprisingly widespread media coverage and support, primarily because of the simplicity of the idea and the ease with which Australians everywhere could take part. Importantly it also brought to prominence a major issue faced every day by senior Australians.

On the last Sunday of March each year, Neighbour Day breaks out with street parties, barbecues, festivals and other social activities to encourage residents to get together.

Since 2003 the evolution of Neighbour Day has been quite remarkable. What started as a warning to check on elderly neighbours has grown into a much wider annual celebration of strong communities and friendly streets. People of all ages participate because everyone everywhere is a neighbour no matter where you live or your personal circumstances.

Andrew was unable to attend the Ceremony due to work commitments but send an acceptance speech to be read on his behalf: "I accept this award and dedicate it to the memory of Elsie Brown who was my inspiration in founding Neighbour Day in Melbourne in 2003, and my late neighbour Clive Tayler. Wherever we live, whatever our circumstances, our neighbours are there for us in good times and in bad. Too often we forget that a friendly smile and a 'how are you today?' can mean the world to a single person living alone, who has no other interaction with their community. It doesn't take much effort to keep an eye out for an elderly or vulnerable neighbour, who could easily be our parent, grandparent or friend. Thank you for awarding Neighbour Day and I this honour - because the community you want really does start at your front door."



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Andrew is now in the running to win the prestigious 2012 NSW Volunteer of the Year award, with the winner to be announced by the Hon. Victor Dominello, Citizenship and Communities Minister, at the State Award ceremony on Monday, 5 December 2012 in Sydney.

Event co-host, Janet Green, from the Junction Neighbourhood Centre said that the event is very rewarding. "Volunteers are the lifeblood of local communities and are not recognised as often as they should be for their valuable, selfless commitment," she said.

The Centre for Volunteering's NSW Volunteer of the Year Award Manager, Kristin Sinclair, said the quality of nominations received for the Sydney City East region was outstanding. "The Sydney City East Region's nominees were of an exceptional standard but the judges felt that Andrew's tireless dedication to the BEA Group was a standout," Kristin said.

"We enjoyed celebrating with the volunteers, their families and the community at the Regional Award ceremony. However, there are thousands of volunteers in this Sydney City and the Eastern Suburbs, and just a handful of them were nominated. We challenge every person, not-for-profit organisation and community group to nominate a volunteer or volunteer team in 2013 to really showcase the region's volunteers to the rest of NSW."

Other Award winners announced at the ceremony are:

- **Alisha King of Camperdown – 2012 Sydney City East Youth Volunteer of the Year**
- **Alex Selig of Rose Bay - 2012 Sydney City East Senior Volunteer of the Year**
- **SISTER2sister Volunteers - 2012 Sydney City East Volunteer Team of the Year**

The above winners received a \$200 donation for their organisation.

The Youth Volunteer of the Year Award is awarded to volunteers aged 15-25. **Alisha King of Camperdown was named 2012 Sydney City East Youth Volunteer of the Year.** Alisha is the founder and CEO of Uni Connect, an organisation which connects secondary students from regional and rural schools with tertiary students to answer questions and provide advice about further study. At the end of August, 85 schools were participating in this program. Alisha has organised a team of 31 advisers from 14 universities across eastern Australia. Increasing the accessibility of this kind of information is important to create social change in rural areas providing students with role models and mentors. Alisha volunteers roughly 8-10 hours a week contacting careers advisers from regional schools, making hand-outs, organising advisers and monitoring the page to match up students questions with advisers in the right position to answer the question. Alisha has been praised by her college and her home town, Great Lakes for this initiative which she says came to her in bed one morning.

Alex Selig of Rose Bay was named the 2012 Sydney City East Senior Volunteer of the Year Award. Alex Selig has volunteered with Jewishcare for 35 years, 12 of those as a volunteer teacher with the English as a Second Language (ESL) Program. Previously he was a coordinator and driver for the transport program which ferried seniors to attend various groups and day centres. Once a week he meets with a group of Russian speaking ladies at Bondi Junction to assist them in learning English. They read the newspaper and discuss the various topics brought up by the articles. Each week he also sets them a word puzzle as homework, which they revise the next week. Anna Bershinsky, who attends his groups, said: "When we arrived in Australia we did not know a word of English. Today we can speak fluently, read newspapers and books, watch TV, feel confident to communicate and socialise with our neighbours." In addition, Mr Selig has assisted the children at Darlington Public School prepare for the selective school entrance exams, and over the years gave 139 blood donations



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until the age restrictions kicked in. Mr Selig's good humour and kindness have endeared him to all those he has come into contact with over the years, and his dedication is an example to others.

