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**MEDIA RELEASE**  
**20 November 2020**

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**SYDNEY LOCAL NAMED LIFELINE VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR**

Lifeline Australia has awarded Sydney local Merlyne Thompson with the national charity's volunteer of the year award.

Federal Minister for Health, the Hon. Greg Hunt today announced that the winner of Lifeline Australia's Mary Parrissons Outstanding Volunteer of the Year is Ms Merlyne Thompson a volunteer from Sydney's Lifeline Harbour to Hawkesbury centre in Gordon.

"I congratulate Merlyne and would like to pass on my thanks to her, as a representative of all Lifeline volunteers, when we say you save lives and protect lives, that's what you do." Said Minister Hunt.

Lifeline Harbour to Hawkesbury CEO Wendy Carver said that Ms Thompson who has been volunteering since 1998 (22 years), has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to the organisation's vision of an Australia free of suicide.

"Merlyne Thompson is a very worthy winner of the *Mary Parrissons Outstanding Volunteer Award*," Mrs Carver said.

"Merlyne has been with us for more than 22 years, volunteering as a Crisis Supporter, Board Secretary, and providing a significant contribution to Lifeline in her role as an administrative volunteer. Merlyne has been involved in a wide range of important projects, including the internal recognition of Lifeline's large workforce of volunteers and ensuring good governance of our Lifeline centre. It has always been my pleasure to work with Merlyne and we are delighted to see her many years of compassionate contribution being recognised at the national level," said Mrs Carver.

Ms Thompson was both pleased and humbled to receive the award, saying her work with Lifeline is some of the most rewarding work of her life:

"To be told I was nominated was amazing, but to be told I've won, I cannot believe it! Particularly this year when everyone knows what a year we've had through drought, flood, bushfire and COVID, we've been incredibly challenged.

"This year, we haven't just worked hard at Lifeline, we've shone. Touching more lives than ever before and it's an absolute honour to be involved. I would like to acknowledge all the team here, everyone who has challenged me, guided me, supported me and changed me, this is all of ours...I have to say thank you for having me on your team, because I think Lifeline is just amazing. Thank you so much for this honour." Said Ms Thompson.

Lifeline Australia Chairman Mr John Brogden thanked Ms Thompson for using her heart-warming compassion and professional skill to help prevent suicide.

"Merlyne Thompson has made an extraordinary contribution to Lifeline, both as a Crisis Supporter and utilising her professional skills to support policy and Board development at Lifeline Harbour to Hawkesbury. She is a highly regarded member of the Lifeline family and we are delighted to recognise her today." Mr Brogden said.

“Merlyne is one of our 10,000 volunteers across the country, including about 3,500 Crisis Supporters, working together to tackle our national suicide emergency. We do this by being there for people when they’re at their most vulnerable – giving them hope when hope seems impossible.” He continued.

The Mary Parsissons Outstanding Volunteer Award recognises the outstanding efforts of the volunteering across the country. It awards volunteers who have showed excellence in their volunteer field, contributed to the community, have been an inspiration within their centre and demonstrated leadership. The winner nominated by Lifeline Australia for an Australia Day Award.

For crisis or suicide prevention support, please call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or visit [www.lifeline.org.au/gethelp](http://www.lifeline.org.au/gethelp).

**Note on the award:**

The Mary Parsissons Outstanding Volunteer Award – is named after Mary Parsissons – herself an outstanding volunteer.

Mary trained to become a Lifeline Crisis Supporter 25 years ago and volunteered on the phones for many years.

She then joined the Board of Lifeline Tasmania where she was President for six years, then served on the Lifeline Australia National Board for 14 years, and was the Australian representative for Lifeline International for nine years.

Mary humbly accepted the award being named after her. She hopes it will give volunteers inspiration as a wonderful way to honour their work.

The national winner will be awarded:

- The Mary Parsissons Outstanding Volunteer Award plaque.
- They will be the national spokesperson/face of volunteering for Lifeline Australia
- The winner of the award will automatically be nominated by Lifeline Australia for an Australia Day Award.

To volunteer or donate to Lifeline, visit: [www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au)