

Thursday, 19 May 2022

CHAIRMAN'S MEDAL AWARDED TO HUNTER VALLEY LOCAL FOR HER WORK SUPPORTING THE INVISIBLE VICTIMS OF CRIME, CHILDREN WITH PARENTS IN PRISON

Recognising more than a decade of volunteering with SHINE for Kids, the Newcastle Permanent Charitable Foundation has awarded its 2022 Chairman's Medal to Helen Walker-McCready, for her efforts supporting children and young people with a parent in Cessnock Correctional Centre.

SHINE for Kids is the only national charity supporting children with incarcerated parents from infancy to adulthood, working to strengthen their connection to community and family through education, support and mentoring.

Jennifer Leslie, Chair of Newcastle Permanent Charitable Foundation, said National Volunteer Week was a fitting time to acknowledge the tremendous contribution Ms Walker-McCready has made supporting the invisible victims of crime, children with a parent in custody.

"Helen's dedication and giving spirit has seen her become a central figure in SHINE, a wonderful organisation that aims to lessen the psychological trauma and emotional and social impact experienced by children as a result of their parent's imprisonment. She not only dedicates hours of volunteering every month, but is always the first to lend a hand when the team is short of volunteers," said Ms Leslie.

"Helen's warmth and ability to connect with people sees the children at SHINE gravitate to her. She has a natural ability to relate to people with empathy and understanding in a non-judgmental way. Her fun and open personality means she's a hit when it comes to play activities, while her willingness to listen makes it easy for the children to open up and talk.

"When we considered her additional service to the local Salvation Army, as well as her support of Cessnock Rural Fire Service during bushfire season, Helen was a standout choice from a pool of extremely worthy nominees as this year's winner of the Chairman's Medal," she said.

First presented in 2018 in honour of the late Michael Slater, who served as Chair of the Newcastle Permanent Building Society and Newcastle Permanent Charitable Foundation for nearly ten years and spent more than 50 years volunteering his time and talents to local organisations, the Medal is recognition for an outstanding volunteer who sets aside their own priorities to better the community.

"SHINE for Kids means a lot to me. It took a while to get to know the children and they need to have trust in us too, but now it's lovely to see them smile, laugh and play games, reading books and colouring in stencils, which they all love to do," said Ms Walker-McCready.

"You feel that you've made a positive impact and difference to their lives. It's not about you. It's what you can do for others.

“One day a family came into my work to thank me for everything I had done for them. They said that I had made a big difference and provided help when they needed it. They were leaving the area but wanted to drop in and say thank you.”

SHINE for Kids CEO Julie Hourigan Ruse said children with an incarcerated parent are the invisible victims of crime and face many challenges when their parent is imprisoned including separation, trauma, stigma and poverty.

“For 40 years, SHINE for Kids has supported children from birth to adulthood who have been affected by the criminal justice system. Our programs maintain family connection and work with children to navigate an extremely difficult time, ultimately, helping to break the cycle of intergenerational disadvantage,” said Ms Hourigan Ruse.

“Helen has contributed much to SHINE for Kids during an incredible ten years with us, from setting up play areas and engaging shy children in activities to assisting families during drop-in services, Helen gives every person she encounters kindness and every task, large or small, the same committed attention.

“Because of this commitment and knowledge, she often takes new volunteers under her wing, guiding them and ensuring our families receive the best possible support. She is vital to our team and we have gained so much from having her on board.”

As well as Helen being awarded the Chairman’s Medal, SHINE for Kids will receive a \$5,000 grant to be used for volunteer training, development and recognition. This is in addition to the \$150,000 the Charitable Foundation has granted SHINE across three previous projects, helping to facilitate the national organisation’s important work in both the Hunter and NSW Central West.

Helen will be presented with the Chairman’s Medal at the Newcastle Permanent Charitable Foundation Grant Ceremony to be held next Thursday, 26 May 2022.

Previous winners of the Newcastle Permanent Charitable Society Chairman’s Medal:

2021: [Sue Clark-Pitrolo](#), the Kaden Centre

2020: [Garth Howard](#), Cancer Council NSW

2019: [Carolyn Comyns](#), Autoimmune Resource and Research Centre (ARRC)

2018: [Damian Charleson](#), Camp Quality

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