The SISTER2sister Program's Volunteers was named the 2012 Sydney City East Volunteer Team of the Year. The SISTER2sister Program is a 12 month mentoring program for at-risk teenage girls (Little Sisters) who are disadvantaged due to circumstances out of their control. With the exception of two paid staff the entire organisation relies on the precious time of volunteers. Each Little Sister mentee is matched with a Big Sister mentee who is there to guide and support her through her obstacles. Groups of ten Big and Little sister matches are supported by a Team Leader whose role is to manage welfare issues and equip the mentors with the necessary tools to deal with the circumstances of the mentees. It is a prerequisite to have been a Big Sister for at least two years to become a Team Leader. The teams are also supported by a volunteer psychologist who is there to provide professional guidance to the team on welfare issues that arise. What makes this program organisation so unique is the strong support network and safety net provided for the Big Sisters. These incredible women have demanding jobs and families, yet they find the precious time to make a difference in the community. They are on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week to respond to any instances of abuse and neglect and are sounding boards for the Big Sister mentors. They are responsible for DoCS reporting, and for the monthly record keeping of case notes and meet with their teams on a regular basis to support them in their role. These incredible women are also responsible for the facilitation of all events of the SISTER2sister program starting with Information Night, followed by Selection Day, Big Sister training weekend, four-day Butterfly Bootcamp, monthly risk management workshops and outings. These women are extremely resilient, as they are dealing with teenagers with very complex mental health issues and often difficult behaviour. Whilst this job sounds very rewarding (and it is), the role is very gruelling and full of challenges.

Two special awards were presented to:

Nicole James of Coogee received the **2012 Sydney City East Highly Commended Volunteer of the Year Award.** Nikki is the President of The Moniker Group, a collaboration of creative young people who are passionate about using their skills to raise awareness for humanitarian issues. Nikki is responsible for the overall running of group, managing governance while also being hands on in its two major projects: The Gallery Project and the Timbre Café – not-for-profit community café that provides a work skills program for young people living in out of home care. Nikki is passionate about young people engaging in meaningful volunteer work and develops projects that not only support humanitarian projects but create youth friendly volunteer opportunities. In addition to her work with the Moniker Group, Nikki is a Youth Leadership Coach with Living Leadership Australia, and a Business Mentor for Club Kidpreneur. During summer she is a surf life saver at Coogee Beach and has previously volunteered for the St Vincent De Paul Society, Invisible Children, The Salvation Army and Vibewire. Nikki is a social entrepreneur who loves setting up new programs and is dedicated to seeing them expand and grow. She is always transparent about her failures, mistakes, victories and challenges in the hope that it will encourage others to step out and set up new projects.

The **Victims and Witnesses of Crime Court Support Volunteer Team (VWCCS)** were awarded the **2012 Sydney City East Highly Commended Volunteer Team of the Year Award.** VWCCS was founded in 2007 to provide professional, compassionate and non-judgmental support to all victims and witnesses of crime at some of the busiest courts in NSW – where they operate every day of the working week and attend other courts when requested. The vast majority of victims and witnesses with no prior experience of the criminal justice system feel overwhelmed isolated and have little knowledge of what might happen in their court experience. Most are unaware of available services, how to access them or receive advice regarding their entitlements under the Charter of Victim's rights. VWCCS has grown to 100 volunteers who provide support. They have assisted with 5000 enquiries and contributed more than 7000 hours of community service. VWCCS has introduced a number of significant initiatives within the court system. In Sydney, the organisation has focussed on providing services at Downing Centre and Parramatta courts. None of these courts provide a dedicated information desk to assist



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court attendees, nor were victims or witnesses informed of services available to them when attending court. VWCCS established a dedicated information and reception desk and recruited and trained specialist volunteers to assist. With the assistance of the attorney general department they established a Police Witness Meeting Area at the Downing Centre. They have established offices and a safe room where victims and witnesses are able to compose themselves prior to giving evidence

Other individual volunteers to be recognised for their outstanding community work are:

- **Carol Adams of Glebe** who has been volunteering with the Glebe Assistance Partnership Project for 8 years giving an average of 10 hours per week
- **Gay Black of Sydney** who has been volunteering at National Breast Cancer Foundation for 2 years giving an average of 16 hours per week
- **Nathan Boyle of Sydney** who has been volunteering at YMCA NSW for 6 years giving an average of 5 hours per week
- **Hazel Brombey of Coogee** who has been volunteering at Randwick Coogee Swimming Club for 35 years giving an average of 18 hours per week
- **John Duncan of Glebe** who has been volunteering at Glebe Assistance Partnership Project for 8 years giving an average of 10 hours per week
- **Evelyn Harris of Maroubra** who has been volunteering at Ostomy NSW LTD for 12 years giving an average of 6-8 hours per week
- **Dr Jaya Jayasooriah of Kingsford** who has been volunteering at MN DNSW for 3 years giving an average of 10 hours per week
- **John Powell of Glebe** who has been volunteering at Glebe Assistance Partnership Project for 8 years giving an average of 10 hours per week
- **Lilly Skurnik of Rose Bay** who has been volunteering at JewishCare for 22 years giving an average of 7-8 hours per week
- **Sam Stone of Bondi** who has been volunteering at Bronte Surf Lifesaving Club for 4 years giving an average of 20 hours per week
- **Bob Williamson of Bondi Junction** who has been volunteering at Wairoa Special School for 5 years giving an average of 15 hours per week

