

25 October 2017

Community heroes receive top honours at national awards

A project supporting migrants and refugees find employment, an individual who designed a service helping people access historical records from their time in children's homes and a campaign to increase funding for Queensland community legal centres received top honours at the HESTA Community Sector Awards in Melbourne last night.

HESTA CEO, Debby Blakey said this year's winners displayed outstanding leadership in addressing social justice in their communities and in developing services that promote equality.

"This year's winners have proven themselves leaders in addressing social disadvantage. Through their programs and services they have helped individuals and communities overcome inequality to build better lives," Ms Blakey said.

"Their work has provided an avenue for people to access life changing assistance and community services, contributing to building stronger more resilient communities. We are proud to be able to recognise them through the HESTA Community Sector Awards."

The winners were selected from 15 national finalists, and recognise exceptional service provision, advocacy, and leadership in social justice and community services across the three Award categories of Unsung Hero, Outstanding Organisation and Social Impact.

The 2017 winners are:

Unsung Hero Award

Jenny Glare
Heritage and Information Services at Mackillop Family Services
South Melbourne, VIC

Jenny was recognised for her work helping Australians raised in orphanages and children's homes access historical records from their time spent in child institutions across Victoria.

Jenny worked with the three Catholic congregations which came together in 1997 to form Mackillop Family Services, to create a database of over 115,000 records available for public access. The pioneering service enables people to access vital information about their family and childhood history.

In her role as General Manager - Heritage & Information Service, Jenny has led the release of records and has helped thousands of Australians raised in child institutions. Her work has assisted them to construct their life stories, access the information required to establish a sense of self and identity, and reconnect with long-lost family members.

Jenny said their services help people re-build crucial parts of their life stories, forming a vital part of Australia's social history.

"Our service means the men and women that grew up in homes and orphanages can access their records with minimal intervention; we act as custodians to help them access these. These records are like pieces of gold that form a part of Australia's social history, helping these men and women complete the unfinished business of their childhoods," said Jenny.

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"We plan to use the prize money to add to the uniqueness of the displays in our heritage centre. We also plan to record more stories of people who experienced out-of-home care in the past so that people can learn for the future."

Outstanding Organisation Award

WEstjustice Footscray and Werribee, VIC

WEstjustice was recognised for establishing the 'Employment Law Project' which helps migrants and refugees living in the western suburbs of Melbourne overcome disadvantage in employment.

The Project empowers migrants and refugees to better understand and enforce their workplace rights by providing free legal advice, legal representation and community education.

Functioning as the only legal service in Australia that focuses on the employment needs of migrants and refugees, WEstjustice has helped its clients recover unpaid entitlements, retrieve monetary compensation for unlawful termination and discrimination, and help them to return to work or get new jobs.

WEstjustice Employment Project Senior Solicitor, Tarni Perkal said employment is crucial in ensuring migrants can build their lives in Australia and through their services they help them to know and understand their work entitlements.

"Employment plays a big part in refugee and migrant settlement. It's at the heart of their identity and unfortunately they're not always afforded the respect they deserve," Tarni said.

"Over the last few years since the program was established, we've managed to retrieve orders for over \$300,000 in unpaid wages and super, and compensation for unfair treatment which goes some way to making sure they get the fair go that Australia is known for."

Tarni said they will use the prize money to boost their services in order to continue to help more people, and advocate for changes to help all migrant workers.

"We plan to use the prize money to employ more bilingual community members to liaise with clients and help us get better employment outcomes for their communities," Tarni said.

Social Impact Award

Community Legal Centres Queensland Stones Corner, QLD

Community Legal Centres Queensland was recognised for successfully campaigning for increased Government funding for their services, which provide support and advocacy to 33 independent, community-led legal centres across Queensland.

Titled 'Reverse the Cuts' the campaign was initiated in response to proposed Government funding cuts in their services – which includes the provision of legal advice, information and representation to vulnerable people needing legal help and advice.

Following extensive community and government engagement, the campaign resulted in the Federal Government granting \$55.7 million nationally over three years to the legal services sector, \$39 million of which will be directed to Community Legal Centres Queensland and \$16.7 million to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Legal Services.

Communications Manager, Cathy Baker said they started the Queensland component of their campaign so they could continue to provide their vital services which support people experiencing disadvantage.

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“In the long queue of women experiencing violence, refugees about to be deported and older people suffering elder abuse we see every day, half will be turned away. We put a line in the sand and decided we had to do something about it,” Cathy said.

“My team had \$700 to run a campaign in Queensland – and this helped provide the means to raise \$8,000 more in fundraising. This then assisted in helping us secure a portion of the \$55.7 million government grant. We think that’s a pretty good return on investment.”

Cathy said they will use the prize money to start the next phase of their campaign.

“We’ll use the prize money to deliver phase two of our campaign, which will include educating decision makers in government about the important services we provide for everyday Queenslanders. The funds will help us get on with the job of giving people the legal support they so desperately need and so rightly deserve,” Cathy said.

Proud Awards sponsor ME – the bank for you, generously provided the \$30,000 prize pool, divided among the winners in the three award categories. Winners received \$10,000 in a ME Everyday Transaction account to use to further their programs or initiatives.

Find out more about the HESTA Awards program at hestaawards.com.au

HESTA

HESTA is an industry superannuation fund dedicated to those working in the health and community services sector. HESTA has **over 830,000 members** and manages more than **\$40 billion** of members’ assets.

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