Westfield Jocal Heroes 2019

Westfield Local Heroes is a community recognition and grants program, designed to shine the spotlight on those people who connect and enrich their local communities across Australia and New Zealand.

Individuals are nominated by their local communities, with the outcome of a public vote determining the three successful 2019 nominees for every Westfield centre. In total, we are recognising 121 Westfield Local Heroes across Australia and New Zealand in 2019.





Each of the affiliated organisations of the Westfield Local Heroes have received a grant to support their work. Westfield will award 121 grants across Australia and New Zealand – totalling \$1.2 million.

We congratulate all the 2019 nominees for being recognised by their communities and thank them for the important contribution they all make to improving social wellbeing in their local areas.

westfield.com.au/local-heroes westfield.co.nz/local-heroes



## **Bondi Junction** NSW

BONDI JUNCTION, NSW



"I am giving back," says George. "I am a holocaust survivor. My mother looked after me when we were in hiding in Budapest. I have never forgotten that Australia took us in as refugees and gave us a beautiful home."

### Holocaust survivor gives back by supporting seniors

#### George Freund — COA Sydney

Compassionate, Inclusive, Powerhouse

When George Freund's father passed away, it was only natural that he would step in to continue his legacy as a volunteer at COA's popular drop-in centre in Woollahra.

The Jewish cultural centre helps more than 1000 seniors of any religion to live independently. It provides connection through a full program of daily activities and offers the only kosher Meals on Wheels service in Sydney.

George had an immediate impact, taking on a leadership role, recruiting volunteers and starting new programs and services.

Now in his 80s, George is still actively involved in managing the organisation and helping with meals deliveries.

"I am giving back," says George. "I am a holocaust survivor. My mother looked after me when we were in hiding in Budapest. I have never forgotten that Australia took us in as refugees and gave us a beautiful home.

"Financially, I can't give much. But since I was young, I have always been trying to help society," says George, who has been an enthusiastic volunteer at synagogues, youth and community organisations.

George feels honoured and a little surprised to have been voted a Westfield Local Hero.

"This recognition by the local community is a justification of the work COA does and its importance to people," he says.

"COA is inclusive. All are welcome and eligible for services. Community work is about creating and maintaining communities of friends and family by helping where you are able. It makes me feel good and brings connection and happiness to those we serve.

"It is a reciprocal cycle of helping and being helped, giving and being given to.

"My work at COA helps create opportunities for seniors in our community to remain connected and socially stimulated," he says.

Westfield Local Heroes are nominated and voted for by their communities, with the three top finalists per Westfield centre each awarded a \$10,000 grant for their affiliated organisation.

COA will use its grant for its Meals on Wheels program, which runs at a loss because nobody is allowed to go hungry regardless of their ability to pay.

"We are a small organisation. This extra funding will be a great help," says George.



"We understand how difficult it can be for parents after receiving a diagnosis. Parents can begin helping their child through therapy but this can create isolation. Next Step is our way of helping parents enrol their child in a normal, fun and inclusive program," says Jose.

# Getting a kick out of helping families with special needs

#### Jose Bello — Next Step Foundation

Dedicated, Generous, Inclusive

As an early childhood educator, Jose Bello knows that having a child with special needs can cause families to disengage from their community and become isolated.

As a former professional footballer, he knows sport brings people together and improves wellbeing.

That's why he took the initiative in 2011 and started Next Step Foundation, a fun soccer skills program for children with autism, down syndrome, cerebral palsy and other medical conditions.

So far, 350 children aged three to eight have benefited from the free program, which many parents refer to as fun therapy. Apart from teaching new physical and cognitive skills, the sessions include physiotherapy excerises, gross motor training and emotional development. "It's a very personal project," says Jose. "I wanted to combine my passion for football with my passion for working in the community.

"It doesn't just benefit the child; it also allows parents to connect with other parents. They feel protected, secure and accepted."

Jose has found it overwhelming and humbling to be voted a Westfield Local Hero. "It is very exciting. I appreciate the community support and it's been an incredible experience," he says.

But his most gratifying reward comes from witnessing parents' joy as they watch their kids in action. "The gratitude and love they show the coaches and everyone involved fuels us to continue growing this program.

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a diagnosis. Parents can begin helping their child through therapy but this can create isolation. Next Step is our way of helping parents enrol their child in a normal, fun and inclusive program," says Jose.

