

# Media Release

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## Winners announced in national community sector awards

An outreach program for homeless youth, a not-for-profit art studio for artists with intellectual disabilities and an organisation helping achieve greater equality for women with disabilities received top honours at the 2016 HESTA Community Sector Awards.

Announced at an awards ceremony held in Sydney last night, the winners were selected from 12 finalists from across Australia.

The awards acknowledge outstanding contributions to social justice in Australia, through the provision of high-quality services, programs and initiatives across the categories of Unsung Hero, Outstanding Organisation and Social Impact.

HESTA CEO, Debby Blakey, said this year's winners demonstrate the vital work those in the sector do to build stronger and more inclusive communities, enhancing the wellbeing of individuals experiencing disadvantage.

"This year's winners are delivering innovative programs and services that have a tremendous impact in shaping society and improving the lives of others," Ms Blakey said.

"Their work breaks down the barriers of disadvantage, helping people who are often socially excluded or facing hardship, improve their lives. We are proud to acknowledge the contribution they make and to give them the recognition they deserve."

### The 2016 winners are:

#### Unsung Hero Award

**Anne Mitchell**  
**Concern Australia**  
**Melbourne, VIC**

Anne is recognised for leading the Steps Outreach Service, a program of Concern Australia, providing support and advocacy to young homeless people.

Since 1985, Steps has helped over 8,000 young people get off the streets and find appropriate accommodation and shelter. Anne's team provides practical support to young people on the steps of Flinders St Station in Melbourne, providing clothing, food, shelter and transport. The paid workers and volunteers also help give these young people hope and self-worth by providing someone trusted to talk to and the tools to create a more positive future.

"We have seen we can make a difference in people's lives and we do it one person at a time," Anne said.

"We support young people as long as they need it, which is a key difference of the Steps program. For instance, we're working with the children of past clients to keep them connected to education, as it's one of the main pathways out of generational poverty."

Reliant solely on grants and donations, Anne has spent the last 18 years sustaining the 'Steps' program through fundraising and advocacy.

Anne said she wanted to use the prize money to further develop the Steps Outreach Service, as part of Concern Australia.

"Over 18 years we've kept Steps going with blood, sweat and tears, working on weekends and struggling for funding as a lot of not-for-profits do, so this prize money will make a big difference for us," Anne said.

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## Outstanding Organisation Award

### **Arts Project Australia Northcote, VIC**

Awarded for supporting artists with an intellectual disability, providing them sustained and individualised pathways into the professional visual arts.

Established in 1974, Arts Project Australia was the first full-time not-for-profit art studio in Australia for artists with intellectual disabilities. More than 120 artists attend the Northcote studio each week, where they're encouraged to find their own voice, artistic style and expression in a safe, supportive environment.

Alongside the studio, the gallery's annual program of rotating exhibitions features artists' work alongside the work of the broader contemporary art community.

Arts Project Australia Executive Director, Sue Roff, said the program has seen artists exhibit their works in leading galleries across Australian and around the world.

"Our artists are treated as professional artists and provided with high-quality material, guidance and mentoring from professional staff artists, vocational pathways and an opportunity to earn income from the sale of their artwork," Sue said.

"But it's not about the money - when our artists see their work framed, hanging on a wall in a gallery, it gives them an amazing sense of self-worth and confidence."

## Social Impact Award

### **Women with Disabilities Victoria Melbourne, VIC**

Women with Disabilities Victoria (WDV) is recognised for their contribution to government policies aimed at achieving greater social justice and change for women with disabilities in Victoria.

The organisation's 11 employees and 300 plus members work to ensure the voices and stories of women with disabilities are heard and considered when public policy and government recommendations and decisions are made.

WDV works to change derogatory attitudes towards women with disabilities that often result in a high rates of violence and social and economic exclusion and were influential in the recommendations handed down in the Royal Commission into Family Violence.

WDV Executive Director, Keran Howe, said the Royal Commission was critical in raising awareness in the community about women with disabilities experiencing family violence.

"The Royal Commission was a really important opportunity for us to raise awareness that women with disabilities are twice as likely to experience family violence than other women and to get government take up these issues and provide a policy response."

Keran said the organisation would use the prize money to update their website.

"We want to give our website a lot more energy, update it, and make it a lot easier for people with functional needs to use," Keran said,

Each winner received \$10,000 towards professional development, or to further implement their programs. The \$30,000 prize pool is generously provided by long-standing Awards sponsor **ME** – the bank for you.

Find out more about the HESTA Awards Program at [hestaawards.com.au](https://hestaawards.com.au)

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