



Media Release

23 October 2022

Dedicated crop of volunteers recognised at Cockburn's annual awards

Passionate locals and organisations who contribute many hours to improving our community every week – often daily – have been recognised at the City of Cockburn's annual volunteer awards.

The 2022 awards recognised a Volunteer of the Year, a Cockburn Volunteer Organisation of the Year, plus a Mayor's Volunteer Award, with 49 organisations represented among 76 nominations.

Described as a natural leader who rallies the troops, the winner of this year's **Volunteer of the Year** title is **Angela Sawiak** from The Wetlands Centre Cockburn.

Angela, affectionately known as the 'cake lady' for her regular sweet supplies to fellow volunteers, plays a pivotal role in community volunteer and conservation programs.

While motivating teams to work together to revegetate and restore natural ecosystems, Angela puts her database management skills to use mapping and reporting landcare processes from seed collection, to propagating and planting seedlings at Beeliar Regional Park rehabilitation sites.

Going above and beyond her two dedicated volunteer days, her aptitude for data collection and creating databases has enabled the nursery and revegetation programs to run efficiently for the past seven years.

She is a leading citizen scientist in the Turtle Tracker program, and is passionate about protecting the near-threatened Southwestern snake necked, or oblong, turtle (*Chelodina oblonga* – prev. *C. colliei*).

Second place was awarded to **Gary Allen** from Cooby Cares and in joint third place was **Serena Gamble** from Feed It Forward and Buy Nothing Hamilton Hill, and **Kate De'Laney** of Pregnancy and Infant Loss Australia.

The **Cockburn Volunteer Organisation of the Year** award was presented to **Marine**



Media Release

Rescue Cockburn.

Its highly skilled volunteers dedicate their time, often in dangerous conditions, to perform a crucial role in our community, responding to hundreds of call-outs to help rescue sea going vessels and their passengers that get into trouble at all hours of the day and night.

This group offers 24-hour radio watch and throughout the two years of the pandemic, continued to respond to every call for assistance, putting themselves at risk to save the boating public.

The **Turtle Tracker** citizen science program was awarded second place, followed by **Cooby Youth Space** in third place.

The winner of the **Mayor's Volunteer Award** for 2022 is **Serene Anderson** of Friends of the Community (FoC).

Serene has been active in the Cockburn community for more than 15 years and co-founded FoC which specialises in providing healthy low-cost food at special events, returning 100 per cent of the profits back into the community.

Dubbed the heartbeat of the charity, Serene works tirelessly as Secretary and Treasurer, while also organising events, coordinating volunteers and managing the facility and food vans.

Her ongoing leadership has resulted in the charity donating more than \$180,000 to 60 charities, and awarding 27 scholarships to local high school students enabling them to beat the odds and go to university.

During the pandemic, FoC fundraising came to a standstill, but Serene sought supplementary funding to help pay ongoing costs, ensuring vulnerable people in our community didn't go without food, medical aid, and other assistance.

Second place was awarded to **Marie Brand** of Cockburn Neighbourhood Watch and Yangebup Progress Association. Third place was presented to **Connie (Concettina) Celenza**, of Fremantle All Abilities Netball Club.

Media Release

Learn more about this year's deserving winners –

Volunteer of the Year, 2nd place, Gary Allen, Cooby Cares:

Gary has been devoted to his community as the driving force behind Cooby Cares since 2016 until its closure in early October this year, helping reduce the financial burden on community members often experiencing a crisis situation.

Through Cooby Cares, Gary donated up to 150 nutritious food boxes each week, toiletries, cleaning products, pet food and seasonal items, such as blankets and back to school supplies to individuals and families.

Adapting to the many challenges posed by the pandemic, Gary oversaw a threefold increase in the provision of food boxes, which helped keep vulnerable people in our community safe.

He also ran a community pantry on the verge of his property supplying locals with emergency assistance, and propagated pot plants which he offered to concession card holders for free.

He made the world a better place for others and recognised “A good meal with a full belly will make school easier, life generally better, and encourage better behaviour. I can just help families lift up a little bit.”

Volunteer of the Year, joint 3rd place, Serena Gamble from Feed It Forward and Buy Nothing Hamilton Hill:

Despite working fulltime, Serena dedicates her weekends to ensuring families in need have access to free healthy food, clothes, toys and furniture.

The pandemic did not slow her down, and with the support of her family, she collected and donated food to the community through the Feed It Forward Inc program distributing fruit, vegetables, bakery and pantry items to hundreds of people from her driveway.

She also administrates the Buy Nothing Hamilton Hill, Coolbellup and Surrounds Crime Watch and Perth's Best Op Shops social media pages.



