

Friday, 11th October 2019

Royal Life Saving Western Australia

Bravery Awards 2019

I would firstly like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet – the Whadjuk Noongar people – and pay my respects to their elders past and present.

I'm delighted to join you this morning for the Royal Life Saving Society's 2019 Bravery Awards.

Owing to our coastal lifestyle and warm climate, many Western Australians enjoy water based activities, including summers spent at the beach, boating on the river, or enjoying time at the pool. Spring has now arrived with its warmer, longer days, and already we can see an increase in these activities around town.

As a community, we benefit greatly from being able to enjoy the water safely. And this ability is, in no small part, due to the dedicated work of members of The Royal Life Saving Society.

As our population grows in size and diversity, The Royal Life Saving Society ensures that all of us, no matter our background or circumstances, can access water safety, swimming, survival and rescue skills. Everyone can be a lifesaver. The leadership shown by the Society in the area of reducing drowning by toddlers is particularly important.

I was astounded to learn that in 2018/19, 32 Western Australians drowned. And, based on past trends, 192 non-fatal drowning victims were admitted to hospital. While this is below the 10-year average, much more needs to be done.

Since the Society's establishment in 1909, an untold number of drownings have been prevented; either directly through rescue or indirectly through the acquisition of swimming and lifesaving skills, as well as the development and promotion of safe practices.

The Bravery Awards presented here today are a fantastic example of The Royal Life Saving Society's important public awareness role. These Awards recognise community members who have gone to the aid of someone in distress, who have shown initiative in rescuing someone from the water, and also those who have made outstanding efforts to provide emergency care to people who have been injured.

Our award recipients' stories uplift and inspire us. They display attributes that we would all hope to find in ourselves, should the need arise. To dig deep and summon the courage to rescue a fellow human being, often in difficult conditions and circumstances, highlights some of the finest qualities of a person's character. I congratulate and thank all of our recipients.

Additionally, I commend the Royal Life Saving Society for making a significant contribution to a number of key areas including:

- Leading efforts to eliminate toddler drowning, as I mentioned earlier – which serves to protect the most vulnerable in our community
- Engaging with multi-cultural groups to better understand the barriers, cultural understandings and adaptations needed to increase water safety skills and participation.
- Working with regional WA to share vital knowledge and empower local communities to be “water safe”.

Further, I was pleased to learn that this year, the Society joined the Department of Education in celebrating 100 years of Vacswim, a program which offers swimming lessons for children aged five to 17 years of age, in both the October and January school holidays. Empowering young Australians to safely enjoy the water remains one of the most important investments we can make as a community. This centenary is a truly unique achievement and worthy of celebration.

Congratulations again both our outstanding awardees, and all those who have played a part in the Royal Life Saving Society Western Australia’s myriad of achievements.

Thank you all, and well done.