

*Westfield*

*Local Heroes*

2020

Westfield Local Heroes is a recognition and awards program that discovers and celebrates people across Australia and New Zealand who make a positive impact to their local community and environment.

Individuals are nominated by their local communities and a public vote determines the successful 2020 nominees for every Westfield centre.

The successful heroes are each awarded \$10,000 for their affiliated organisations.

*Westfield*  
*Local Heroes*

Since the program began, we have awarded \$3.62 million to 363 community organisations.

Every year, we recognise more than 120 Westfield Local Heroes and provide more than \$1.2M in community grants to their affiliated organisations.

We congratulate all the 2020 nominees for being recognised by their communities and thank them for the important contribution they all make.

[westfield.com.au/local-heroes](https://westfield.com.au/local-heroes)

[westfield.co.nz/local-heroes](https://westfield.co.nz/local-heroes)

# Westfield

## Eastgardens

### NSW

**It was while working as a social worker that Margaret Skagias recognised the unique contribution of thousands of Australian children who take care of parents or siblings with a disability or illness.**

These young heroes are often isolated and may take on housework, shopping, cooking, personal hygiene care, liaising with health professionals and financial matters.

In 2014, Margaret founded volunteer-run CaringKids. She and her team make up toy boxes for young carers so they can feel that their contribution and role is honoured and recognised.

The mental health challenges these children can face are real, with people rarely considering the impact illness can have on the carers in a family.

Any child who is not already connected to ongoing support is connected to a service such as Little Dreamers, Margaret says.

She is proud that the toy boxes contain pre-loved toys that are saved from landfill.

"There are thousands of special needs siblings and young carers in Australia. They are hidden, unsupported and experience social isolation, financial hardship and lower rates of education and achievement than peers who do not have caring responsibilities," Margaret says.

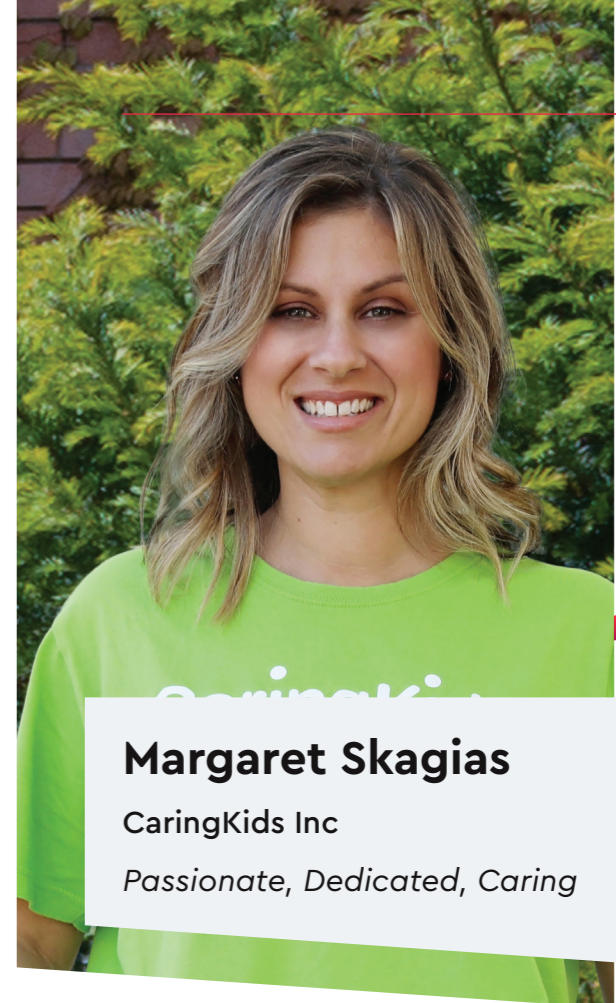
"It is my belief that carers of all ages in Australia need recognition for the unpaid care they provide.

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.

