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6 April 2023

Farewell from Neville Tomkins

Today is my final day in the role of NSW Chief Commissioner.

As many people do when it's time to move on, I've been reflecting on my experiences over the past six and half years.

And when I think back over my time in this role, I think about the significance of Scouts, and how proud I am to have been part of the journey in NSW.

In our busy lives, when there's **so much change taking place in the world**, it's worth stopping for a moment to reflect on the contribution Scouts has made over its one hundred and fourteen years.

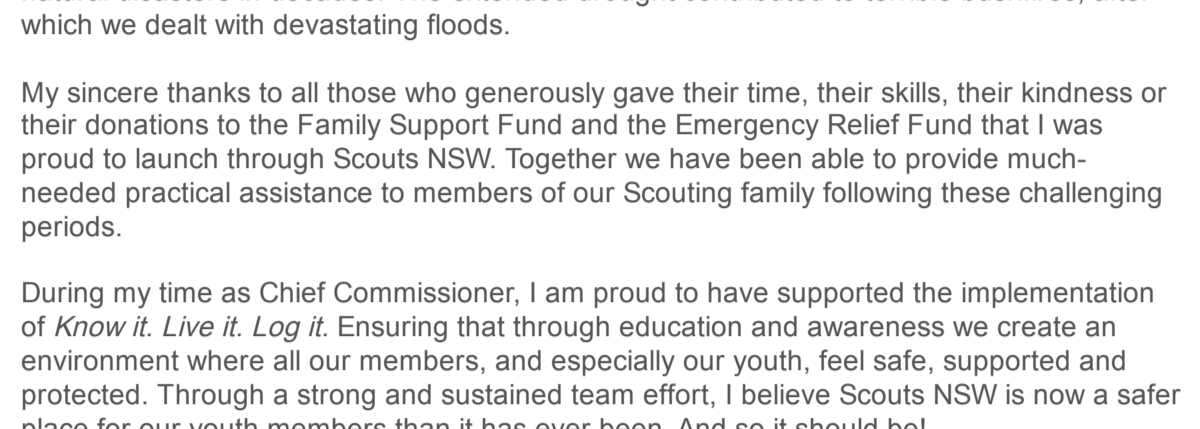
Scouts NSW is part of a huge, international community bonded by a clear purpose, shared values and rich history. With over 57 million members, including 7 million adult supporters, we're the largest non-formal youth education Movement on earth.

For millions of young people in more than 160 countries around the world, Scouts has built lasting friendships, nurtured life skills and delivered experiences with memories that you never forget.

My abiding memory of Scouts is of friendships. The ones I've made, the ones I've helped make, and the ones I've watched grow from afar. I truly believe that a friend is one of the nicest things you can have, and one of the best things you can be.

The friendships we make at Scouts are because we're part of a community of people who care, who share our values, and who will help out when we can. At a time when loud voices in various forms of media seem intent on highlighting everybody's differences, our Scouting family is a place where we can find a sense of belonging, shared purpose and happiness. And we care for each other – in good and difficult times.

At its best, Scouts is a place where friendship thrives.



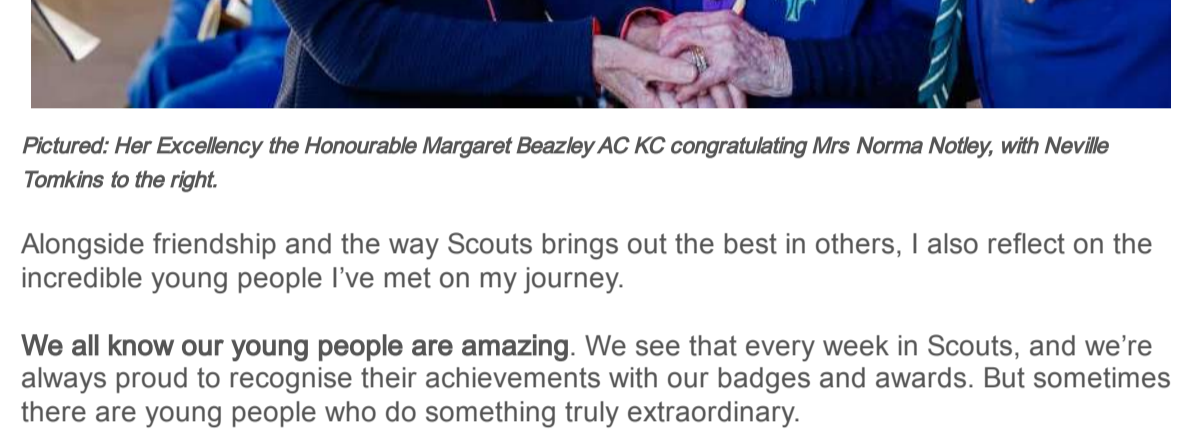
I also reflect on how Scouts NSW has navigated through some of the most significant changes our state and our country have experienced.

