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Toowoomba Youth Service a finalist in national community sector awards

The Toowoomba Youth Service has been named one of five finalists in the Organisation category of the 2013 HESTA Community Sector Awards.

The organisation was recognised as a finalist for its Random Acts of Kindness program, which involves working with vulnerable young people to help others.

The Organisation Award category recognises organisations that have made outstanding contributions to social justice in Australia, through the development of an innovative program, project or specific service.

Toowoomba Youth Service Manager, Michelle Wiersma, said the organisation had been supporting young people aged between 10 and 18 years and their families for 30 years.

“At Gateway House crisis accommodation our staff support young people who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, to develop skills to enable them to live independently,” she said.

“The Random Acts of Kindness program takes an innovative approach to addressing the marginalisation of these young people, who often see themselves as removed from their community and having no particular value in society.

“With the help of staff and volunteers, the young people aim to produce high-quality products that provide happiness or some benefit to an unknown person.

“For example, the young people helped make decorative library bags for local primary school children, Easter chocolates for the residents at the Cerebral Palsy League Centre, toys for the animals awaiting adoption at the RSPCA and lolly bags for the children’s ward at the local hospital.

“The program enables these young people to give back to the community that supports them and, in doing so, it gives them a sense of value in the community.”

Ms Wiersma and the other finalists will be flown to Adelaide to attend an awards dinner, where the winners will be announced during the Australian Council of Social Service National Conference on Monday, 25 March 2013.

A \$30,000 prize pool will be shared among the winners, courtesy of long-term HESTA awards sponsor, ME Bank. The Organisation and Social Impact Award winners will each receive a \$10,000 development grant. The Unsung Hero Award winner will receive a \$5,000 ME Bank *EveryDay* Transaction Account and a \$5,000 education grant.

HESTA is the leading super fund for health and community services, with more than 750,000 members and \$21 billion in assets. More people in health and community services choose HESTA for their super.

Visit hestaawards.com.au for tickets for the awards dinner or to learn more about the awards.

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