



*Westfield*

---

*Local Heroes*

---

2018

Westfield Local Heroes were nominated and voted for by their communities, with the three successful Westfield Local Heroes per centre each awarded a \$10,000 grant to support their affiliated organisation's work, programs or activities.



*Westfield*  

---

*Local Heroes*

---

In the first year of the Westfield Local Heroes program, we received an overwhelming response and many heart-warming stories after asking the local community to nominate individuals who promote wellbeing and harmony in their communities.

We congratulate every one of our nominees and recognise the important contribution they make to their local community.

---



*Westfield*

**BONDI JUNCTION**

NSW



## **Erika Gleeson** Autism Swim

---

*Passionate, Effervescent, Driven*

### **Warm-hearted Erika makes it safe for children to cool off in water**

There are few things better on a hot day than cooling off at the beach or the pool, but many children with autism never get near water because it's too risky. In fact, children with autism are 160 times more likely to drown than other kids.

That's why Sydney autism specialist Erika Gleeson created Autism Swim, a social enterprise specialising in swimming and water-safety for those with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and other disabilities.

"Our mission is to change those statistics by tackling the issue from every angle we can," says Erika.

"We believe everyone has the right to thrive and survive in the water."

Autism Swim works with swimming instructors, therapists, surfing organisations and schools to offer lessons tailored to the needs of each child, allowing them to learn at their own pace.

The organisation also provides training and support to parents on drowning prevention and how to prevent their children from wandering towards water.

"Our lessons are quite specialised compared with mainstream swimming lessons as they are inclusive of water therapy and

education about water safety as much as learning to swim," Erika says.

As founder and clinical director of the social enterprise, Erika works over 60 hours a week developing training material and resources, organising events and coordinating staff, volunteers and participants.

But she says it's worth it for the smiles on the faces of the children as they develop confidence and skills in the water.

"It is amazing when you see them supersede all expectations and do things like go surfing, which their parents may have thought was never possible," she says.

Erika says she is chuffed to have been voted by her community as a Westfield Local Hero.

Autism Swim will use its \$10,000 Westfield grant to fund a video to educate the public about the dangers of wandering and drowning among those with ASD. Funds will also go towards an online training program and wandering and drowning-prevention toolkits for 30 families.



## **Kara Holmes** B Miles Women's Foundation

*Industrious, Big-Hearted, Dedicated*

### **Kara's psychological embrace helps women in need rebuild their lives**

After 12 years of working with Sydney's homeless community, clinical psychologist Kara Holmes has developed a wealth of knowledge and expertise on how to support women in distress.

She puts it to good use with the help of the B Miles Women's Foundation, a specialist service for women living with homelessness and mental illness across inner-Sydney.

As a contractor for the foundation, Kara provides free individual psychological therapy and group programs for women in need who otherwise would be unable to afford to see a therapist.

"We help women with complex needs that aren't getting support from public mental health services due to under-resourcing, but who still really need psychological treatment," she says.

Kara also runs a weekly Wellbeing Group for women who are finding housing and stability in their lives after periods of homelessness, but who need support to develop skills and strategies for coping with everyday living.

The therapy Kara provides is especially important because, despite the fact that many women experiencing homelessness are also recovering from trauma or mental illness, severe financial hardship usually puts psychological therapy out of reach.

"There are lots of barriers to accessing psychological therapy and while a big issue is affordability, people also get confused navigating the complex health system when they are really vulnerable," Kara says.

Many of Kara's clients find her sessions life-changing.

"I feel included. I have somewhere safe to go where people know me," says one woman who attends group sessions.

"I felt respected, trustworthy and included in the group sessions," says another.

"This support has helped me to bring about transformation and positive change in my life in a multitude of ways," says another.

Despite this, Kara is surprised to have been voted a Westfield Local Hero by her community. But she says she is also delighted by the recognition of the service she provides.

The Wellbeing Group will use its \$10,000 Westfield grant to fund interventions for 40 women. This could include the required clinical psychology assessments, medical assessments, documentation and advocacy to ensure they are approved for accommodation, income support and NDIS packages.



## **George Karounis** Our Big Kitchen

---

*Enthusiastic, Loyal, Caring*

### **George's warmth nourishes bodies and souls across a state**

With his infectious enthusiasm and can-do attitude, George Karounis is the heart and soul of an iconic Bondi institution that delivers 80,000 meals a year to people in need across NSW.

George is the manager of Our Big Kitchen, a community run, industrial-sized kitchen. He is the man responsible for ensuring volunteers are rostered, ingredients and donations are sourced and meals are prepared, packed and passed-on to people who need them.

