

Australia Day Awards 2023 – Nominee Summaries

Citizen of the Year

Helen Mears

Helen Mears has been a United Hospital Auxiliaries volunteer at Coffs Harbour Health Campus for the past 40 years and has been President of the local UHA group, affectionately known as the Pink Ladies, for over 30 years. In December last year, her outstanding service to the community was recognised when Helen was named the NSW 2021 joint Senior Volunteer of the Year in the NSW Volunteer of the Year Awards.

Cheryl Post

Cheryl Post has been volunteering at Lifeline for the past six years and has been vital in supporting the recruitment of other retail volunteers and maintaining a healthy volunteer culture, despite having her own health challenges. If she knows someone is having a difficult time, Cheryl will always help support them as much as she can to ensure they feel valued and cared for.

Mayor's Community Spirit Award

Matt Donovan

Quick thinking from Matt Donovan was instrumental in the rescue of two people at the North Wall on the 14 October 2022. Matt was actually driving in the area when he saw the incident unfolding and showed great initiative in grabbing a life jacket from the yacht club to help rescue the men. With the help of the lifeguards, police and ambulance, Matt's actions led to a safe rescue in a situation which could so easily have ended in tragedy.

Ian Taylor

Lifeline North Coast Ambassador volunteer and fund-raiser Ian has made a huge impact in the past year by hosting two truck convoys to raise awareness of male mental health and suicide. He also helps with the local Suicide Prevention Day Walk, gives talks at men's groups and is a coach and mentor for an under 15s AFL team that supports boys from one-parent families who need male guidance.

Sport and Recreation Award

Ryan Gilchrist

Ryan spent many months overseas in 2022 competing in the mountain bike Enduro World Series against the best in the world, while simultaneously keeping up with his university engineering studies remotely. Ryan had outstanding results over the series, finishing fifth overall – which was particularly notable as he didn't have the support of a professional team behind him unlike his competitors. On his return, he competed in the Gravity Enduro Nationals becoming the 2022 Australian Champion. Ryan, who was Captain of Toormina High School, is considered a hero and mentor to local aspiring MTB riders and he regularly runs volunteer coaching sessions with youth keen to meet and ride with him.

Indigo Harris

Indigo is making a real name for herself in the Modern Pentathlon and has competed and won gold at events internationally and in Australia already. Alongside her talents she is also been noticed for her generosity and encouragement to her fellow athletes and willingness to volunteer at events. She is always proud to represent Australia and hopes to do so at the Junior Olympics and the 2028 and 2032 Olympics.

Brett Hodgekiss

Brett is the Club President for Coffs City United Football Club; a club that recently earned five stars in the National Club Development Program. Brett spends countless hours bringing the football community together. He has championed the development of female football in the region and worked for State and National bodies to further the game in Northern NSW.

Simon Portus

As well was being instrumental in the redevelopment of Toormina Oval, Simon is credited with making Sawtell Football Club a leader in female football in Northern NSW. In just one year, the Club saw significant growth in female player numbers from 32% of total players in 2021 to 36% in 2022. This is particularly impressive when you learn that the average across the North Coast Football region is to have just 28% of female players registered with a club.