



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

HURSTVILLE

NSW



Natalia Esdaile-Watts Moving Forward

Smart, Active, Vibrant

Natalia finds her voice to help free women from family violence

It took 10 years, but Natalia Esdaile-Watts finally found her voice and the courage to tell her story of family violence to help others in the same situation.

Speaking out about her ordeal has not only raised awareness of the impact of domestic violence on families, and but also helped her live without fear.

"The more I talk about it, the more I find my own strength and become free of the fear," she says.

"In doing so I'm helping others and raising awareness as well."

Natalia has given talks about her experience at numerous public events, as well as presentations to police and psychologists who work with perpetrators.

Her aim is to inspire all women to never give up, to stand tall and to believe in themselves.

Educating the community about the effects of domestic violence promotes respectful and strong relationships, which will hopefully create a safer community for all, she says.

As well as promoting awareness, Natalia has raised money for charities including White Ribbon and the Moving Forward organisation.

She also supports women through her Facebook page, Natalia's Warriors, which provides information and advice on domestic violence.

"Being voted a Westfield Local Hero has been surreal and is absolutely amazing, as I can now give back in some way, other than just words," Natalia says.

"To be able to contribute financially, knowing it will make a difference and create change that is so much bigger than me, is such a privilege."

Moving Forward will use half its \$10,000 Westfield grant to directly fund women in need and the other half will help set up a refuge in the St George area.

"It's hard work, and they are very sad issues, but there is hope because I think society is slowly changing," Natalia says.



Steve Drakoulis Autism Community Network

Passionate, Committed, Inspiring

When Steve felt isolated, he formed a network for 1300 families

Doting dad Steve Drakoulis knows all too well the isolation faced by families coming to terms with a diagnosis of autism.

This was his biggest burden when his son was diagnosed as being on the spectrum.

"It was overwhelming. At the time you imagine all the worst-case scenarios because you can't see what the future holds," Steve says.

While he found easy access to information, there was little to connect him with other parents going through the same experience.

So, he volunteered to set up a group of parents and carers to meet regularly to support each other.

Since then, he's left his corporate position to make spreading the network his full-time job. And over the past eight years, he and his team have established 30 more parent groups across Sydney catering for 1300 families.

As a founder and general manager of the Autism Community Network, Steve manages most aspects of the organisation, from washing the dishes to training and supporting a team of 30 volunteers.

The network has also set up groups where children with autism can meet, learn to socialise, and participate in art and drama classes, music, fitness groups and playgroups.

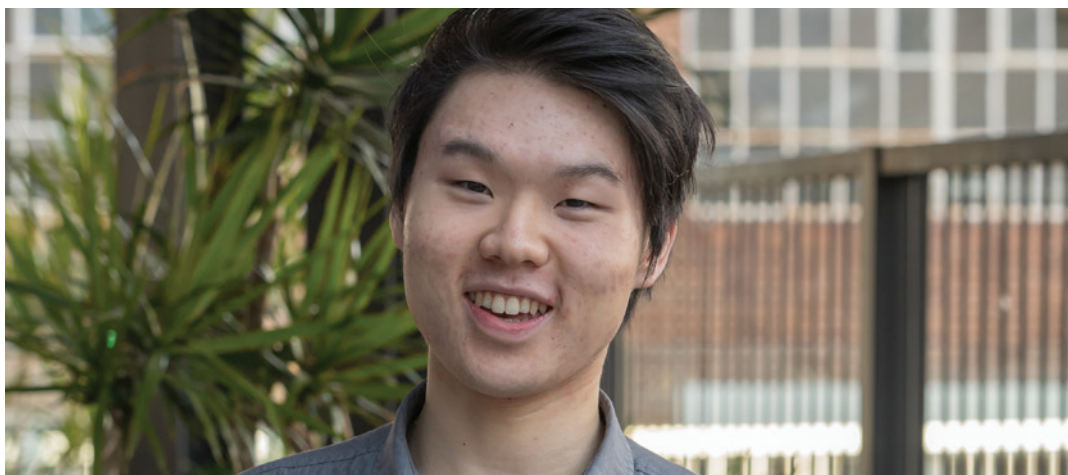
"It's important to surround yourself with people who understand, who are not going to judge you and who can offer acceptance," says Steve. The groups are also a way to escape isolation.

