

30 October 2018

Community heroes receive top honours at national awards

Winners from NSW, SA and WA were recognised for their life-changing work and inspiring advocacy at the 2018 HESTA Community Sector Awards in Sydney last night.

South Australian, Sue Miers, was recognised for her two decades of tireless work addressing the impact of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD).

VisAbility's ROAM project team based in Victoria Park, WA took out a top award for their cutting-edge delivery of mobility and orientation services to people who are blind or visually impaired using real-time, remote video assistance.

And NSW organisation, End Rape on Campus Australia, won for their ground-breaking advocacy, helping to lead the fight to end sexual violence in universities and residential colleges.

HESTA CEO, Debby Blakey said this year's winners have all made invaluable contributions to social justice and have displayed outstanding leadership skills in developing programs advocating for and supporting those in need.

"This year's winners have demonstrated the highest qualities of the community sector through their unwavering commitment to addressing social justice in their communities. Through their dedication and professional excellence, they've supported so many in our community, helping to pave a pathway to a better future."

"The hard work and heart and soul they have put into building stronger communities is truly inspiring. We're immensely proud to be able to help recognise them through the HESTA Community Sector Awards."

The winners were selected from 10 national finalists, and were recognised for their 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 winner of each award category will share in a \$30,000 prize pool, courtesy of proud awards sponsor ME – the bank for you.

The 2018 winners are:

Unsung Hero Award

Sue Miers
National Organisation for Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders
Normansville, SA

Sue was recognised for her voluntary work supporting families struggling to manage and understand Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) and for playing an instrumental role for the past 20 years establishing the recognition of this disability in Australia.

Sue is the founder of the National Organisation for Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (NOFASD). Although she retired from the board in 2015, she continues to volunteer and provide support to parents, carers and employees working with those living with FASD.

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For the past 20 years, NOFASD has focused on prevention and Sue's continuing voluntary contribution has led the way in building NOFASD's social media presence through awareness campaigns that have been viewed by hundreds of thousands of Australians.

"There is still not a lot of understanding about FASD in the wider community and in our education system," Sue said.

"Parents and carers often struggle to get their children understood because these children actually have undiagnosed brain damage. It can be a very lonely journey and having other parents with lived experience to talk to can be really helpful."

Sue said the prize money would help NOFASD expand their support services and advocacy.

"We want to increase the resources and support we can provide parents and children, and at the same time keep raising awareness, which will hopefully lead to less children born with FASD and more positive outcomes for those who are living with FASD."

Outstanding Organisation Award

VisAbility Ltd

Victoria Park, WA

VisAbility Ltd was recognised for developing an innovative model of remote delivery of orientation and mobility services (O&M) to people who are blind or vision impaired living in regional areas.

The project supports blind or vision impaired people by using the latest technology paired with O&M services.

For the last three years VisAbility's ROAM team has developed a way to provide instructions from their Victoria Park office via a video link, connecting them with regional clients. An O&M specialist from the ROAM team can give advice in real time, assisting a blind or visually impaired person and their carer move around their local community.

Being able to provide this service remotely has been life changing as regional clients typically had to wait months to receive O&M instruction.

There are few O&M providers in WA as this highly specialised skill is not taught in the state. With O&M specialists in short supply, this project has greatly improved access to services for those living in regional and remote areas of WA.

VisAbility Ltd CEO Dr Clare Allen said that providing orientation and mobility services could be very expensive and it could take clients in regional and remote areas up to a year to get an initial check.

"We really wanted a fast, efficient and effective way to help meet clients' needs. If you imagine being blind and effectively house bound, this service helps give people their independence, which is life changing and completely transformative," Clare said.

"Our team at ROAM came up with the idea and developed the use of the technology. There is really nothing like this program anywhere else in the world."

"I am just so proud of our team who are really showing that we can lead the world in helping people who are blind or visually impaired connect with their community and the world around them."

Clare said the ROAM team was already planning the next phase of the program and would use the prize money to upgrade technology and to also raise awareness of the service so they can help many more people.

Social Impact Award
End Rape on Campus Australia
Sydney, NSW

End Rape on Campus Australia (EROC) was recognised for their leadership in working to end sexual violence at universities and residential colleges. They support survivors and through their advocacy, promote prevention through education, and policy reform on campus and at the state and federal government levels.

The EROC team has recently established a centralised national database, allowing students to lodge complaints or access university policies and procedures related to sexual assault.

They have lodged multiple complaints on behalf of students and have filed a historic first national complaint under the Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency.

Through quality, evidence-based research and the relationships they've built by working closely with the media and other sexual assault organisations, EROC has become a leading voice in the sector, receiving their first funding grant.

EROC Founder and CEO, Sharna Bremmer said they believe that everyone has a right to access education free of sexual violence and the fear of sexual violence.

"We work predominantly with students sexually assaulted on university campuses across Australia," Sharna said.

"I was recently talking with a student who said that without our support she wouldn't have been able to graduate and for us that's really the ultimate goal."

EROC is run by volunteers and Sharna said the \$10,000 prize money would help the organisation to continue their advocacy efforts and support services for students.

"Over the last three years our total operating budget was just \$3000, so this prize money is going to make such a huge difference and help us to support students every day," Sharna said.

For further information and photos from the event please visit: hestaawards.com.au

Ends.

HESTA

HESTA is an industry superannuation fund dedicated to those working in the health and community services sector. HESTA has over 860,000 members and manages more than \$46 billion of members' assets.

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