

PO Box 615
Carlton South VIC 3053
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Flood-hit Queensland aged care homes win national award

When ex-cyclone Oswald bore down off the Queensland coast in January 2013 — bringing storms and floods in its wake — staff from aged care provider, RSL Care, prepared for the worst.

Now, their work maintaining services in RSL Care homes around the state, following the devastating emergency, has earned them the Outstanding Organisation Award at the 2013 HESTA Aged Care Awards.

Of the network's 29 retirement and residential care communities, 15 were impacted by the floods. However, most of the centres were operational again within hours and days, thanks to RSL Care's highly-prepared staff and its thorough emergency response plan.

At the worst hit home of Fairways in Bundaberg, 108 residents were evacuated in a mass operation to four temporary accommodation sites, while continuing to receive the best of care.

More than 40 RSL Care staff from 12 other centres then travelled by car, bus and plane to support and relieve fellow team members who had been relocating residents since the flood crisis began.

RSL Care's Chief Executive Officer, Craig Mills, said staff also had help from the local community and fire officers, as well as defence force personnel who moved in to help with the clean up.

"Many of the Fairways staff lost most, if not all, of their personal belongings themselves. So we set up an employee appeal across our organisation to raise funds for them. We also made a one-off payment of one thousand dollars to affected staff, under a new grant scheme," Mr Mills said.

"While there was much heartache and loss as a result of the flood, we also saw a lot of goodwill and generosity of spirit. In many ways, what tore a small community apart brought a bigger community together."

HESTA CEO, Anne-Marie Corboy, congratulated the winners of the three award categories.

"The judges received nominations from around the country and had a difficult decision choosing 15 outstanding finalists. The winners are a credit to their organisations and are all contributing to improving the health and wellbeing of older Australians," she said.

The winners of the HESTA Aged Care Awards were announced at an awards dinner in Sydney on 4 August 2013.

RSL Care and the Team Innovation Award winner each accepted a \$10,000 development grant to put towards their program — courtesy of long-term awards sponsor, ME Bank. The Individual Distinction Award winner received a \$5,000 ME Bank *EveryDay* transaction account and \$5,000 towards further education.

HESTA is the leading super fund for health and community services, with more than 750,000 members and \$23 billion in assets. More people in health and community services choose HESTA for their super.

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MEDIA CONTACT: Luisa Saccotelli 0400 149 901 or Aileen Muldoon 0419 112 503.