Media Release

Volunteer of the Year, joint 3rd place, Kate De'Laney of Pregnancy and Infant Loss Australia:

Over the past year Kate has successfully advocated for changes to the Fair Work Act, enabling people who experience the loss of a baby at any stage of pregnancy to be entitled to bereavement leave.

She has also advocated to the WA government and WA unions for this entitlement to be provided to WA public servants and West Australians not covered by the Fair Work Act.

At a federal level she has advocated for 15 October to be proclaimed National Pregnancy and Infant Loss Remembrance Day, making it one of only four official days of national remembrance.

She also provides free counselling and support services to people impacted by the loss of a baby through pregnancy or miscarriage.

Kate's work has raised awareness in the community for bereaved parents, acknowledging that their physical and mental wellbeing is important and that their baby is valued.

Her work has also helped reduce the stigma associated with the loss of a baby through pregnancy and miscarriage. This has helped bereaved parents feel at ease as part of a community that supports their experience and where the loss of a baby should no longer be seen as something that shouldn't be discussed.

Cockburn Volunteer Organisation of the Year, 2nd place Turtle Tracker citizen science program:

Turtle Trackers aims to protect and support the near-threatened species Southwestern snake necked, or oblong, turtle (*Chelodina oblonga* – *prev. C. colliei*) which lives in many Cockburn lakes and wetlands, including Walliabup-Bibra Lake.

Its volunteers devote their time and efforts, generally in undesirable, cold and wet weather during turtle nesting season between September and November.



Media Release

Due to the unpredictable nature of volunteering with animals, Turtle Trackers are also on call for mass turtle nesting events during the nesting period. Mass nesting events are intense and can occur up to 3-5 times per nesting season, when volunteers drop what they are doing and head to Walliabup-Bibra Lake to help protect, monitor and record the active turtles.

The program monitors the general movement and nesting behaviour of turtle species, particularly females during the nesting season, by observing and protecting them where appropriate, to ensure they safely make it to a chosen nesting site, lay eggs and make it back to the wetlands.

This involves protecting the turtles and nests from human interference, road mortality, and predators such as ravens, bandicoots and dogs. Trackers record turtle sighting, nests and mortality on the Australian turtle mapping application called TurtleSAT, a national collection point for citizen science data on freshwater turtle species.

Turtle Trackers is a partnership between the City, Murdoch University, The Wetlands Centre Cockburn, WA Wildlife and the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions.

Cockburn Volunteer Organisation of the Year, 3rd place Cooby Youth Space:

This grass roots organisation tackles the key community issue of how to keep young people engaged and safe.

Founded by a handful of locals, Cooby Youth Space is a safe drop-in zone where local youth aged 10-16 can hang out with other local kids.

The founders recognised the variety of youth needs in Coolbellup and after some research and outreach, created a space that is free of charge, where young people can enjoy snacks and dinner cooked by the committee.

It began with a term of weekly meetings for young people through a pilot program called Cooby Nightfields, with the Stephen Michael Foundation. From 10 participants in the first week, attendance grew weekly over the term, peaking at 28 youths of varying ages.



Media Release

The organisation's next step is to create a steering committee of youth members who attend the program to guide future development. A venue has been secured at Coolbellup Community Hub, local youth artists have created a logo and a social media platform is now active.

Mayor's Volunteer Award, 2nd place, Marie Brand of Cockburn Neighbourhood Watch and Yangebup Progress Association:

Marie has been volunteering with Cockburn Neighbourhood Watch and Yangebup Progress Association for more than 28 years, including many years in the role of Secretary at both organisations.

She is a consistent participant at City of Cockburn events, such as the Teddy Bears Picnic, Spring Fair, Christmas on the Green, Australia Day and Coogee Beach Festival representing the community group at information stalls, including replacing licence plate screws with anti-theft screws.

Mayor's Volunteer Award, 3rd place, Connie (Concettina) Celenza, of Fremantle All Abilities Netball Club:

For more than a decade, Connie has quietly volunteered by doing the crucial work that allows the club to continue providing support to people with disability to enjoy sport and social activities.

In her role as Secretary and Treasurer, Connie ensures the club's financial stability, helped secure government grants for equipment and uniforms, fundraises, negotiates access and playing times with Fremantle Netball Association, and organises trips in the metropolitan area and interstate for competitive tournaments.

This is in addition to being a personal support to the players and stepping in to fill player positions.

Winners were announced at a special awards evening at the City's Administration Centre on 23 October.

All nominations were submitted by members of the community.



Media Release

Find out more about volunteering in the Cockburn community at the City's [website](#).

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