Westfield
Local Heroef
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 Heroef

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



### **Parramatta**

NSW



"The grant will help us continue and expand our existing programs, but the impact from the exposure is just as important for raising awareness of autism," Belinda says.

# Super-volunteer helps families break autism isolation

### Belinda Tabbaa — Autism Community Network

Inspirational, Dedicated, Caring

Belinda Tabbaa is a supervolunteer for children with autism and their families, giving up hours of her time so others can thrive.

As a volunteer coordinator with the Autism Community Network, Belinda oversees programs across western Sydney for children with autism and their parents.

She is appreciated and respected by the many families that rely on the activities she puts on to help break the isolation they would otherwise experience.

With a child on the autism spectrum of her own, she runs tailored cooking classes, bowling days for the kids and a regular support network for parents and carers.

"Teaching life skills to kids with autism is wonderful," Belinda says. She has also personally benefited from the network, which provided her with much-needed information and support after her son's diagnosis.

Belinda says it is a great honour to have been voted a Westfield Local Hero, admitting that she had to dry her eyes after spotting her photo around Parramatta.

"It was lovely to have people coming up and congratulating me, and it was funny to have my friends and family taking selfies with my photos and sending them to me," she says.

The mother of three works at her family business during the day but she describes her volunteer role as the most rewarding job she has ever had.

"Most families find it hard to find appropriate programs for their kids elsewhere," she says.

"And thanks to funding from the Autism Community Network, they can join these activities free of charge in a nice family environment where no one is judged by anyone."

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. Autism Community Network is using its grant to fund a wellness program for carers and training and support for volunteers.

"The grant will help us continue and expand our existing programs, but the impact from the exposure is just as important for raising awareness of autism," Belinda says.



Susai feels honoured to be voted a Westfield Local Hero and is grateful for the community support, which he says is encouraging all the volunteers at the centre. "Credit should go to everyone involved, not just me," he says.

# Giving free legal support to marginalised people

#### Susai Benjamin — Toongabbie Legal Centre

Dedicated, Committed, Selfless

Solicitor Susai Benjamin believes being marginalised and vulnerable should not deny people the right to high-quality legal support.

Driven by this philosophy, he founded the Toongabbie Legal Centre, which provides free services to culturally, socially and economically disadvantaged people who don't qualify for means-tested support from NSW Legal Aid.

The centre operates twice a week at St Anthony's Church, where it helps more than six hundred clients a year and has supported more than six thousand since it opened in 2007.

Susai is well known and popular in the area and never turns anyone away if they come to his home in seek of help when the centre is not open.

"We try to assist people who cannot afford legal support.

Sometimes we provide representation and hopefully try to resolve legal issues so that people can avoid having to go to court," Susai says.

Volunteers at the centre include solicitors, barristers, law students, migration agents and people from various other relevant professions.

Susai feels honoured to be voted a Westfield Local Hero and is grateful for the community support, which he says is encouraging all the volunteers at the centre. "Credit should go to everyone involved, not just me," he says.

In the beginning, the centre's work usually involved minor criminal or traffic offences, but these days most of the cases are far more complex and often involve family law.

"Our clients are often confronting a legal issue for the first time and can be guite overwhelmed and desperately looking for legal help," says Susai.

One of the centre's innovative projects involves inviting experienced lawyers and judges to present insights on everyday legal issues at free seminars for the local community.

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The centre will use its grant to replace its old and unreliable computers.

"This grant is important because as a team of volunteers we struggle financially and are looking for support to make our work fulltime," Susai says.



"Receiving the grant and recognition just reinforces the great work PCYC NSW and the NSW Police Force are doing in the youth sphere," Draz says.

# Achieving a policing ambition by supporting youth

### Draz Brkljac — PCYC Parramatta

Enthusiastic, Devoted, Respected

Senior Constable Draz Brkljac's life ambition was always to serve and protect the people of NSW by becoming a police officer.

He is taking that ambition to the next level through his work as an engaged and innovative role model and mentor to young people.

For the past seven years, he has been a case manager at Parramatta's Police Citizens Youth Club, where he helps young offenders and at-risk youth to improve their self-respect and reduce their risk of reoffending. He also encourages them to participate positively in the community and teaches them life and social skills that other people may take for granted.

Draz, who was named the 2019 Blacktown City Citizen of the Year, is deeply honoured also to be voted a Westfield Local Hero. His most successful initiative is the Stand Tall program, which is designed to help disengaged youth to resolve criminal and behavioural issues or cope with learning difficulties.

The program redirects participants away from making negative decisions.