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The foundation will use its grant to recruit more coaches to expand its reach and invest in much-needed specialist equipment for children with high needs.

"The grant is extremely helpful because we always make the program free," says Jose. No parent has ever paid to access the Next Step program and we rely on community support to run it," says Jose.



"I am humbled to say that I am now cancerfree, and have been able to create a community of beautiful women who I proudly call my friends," says Rikki.

### Brave young woman launches a cancer movement

### Rikki Stern — Cancer Chicks & Pink Hope

Brave, Strong, Resilient

When Rikki Stern was diagnosed with Hodgkin's Lymphoma at the age of 20, she craved contact with others in her position but could not find community support for women her age.

That inspired her to launch Cancer Chicks, an Australian social media group based on a similar concept in the UK.

Thanks to Rikki's initiative, more than 300 young women use the group to share the highs and lows of their journey.

"These women benefit from group rehabilitation. They have a network that provides comfort and support through shared experience," says Rikki.

Although she is "over the moon" at being named a Westfield Local Hero, Rikki is also touched and grateful for the support. "It is amazing to know that the community at large are trying to help as much as they can."

The women who use the forum are generally aged 20 to 30 and may have a terminal illness with short prognoses.

"They have experienced major surgeries, invasive treatment, had body parts removed or had pregnancies terminated. Having lost hair, breasts and ovaries, many struggle with their self-identity and body image," says Rikki.

"I am humbled to say that I am now cancer-free, and have been able to create a community of beautiful women who I proudly call my friends," says Rikki.

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Rikki feels strongly that young women with cancer need a break from the confinement of their homes and hospitals as well as an opportunity to be re-empowered and have some enjoyment.

To help with this, Cancer Chicks has teamed up with Pink Hope, an organisation that focuses on the prevention of breast and ovarian cancer. They will use the grant to fund a Girls Getaway to give young women some respite and a chance to connect, share stories and attend workshops.

"We are a small organisation, and without this money we would not have been able to achieve this," says Rikki.

# Your 2019 Finalists

#### **Grant Trebilco** OneWave

Grant Trebilco was diagnosed with bipolar disorder in 2012 and found it helped to go surfing with his family and mates. One Friday morning, he dressed up in a shirt and tie and went for a surf at Bondi with the aim of starting conversations about mental health. Soon after that the now world-famous OneWave Fluro Fridays were born, with people in bright outfits going for an early-morning surf or swim, or doing yoga on the beach. A highlight of Fluro Fridays is the "anti-bad vibes circle" during which people share stories in a safe environment.

#### **Diana Ucles** PCYC City of Sydney

Senior Constable Diana Ucles joined the NSW police 13 years ago, but it was only after being deployed to the Police Citizens Youth Club in 2015 that she found her true calling. Since then, Diana has been a stable influence and confidant to many young people in the inner-city Woolloomooloo/ Darlinghurst area. She says her easygoing nature helps build rapport with the people she is trying to help. "My role is to prevent youth crime by supporting and empowering young offenders and youth at risk through targeted crime prevention programs and case management."

#### Rachael Natoli Lokahi Foundation

Rachael Natoli is a domestic abuse survivor who is grateful to her empowering and supportive caseworker for helping her to conquer the stress and difficulty of starting a new life. The experience inspired Rachael to start the Lokahi Foundation, which provides case workers to support women during the process of escaping from domestic abuse. "We provide unlimited support with no time restriction," says Rachael, who understands it can take two or three years for women to begin reclaiming their lives. "Our caseworkers will tailor their service to what each individual woman needs."

# Recognising all of our 2019 Nominees



Jose BELLO Next Step Foundation

**Shterny DADON** Australian Jewish Fertility Network

Jen DUGARD Body Beyond Baby

George FREUND COA Sydney

Adam HEGEDUS Educating The Future

James ISLES headspace Bondi Junction – South Eastern Sydney Local Health District

**Chana KAVKA** NSW Friendship Circle

Russell KING WAYS Youth & Family Rachael NATOLI Lokahi Foundation

Judy RENFORD Holdsworth Communty Ltd

Mo ROSA Heart Cafe

Harriet SMELT Make-A-Wish Australia

**Rikki STERN** Cancer Chicks Australia

Grant TREBILCO OneWave

Diana UCLES Police Citizens Youth Club NSW (PCYC City of Sydney)

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

#### AUSTRALIA

#### NEW ZEALAND

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 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

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