



Westfield

Local 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.

Westfield
Local Heroes

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

Westfield

Burwood
NSW



"I believe a sense of belonging and equality of opportunity is necessary for social cohesion," says Bassam.

Racist slur inspires teen to give back to community

Bassam Maaliki — Settlement Services International

Determined, Thoughtful, Caring

When Bassam Maaliki was thirteen years old, bigoted bullies at his school accused him of being a terrorist and told him to go back to where he came from.

That and other racist experiences inspired the Australian-born Muslim to campaign for change in his community and at school.

"It motivated me to do more," says Bassam, who is now sixteen and is dedicated to helping refugees and other migrants feel welcome in Australia.

One of the first things he did was join the YMCA Youth Parliament, where young people come together and debate controversial issues. He also speaks at school harmony days and other events and is an Australian Youth Ambassador for Save the Children.

Among Bassam's many innovations is a #uBelong badge and key

that he developed for people to wear in solidarity with refugees, migrants, people who feel alone, those that feel unheard and those who feel helpless.

He also organised a #uBelong flash-mob choir in Sydney, which was an emotional event attended by eight hundred people.

He feels good to be voted a Westfield Local Hero. "I am happy people believe in what I am doing about a real issue," says Bassam, who in 2018 was named Youth Parliament Advocate of the Year and also won the NSW Premier's Youth Medal.

"I believe a sense of belonging and equality of opportunity is necessary for social cohesion," says Bassam.

"My parents have supported and motivated me to do this type of work in the community and

Settlement Services International has helped me to develop my work. I would like to acknowledge the impact they have had on my life," says Bassam, who has raised thousands of dollars for good causes.

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.

SSI will use the grant awarded in Bassam's honour to expand the #uBelong initiative, including the development of a website and app for young people to interact.

"It will offer resources for young people, including volunteering opportunities and social justice forums," says Bassam.



"Our vision is to not only relieve hunger and poverty. We also encourage people within the community to feel they are supported and not left alone," says Paula, who immigrated to Australia from Lebanon with her family when she was 16.

Cooking up hope and connection for people in need

Paula Nicolas — St Merkorious Charity

Passionate, Caring, Visionary

When Paula Nicolas started cooking meals in her kitchen for six families, she had no idea her good deed would grow into a major charity that distributes thousands of meals a week.

Paula founded St Merkorious Charity in 2013 and provides cooked meals to the disabled, elderly and homeless and also supplies food hampers to people who can cook for themselves but are unable to afford essential items.

The charity also hosts free community meal gatherings in Fairfield and Rhodes, with plans to start one in Burwood.

Paula works five days a week at the charity, supported by volunteers and a small staff. "It makes me feel happy and gives me satisfaction. It makes me feel that I am fulfilling God's work," she says.

"We live in a world where some of us have so much, and others have so little."

Paula feels humbled to be voted a Westfield Local Hero. "What I do is not heroic but is necessary. It is our duty to look after the disadvantaged in our society."

The charity embraces each client on a personal level. "We chat and, most importantly, we listen. We know the stories of each and every client," says Paula.

"Our vision is to not only relieve hunger and poverty. We also encourage people within the community to feel they are supported and not left alone," says Paula, who immigrated to Australia from Lebanon with her family when she was 16.

Paula has received widespread recognition for her work and was

Burwood Citizen of the Year in 2017 and Strathfield Local Woman of the Year in 2018 when she also won the Jesus Cares Contribution and Service Award.

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.

St Merkorious charity will use its grant to fund thirty-eight thousand meals for the poor, which is a ten-week supply.

"The need is growing every day," says Paula. "The grant will help us to do more and to have a bigger impact."



"It's reassuring when the work you do quietly and privately is recognised by others. I have been fortunate in my life. I have a good family and good friends. Some of the women who come to Stepping Out don't have any of those things."

Helping abuse survivors build their lives from the ground up

Bev Lange — Stepping Out Program

Committed, Dedicated, Confident

When it was time for Bev Lange to move on from her position as General Manager of the Stepping Out Program, she was so committed to the charity that she stayed on as a volunteer.

