



MEDIA RELEASE

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SydWest recognises selfless volunteers during Volunteer Week

Two hours every week at Blacktown, Bashir Faiz can be found in the passenger seat of the SydWest Multicultural Services Learner Driver car, patiently instructing newly arrived refugees so that they can obtain a NSW drivers' licence.

Over at our disability division at Croydon, Maggie Ross can be found baking up a storm with our NDIS participants every Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

Both agree that volunteering gives them a great deal of satisfaction.

Bashir and Maggie were just two of a host of SydWest volunteers who were celebrated this week at High Tea as part of National Volunteer Week celebrations.

Acting CEO Clement Meru said volunteers played a critical role in SydWest's ability to provide quality services to the community.

'Our volunteers take part in a range of activities,' he said. 'From helping teach refugees and humanitarian entrants new to Australia how to drive, to supporting our disability participants with cooking skills, to helping out with translations or with our Mother's Support groups that help new mums make friends.'

'There are people like Ana Estala who came to Australia in 1974 and who set up our first Spanish social support group for seniors. Even though she has recently moved to the Central Coast, she still comes back every week to ensure our Spanish speaking seniors can get together and socialise in their own language,' he said.

'Then there is Ivona Jurcevic, initially from Croatia, who pays regular visits to seniors, providing friendship and support, and will soon be running rockabilly dance lessons for our disability participants.

'They are too many people to individually mention, but they are the lifeblood of our organisation and we are deeply grateful for their service.'

Each year SydWest has the hard task of awarding a volunteer of the year – this year it went to Bashir. He was presented with a certificate by our Board Member Professor Peter Zelas at the morning tea event. You can read more about his story, and Maggie's, below.



Case study #1

Volunteer of the Year helps navigate road to driving success

Two hours every week, Bashir Faiz can be found in the passenger seat of the SydWest Multicultural Services Learner Driver car, patiently instructing newly arrived refugees so that they can obtain a NSW drivers' licence.

The qualified driving instructor, who runs his own driving business, has been doing this for 7 years and was recently recognised with SydWest's Volunteer of the Year award.

Bashir's voluntary work with the Learner Driver Mentor Program helps alleviate the cost of driving lessons for new arrivals to Australia. Having a driver's licence means greater independence and self-confidence, and greater chances of getting a job.

A migrant from Afghanistan, Bashir speaks Farsi and Pashtu, so can communicate in language with refugees and humanitarian entrants who come from countries including Afghanistan, Iran and Northern Pakistan.

SydWest caseworker Khatol Ahmadzay said Bashir has helped many people over the years, including a sole parent from Afghanistan, who could not read or write, and was struggling to get her children to school, or to get to a job, by public transport.

With the dedicated help of Bashir, she was able to obtain her licence, opening up a world of opportunity for her and her family.

'I am honoured to be making a small contribution to this fantastic organisation,' said Bashir, adding that being a volunteer gave him a great deal of satisfaction.

'His selfless commitment and positive impact on our organisation and community make him a truly deserving candidate for this year's award,' said Saurav Shrestha, SydWest's Settlement Services Team Leader.

CAPTION: PHOTO ONE - SydWest Board member Prof Peter Zelas presents the Volunteer of the Year award to volunteer Bashir Faiz, with HR Manager Nicholette Bowen.



Case study #2

Love of baking inspires volunteer work teaching cooking skills to people with disability

Maggie Ross, of Penshurst, loves to bake.

Three times a week she can be found at Participate Australia's Croydon premises, creating amazing meals and treats with a group of disability participants. [Note: Participate Australia is part of SydWest, running its disability division.]

A former cafe owner and restaurant cook, Maggie stumbled upon the volunteer opportunity at Participate Australia through friend networks about 7 years ago.

She started making basic food once a week as part of an organised activity to teach cooking skills.

'Biscuits and bread - bread you can't kill - I just tell them, go for it!' she says.

'It has now evolved, and I make lunch meals as well as something to go with it afterwards. For example, on Monday we made meatballs and salad.

'Some participants help cook the whole meal while others just do parts of it. It's whatever they want to do,' she said.

Maggie was one of the guests of honor at a SydWest's high tea this week. SydWest spokesman Thom Calms said Maggie makes an amazing contribution to the organisation.

CAPTION: PHOTO TWO - Volunteer and keen cook Maggie Ross. [Please note we also have a video interview of Maggie].

Facts about volunteering

- Across Australia it is estimated that over 5 million people volunteered through an organisation or group.
- Volunteers contributed 596 million hours to the community.
- Men and women tend to volunteer at similar rates.
- A 2023 survey found that 93% of volunteers were either satisfied or very satisfied with their experience volunteering.
- A survey of culturally diverse volunteers found that they described volunteering as an *'inseparable element of their culture that needed to be passed onto the next generation and shared with other Australian communities.'*

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