

Always Was, Always Will Be

2020 Eastern Metropolitan Region NAIDOC Awards

Elders Award proudly sponsored by Boorndawan Willam Aboriginal Healing Service

Presented to Uncle Eric Peters



“Uncle Eric Peters has been a longtime supporter of many causes over the years including Oonah Belonging Place. He has so generously given his time and energy to many projects and programs including our Elders project, the Healesville 150 year celebration, Reconciliation events, The Healesville Indigenous Arts Enterprise, Oonah Learning Centre and most recently sharing his story on zoom for the who’s your mob group that is being facilitated by Gail Crozier for the Bringing Them Home project. I am so impressed with his skills using online platforms and I hear he is a regular on Facebook.

Uncle Eric and his beloved wife Aunty Marg and Sister Aunty Dot Peters were instrumental in the development of the Victorian Aboriginal Remembrances Committee of which he is still a part of today. His presence is also ensuring that Aunty Marg and Aunty Dot remain linked. Uncle Eric was always there to support his sister except when Collingwood were playing North Melbourne then the sibling rivalry would come out.

It’s hard to remember a community gathering that Uncle Eric hasn’t been at and he is always the life of the party. He loves to tell a yarn and you have to be careful and pay attention to what he is saying because he can be very creative in what he is saying and before you know it you are completely sucked in hook line and sinker, then he will burst out laughing because he has such a great poker face and is quite believable. Apart from when he lost his precious Aunty Marg I have never seen him without a smile on his face and he just lights up the room. I always feel uplifted after having a yarn with Uncle Eric and I appreciate all that he has done and continues to do for our community. He is an inspiration and role model and most deserving of the Elder Award for 2020.”

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Arts Award proudly sponsored by Mullum Mullum Indigenous Gathering Place

Presented to Leanne Henderson



Leanne Henderson is an Indigenous Community member who began engaging with Oonah originally as a participant in our Community Art Group at the beginning of 2017, then not long after signed up to become a volunteer with us in May of 2017.

Leanne continued to engage with the Art Group, working on projects such as the Bunyip Project. This is where Leanne found a love for 3D art, particularly using natural materials. Utilizing the techniques, she learnt in class, Leanne created a beautiful 3D art piece for the 2018 NAIDOC Art Exhibition Oonah held at the Memo. This piece was sold, much to Leanne's surprise. After this, Leanne continued to experiment with this style of art, creating more 3D sculptures which would feature in 2019 and 2020 NAIDOC Oonah Art Exhibitions. Most recently she has created an incredible Rainbow Serpent 3D piece for Oonah's virtual NAIDOC Art Show.

Leanne uses art to express her cultural identity and learn more about her heritage. All pieces tell a story and share Leanne's journey of connecting to Community. However, this whole time Leanne has not seen herself as the deadly artist she truly is. We all love seeing her creations and we think she deserves a lot more credit than she gives herself. We are so proud of the artist she has become, and we cannot wait to see what she produces in the future.

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Community Award proudly sponsored by Eastern Health

Presented to Carolyn Dawe



“Carolyn has been working for community for many of years, always quietly without recognition. She is always willing to go above and beyond to make things happen. She works in Admin, Accounts, training of staff, quality control, project management for events.

An inspirational and supportive community member who has been supporting Mullum Mullum Indigenous Gathering Place and now Boorndawan Willam Aboriginal Healing Service through her dedication and commitment. She wouldn't ask for recognition as a quiet achiever, but she deserves it.”

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2020 Eastern Metropolitan Region NAIDOC Awards

Youth Achievement Award proudly sponsored by Swinburne University of Technology

Presented to Brandi McGregor



“Brandi has been going from strength to strength over the past few years and it has been true pleasure to watch her grow in confidence during this time.

When I first met Brandi just over 4 years ago now, she was attending weekly tutoring sessions at Oonah. She was a quiet and soft spoken, but after a while she warmed up and I got to know her a bit better. She would never miss a session with her tutor and was always attentive during her sessions. When she would arrive early and we would catch up on her week, sometimes she would tell me about the times she spoke up against racism and confronted difficult situations (often with a maturity beyond her years). Brandi also shared her love of netball, as well as the acceptance letter she had received in 2017 to attend SEDA the following year to complete her year 11 and year 12 studies.

