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Regal tenancy officer a finalist in 'Unsung Hero' category of national community sector awards

A tenancy officer who stamped The Regal Rooming House in St Kilda with her own inimitable style and generosity is one of five finalists in the Unsung Hero category of the 2014 HESTA Community Sector Awards.

Kerry Riches, of the Port Phillip Housing Association (PPHA), has spent the last eight years transforming the 49-bed, male-only rooming house into a safe and comfortable home for the previously homeless men to live in.

PPHA Chief Executive Officer, Karen Barnett, described the rooming house as a haven for men who are single, disenfranchised, hitting hard times, exiting correctional services institutions and those dealing with substance abuse and substantial physical and mental health issues.

"The work Kerry does enriches the residents' lives in many ways. She prepares healthy meals, sources clothing and shoes, refers them to appropriate services to support sustainable tenancies and keeps an eye on the vulnerable," Ms Barnett said.

"Kerry hosts celebratory feasts around traditional festive seasons across cultures; fostering support and camaraderie among the residents and a 'look out for each other' culture in the house.

"She secured funding to design and to build a tiered garden in the small courtyard to encourage an interest in gardening, growing vegetables and healthy eating.

"Kerry also received a local council grant to help the men to set up their own social group, the 'Ol' Bastards Club' that sees the men get together for a BBQ, mutual support and socialising on weekends. Visits to hospitals and arranging funerals are also all too frequent responsibilities.

"She works at the 'pointy' end of what we do in community housing and her resilience in the face of continually challenging environments with people living with severe disadvantage makes her a worthy finalist."

Ms Riches and the other interstate finalists will be flown to Brisbane to attend the awards dinner, where the winners will be announced during the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) National Conference on Wednesday 11 June 2014. A \$30,000 prize pool will be shared among the winners, courtesy of long-term HESTA awards supporter ME Bank. The Unsung Hero and Social Impact Award winners will each receive a \$5,000 ME Bank *EveryDay* Transaction Account and a \$5,000 education grant. The Organisation Award winner will receive a \$10,000 development grant.

The HESTA Community Sector Awards are presented in partnership with ACOSS the peak body for community services in Australia, as part of their commitment to building a strong, sustainable community sector supporting the needs of people affected by poverty, disadvantage and inequality.

HESTA is the leading super fund for health and community services, with more than 770,000 members and \$27 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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