"It exposes the program participants to the NSW Police Force in a positive way," he says. "They realise that the police are there to help and to protect."

The overall focus of Draz's work is to empower young people to take control of their lives.

The social skills he teaches include basic manners like greeting someone in the morning or shaking their hand when appropriate. This helps to counter the potential anti-social and negative influence of screen-based distractions like social media and video games.

"We try to break down the barriers – especially of technology – that are preventing conversation between individuals."

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.

The Parramatta Police Citizens
Youth Club will use its grant to
fund the continuation of the Stand
Tall program and to provide
barista courses.

"Receiving the grant and recognition just reinforces the great work PCYC NSW and the NSW Police Force are doing in the youth sphere," Draz says.

"Both organisations are empowering young people to make positive life choices."

## **Your 2019 Finalists**

#### **Gabrielle Dracopoulos**

# Granville & Districts Soccer Football Association

Soccer is known as the beautiful game, but for Gabrielle Dracopoulos, it is also a game that anyone should be able to play. Gabrielle is a volunteer director of the Granville and Districts Soccer Football Association, which includes 23 grassroots clubs from around Parramatta. It's Australia's oldest continuously running soccer association, but Gabrielle has been breathing new life into the league by opening it up to new groups, including new migrants and people with disabilities. "When people begin participating in sport by either playing or volunteering, they are building friendships and new networks," she says.

#### **Alex Long**

#### Multicultural Youth Affairs Network NSW

Alex Long is a social justice advocate who works tirelessly to help young migrants become future leaders of their communities. She is the inspirational leader of Multicultural Youth Affairs Network NSW, an organisation that supports young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds to build the skills and networks they need to be active citizens in Australia. With the support of a tiny staff. Alex has helped thousands of families around NSW. "We work towards a society where all young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds are connected, influential and valued," Alex says.

#### **Jennifer Harris**

#### The Hills School SSP, Northmead

Jennifer Harris is dedicated to helping school students with special needs to be the very best they can be, no matter what obstacles life has thrown in their way. Jenny has been a long-serving volunteer on the parents and citizens committee at The Hills School for students with intellectual and physical disabilities. As immediate past treasurer on the committee, she coordinated fundraisers which helped the school pay for therapy sessions, playground upgrades and equipment. "I get a great deal of happiness helping others but my greatest pride and happiness lies in my family," Jennifer says.

# Recognising all of our 2019 Nominees



Toongabbie Legal Centre Inc

#### **Mark BENNETT**

Abdominators PT

#### **Sarah BENNETT**

Sarah Bennett

#### **Norma BOULES**

The Community Migrant Resource Centre

#### **Anton BREINL**

Cancer Council NSW

#### Draz BRKLJAC

Police Citizens Youth Club NSW (PCYC Parramatta)

#### **Gab DONNELLY**

Angel Gowns for Australian Angel Babies Inc

#### Gabrielle DRACOPOULOS

Granville & Districts Soccer Football Association

#### **Mathew EDSALL**

Hills Triathlon Club

#### **Nichole EDSALL**

Hills Triathlon Club

#### **Tanya GHOSN**

Walk for Hope

#### Jennifer HARRIS

The Hills School

#### Tanya HEBERLEY

Ronald McDonald House Charities
Greater Western Sydney

#### **Kimberlee HUGHES**

Kool Kids And Teens Therapy Service

#### Fevziye KAVAS

Our House

#### Jacqui KEOGH

Myeloma Australia

#### Glen LEBEAU

Disability Sports Australia

#### Lynette (Lyn) LEERSON

Reconciliation for Western Sydney Inc

#### Jarrod LOMAS

Make-A-Wish Australia

#### Alex LONG

Multicultural Youth Affairs Network NSW

#### Sayd MAHMOD

SSI International

#### **Alex McALONAN**

GRILL'D

#### **Christine McKENNA**

Angel Gowns Australian Inc

#### **Rosemary McKENZIE-FERGUSON**

Craig's Table NSW

#### Mark MIKHA

Yaruki Martial Arts School

#### **Ross PARKINSON**

Youth Off The Streets

#### **Antoun SALEM**

**BMDH Fundraising and Events** 

#### **Elizabeth SHEPHERD**

The Children's Hospital at Westmead

#### Belinda TABBAA

Autism Community Network

#### Lija TAYLOR

NSW Powerchair Football Association

#### Jane THEAU

Settlement Services International

#### Sarah THORNTON

Walk for Kids Cancer

#### Naomi WHITE

Winston Mall Children's Centre

#### Sue WOOD

**ROSE Charity Incorporated** 

#### 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

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