Many of our people and our properties have been directly impacted by some of the worst natural disasters in decades. The extended drought contributed to terrible bushfires, after which we dealt with devastating floods.

My sincere thanks to all those who generously gave their time, their skills, their kindness or their donations to the Family Support Fund and the Emergency Relief Fund that I was proud to launch through Scouts NSW. Together we have been able to provide much-needed practical assistance to members of our Scouting family following these challenging periods.

During my time as Chief Commissioner, I am proud to have supported the implementation of *Know it. Live it. Log it.* Ensuring that through education and awareness we create an environment where all our members, and especially our youth, feel safe, supported and protected. Through a strong and sustained team effort, I believe Scouts NSW is now a safer place for our youth members than it has ever been. And so it should be!

And I've found that **the most difficult circumstances can bring out the best in people.** I couldn't reflect on my time at Scouts NSW without mentioning the pandemic. Everyone in Scouts has faced astonishing challenges over the past few years - young people, adults and staff alike. I am so proud of the inventive ways we found to stay connected with each other and with our communities. We chose not to close down but to dig deep to find strength and ideas that worked. I joined so many online section meetings, AGMs, and award ceremonies and witnessed simply incredible support for the young people who were struggling with feelings of isolation.



Alongside friendship and the way Scouts brings out the best in others, I also reflect on the incredible young people I've met on my journey.

We all know our young people are amazing. We see that every week in Scouts, and we're always proud to recognise their achievements with our badges and awards. But sometimes there are young people who do something truly extraordinary.

They could be raising money for a worthy community cause, getting through an incredibly tough illness, helping someone in urgent need or showing tremendous passion for the future of our planet. And that's why we launched Scout of the Year - to celebrate their courage, kindness and extraordinary spirit of determination and resilience.

We also celebrate this spirit through our peak awards, and it was a pleasure to recently attend the presentation of these to 39 Venturer Scouts by Her Excellency the Honourable Margaret Beazley AC KC, Governor and Chief Scout of NSW. Congratulations to this next generation of leaders - our future Chief Commissioners in the making!

Our young people were also active just last week hosting a 'Scarf Up for Scouting' event at our Federal Parliament House in Canberra – a symbolic sharing of our Scouting culture with elected representatives from across the political spectrum – gaining valuable educational experience in the process.



Speaking of our elected representatives, we can all be proud of the enduring relationships we have formed with our three levels of government – local, State and Federal, as well as with philanthropic organisations, and generous individuals. Their support of our Movement says it all, demonstrated by over \$15 million in grants over the past few years. Like us, they see the development of our youth as a solid investment in the future.

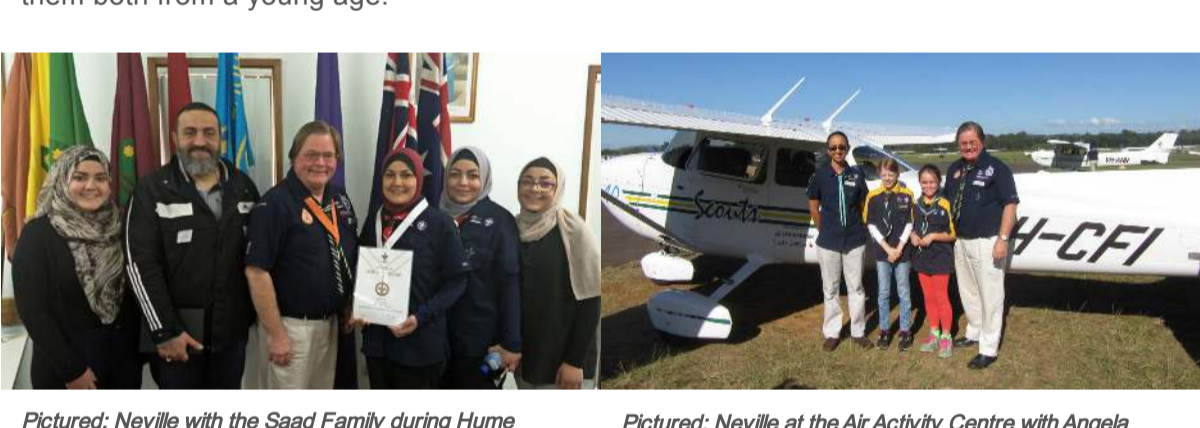
Whether it's a Scout holding an umbrella to shield the Premier of NSW from rain at a wet Anzac Day dawn service at Martin Place, a float of Scouts celebrating diversity at the Sydney Mardi Gras, or a Scout Group helping run a community event, our young people are embedded in the fabric of their local communities whilst also looking outwards to the wider world.

Through our Scouting Program, our 'youth leading, adult supporting' approach, and our method of learning by doing, we give young people a sense of freedom and independence to satisfy their insatiable sense of curiosity and their instinct for adventure. Whether that's through participating in events such as State Rally, or Dragon Skin, auditioning for a Gang Show, or learning to fly a plane at our Air Activity Centre (which has been going strong for fifty years now), the sky is literally the limit for our Scouts!