CaringKids will use its grant to fund endeavours including the provision of 200 toy boxes to special needs siblings and young carers and the rehoming of about 8000 pre-loved donation items.

*Margaret's nominator says:*

*"Margaret combines passion and compassion to make a difference for children who care for disabled or chronically ill family members."*



**Margaret Skagias**

CaringKids Inc

*Passionate, Dedicated, Caring*

## Recognising young champions

**"The mental health challenges these children can face are real, with people rarely considering the impact illness can have on the carers in a family."**



## Richard Habelrih

Autism MATES

*Courageous, Positive, Determined*

## Having his say

**"I like to tell doctors and teachers that I can understand what they are saying and I like it when they talk to me, not just to my mum. That's important."**

**Richard Habelrih has severe autism, and doctors told his parents he would never speak. But he has proved them wrong and has grown up to be a popular public speaker.**

Richard is regularly invited to speak at schools and conferences, where he enjoys spreading his message of kindness.

One of the highlights at schools is his Best MATES puppet show.

"I play Tommy the Turtle because he is a bit like me. He didn't fit in, so some of the animals don't like him to join their party. It's important to teach kids about being nice," Richard says.

He has a special reminder when he speaks at medical and teacher conferences.

"I like to tell doctors and teachers that I can understand what they are saying and I like it when they talk to me, not just to my mum. That's important."

He was a keynote speaker at the NSW Independent Schools conference in 2019 and was voted the most memorable and impactful speaker.

Richard ends each speech with some moving thoughts. "I always say I have dreams like you, I like to have friends, I like to have a job, and I'd like to live in my own place one day."

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Autism MATES will use its grant to create an animated version of his puppet show for viewing at schools and on the internet.

*Richard's nominator says:*

*"Richard's story is a beacon of hope and inspiration to so many who have felt the way he does. He speaks from the heart because he knows no other way to communicate."*

**From the outside, Bailey Fitzgerald looked just fine. He had been vice-captain of his high school, had captained representative footy teams and he had a supportive family and circle of friends.**

In reality, he was battling severe anxiety and depression, and he was worried about what people would think if they knew.

But he sought help. And now, aged just 21, he is giving back.

Bailey has bravely launched the Maroubra Movement, which holds monthly seminars to increase mental health awareness and bring people together in a judgment-free zone to create a community in which they feel comfortable to seek help for themselves or friends and family.

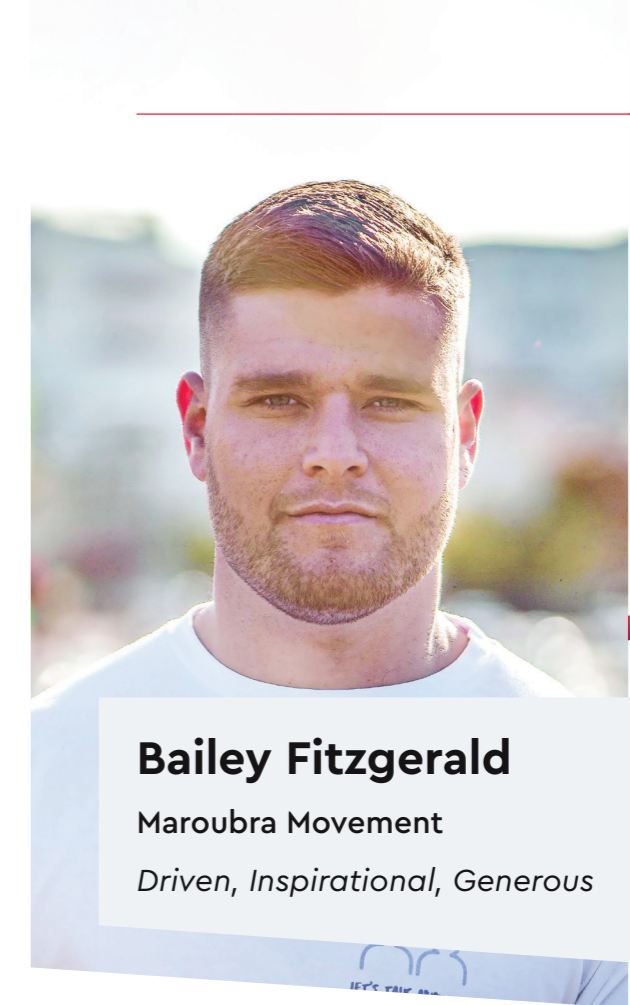
"Having gone through years of my own mental health battles, and through being affected by suicide in my friendship circles, I felt I could use my position in the community to put a program together that is relatable and people would gravitate to," Bailey says.

