

Citizen of the Year 2023

Cathie Smith Acceptance Speech



Mansfield Shire

Firstly, thank you to the Shire for this honour and thank you to my dear friends Leonie McLaughlin, Ross Martin and Sir Andrew Grimwade for getting together to nominate me. And thank you to my friends and family for coming along to support me.

Now, about volunteering, something I have done since I was a child. I am the oldest of seven siblings. At one stage my mother had 6 children under 8 years old but I don't remember a time when she wasn't helping out someone in need. We lived in commission housing with my father's laborer's income only but there was often a mum and her kids there for dinner because her husband had drunk away the housekeeping money. Mum always said "we can throw another jug of water in the stew to make it go further!"

She ran bingo nights to raise funds for different causes and made clothes for those in need. So, I didn't know any different.

From a young age I helped out older neighbours with their housework or shopping and never for payment, but just because I could. Or I would babysit for that new mum so she could have some time out. With six younger brothers and sisters, I certainly had the skills. After I moved to Bonnie Doon in 1986 with my husband and two toddlers, I saw an ad in the courier for "expressions of interest" for MMuDS new play. I was not interested in acting but I could sew so I thought I would go along to offer my skills. As soon as I walked in, I was handed a script. When I tried to explain my reasons for being there, Jeannie McDonagh said "Well, there are four roles for women and four women here so you are in the play!". That began my love affair with MMuDS and over the next 30 years I certainly got to use my dressmaking skills. But I learned so many more skills and made some wonderful friends.

And yes, I have also volunteered in a multitude of other positions, including my position within the fantastic Rosehaven hospice and shop and also the L2P program which I have been doing for almost 14 years now. I love the connection with our young people and I have learned as much from them as they have from me.

My two daughters have followed in my footsteps. Brydie was nominated for Mansfield Citizen of the Year 3 years ago for her support and advocacy for the LGBTQIA+ community and Courtney, when she first moved to Melbourne volunteered every Wednesday for many years with Vinnies soup kitchen, preparing the food and then going out on the van to feed the homeless. In fact, she has only just moved to Port Douglas but has already volunteered at the local animal shelter and takes dogs out for walks each day.

So, in finishing, if you are new to town or lonely or bored or if you have some spare time, then volunteer somewhere! There are many areas where volunteers are always needed - SES, CFA, MMuDS, radio Mansfield, Scouts. Guides, op shops, CWA, nursing homes, hospital, the L2P program, Rosehaven and all the services clubs. Get involved. Give back to our wonderful community. Just do it. You will get back far more than you put in. I promise.

Lastly, thank you to my long-suffering husband John who says I only volunteer so I don't have time to vacuum. Thank you for picking up the slack.

