



PO Box 615
Carlton South VIC 3053
hestaawards.com.au

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Victorian advocate for migrant women a finalist in national community sector awards

A Victorian who has spent more than 20 years working to improve the quality of life for immigrant and refugee women is a finalist in the 2014 HESTA Community Sector Awards.

Melba Marginson, of the Victorian Immigrant and Refugee Women's Coalition, was recognised as one of five finalists in the Social Impact category for her work addressing family violence, social isolation and disadvantage amongst immigrant and refugee women.

In the early 1990s, Ms Marginson began advocating on behalf of Filipino women in Australia who faced a range of difficulties settling into their new home. This work eventually led her to a national campaign to better protect immigrant women from family violence.

"The campaign was successful in introducing a family violence provision to the Immigration Act to assist women who were experiencing domestic violence, but were forced to stay in the relationship because of their legal status," she said.

"This change was very important because it allowed migrant women who were on a temporary resident visa to apply for residency status in their own right, where the relationship had broken down because of domestic violence."

In 2002, Ms Marginson developed a 'Women's Leadership Course' tailored to immigrant and refugee women. Since its introduction 10 years ago, more than 600 women have undertaken the one-week course to gain a greater understanding of their new culture, learn how to connect their past experiences to their new environment, and develop leadership skills. This accredited course is now offered in neighbourhood houses and learning centres throughout Victoria.

Ms Marginson has also started a program called 'Women Building Bridges' and trained more than 200 women to develop community projects that reduce women's isolation. Since 2011, 12 'Women's Friendship Cafes'—similar to Men's Sheds — have been established.

Ms Marginson 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.

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