

Pauline McKenzie, a parishioner at St Peter and Paul's Church Community, Buninyong recently was honoured as a Victorian finalist for the Barnardos Mother of the Year. Barnardos Mother of the Year recognises women whose love, security and hope helps change the course of the next generation. A national winner will be announced on May 5. The story from the Ballarat Courier can be read below:

Grandmother Pauline McKenzie dropped everything at Christmas to look after her daughter Laura, who had an injured ankle, in Port Macquarie. Pauline helped a lot with Laura's young family, but Laura could tell her mum was a little torn, also wanting to be helping her close friends affected by the Scotsburn fires. Never had she imagined her way of saying thank you would turn into national honours. Pauline was named Victorian finalist for Barnardos Mother of the Year in a ceremony at Novotel Melbourne recently.

"I'd heard about it on radio and thought mum would fit that description very well," Laura said. "Mum's an amazingly giving person. She is a mother figure for many."

When it comes to motherhood, and 'grandmotherhood', Pauline's compassion and generosity knows no bounds. Her eight children includes adopted son Andrew, now a MICA flight paramedic, and two children with cerebral palsy (one who died aged 32).

Pauline continued to open her arms, and doors, to foster children for various lengths and times. In her widespread community work, Pauline has predominantly campaigned for children's rights. Lately, this has been with the Grandmothers Against the Detention of Refugee Children's Ballarat chapter.

Pauline says all children deserve love and stability. "I just believe mothering is terribly important and often unrecognised," Pauline said. "I've been very fortunate that I have a wonderful, supportive marriage. When I learned my son was disabled, I knew I'd have to give up work to care for him full-time, but this also allowed me time to do everything else I could."

Pauline is passionate to use her new-found recognition to raise awareness for refugee children because "no child should ever be in detention", she says. You can support Pauline and Ballarat's Grandmothers Against the Detention of Refugee Children by emailing grandmothersballarat@gmail.com



Text by Melanie Whelan

Photo: Pauline McKenzie celebrates her state honour with daughter Laura Game, who nominated her, and her "wonderful, supportive" husband Hugh McKenzie.