He works more than a full week, but there is enough money to pay only for a portion of his hours. "It's worth it," he says, "to see the transformation in people's lives."

Steve says being voted a Westfield Local Hero is special.

"It means a hell of a lot. I've been recognised before and it's always nice, but it's never meant as much as this does. This is my local community. I'm blown away by the support."

The network relies entirely on donations and Steve's founding principle was that parents would never be charged, so it will use its \$10,000 Westfield grant to help ensure its long-term sustainability.



Ray Sun headspace Hurstville

Insightful, Inspiring, Dedicated

Ray spread a big dose of sunshine and an important message

Raymond Sun was in his final year of high school when he first started volunteering at his local headspace, a national youth mental health organisation.

Even though he was in the middle of his HSC, he jumped at the chance to help out because he wanted to inspire others going through tough times.

"My parents named me Ray Sun, perhaps as a way to remind me to stay positive and be a ray of sunshine to myself and others," he says.

"But life is not all smooth sailing, and I've had my ups and downs, yet I've gotten through them. With each challenge, I've realised the power of your mindset and the power of your resilience, in conquering life's hurdles, and I wanted to share that experience."

That was four years ago, and the law student still devotes his time to the organisation which supports people aged 12 to 25 with mental health, physical health, work and study and substance issues.

As a member of the Youth Reference Group, Ray attends meetings, events and school presentations to advocate for youth mental health and support his peers. At these events, Ray shares stories of his life experience and offers self-care advice and tips.

Ray says headspace spreads the message that mental health is not just about depression and anxiety.

"We want to expand the community's knowledge and awareness of mental health beyond those two things," he says.

"Mental health also encapsulates spirituality, meditation, a positive mindset and resilience. These positive things are also part of mental health and changing even one person's perspective or understanding of that is what makes the headspace journey so meaningful."

He says he was surprised and grateful to be voted as a Westfield Local Hero.

Headspace will use its \$10,000 Westfield grant for a yoga and art group as well as staging community events, redecorating its centre and buying resources.

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

Lifeline: 13 11 14

Suicide Call Back Service: 1300 659 467

Kids Helpline: 1800 55 1800

Your 2018 Finalists

Syed Ahmad | Top Blokes Foundation

Hilarious, Humble, Relatable

The purpose of the Top Blokes Foundation is to improve young men's mental health and well-being. In the last 12-months, Syed has personally mentored over 65 young men aged 14-24 where each of them have completed a 6-month mentoring program. His mentoring ensures boys discuss: anger management, healthy masculinities, mental health, respectful relationships, peer pressure and risk taking, reducing homophobia and improving connection to education.

Kellie Checkley | Project Youth Inc

Committed, Focused, Driven

Working as the executive officer for Project Youth, Kellie's work is tireless in ensuring the social justice, inclusion, and rights of young people in the community. Kellie is a strong advocate for the rights of young people and lobbies at a local, state and federal level, ensuring resources remain available to service and support them. Additionally, Kellie works directly with the community through drop in and case management.

Amal Madani | 3Bridges Community Limited

Modest, Inspirational, Passionate

Amal is a community leader who supports and enriches the lives of vulnerable people in our local community providing services including case management, crisis intervention & counselling. Amal is leading many local dementia friendly initiatives to make places that are inclusive and supportive of people living with dementia.

Recognising all of our 2018 Nominees

Syed AHMAD

Top Blokes Foundation

Joseph ALAM

Bankstown Canterbury Community
Transport

Madani AMAL

3Bridges Community Limited

Chris BAILEY

Riverwood Hornets- Australian
Air League

Aphrodite COX

GRC Hurstville Boys Campus

Steve DRAKOULIS

Autism Community Network

Natalia ESDAILE-WATTS

Moving Forward

Louise FARROWAY

Project Youth Inc

Tin Man FONG

Australia Rouli Ball Cultural
Association Inc

Rachel GREENWOOD

St Mark's Anglican Church,
South Hurstville

Vimla HAYMAN

Rotary Club of St George Next Gen

Sharlene McKENZIE

3Bridges Community Ltd

Nicola POULOS

National Breast Cancer Foundation

Natalie ROSE

Shopfront Arts Co-op

Ray SUN

headspace Hurstville

Jennifer THACKER

WIRES South Branch

A decorative red ribbon graphic that starts as a thick, straight line on the left and then curves and loops into a thinner, wavy line on the right.

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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