And as adult leaders, it's the magical moments when a young person shows us the skills they've learned at Scouts that reinforces why we volunteer.

It could be the moment when a young person shows maturity or generosity beyond their years. Or the moment when a youth member demonstrates perseverance or motivation to complete a task that creates a sense of pride. It's these stories about the impact Scouts had on a young person that are so meaningful.

Putting this grounding into action, at the end of the earth, two tenacious former Scouts – now Ambassadors for our Movement - Doctors Gareth Andrews and Richard Stephenson recently completed a major Antarctic expedition, reaching the South Pole on 18 January this year, after spending 66 days traversing 1,400km of gruelling terrain. Proudly wearing special-edition Scout scarves in minus 40-degree temperatures, their feat of endurance is an inspiration for Scouts everywhere, and a credit to the fortitude that Scouting inspired in them both from a young age.



Which brings me to recollect on how we can always do better **when we work as part of a team.**

I'm only one member of the Scouting team. We have thousands of incredible volunteers, who bring passion, ideas and plenty of straight-talking. We also have dedicated staff who, just like the volunteers, serve our Movement. Every one of them brings strengths to Scouts.

Much of the work of our staff and extraordinary leaders and supporters isn't noticed, but without their important contributions, Scouts simply wouldn't be able to run. I acknowledge there has been a lot of change in recent years as we've endeavoured, together, to modernise our Movement and remain relevant in a rapidly changing world. As a team, we have done our best to grow our membership and offer the world-renowned youth program to many more children, from diverse backgrounds.

Over more than six and a half years as Chief Commissioner, I've been supported by many impressive Deputy Chief Commissioners, Commissioners, CEOs and their teams, and members of our Board of Directors. My mentors deserve special mention. Together, we've tackled some extraordinarily difficult challenges and stayed true to our mission to make Scouts an even better place for everyone involved. They have my gratitude and my deep respect.

And, importantly, I believe we are now a much more confident Movement than we have been for a long time. That confidence positions us well for the future.



So finally, let me look forward

There are so many opportunities for Scouts to thrive long into the future.

We have an energetic incoming Chief Commissioner (Lloyd Nurthen), a team of highly dedicated front-line volunteers, gifted Commissioners, a committed Board of Directors, and experienced staff ready to tackle the coming years. We should never forget what binds us together.

I'm excited about the future for Scouts. If we can continue to harness the positivity, the enthusiasm, the energy and the recognition that this is an organisation for young people with their own needs, ideas, passions and sense of the world, we can bring life skills and new friendships to more youth long into the future.

As a wise writer once said, "If I've learned anything about friendship, it's to hang in, stay connected, fight for them, and let them fight for you. Don't walk away, don't be distracted, don't be too busy or tired, don't take them for granted. Friends are part of the glue that holds life and faith together."

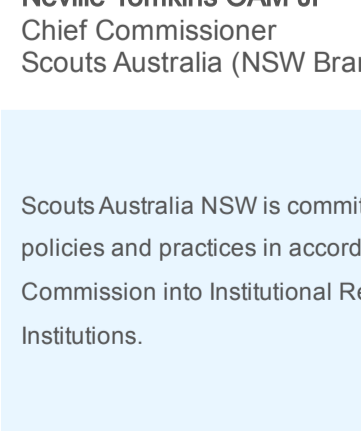
My sincere and heartfelt thanks to everyone in our great Movement, whatever you do. For us adults, being part of Scouts is a great privilege; for young people it is a right – a right that we must fight and stand up for. We want Scouts to remain relevant for decades to come.

I owe the deepest gratitude to my wife, Jenny, and our three adult children, Katy, Sarah and Matt, for allowing me to devote all the time and energy I could to the development of Scouting across NSW.

I thank you for the privilege to serve as your Chief Commissioner.

Enjoy your Scouting! A huge B-R-A-V-O to each of you!

Yours in Scouting,



Neville Tomkins OAM JP
Chief Commissioner
Scouts Australia (NSW Branch)

Youth Safety in Scouting

Scouts Australia NSW is committed to operating as a youth safe organisation and implementing youth safe policies and practices in accordance with the elements of a child safe institution outlined by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse report entitled Creating Child Safe Institutions.

Remember

All suspicions, concerns or allegations about criminal matters or child protection matters should be reported directly to the Chief Commissioner, CEO, State Commissioner (Youth Protection & Issues Management) or the Manager of Safeguarding Youth, Issues Management and Research at the NSW State Service Centre.

To make a report you may use the [online youth protection form](#), call 9735 9000 or email YouthProtectionTeam@nsw.scouts.com.au.

Imminent Danger

If someone is in danger NOW, the matter should be reported directly to NSW Police on 000. Where a report is made to the Police, you must also subsequently notify Scouts NSW State Office.

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