

Aaron Patton – Certificate of Commendation



Aaron Patton is a tireless and dedicated community worker, who ultimately plans a career in psychology. Eighteen year old Aaron will receive a Certificate of Commendation from the Order of Australia Association this month for his magnificent efforts.

Tell us a bit about yourself.

I'm 18 years old; I've lived in Port Macquarie all my life. I'm currently doing my HSC at Westport High School. Both my parents are from a farming background – my mum born locally and my dad in Central-West New South Wales.

What prompted your interest in community work?

In 2006 when I first began high school, I joined a Westport High School group known as WASCALS (Westport Aware Students of Cancer And Leukaemia Sufferers) and I first started and began to help out in community events such as The Biggest Morning Tea, Relay for Life, Daffodil Day and Australia Day Games, a local event run by WASCALS every year on Town Green.

How has your contribution to WASCALS grown since then?

In 2009 I was elected President of WASCALS, and I have also been team captain for the Relay for Life team from 2009 onwards. Since 2006 I have travelled to various primary schools on Daffodil Day to speak to the students of the importance of Daffodil Day – as well as working with WASCALS.

What are some of the other community activities you've been involved with?

I also joined up with Camp Quality on many occasions – one being the Christmas outing, helping run activities for the local kids suffering from cancer and their families.

In 2009 – 2010 I helped raise money and awareness for fundraisers such as Loud Shirt Day, Bandana Day and have also been involved in many World Vision 40 Hour Famines.

In 2010 – 2011 I was nominated for the Lions Youth of the Year, in which I had to go through an interview stage and a public speaking competition judged by Lions representatives from Sydney. I also completed a public speaking course called 'Toastmasters', which went for 8 weeks; during this time I also represented the Rotary Club of Port Macquarie West in a public speaking competition.

Early in 2010 I travelled with some of my peers to Woolgoolga to attend the Model United Nations Assembly with many other students from across the Mid North Coast. During my stay in Woolgoolga, I was billeted with a family of 5 and got to experience life through another family's eyes.

Also in 2010 I was elected into the WPHS Leadership Team as a prefect and was elected School Captain this year. Through my time on the Leadership Team, I helped to continue the WPHS Anti-Bullying Committee, which helps to provide solutions to many issues within the school and encourage positive relationships between students. During Education Week 2010 I was awarded the North Coast Region award for my community efforts.

A few weeks afterwards I attended the Halogen Foundation National Young Leaders Day in Sydney. This day was led by inspirational speakers, the then Premier and MP Kristina Keneally, Mike Martin, Paralympian Matthew Cowdrey and Comedian Ahn Do, who all shared personal stories and valuable advice.

Earlier this year I had the honour to fly to Sydney and take a tour of both Government House and Parliament House, where I had the opportunity to meet with the Governor of New South Wales, her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir.

In 2010 – 2011 I was voted Sports House Captain; this was a privilege to me, as I am a keen sportsperson. In 2009 and 2011 this was evident in my participation in the Australasian Schools Futsal Championships, where schools from around Australia, New Zealand and South East Asia came to one large tournament held in Runaway Bay, QLD. Being Goalkeeper in this 3-day-long competition really tested my sporting ability.

Early last year I was presented with the opportunity to apply for and complete a 22-week leadership and community service course known as ‘Max Potential’. This course was founded by Future Achievement Australia. Through this course I met and worked with my mentor, Adrian Davis, who was there to help and guide me through this program. Together we worked on a project: to convince 30 people in 1 month to donate blood. This was an important project to me, as since I turned 16 I have been a regular blood donor.

Blood donations, especially in the Hastings area, are at a low and to bring 30 people along to donate in 1 month would bring blood supplies up to help those involved in accidents or transfusions through cancer treatment. At the end of this course we presented a showcase which allowed members of the community to talk and share their views on this particular topic and discuss ideas for improving donation numbers in the local community.

Earlier in June, I took the Minister for Education, the Honourable Adrian Piccoli MP, and Member for Port Macquarie, Leslie Williams, on a tour of WPHS and had the chance to talk to both of them about key issues in our community and how these could be addressed for the benefit of our community.

What is the award you’ve been nominated for – and why have you been nominated?

The Order of Australia Association has this year awarded twenty-one Certificates of Commendation for community service – the awardees being students in secondary schools throughout New South Wales. An inscribed medallion will be presented to me by Her Excellency the Governor, Marie Bashir, at Government House, Sydney, at 3pm Wednesday 23rd November. There I will also be presented with the Certificate of Commendation. I have been awarded this honour in recognition of my service to the community.

It was actually sprung upon me; I was nominated for this award by Lions club member, Mary McLarren, which meant a lot of forms to fill out. A few weeks had gone by in which I hadn’t

heard anything, and it was at the WPHS graduation that our acting principal announced that I had been accepted for this award. I wasn't expecting it, as I had many different things going through my mind due to the graduation. So it came as a bit of a shock, but I was ecstatic to hear the news!

Why do you think others in the community should follow your lead and help aid those less fortunate?

Through helping out in the community you're helping others out as well as yourself. Even just a little effort on your behalf can really help somebody in need. There are a number of ways people can get involved and help out; some things are as simple as taking an hour out of your day every 3 months to donate blood. It's these small acts that make an enormous difference in somebody's life.

Outside of community work, what are some of your other interests?

I've always loved sports; I played cricket for four years, soccer for seven and futsal for four years now. I did swimming when I was younger; I love the water, but now I only swim recreationally and love to go snorkelling. Photography has always been an interest to me. I've always loved singing and recently performed in Westport High School's Creative Arts and Performance Evening.

What are your goals for when you finish school?

I plan on taking a gap year in 2012 and 2013 to earn and save some money and travel to either Hawaii or England ... if not, then I'll travel up north to Queensland and to the Cape York Peninsula, along the way snorkelling off of the Great Barrier Reef (having been there before).

While I still live locally I would like to continue my community work; however, having finished school, some opportunities will have to be missed. I hope to be in uni studying my Bachelor of Psychology within two years, as that is what I'd eventually like to become. I've always been interested in that field.

Thanks Aaron – and congratulations on your nomination.

Interview by Jo Atkins.