



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

SOUTHLAND

VIC



Helen Romanis Marriott Support Services

Motivational, Engaging, Positive

Helen focuses on people's abilities as she helps them gain independence

More than 30 years ago Allan T Marriott had a light-bulb moment. Realising there was a lack of disability services for adults in south-east Melbourne, he donated money to buy land for a new facility.

In 1985 Marriott House opened and began helping adults with disabilities to gain their independence.

"Marriott Support Services prides itself on being small enough to get to know people and their strengths while being big enough to have a range of supports to develop those strengths," says Helen Romanis, who has volunteered there for five years.

She is seen as an amazing role model for staff and students alike, thanks to her knowledge and positive attitude.

Marriott helps people with an intellectual disability become involved in their community and has grown to three sites across Glen Eira, Kingston and Bayside local government areas. It provides supported employment to 110 people, supports 130 people in community programs and employs 80 staff.

Helen volunteers two days a week and takes time to focus on what people are able to manage rather than on their disability.

Her current role is to help people complete a certificate to help get into a course or find work.

Helen patiently helps her charges learn writing skills and the ability to effectively express ideas, feelings and viewpoints.

"They gain confidence and often new skills, such as speaking to a group of people, travel planning and accessing facilities such as banks and public transport," says Helen, who is both humbled and thrilled to be voted a Westfield Local Hero.

She is known for building warm connections with the people she helps.

"Helen knows a lot about life and helps me by encouraging me," says one of her students.

"Helen has helped me through my fears about banking and self-control," says another.

Marriott will use its \$10,000 grant to replace outdated iPads and computers. The money will also help fund activities that build life skills, such as gym, cooking and make-up classes.



Cindy Longley Southern Autistic School

Passionate, Optimistic, Supportive

Cindy just loves helping her students find their place in the world

If there is one thing that is sure to bring Cindy Longley to tears, it's the annual graduation of her Year 12 students at Southern Autistic School.

Many of her students have been with the school since they were three, so Cindy has a strong bond with them.

This often endures after they have left the school, with students popping in to catch up.

"All of our students have differing abilities," Cindy says. "But we have had some that have got part-time jobs, that are travelling independently or have gone on to TAFE courses."

Cindy says one of the highlights of her job is helping students develop the confidence to go out and join in with the community when they leave the school.

She initially studied as a primary teacher but is now the leader of the secondary school and is directly responsible for 56 students and 60 special education teachers and support staff.

Cindy initially chose to do a graduate diploma in special education "because it was available." But she soon discovered it was her passion.

"I got the position at the school and I loved it so much I've stayed here ever since."

She has made her mark in those 23 years, and her teaching methods are highly regarded for providing a progressive, dynamic and supportive yet challenging environment for her students.

Cindy has a holistic philosophy and has developed a network of local organisations to provide work experience for the students. This has increased understanding of people with autism spectrum disorder and their ability to contribute to the community. The students are also giving back through volunteer work at charities such as Meals on Wheels.

Cindy feels humbled to be voted a Westfield Local Hero. The Southern Autistic School will use its \$10,000 Westfield grant to fund several secondary school programs.

These include activities to help students prepare for the Duke of Edinburgh Award.



Sarah Dobbie TaskForce Community Agency

*Passionate, Compassionate,
Tireless*

Brother's care impressed Sarah, so she joined the team

When Sarah Dobbie's brother needed help he turned to TaskForce, a support service for young people.

Sarah was so impressed by what she saw that she volunteered to help and was placed at the reception desk.

Later, she achieved the required qualifications and jumped at the chance to be employed with the youth team. Five years on she is the youth services team leader.

She feels a real sense of satisfaction at helping young people who have been through "foster care, residential units, homelessness and you name it."

TaskForce services inner South East Melbourne and helps young people aged 12 and up deal with a wide range of issues.

Some of Sarah's clients have spent 10 years in correctional institutions and are only 25 years old.

Others have an acquired brain injury or mental health issues as a result of drug and alcohol use.

Many come from homes affected by domestic violence, poverty and unemployment.

"To have them come in and sit down and have a very raw and real connection with someone who is actually there to help them, that's the reward," she says.