There were two seminars before the COVID-19 disruptions. The first was on alcohol and other drugs. At the second, inspirational speaker Dan Price shared his mental health journey to wellness. R U OK? ambassador Kevin Heath was the MC and there were two psychologists on hand to offer support.

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Maroubra Movement will use its grant to market the seminars, provide food for guests and buy branded merchandise.

*Bailey's nominator says: "Bailey Fitzgerald has taken the initiative within our local community to create a safe, supportive and helpful space which can be accessed by anyone."*



## Bailey Fitzgerald

Maroubra Movement

*Driven, Inspirational, Generous*

## Judgment-free zone

**"Bailey has bravely launched the Maroubra Movement, which holds monthly seminars to increase mental health awareness and bring people together in a judgment-free zone."**

## Your 2020 Finalists

### Kate Melhopt

#### South Eastern Community Connect (SECC)

Kate Melhopt's career spans roles as a psychiatric social worker in New Zealand, working with mentally disordered people in London and trauma work in Sri Lanka.

But she is proudest of her achievements in and around Eastlakes as CEO of South Eastern Community Connect, which supports locals of every age.

"I feel my work has positively impacted the local community through the provision of a number of services which simply didn't exist before. These include whole-of-life services, as opposed to simply families and aged care services."

### Lorin Muhlmann

#### Bayside Women's Shelter

Big-hearted Lorin Muhlmann is the Fundraising Director at Bayside Women's Shelter and faces the task of having to raise at least \$200,000 a year to cover rent and operating costs.

That's a big ask for a local shelter. While national organisations can rely on big corporate donors, smaller not-for-profits need to work hard at sourcing many smaller donations.

But Lorin gets the job done.

"I am incredibly proud to be a founding member. Providing short-term accommodation of around three months for women and children leaving violence means we are providing a safe home and potentially saving lives."

### Tracey Ayton

#### Little Heroes Swim Academy

Highly regarded swimming instructor Tracey Ayton founded the not-for-profit Little Heroes Swim Academy seven years ago to provide swimming therapy and aquatic education to children with a disability.

Now she has secured funding for a specialised swim centre where children have access to appropriate facilities and families can be together in a relaxed environment.

## Recognising all of our 2020 nominees

### Ben Higgs

The Rise Foundation

### Darren Tahu

Youth Off The Streets

### Ben Folino

The Randwick City Football Club's Purple Hearts

### Michele Burridge

Blue Gum Cottage Children's Centre

### Tracey Ayton

Little Heroes Swim Academy

### Lorin Muhlmann

Bayside Women's Shelter

### Kate Melhopt

South Eastern Community Connect

### Margaret Skagias

Caring Kids Inc.

### Bailey Fitzgerald

Maroubra Movement

### Richard Habelrih

Autism Mates

### Anthony Vecellio

Randwick Botany Little Athletics Centre

### Craig Noble

La Perouse Public School

### Fidel Tukul

Youth Off The Streets

### Kevin Heath

Dream Time Academy

### Amanda Hubbard

Raise Foundation

### Victoria Brooke

Raise Foundation

### Fabian Heaton

Prince Of Wales Hospital Foundation

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

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**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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