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Ganbina general manager Jean Miller-Fowler with past Ganbina award recipient April Atkinson.

Photos: Bree Harding

# Rise up for Ganbina achievement awards

By Bree Harding

Ganbina means ‘rise up’ in Yorta Yorta language, and rise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth will do with the organisation’s support and encouragement.

Since 2005, Ganbina has been running annual awards to celebrate the achievements of young people’s education and employment from Year 7 to age 25.

Nominations will open late in September and Ganbina is reminding people the Youth Achievement Awards are for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth in the region, not just those signed up for Ganbina programs.

Family partnership worker April Atkinson, 23, won an employment award last year and said being recognised for finding work, staying employed and doing well in her role was inspiring.

“It’s given me more motivation to stay in work,” Ms Atkinson said.

“I feel like I want to build my role up from here.”

Ms Atkinson has worked at Rumbalara for three years and said she’d been “bouncing between different programs” but now felt settled working within The Australian Family Partnership Program at its only Victorian site from 15 Australian locations it’s been established.

In her role, she supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mums.

“It’s very rewarding,” Ms Atkinson said.

While the former Mooropna Secondary College student submitted her own application for the award she won, managers and teachers from workplaces or education facilities can also nominate staff and students.

Ms Atkinson’s association



Past Ganbina award winner April Atkinson.

with Ganbina and the awards goes further back than last year’s award season. Not only did she win Ganbina education awards while she was at school, but she has also engaged with several of the organisation’s programs.

“It’s really good. I enjoy all the Ganbina programs,” she said.

She recommends other youth have a crack at applying for the awards, especially while they’re in school because of the leadership programs in place.

“I was in the leadership program when I was at school and they made us speak in front of corporate businesses,” Ms Atkinson said.

Each year, the Ganbina awards are emceed by secondary school leadership students. The current leadership program lasts one year, when students are in Year 11. When she was a student, Ms Atkinson presented a couple of awards at the ceremony as part of her leadership studies. She recalled being nervous about the task.

“I was nervous; my voice was shaking. It was so scary,” she said.

“But it’s definitely gotten me out of my shell since Year 10 because I would never have done a speech in front of 300 people, but it’s a



Ganbina staff (back) Talia Trimboli, Dayna Seymour, Brad Argae, Valerie Atkinson, (front) Sharni Beeton and general manager Jean Miller-Fowler.

massive confidence booster for all the young kids in the area because if they’re not able to do that, I don’t think they’d be able to get that experience anywhere else.

“So them pushing us to do this is a good thing, even though I debated with them heaps about sitting it out.”

Now, Ms Atkinson loves doing speeches, putting her hand up to speak at friends’ birthdays — something she doesn’t think she would have had the courage to do before.

Ganbina general manager Jean Miller-Fowler said the awards, which will be officially presented to winners at an awards night on November 15 along with a cash prize, were an opportunity to celebrate people’s learning journeys.

“That’s what it’s about: celebrating and acknowledging that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can succeed,” Ms Miller-Fowler said.

“These awards are there to help acknowledge that and to inspire them to keep going and set goals.”

Applications for the awards close strictly on Friday, October 18 with no late nominations accepted, before a panel of three judges will decide the winners.

Four winners will be

selected in each category, which includes every year level from 7 to 12, full-time education for over-18s and full-time employment for over-18s.

A single winner will be named Youth of the Year.

Ms Miller-Fowler said Ganbina had been supporting and advocating for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and youth in the Goulburn Valley to help achieve their education, employment and training goals for 27 years.

“We have programs that support our families in the community from the age of five right through to 25,” she said.

“Each program is very different. Our school program offers financial support in particular and building confidence in parents to be more engaged in their children’s education.”

Support staff check in fortnightly with students to make sure they’re feeling supported and help them with funding and other things, such as creating resumes and signing them on to Ganbina’s driver’s program, where they can get access to lessons.

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