Sarah works hard to help her clients overcome these challenges and build positive social networks.

It takes a lot of time and hard work before her clients can even start thinking about a job and a brighter future.

She says it feels surreal to be voted a Westfield Local Hero.

"There are moments where you feel disheartened or you feel a bit bogged down by all the bad stuff. But to have the efforts of the youth team recognised in this way reminds us why we come to work each day."

Taskforce will use the \$10,000 grant to support its new youth hub, which Sarah helped design, right down to the fixtures and furnishings. Young people can drop in to play table tennis or Nintendo and get a hearty meal.

"There is a laundry so they can clean their clothes if they have been couch surfing — all the little things we take for granted," Sarah says with pride.

Your 2018 Finalists

Michael Browne | Seaford Primary School

Humility, Compassionate, Inclusive

Michael Browne is the Principal of Seaford Primary School and through his leadership and guiding principles Seaford Primary prides itself on being a school of inclusion. This is reflected in the enrolment of 154 students with 45 students with additional needs. Michael fought hard to keep guaranteed funding for the Language Unit at Seaford Primary to remain open which has created a legacy for some of the most at risk students to become confident learners.

Deb Napolitano | Les Twentyman Foundation

Patient, Persistent, Caring

The Youth Assist Program is a voluntary program for young people aged between 10–17 years of age. The aim of the program is to support and guide at-risk or vulnerable young people through challenges they face. Deb is the Youth and Community Engagement Coordinator and her role includes: maintaining regular contact with young people, promoting positive social behaviours and problem solving skills.

Michelle Krueger | Make-a-Wish (Bayside)

Driven, Caring, Dedicated

As part of the Make-A-Wish Bayside Volunteer Branch, Michelle has worked tirelessly to grant wishes to seriously ill children with life threatening illnesses in the Bayside region for four years. Over this time, Michelle and the Bayside Branch, have granted 23 wishes. Michelle is involved during all stages of a child's wish journey; from meeting the child and family to the diligent planning to make each wish perfect.

Shaye Woodhouse | SANDS Australia

Selfless, Inspiring, Passionate

Shaye produces self-care support hampers for Mothers and families of pregnancy loss. The hampers are a valuable offering of acknowledgment and an act of compassion to those grieving and to help reassure families that they are not alone during this tragic time. Shaye began making the baskets as a one-woman-show, sourcing the donations and running the program. She has now merged with Sands Australia to distribute locally, and across Australia.

Recognising all of our 2018 Nominees

Amanda ADAMS
Minties Netball Club

Charles AGIUS
Rotary Club of Bentleigh
Moorabbin Central

Gavin BLUE
Heartfelt

Michael BROWNE
Seaford Primary School

Linda DENNISON
Holmesglen Institute

Christopher DENT
Revolution Sports Club

Sarah DOBBIE
TaskForce Community Agency

Charlotte EIZENBERG
Hineni Youth and Welfare

Peter FOWLER
5th 6th Moorabbin Scout Group

Gopal GANWANI
Friends of the Children Foundation

Yvonne HONG
Pets of the Homeless

Michelle KRUEGER
Bayside Volunteer Branch of
Make-A-Wish Australia

Cindy LONGLEY
Southern Autistic School

Duncan MACKINNON
Victorian Maritime Centre

Jessica MACPHERSON
St Kilda Mums

Louise McCANN
Moody Activewear

Ellen McGRATH
Brighton District Cricket Club

Elisa MINEO
Reaching Out Because We Can

Deb NAPOLITANO
Les Twentyman Foundation

Natasha NOLAN ADDISON
Monash Children's Centre Clayton

Rhett OGSTON
Qi Health Clinic Pty Ltd

David ROGERS
Challenge Supporting Kids
with Cancer

Helen ROMANIS
Marriott Support Services

Shaye WOODHOUSE
Charlees Basket

James YOUNG
Bayside Film Festival Inc



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

Kidslines: 0800 54 37 54

Depression Helpline: 0800 111 757

Samaritans: 0800 726 666

Family Violence Information Line: 0800 456 450



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