



■ **RECOGNITION:** Pictured at back, volunteer award recipients Brendon Nichol, Mulbring Fire Brigade captain Scott Callan (on behalf of Kevin Bristow), Cessnock MP Clayton Barr, John Ryan, Garry Payne, and at front Joe Cause and Allison Bonne.

## Volunteers recognised for service

By Sage Swinton

Five local volunteers and a Justice of the Peace (JP) have been recognised by the NSW Government for their service to the community.

The Premier's Volunteer Recognition Program invited nominations for the awards in February this year.

Allison Bonne and Joe Cause were recognised with adult volunteering effort awards for their work with Heal for Life, a retreat for victims of childhood trauma and abuse that offers residential healing programs.

Both recipients spoke about being survivors and now work to support others in healing from abuse.

"As I support, I grow myself," Ms. Bonne said.

"But I love it, for me it's a blessing and I feel honoured to receive this award."

"It's amazing and I wouldn't change it for the world," Mr. Cause added.

Three local long-serving fire fighters were also recognised for their services to the NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS).

Kevin Bristow, who was not present at the ceremony, was awarded a lifelong volunteering award for over 40 years' service to RFS.

Captain Scott Callan of Mulbring Rural Fire Brigade, where Mr. Bristow is still an active member, accepted the award on behalf of him.

"He gives up a lot of his time," Mr. Callan said, "to help people and that's why he's in it."

John Ryan was recognised for a long-term volunteering award, having served in the brigade for over 35 years.

Mr. Ryan has been captain of three

brigades in Cessnock and said he appreciated being recognised.

Brendon Nichol was also bestowed with a long-term volunteering award for his 25 years' service to the RFS.

Mr. Nichol said he has been to many fires over the years, and thoroughly enjoys being a volunteer.

"I love being in the RFS," he said.

"I wouldn't give it up for anyone, I love what we do."

Local man Garry Payne was also recognised for serving as a JP for over 50 years.

Member for Cessnock Clayton Barr presented the awards at an afternoon tea at Cessnock Performing Arts Centre on July 22.

Mr. Barr said there was a common theme between the recipients and the volunteer work that they do.

"They both scream safety to me," he said.

"Whether it's physical safety or assisting with mental health, it's about making people safe."

He commended the volunteers present and volunteers in general as governments rely on them for the unpaid work that they do.

"The very fabric of our society relies on volunteering," he said.

Mr. Barr said it was amazing to be able to honour these volunteers, and hopes the awards will continue so that more hard-working volunteers in the community can be recognised.

"This has been a good starting point and in future years we need to make sure that the net is cast more widely," he said.

"I will happily work harder to make it better and better."