Other volunteer teams to be recognised for their outstanding community work are:

- Caren Lockhart and the **Counselling@MAC's 8 volunteers**
- Denise Lvoff and **Jewish Care's Archive Project's 10 volunteers**
- The **Kadimah Gardens Administrator duo: Raymond Kassel OAM and David Laufer**



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- Anne Bennett and the **nabSchools First - IEC Screening Project Extension's 8 volunteers**
- **The St George Cancer Information Centre's 25 volunteers**
- Jackie Clark and the **Sydney Heritage Fleet's 500+ Active Volunteers's more than 500 volunteers**
- La'Reine Lang and the **Sydney Jewish Museum's Mail-Out Team's 10 volunteers**
- Yun Fang Lu and the **Tai Chi Teachers at the South East Neighbourhood Centre (SENC)'s 4 volunteers**
- Duo **Yvonne and Michael Shapiro** who volunteer with Princess Gardens Retirement Village, Rose Bay

Award ceremonies have been held in the Award's 19 Regions across NSW throughout October and November, with the regional winners in the running for the 2012 NSW Volunteer of the Year Award.

The winner of the 2012 NSW Volunteer of the Year will receive a \$1,500 donation to their not-for-profit organisation, Youth and Senior, Team and Not-for-Profit of the Year will each receive a \$1,000 donation.

The Award is an initiative of The Centre for Volunteering, the peak body for volunteering NSW. Now in its fifth year, this is the state-wide Award program recognising and thanking the volunteers in NSW who generously give more than 235 million work hours each year in NSW, contributing an extraordinary \$5 billion to the State's economy.

"The week-in week-out contributions that volunteers make stretch from aged care, education, child welfare and counselling, through to emergency callouts, event control, running sports, environmental care and animal protection. There's hardly an area of life which is not helped by volunteering," Kristin said.

More Information

Kristin Sinclair

NSW Volunteer of the Year Award Manager, The Centre for Volunteering
0412 313 359 | ksinclair@volunteering.com.au



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NSW Volunteer of the Year Award Background

The NSW Volunteer of the Year Award is an annual awards program launched in 2007 by The Centre for Volunteering to recognise the outstanding efforts of the two million plus volunteers in NSW, and to promote the importance of volunteering to the community and to companies. Prior to 2007 there was no state-wide recognition program for all volunteers.

The NSW Volunteer of the Year Award has the support of the NSW Government's Office of Communities who is a financial supporter of the program and the Hon. Victor Dominello, Citizenship and Communities Minister and Member for Ryde, is Patron of the Award. ClubsNSW has just signed on as official sponsor of the NSW Volunteer of the Year Award. ClubsNSW see the Awards as an opportunity to recognise their own 50,000 volunteers working in clubs throughout NSW.

Nominations

Nominations for the 2012 NSW Volunteer of the Year Award have now closed.

Judging

The 2012 NSW Volunteer of the Year Award program is run at a Regional and State level. The Individual and Volunteer Team categories are judged and presented at Regional and State levels. The Corporate Volunteer and NSW Excellence in NFP Volunteer Management categories are judged and presented at a State level only.

There are 19 regions across NSW, with winners of the 2012 NSW Volunteer of the Year Award selected from the Regional Award winners. Special awards are given by the judges for to standout individual Youth and Senior volunteers at Regional and State levels and Highly Commended volunteers.

Regional Ceremonies

Regional Award Ceremonies are held October-November in the Award's nineteen regions. The Ceremonies will be co-hosted by The Centre for Volunteering and the local Volunteer Referral Centre in each Region.

State Award Ceremony

The Award culminates in the 2012 NSW Volunteer of the Year Award Ceremony to be held on Wednesday, 5 December 2011 (in recognition of International Volunteer Day which falls every year on 5 December).

About The Centre for Volunteering

The Centre for Volunteering is the peak body in NSW, promoting and supporting volunteering and community participation. The Centre for Volunteering connects people and organisations in order to enrich its community, through referral, training, resource development, information and education services to help people get involved in their communities, and enhance the capacity and skills of not-for-profit organisations, corporations and government to become involved in the community. For more information visit:

- The Centre for Volunteering (www.volunteering.com.au)
- School of Volunteer Management (www.svm.edu.au)
- NSW Volunteer of the Year Award (www.nswvolunteerawards.com)



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