"It is about coordinating high school groups, university groups, charities and individuals and getting them to cook a lot of meals. It really is a huge organisational challenge," George says.

The kitchen is non-denominational and all meals are both kosher and halal. Anybody can come in to ask for food, but most are distributed via organisations such as The Salvation Army, St Vincent's De Paul, Lou's Place, Wayside Chapel, Jewish House and The Greek Orthodox Church.

An aim of the kitchen is to connect and empower people to have them all working together to make a difference. George puts his heart into providing meaningful volunteering opportunities that are especially popular with young people seeking experience for Duke of Edinburgh awards.

There are also opportunities for corporate team building and the kitchen staff delight in hosting children's birthday parties at which the host and their guests bake and decorate delicious party food that is then packaged up for all guests to take home.

In line with the spirit of giving, each child leaves with two of everything, one for them and one to make someone else happy.

Known for his focus on helping people "in the now", George centres his attention every day on support and education for volunteers and recipients alike.

"We aren't thinking about long-term solutions. They're important, but if you're hungry and living in a park you need a meal today," George says.

"The meals are one way of telling people we care."

George says he is proud to have been recognised by his community as a Westfield Local Hero.

Our Big Kitchen will use its \$10,000 Westfield grant on much-needed upgrades to the cooking and serving equipment, including a new oven that should allow the centre to cook even more meals for people in need.

# Your 2018 Finalists

## **Rachel Draper** | Responsible Cafes

*Passionate, Resilient, Enthusiastic*

As a volunteer at Responsible Cafes, Rachel has established Responsible Runners, a community group that engages local schools, children and community members to meet weekly for beach clean-ups in Rose Bay. Single use plastic pollution is a growing problem on the pristine beaches of Australia, and Rachel has worked tirelessly to educate and engage local members of the community, with the hope they will rethink how they use plastic in their lives.

---

## **Saxon Graham** | Holdsworth Community

*Inspirational, Generous, Loving*

Saxon's journey with Holdsworth started when he joined their afterschool programs as a child living with an intellectual disability. Holdsworth Community supports individuals and families in need throughout Sydney and the Eastern Suburbs, including children and adults living with disabilities, families with young children, and the elderly. As Saxon grew into adulthood, his amazing community spirit shone through, and he began volunteering with the Holdsworth Community.

---

## **Karen Hamilton** | REELise Incorporated

*Committed, Innovative, Empowering*

Karen is the Founder of REELise, an innovative approach to cyberbullying that aims to empower young people to address the risk and the opportunity of their online environment. When Karen established REELise in 2013, Australia was ranked the worst country in the world for cyberbullying. With programs that are interactive and hold individuals accountable for both their actions online and their roles as bystanders, Karen has helped to empower and protect thousands of children.



# Recognising all of our 2018 Nominees

**Nadene ALHADEFF**  
Mum For Mum NCJWA

**Tara CLARK**  
WITS - Women in Theatre &  
Screen

**Jessica DAVIDSON**  
BaptistCare HopeStreet

**Rachel DRAPER**  
Responsible Cafes

**Jen DUGARD**  
Body Beyond Baby

**Robert ENEMARK**  
Waverley Woollahra Art School

**Rob FERGUSON**  
1st Clovelly Scout Group

**Erika GLEESON**  
Autism Swim

**Saxon GRAHAM**  
Holdsworth Community

**Karen HAMILTON**  
REELise Incorporated

**Kara HOLMES**  
B Miles Women's Foundation

**George KAROUNIS**  
Our Big Kitchen

**Mendel KASTEL OAM**  
Jewish House

**Russell KING**  
WAYS Youth & Family

**Bronwyn LOWE**  
Goodstart Early Learning -  
Bondi Junction Oxford Street West

**Hamid MOBARREZ**  
KRB Aquatics Swim Club

**Brett PATTINSON**  
Clean Oceans

**Shannai PEARCE**  
Black Dog Institute

**Daliah SZWARC**  
Maccabi NSW All Abilities

**Sam WEBB**  
Top LIVIN

**Dean WHITE**  
Kit Bag for Kids



**If you or anyone you know would like more information on what support is available:**

---

**AUSTRALIA**

Lifeline: 13 11 14

Suicide Call Back Service: 1300 659 467

Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800

MensLine: 1300 78 99 78

Beyond Blue: 1300 22 4636

1800RESPECT: 1800 737 732

**NEW ZEALAND**

Lifeline: 0800 543 354

Suicide Crisis Helpline: 0508 828 865

Kidsline: 0800 54 37 54

Depression Helpline: 0800 111 757

Samaritans: 0800 726 666

Family Violence Information Line: 0800 456 450





SCENTRE GROUP

Owner and Operator of **Westfield** in Australia and New Zealand