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Media release 3 June 2015

Innovative swag design a lifesaver for homeless

An organisation that developed a swag that can be stored in a backpack and is designed specially to meet the needs of the homeless has been recognised for their lifesaving innovation.

The Swags for Homeless organisation has distributed more than 15,000 of the lightweight, portable Backpack Beds® for homeless people across Australia since the first production hit the streets in 2009.

Swags for Homeless are one of five finalists in the Organisation category of the 2015 HESTA Community Sector Awards. The Awards recognise those in the community sector who made an exceptional contribution to social justice in Australia, by enhancing the wellbeing of disadvantaged individuals and communities.

Swags for Homeless Founder and CEO, Tony Clark, said the organisation aimed to provide emergency relief to every homeless person without shelter at night.

“Sleeping outside, under cardboard, without suitable protection is cruel, inhumane and degrading. Exposure to cold, wind and rain contributes to a higher incidence of physical and mental health issues for homeless people, often with severe health complications, which can lead to death,” he said.

“Our research shows that a Backpack Bed® provides warmth, protection, comfort and dignity, which contributes to protecting and promoting physical and mental health and individual resilience.

“Last year, we partnered with almost 400 organisations to distribute approximately 4000 Backpack Beds® to homeless Australians. While our high tech outdoor beds go a long way to addressing the immediate needs of homeless people, they are never intended to replace housing for the homeless.”

Mr Clark said that after extensive research and development, the charity successfully developed a sleeping bag made out of an innovative polar fleece material.

“In 2014, the charity developed a new chemically safe fabric that is not only water, fire, and mildew resistant but also ‘breathable’ while still meeting stringent international safety standards and we’re now developing a green portable power source enabling homeless people to charge their mobile phones.”

The Organisation Award winner will receive a \$10,000 development grant, courtesy of proud Awards sponsor **ME**. There are two other categories — Unsung Hero and Social Impact and the winners of those Awards will each receive \$5,000 in a **ME EveryDay** Transaction Account and a \$5,000 education grant, also courtesy of **ME**.

Finalists will be flown to Sydney for the awards dinner on 25 June 2015, where the winners will be revealed.

The HESTA Community Sector Awards are presented in partnership with the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) as part of the ACOSS National Conference 2015 and have been sponsored by ME since they started in 2012.

Learn more about the awards at hestaawards.com.au

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HESTA is the super fund for health and community services, with more than 800,000 members and \$32 billion in assets.

Issued by H.E.S.T. Australia Ltd ABN 66 006 818 695 AFSL No. 235249 Trustee of Health Employees Superannuation Trust Australia (HESTA) ABN 64 971 749 321.