

Sustainable Media Center Announces 2025 Social Media Heroes Awards

Sustainable Media Center honors 5 leaders: for a safe digital world: the Roberts family, Maria Ressa, Sarah Gardener, Sarah Wynn-Williams, Seán Killingsworth.

NEW YORK, NY, UNITED STATES, December 8, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The [Sustainable Media Center](#) announced the recipients of the 2025 Social Media Heroes Awards. Now in its second year, the awards honor five leaders whose work is helping build a healthier digital world: Toney and Brandy Roberts, Maria Ressa, Sarah Gardener, Sarah Wynn-Williams, and Seán Killingsworth. Each honoree represents a different path toward a future where young people, creators, families, and citizens have more control over the digital environments that shape their lives.

“

This work only moves when generations work together. Young people feel the harms most directly. These honorees show what intergenerational partnerships can look like.”
said Emma Lembke, Director of Gen Z Advocacy at SMC



The awards grew out of a year of work that brought together parents, technologists, researchers, Gen Z advocates, and policymakers who are looking for practical ways to reduce harm online. The Sustainable Media Center has been working with communities across the country that feel the real cost of today's digital systems. The stories of these communities shaped the criteria for this year's awards, and the honorees reflect the range of leadership needed to create a more human and accountable digital landscape.

2025 Social Media Heroes Award Recipients

Toney and Brandy Roberts

Toney and Brandy Roberts became national advocates after losing their 14-year-old daughter Englyn to the pressures and dangers of social media. Their leadership has brought new urgency to the movement for strong, enforceable online protections for youth. They have spoken directly with lawmakers, schools, and families, making the case that responsibility cannot stop at the edge of a screen. Their work helped push youth mental health and platform accountability into the national conversation in a way that has reshaped both policy debates and public awareness.

Maria Ressa

Maria Ressa is a journalist, Nobel Peace Prize laureate, and cofounder of Rappler. She has spent years showing the world how disinformation campaigns and targeted manipulation weaken democracies. Her work illustrates what happens when powerful digital systems operate without checks or transparency. Ressa continues to be one of the clearest voices on truth, trust, and the human cost of online violence. Her leadership influences everyone who works to defend factual reporting and open societies.

Sarah Gardener

Sarah Gardener is a leader at The Heat Initiative, an organization focused on reducing tech-enabled harm. Gardener's work has helped secure

real, measurable wins that have forced

platforms to acknowledge their role in rising youth harm. Under Gardener's leadership, The Heat Initiative has demonstrated that public pressure, legal clarity, and strategic advocacy can move



Emma Lembke, Director of Gen Z Advocacy



Steven Rosenbaum, Executive Director of the Sustainable Media Center

large companies toward safer design choices. Gardener's work helps set a higher standard for what responsible technology can look like.

Sarah Wynn-Williams

Sarah Wynn-Williams is the author of *Careless People: A Cautionary Tale of Power, Greed, and Lost Idealism* and a former director of global public policy at Facebook. Her book offers a rare inside view of how one of the most powerful social platforms in the world made decisions that shaped politics, speech, and safety. By documenting the gap between the company's public promises and its internal practices, she has helped the public understand how profit-driven choices can fuel real-world harm, including harms to young people. Her work has come at personal cost and has sparked a global conversation about accountability, transparency, and the duty of large tech firms to the communities they serve.

Seán Killingsworth

Seán Killingsworth is the founder of the Reconnect Movement, one of the most influential Gen Z-led communities working to reshape the relationship between young people and technology. Killingsworth's message emphasizes agency, community support, and the idea that digital life should enhance real life rather than replace it. His work has reached millions of young people and has helped them rethink their relationship with their phones, their time, and their mental health. The Reconnect Movement continues to grow as a model for youth-led change that resonates far beyond the digital safety space.

"Our goal with these awards is straightforward. We want to shine a light on people who choose action over resignation," said Steven Rosenbaum, Executive Director of the Sustainable Media Center. "There is a growing belief that social media is broken beyond repair. These honorees prove that change is not only possible but already underway. Each of them brings a different kind of leadership, and together they give us a picture of a digital future that feels more human and more grounded in care."

"This work only moves when generations work together," said Emma Lembke, Director of Gen Z Advocacy at the Sustainable Media Center. "Young people feel the harms most directly, and older generations hold much of the power to change the systems that create them. When we combine those strengths, real progress becomes possible. These honorees show what that kind of partnership can look like."

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