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Successful campaign for equal pay for community workers is recognised at annual union awards

The Australian Services Union's long and ultimately successful fight for equal pay for women in the social and community sector has been recognised with two awards from the ACTU.

The ASU was the joint winner of the Workplace Campaign of the Year award, alongside a smaller but equally tenacious campaign by the NSW Nurses Association's Griffith Base Hospital branch in their fight for more staff.

ACTU President Ged Kearney said both unions won their campaigns because they demonstrated unwavering commitment and determination in their pursuit of justice for workers.

"The pay equity ruling by Fair Work Australia last month was a landmark in the fight for equal pay for women and ended decades of undervaluation of the work of the 150,000 women who do this very important work," she said.

"In NSW, the nurses refused to give in to management's refusal to adequately staff the Griffith Base Hospital with enough clerical workers and nurses, taking their fight to the media and local politicians.

"Both these campaigns ultimately show that when workers combine collectively as a union, they can achieve the unimaginable.

"Both unions fought hard and refused to give up so that their members, who go to work each day to care for some of the most vulnerable members of our community, could have a better life.

The ACTU National Union Awards are an annual event sponsored by the ACTU and ME Bank to reward the unsung heroes of the union movement.

The ASU also featured in three other key awards, with the Jennie George Award for contributions to women's advancement in unions going to Maree McDermott from the NSW and ACT branch.

The ASU's NSW and ACT branch Secretary Sally McManus was also recognised with the award for Best Media Quote.

The national branch also took out the Best Communications Strategy for the equal pay case, sharing that award with the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union for its "Australia's Future" campaign for industry policy and government investment in the car industry.

Delegate of the year George Oei, from the Transport Workers Union's NSW branch. He works as a baggage handler at Qantas, and has been a leader and mentor for his workmates in the campaign for job security.

Other recipients included Erina Early from United Voice's Northern Territory branch for Organiser of the Year, the Electrical Trades Union Queensland branch, which received the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Award.

Special mentions were also awarded, including Queensland Teachers Union for their fundraising efforts for the Natural Disaster Relief Fund, which has raised nearly \$400, 000 to assist members after the devastating floods and cyclone that struck Queensland in 2010 and 2011.

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The Community and Public Sector Union health and safety team also received a special mention for their work in consulting with the Department of Human Services to improve the health and safety arrangements across Centrelink, Medicare Australia, Child Support and CRS Australia offices.

Special mentions also went to Deborah Vallance from the AMWU and Victorian Trades Hall Council's Cathy Butcher, for their significant contribution to the union campaign throughout the harmonisation of the workplace health and safety laws.

"These awards acknowledge the union officials and delegates who devote their days to working for a better life," Ms Kearney said.

"The stories of these delegates are inspirational.

"Often they come under immense pressure from their employers for undergoing their duties as elected union representatives, advocating for workmates, negotiating pay rises, and informing colleagues of their rights. They are not paid for any of this."

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