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Local Touch legends wanted: Bunnings Home Ground Heroes nominations open



2023 Bunnings Home Ground Hero, Jemma Taikato awarded by her students

Nominations are open to celebrate the unsung heroes whose dedication and generosity help their Touch communities thrive, with selected recipients receiving \$5,000 to reinvest in grassroots sport

As one of New Zealand's most community-driven sports, Touch relies on the tireless commitment of volunteers and supporters who give far beyond the sidelines to help players train, compete and represent their communities.

Bunnings Home Ground Heroes is inviting Touch communities across Aotearoa to recognise the volunteers who make the game possible. From organisers and coaches to those working tirelessly behind the scenes, the initiative celebrates the unsung individuals whose passion, commitment and mahi keep Touch thriving at a grassroots level.

Over the past five years, 20 Home Ground Heroes from communities nationwide have been recognised for their outstanding contributions to Touch. Their stories reflect the heart of the Touch community and highlight the lasting impact one dedicated person can make.

Touch NZ Chief Executive, Joe Sprangers, said the partnership continues to make a meaningful difference.

"Through the Bunnings Home Ground Heroes programme, Touch NZ has the opportunity to recognise and celebrate the people who are the backbone of our communities. In partnership with Bunnings, we've been able to acknowledge 20 remarkable individuals over the past five years, and we're excited to continue celebrating these everyday heroes," said Sprangers.



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Bunnings NZ General Manager, Melissa Haines said, “Touch communities thrive because of everyday New Zealanders who give their time and energy to others. Home Ground Heroes lets us support that impact in a meaningful way, helping local volunteers do even more for their players and whānau. With many of our own team part of the Touch community, we’re proud to open nominations for 2026 and continue backing the people who strengthen their communities.”

Past recipients have used the support to expand local initiatives, reduce barriers for families and invest in equipment that strengthens participation. Among them is winner **Jemma Taikato**, who is widely known as the heart of Nelson’s touch community and has proudly reached record participation, growing each year.

“The funding allowed us to invest directly in our people by sending our lead coach to Touch NZ qualification courses,” says Taikato. “Bringing that high-level knowledge back to our module has been a game-changer. We’ve implemented new coaching pathways and provided better guidance for our junior coaches.”

In Methven, Canterbury, local legend **Jason Watene** is a driving force behind community sport, tirelessly fundraising for teams and coaching countless school teams His dedication ensures players never miss a chance to participate. With the \$5,000 he’s been able to “directly support our seniors national team’s involvement in the New Zealand Secondary School Touch tournament each year. In return, this helps the school fund their own participation in the tournament, creating a wonderful cycle of growth”

Leisel Van Schalkwyk, Bunnings Home Ground Heroes 2023 winner also transforming the local sporting community in Canterbury, established NZ’s first all-girls module to boost participation, creating a fun, inclusive environment for 210 girls. Leisel says “The grant came at the end of our first year and gave us incredible momentum. The local and national publicity lead to an increased interest and we were able to promote a positive, high energy, fun space for young female touch players to thrive.”

The 2026 Bunnings Home Ground Heroes initiative now invites Touch communities nationwide to nominate those who embody this same dedication. Nominators will simply need to outline how their nominee positively impacts the Touch community and how a \$5,000 grant would further strengthen their efforts.

Nominations close Saturday, 14 March 2026, with winners to be announced in mid-April.

For more information on the 2026 Bunnings Home Ground Heroes programme, visit:

[Touch New Zealand - Bunnings Home Ground Heroes \(touchnz.co.nz\)](https://touchnz.co.nz)

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Notes to the editor:

Since 2018, Bunnings Warehouse has been the principal partner of Touch New Zealand and the naming-rights sponsor for all national tournaments. In 2026, the Bunnings Home Ground Heroes initiative returns to recognise the volunteers who go above and beyond to support the Touch community, with five recipients each receiving \$5,000 to reinvest locally. Making a positive difference in the Touch community is just a small way Bunnings can lend a hand to the communities in which we operate.

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