

Volunteering WA

WA Volunteer of the Year Awards and National Volunteering Week

**Address by the Honourable Kim Beazley AC
Governor of Western Australia**

Wednesday, 22nd May 2019

I would firstly like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet – the Whadjuk Noongar people – and pay my respects to their elders past, present and emerging.

As Patron of Volunteering WA it is my great pleasure to join you once again for the annual Western Australian Volunteer of the Year Awards.

It is a privilege and humbling experience to attend an occasion with so many generous people that make a difference in their community and State by volunteering.

Our volunteers tonight, some of whom are finalists in this award ceremony, are from all over Western Australia, from remote and regional areas to our local suburbs and cities. They are all ages and from all backgrounds. But the thing that ties them together is their dedication to give back to the community and to others.

You are the volunteers of our great state of Western Australia, and I am proud to be here amongst you all.

Also here tonight are volunteer-involving organisations which are made up of passionate ‘advocates of volunteering’ who make things happen, who work tirelessly day in and day out to address the issues and challenges in our society.

These charities, community and service organisations (and indeed many Government programs) could not exist or do their important work without the committed support of their amazing volunteers.

Tonight I am wearing orange for *Wear Orange Wednesday* to mark the 60th anniversary of the WA State Emergency Service. There are over 2,100 SES volunteers who are ready to support WA communities when a natural disaster strikes or an emergency situation arises. They also work behind the scenes as radio or computer operators, in administration or incident control, planning and safety promotion. We would be lost without these men and women and we thank them.

Our volunteers contribute significantly to our economic, social, cultural and environmental well-being, and we can’t imagine a State without them.

To echo the theme of this year’s National Volunteering Week, our volunteers do ‘Make a world of difference’.

And in our State, Volunteering WA is a driving force behind this.

Last year, their support services:

- assisted 1, 141 individuals

- supported 247 organisations
- and trained 1, 303 volunteers.

Impressive numbers, and only a small snapshot of their outreach and engagement.

As mentioned, we are in the middle of National Volunteer Week – our country’s most significant and enduring celebration of volunteerism – currently in its 30th year.

It is a time to say thank you to those who give up their own free time and put up their hand to volunteer without expecting anything in return. This work provides something that simply can’t be bought and is an important multiplier benefit for the whole community.

In 2017, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) put out a call for submissions to “...*inform current and emerging needs for ‘volunteering and giving’ data.*” The call for data sought to address why the participation rates of formal volunteering had dropped from 34% of adults in 2010, to 31% of adults in 2014.

Estimates of voluntary work in Australia have not been collected since 2014. In their submission call, the ABS highlighted that new and reliable statistics would be vital for, “...*ongoing policy and future planning for communities...*”, and to help us understand the effect of volunteering on the economy.

As schedules and bank balances become tighter in our increasingly fast-paced and interconnected lives, it is clear in some ways to see why people may be volunteering less.

More than ever though, our world needs these important social contributions and there are new ways to help if you think outside the square.

For example, anyone with an internet connection can now contribute to citizen science (helping researchers answer critical scientific questions by taking part in surveys) or remotely volunteer skills like graphic design for non-profits, or help mentor students via a Skype call.

In whatever small way we can, giving back to the community is something we should all look to do.

Since becoming Governor and the Patron of Volunteering WA, I have had the privilege to meet many fellow Western Australians who individually, and in groups, selflessly open their hearts to give to others – all without expectation of any reward.

I commend Volunteering WA for creating such a fantastic event tonight that showcases, acknowledges and celebrates volunteering in our State. It sets important examples to the community and inspires us all.

To each and every one of our volunteers, we salute you. We know you don’t expect commendation and praise but you deserve it and so collectively we all say THANK YOU for your enormous contributions.

I look forward to helping to announce the very worthy recipients of this year’s Western Australian Volunteer of the Year Awards shortly. Thank you.