



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

 @HESTACSawards

Media release: Wednesday 21 May 2014

‘Top Blokes’ founder recognised in community sector awards

A young Illawarra woman who established a youth-led organisation to combat anti-social behaviour is a finalist in the 2014 HESTA Community Sector Awards.

Melissa Abu-Gazaleh of the ‘Top Blokes Foundation’ is one of five finalists in the Unsung Hero category. Ms Abu-Gazaleh was recognised for her role developing peer-mentoring and training programs aimed at challenging young men and teenage boys in the Illawarra region to make a positive contribution to their local community, while developing qualities of integrity and self-respect.

Ms Abu-Gazaleh founded the Top Blokes Program in 2006 at age 19.

“Around this time there was constant media bombardment of negative news stories around alcohol-fuelled violence, gang-related crimes and vandalism involving young men,” she said.

“The Top Blokes Program challenges and inspires young men and teenage boys to grow into the man they want to become. We provide opportunities to get involved in a local community projects that gives them a sense of purpose, allows them to display leadership and become role models to their peers.

“Since the program began there has been an increase in the number of young men adopting healthier lifestyles, volunteering in a variety of civic activities and a reduction in youth crime in the Illawarra region.

“An evaluation of the program also found that 92% of participants were rethinking their level of alcohol consumption, 87% said they were better able to communicate with adults after the program and 89% were better able to identify symptoms of good and poor mental health.”

The Top Blokes Foundation has grown to employ five people and in 2013 formed a partnership with the ‘House With No Steps’ organisation to increase the social inclusion and community engagement rates among young men aged 16-24 by carrying out maintenance on residential properties for people living with a disability.

Ms Abu-Gazaleh and 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