



**NEW HORIZONS TASMANIA
CHAMPIONS NEXTGEN LEADERSHIP PROGRAM GRADUATION
REMARKS BY
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE CAROLINE WELLS
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
GOVERNMENT HOUSE, FRIDAY 16 OCTOBER 2026**

Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to Government House.

I'd would like to acknowledge the Palawa people as the First Peoples of lutruwita/Tasmania and the Traditional Custodians of the land we're gathered on today.

For countless generations, they have cared for this island, its landscapes, its waterways and its communities, and I'm grateful to be able to live here.

I pay my respects to Elders past and present, and to any Aboriginal people with us today. Your continuing contribution to the cultural, social and spiritual life of our State is deeply valued.

It is an absolute delight to have you all here and to host this graduation ceremony as we acknowledge and cheer on the graduates of the 2026 Champions NextGen Program.

I have had the privilege of working with your CEO Belinda and Chair Pip and through that connection I have got to know about a bit about New Horizons, so this feels extra special. I would like to acknowledge the massive amount of work done by the staff and Board. Your focus on improvement, always seeking opportunities for funding and the desire to make a meaningful difference is to be commended.

I would also like acknowledge Robyn Hansen who was a finalist in the 2026 Volunteering Awards, for Lifetime Commitment. Robyn is a testament to how amazing this organisation is.

This year, New Horizons Tasmania turns forty.

The organisation started in the mid-1980s when a young woman with Down syndrome was refused entry to a local netball club. The Tasmanian Government funded a trial of a club to create a space where members could be physically active, learn new skills, where they could feel safe and play at their own pace without pressure, and so, the New Horizons Club began in Launceston in 1986.

Since then, it has offered sport, recreation and friendship to Tasmanians living with disability, and has built a community where everyone is welcome and everyone belongs.

It does this with a simple, powerful idea: focus on ability, not disability. Come and try something new, at your own pace. Set a goal. Meet people. Discover what you are capable of.

The New Horizons community includes more than 300 members across Tasmania, ranging in age and living with a diverse range of disabilities, including intellectual, physical and neurodiverse conditions. As a state-wide organisation, New Horizons Tasmania operates clubhouses and delivers programs in the North, North-West and South of the State.¹

As Governor, I have the privilege of meeting Tasmanians from every corner of our State, and one thing I have learnt is this: a community is only as strong as its willingness to make room for everyone.

¹ <https://www.newhorizonstas.org.au/about-us/>

Inclusion is not a favour we extend to some people. It is the foundation of a fair and generous society. When a person with disability is welcomed onto the team, into the workplace or onto the committee, the whole community gains. We gain their talents, their perspective, their humour and their determination.

I believe deeply that an inclusive Tasmania is a stronger Tasmania. Every time we make room for someone at the table, we all benefit and we gain insight and understanding.

Organisations like New Horizons show us how it's done.

Today we celebrate a fabulous program at New Horizons, the Champions NextGen Program.

Being a champion is not a title. Being a champion is the courage to speak up, the willingness to lend a hand, and the confidence to say "I have something to offer, and I am going to offer it".

The Champions NextGen Leadership Program is designed to support people with disability to develop leadership skills, community connections and confidence.

The program is delivered over eight weeks in each region of Tasmania and culminates today in this wonderful state-wide graduation celebration, where we formally acknowledge the 28 participants from across the State who successfully completed the program.

Through the course the participants explored a range of topics including:

- Understanding their personal strengths and challenges
- Goal setting
- Personality styles and values
- Storytelling
- Public speaking and communication

To each of you, congratulations. You have shown up, you have stretched yourselves, and you have done the work. Whatever your next step is, you are champions today, and Tasmania is better for it.

I am particularly pleased to see so many of you here with the people who have walked alongside you. Your families, your friends, your coaches, and the volunteers and staff of New Horizons. Thank you to them for your patience, your encouragement, and your belief.

Graduates, you represent the next generation of champions in our sporting clubs, our workplaces and our communities. Inclusion does not just happen. It begins with people like you, who are willing to step forward and show others what is possible.

So, as the name of this organisation suggests, keep looking toward your new horizons. They are closer than they seem, and I have no doubt you will reach them.

Congratulations to every one of you. And now let's get on with the most important part of this afternoon, the presentation of the awards!

Thank you.