Stepping Out supports women who have experienced childhood sexual abuse; aiding their recovery and empowering them to achieve independence.

Many survivors have long-term mental illness and social problems and the the Leichhardt-based Stepping Out caseworkers help them access doctors and psychologists and connect them with support agencies that can provide basic needs such as housing.

"It's practical work," says Bev. "We help people build their lives from the ground up."

Bev chairs the fund-raising committee and oversees marketing. She is also a driving force behind a social inclusion group that meets on Fridays.

She says being voted a Westfield local hero is humbling and exciting. "It's reassuring when the work you do quietly and privately is recognised by others. I have been fortunate in my life. I have a good family and good friends. Some of the women who come to Stepping Out don't have any of those things."

She shares an example of a survivor in her sixties who was recently referred for help.

"She was receiving treatment for a serious medical condition and was living in her car. Within a month, we had secured her accommodation and connected her with support services.

Today, she presents a very different picture."

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. Stepping out will use its grant to extend its social inclusion group.

"Many clients experience extreme social isolation. It will make a tangible difference because it will allow us to broaden our footprint to different areas and help us pay for outings and guest speakers," says Bev, a recipient of the Centenary of Federation Medal.

She has held many high-profile community positions. These include being President of the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras and a directorship at NSW Council of Social Services.

Your 2019 Finalists

Aracely Barreras

Inner West Community Drug Action Team

Aracely Barreras was raised in poverty in the US; the likes of which, she says, almost guarantees personal and professional failure. She knew the way to succeed was through education, so she completed two degrees and is studying for a post-graduate nursing degree. As she is in Australia on a student visa, Aracely can work only limited hours, all of which she dedicates to improving the lives of at-risk people through the Inner West Community Drug Action Team. One of Aracely's innovations is a website on which community members can self-refer for assessments and services.

Biljana Milosevic

Jannawi Family Centre

Biljana Milosevic knew from a young age that she wanted to be a social worker. Her passion is social justice and, as director of Jannawi Family Centre, she runs two programs aimed at breaking cycles of family violence and abuse. "My greatest achievement is running an effective charity where significant improvements occur in the lives of the people we work with," says Biljana, who is the first person in her family to gain a university degree. She and her team work with culturally diverse families to help them provide a safe, happy and healthy upbringing for their children.

Jackie Walters

Inner West Neighbour Aid

Jackie Walters is committed to helping older people to live independently and stay socially connected to their community. She leads a compassionate team at the Inner West Neighbour Aid charity who provide services such as assisted shopping, exercise classes, day outings, pet care and social visits to more than 300 older people. More than half of the clients live alone, and for many Neighbour Aid is their only link to the outside world. "We help people build friendships and maintain their health and wellbeing, which assists in reducing loneliness, depression and anxiety," says Jackie.

Recognising all of our 2019 Nominees

Aracely BARRERAS

Inner West Community
Drug Action Team

John BRODIE

New South Wales Justices
Association Inc

Julie CORKERY

Make-A-Wish Australia

Yinxia HU

Australian Cultural and
Commerce Association

John HUGHES

Children's Tumour Foundation

Bev LANGE

Stepping Out Program

Bassam MAALIKI

Settlement Services International (SSI)

Vivienne MARTIN

Olivetree Women's Network
and Connect Marrickville

Milad MELHEM

Nissan Patrol 4WD Club
of NSW and ACT Inc

Biljana MILOSEVIC

Jannawi Family Centre

Paula NICOLAS

St. Merkorious Charity

Wendy SCHMID

Embroiderers' Guild NSW Inc

Jackie WALTERS

Inner West Neighbour Aid Inc

Jodie WILSON

Russell Lea Women's Soccer Club

Faryal ZEHRA

Little Helpers on the Run

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

westfield.com.au/local-heroes

westfield.co.nz/local-heroes

Westfield

Local Heroes

2019

SCENTRE GROUP