

Val Sturgess Memorial Trophy, NZDSA National Volunteer Award

2014



Left to right: **Val Sturgess**, Georgia Garrett
Back: Gary Sturgess

In 2014 the NZDSA was pleased to announce the Inaugural NZDSA National Volunteer Award. The NZDSA was established by volunteers and over the past 33 years has continued to rely on volunteers to provide a valuable support to both the Down syndrome community and New Zealand society. The NZDSA National Committee is delighted that we have had the opportunity to create a platform to recognise individuals who have made considerable contributions to enabling the NZDSA to achieve its mission.

The presentation of the first award was mixed with sadness as it was a posthumous award to recognise the valuable and dedicated volunteer work that Val Sturgess so generously offered to the NZDSA.

We would like to thank Val's family who at a time of great sadness continued to think of her dedication to the Down syndrome community by requesting friends and family to make donations to the NZDSA in lieu of flowers. These donations enabled the NZDSA to purchase the Val Sturgess Memorial Trophy.

In the words of the Honourable Tariana Turia, who hosted the 2014 NZDSA National Awards, "The Val Sturgess Memorial Award is a fitting tribute to the life of a very special volunteer, a woman who to her last days was meticulous in her attention to detail, a passionate and dedicated advocate and a true champion for the community." Georgia Garrett accepted the award in memory of Val Sturgess (her Grandma).

2015

Christel van Baalen



Christel van Baalen had a vital role in researching and introducing Buddy Walk to New Zealand and each subsequent year has seen this event grow under Christel's guidance, commitment and dedication. Christel has remained an active volunteer since the inaugural event. In 2005, the Auckland Down syndrome Association enlisted the services of 4 Auckland University of Technology students in their final year of their Bachelor of Communications degree majoring in Public Relations to help organize the inaugural Buddy Walk which was then held in October. Under Christel's guidance, and using a manual provided by the United States, Michael Allen, Victoria Blackman, Leah Evans and Shannon Green won the prestigious Public Relations Institute of New Zealand Award in 2006 for organizing the event.

The Buddy Walk in Auckland is a 3.5 km walk in and around Mt Eden and the walk is followed by a carnival with clowns, rides, spot prizes, stalls, music and entertainment. It is a wonderful, heart-warming event enjoyed by families and members of the community and celebrates the many abilities and accomplishments of people with Down syndrome.

In 2009, the Auckland Down Syndrome Association decided to change the date of the event from October to March so that the event could be held around World Down Syndrome Day which is celebrated on 21st March.

The Buddy Walk in Auckland celebrated its 10th anniversary on Sunday 22nd March 2015 and the success of this significant milestone is a testimony to the many volunteer hours that Christel has invested to organize the event and to develop over the years a dedicated team of volunteers to assist with hosting the annual Buddy Walk. Over the last nine years, Annie Williams has also been a key volunteer. Funds raised during Buddy Walk have been used to establish a Resource Library for ADSA's members and employ a Librarian as well as fund other events.

Nationally, Christel's vision has also impacted on the national Down syndrome communities as other regional Down syndrome groups have been inspired to host walks to promote World Down syndrome day in their own communities.