Brandi was nominated and awarded with the EMR Youth Sporting Achievement in 2017 and it was after this that her confidence truly grew.

Brandi felt more comfortable in speaking up and using her voice. She showed genuine interest being more involved in her Community and learning the ‘behind the scenes’ of Oonah through student placement. Brandi also did placement with Badger Creek Primary School during this time.

After completing her placement hours in 2018, Brandi called Oonah at the start of 2019 to ask to continue learning through Work Experience.

In her own words:

“I want to know how you do for someone what you did for me; how you work out what they’re good at and what they want to achieve and then how you help them to achieve it”.

Brandi would travel from Healesville to Hawthorn East via public transport to attend her classes at SEDA, where she rarely missed a day. One of Brandi’s big achievements was when she developed a workshop for 30-40 SEDA students (her peers) during Reconciliation Week to help educate her classmates on what Reconciliation is and why Indigenous education is so important. In this workshop she engaged two local Indigenous young people to share their stories on racism, Stolen Generations and growing up proud in their culture.

Brandi had tried to engage another Indigenous young man to share his story, but as he was unable to attend, a Oonah staff member took his place to share her experience of reconciliation and what she has learn from working in an Indigenous organization as a non-Indigenous woman. This workshop was so successful that Brandi was then asked to take on the responsibility of being the cultural leader at her school, which saw her planning future cultural events/workshops. Her session inspired fellow classmates with Indigenous heritage to look further into the cultural as well as helped educate some peers who had previously made some distasteful remarks towards Brandi for holding the workshop.

When Brandi completed her studies with SEDA, she then took a Traineeship through AFL SportsReady at Oonah, which she has been completing this year. She finishes her studies at the end of November 2020 and we could not be more proud. Brandi has showed resilience, determination, commitment to her Community and commitment to her education over her years of study. This has supported her with the skills she needs for employment opportunities now, and in the future.”

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Non-Indigenous Community Service Award proudly sponsored by Oonah Health and
Community Services Aboriginal Corporation

Presented to Bernie Freeman



“Bernie has been volunteering with Oonah Aboriginal Health and Community Service since 2015. Before this he would volunteer with the Healesville Aboriginal Arts Enterprise with helping at markets, packing and unpacking etc. With Oonah he is there every week assisting with Tucker Bag pick up every Thursday & Friday, assisting at Oonah events and helping with any task, and is always one of the last to leave with Anne Jenkins (CEO).

For years he has volunteered cleaning Oonah, now he gets a little money but never said a bad word about anyone or anything. Because of his volunteering with tucker bag a lot of families have more food in their bags every Friday, he is a quiet man that has given so much to community over a long period of time and keeps giving. Our service would be lost without him.”

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Youth Achievement Award proudly sponsored by Karen Milward Consulting

Presented to Emily Mancel



“Emily is 17 years old and is a proud Aboriginal woman devoted to her local community. She embraces her culture, her peers and her Elders. Emily has grown up with Mullum Mullum since she started school and she has grown to be a wonderful role model and a leader for all future leaders.

I am proud to call Emily a true friend and I admire her resilience, her determination and community-spirit. Emily has been in foster care for the majority of her life and now lives by with her brother Anthony.

Emily’s maturity is well beyond her years and despite the challenges she and her brother have faced she always look so the positive side of life.

I admire Emily’s qualities and generous and caring personality. Emily always puts others before herself, she wants to see other people happy and she has been a great role model with helping the young people at VACCA’s youth /kids group while also helping teach kids the ways of cultural dance at Mullum Mullum.

Emily’s commitment to working with community and young people was recognised when she won the Maroondah Team award with the hip hop crew through Mullum Mullum.

I also know that Emily is close to her nanna Aunty Fran. She loves looking after her nanna and I love how Emily is devoted to her nanna and her brother.

Emily has proven that she can handle the toughest of situations and this year has successfully completed Year 12 at Mooroolbark Secondary College while also completing TAFE at Box Hill Institute.

Emily has always shown people that no matter what your life situation is you can always achieve what you put your mind to.

Emily has a bright future and her determination, compassion and devotion to community will ensure whatever path she takes in life her path will be a rewarding and fulfilling path. Please join me in recognising all of Emily’s hard work. Emily is very deserving of the Youth Achievement Award.”