



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.

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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

Plenty Valley
VIC



Alex has written two inspiring books about his life story and feels grateful to be voted a Westfield Local Hero. "I've learnt it's not about me, it's what I can do for others," he says.

Family tragedy unleashes a passion for caring

Alex Fabiani — Global Care

Hardworking, Loving, Cheeky

The turning point in Alex Fabiani's life came during the ten years that he spent looking after his brother who was left a quadriplegic by a heroin overdose.

During that time Alex gave up drugs and alcohol himself and embarked on a journey of recovery that included becoming an advocate for the disabled and reigniting his passion for writing.

After Alex's brother died, he founded the Infinity Church Community Meals Kitchen South Morang, which provides more than one hundred meals a week to people in need and also gives families food parcels that include items needed for children's school lunches, including treats.

"I started helping out more at church and then one day it came to me that the kitchen was what

I wanted to do," says Alex, who never declines anyone seeking a home-cooked meal.

"Our community meals kitchen is not just for food, it's a place for social interaction and to feel wanted."

Alex has written two inspiring books about his life story and feels grateful to be voted a Westfield Local Hero. "I've learnt it's not about me, it's what I can do for others," he says.

Over the past nine years, the Community Meals Kitchen has provided thousands of meals to the homeless, elderly, disabled, struggling families and refugees. Last Christmas, Alex and his team of volunteers handed out hundreds of parcels, more than a thousand toys and delighted women with gifts of a handbag.

Thanks to Alex's involvement in local emergency relief and disability networks, the program also offers help beyond a regular meal. "We give out information about other organisations and support programs that may be able to help people," 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.

The Community Meals Kitchen, which is affiliated to Global Care, will use the grant to buy kitchen equipment and to relieve the constant pressure to raise funds.

"The kitchen costs over \$20,000 per year to run and we don't charge for meals," says Alex.



"The work I do with refugee women means a lot to me. It brings a lot of satisfaction because I can see the difference it makes in the women's lives, particularly the newly arrived ones."

A guiding hand for refugee women

Sousan Hawalla — Drummond Street Services

Selfless, Compassionate, Honest

Sousan Hawalla is dedicated to helping women refugees and asylum seekers to find their feet in Australia.

She works at Drummond Street Services, where she established a social group for vulnerable women who are struggling to settle into their new country.

The women participate in ten Bright Morning Women's Group sessions which provide a safe environment for them to discuss challenges they are having with cultural differences, family violence, parenting, financial matters and tenants' rights.

"It alleviates some of the social isolation and provides a safe environment for the women to learn, ask questions and connect," Sousan says.

She feels humbled and "a bit overwhelmed" to be voted a

Westfield Local Hero by the community.

"The work I do with refugee women means a lot to me. It brings a lot of satisfaction because I can see the difference it makes in the women's lives, particularly the newly arrived ones."

Sousan understands what it is like to start again as she escaped civil war in Lebanon and arrived in Australia when she was just ten years old.

"The women find it really helpful to have someone who speaks their language, somebody from the same culture who can actually answer some of their questions."

With Sousan by their side, some women have found the courage to attend court after experiencing family violence. Through the group, the women become financially literate and have

learned to embrace rights many have not enjoyed before.

"One woman had never been shopping on her own before. She felt empowered after she started shopping by herself," says Sousan.

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. Drummond Street Services will use its grant to fund skills and employment training for the women and help the group to run on an ongoing basis.

"When each group ends after ten sessions the women are upset and sad," says Sousan. "We are looking at training some of the women to run the group to sustain it long-term."



"I am very passionate about giving back to the community," says Gurinder.

Taking interfaith tolerance to the next level

Gurinder Kaur — Khalsa Education Society

Passionate, Selfless, Committed

Gurinder Kaur is a proud Sikh and just wants everyone to get along without misunderstanding each others' culture and traditions.

As a volunteer with the Khalsa Education Society, she promotes cultural harmony and interfaith solidarity by visiting schools and workplaces to familiarise people with the turban Sikhs wear to represent equality.

The program helps to break down stereotypes and misconceptions that sometimes lead to bullying of Sikh children, Gurinder says.

"Sometimes there can be a negative association between turbans and terrorism."

One of the society's innovations is to run turban tying stalls, where non-Sikhs can try on a turban and get to know more about the religion.

Gurinder is over the moon about being voted a Westfield Local

Hero for work that is part of her identity. "I grew up with a culture of sarbat da bhala, which in Punjabi means wellbeing of all," she says. "I was raised to care about the people around you without any judgment. They are like my extended family, my brothers and sisters."

Gurinder has been going above and beyond in her efforts to help her local community since arriving in Australia in 2006. Despite a full-time job as a business analyst, she never turns down a request to support local projects, such as getting involved in the Whittlesea Relay for Life to support cancer research.

Taking the lead, she encouraged many in the Sikh and Indian community to take part.

"I am very passionate about giving back to the community," says Gurinder.

"But in my Punjabi community, there are still a lot of people who don't know about community work. I believe my recognition will motivate the younger generation and the Punjabi community to come forward."

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The Khalsa Society will use its grant to reach out to more schools and develop educational material, such as videos and leaflets.

"It will help increase awareness of the Sikh community and create better relationships," says Gurinder.

Your 2019 Finalists

Matthew Odgers

Links Community Group

Matthew Odgers is bringing people together through the flourishing public garden that has become a proud landmark in Lalor. There are no individual plots, and everyone is free to enjoy the space. Matthew has also helped create gardens for local schools and organised free workshops. "New families moving into the area have a way to get to know their neighbours," says Matthew, who founded the Links Community Group with the intention of starting the garden. "Refugees and new migrants get to know their new town is safe and inviting," he says.

Melissa Flentjar

Lalor Running Club

Melissa Flentjar was overweight and depressed, but she changed her life when she started running, lost 48kg and stopped smoking. She wanted to share her healthy new lifestyle with others, so she organised a regular local park run and set up the Lalor Running Club. These enable beginner and intermediate runners and walkers to exercise together in a safe and social environment. Now Melissa has funding for a regular 5km Saturday morning walk and run managed by volunteers. "Over 10,000 people in the Epping North area will be able to participate," she says.

Leonie White

Thomastown Secondary College

When she started at the school 43 years ago, there was high unemployment nationally and particularly for the youth in the northern suburbs. There was a view that success was only possible for a few. This impacted on students' self-esteem and aspirations. But after banning the word 'disadvantaged' and focusing instead on all that was possible, students started to thrive. In 2018, 91 per cent of students who applied for a tertiary place received a first-round offer and 97% of Year 12s had positive exit destinations. "Students are not only motivated to achieve, they do," says Leonie

Recognising all of our 2019 Nominees

Rosa CORNWELL
Findon Calisthenics Club Inc

Alex FABIANI
Global Care

Melissa FLENTJAR
Lalor Running Club

Dinnae GALLOWAY
1st Doreen Scout Group

Craig GRAHAM
Northern BMX Club Inc

Simone GREEN
Make-A-Wish Foundation Australia

Sousan HAWALLA
Drummond Street

Sarah HOPES
Findon Calisthenics Club

Gurinder KAUR
Khalsa Education Society Inc

Julie MALHERBE
JABS Joey and Bat Sanctuary

George McMURTRY
Arilla Retirement Village

Daryl McSHANAG
Mernda Bulls Basketball Club

Matthew ODGERS
Links Community Group

Revati (Rae) SUBRAMANIAM
MANAS (Mental Awareness
Network And Support)

Kylie WEBB
Children's Tumour Foundation

Leonie WHITE
Thomastown Secondary College

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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SCENTRE GROUP