

Acknowledgement of GARY LEE OAM

It's my great pleasure to acknowledge the work of Gary Lee, who in this year's Australia Day awards was the recipient of a Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM), This is a significant award, 'for service worthy of particular recognition'. In this case, for community service. So, we are here now, paying Gary particular recognition, and thanks.

Gary adds his OAM to a string of other awards, among them:

- The **AFL Multicultural Community Ambassador** award in 2014 recognising his work on behalf of the City of Melbourne in bringing more than a thousand international students and migrants to AFL matches, banner making workshops, football clinics and tours of training facilities.
- In 2016 the Australia Day Council selected him for the **New Australian of the Year** award
- And in 2018 he was given a **Distinguished Contribution to International Education** award, by the International Education Association of Australia (IEAA),

Many of us can easily relate to (and are sometimes exhausted by) the energy and commitment that volunteering involves. Those who know Gary will recall meetings, activities sharing food and good fun we've had over the years. We also know volunteering is hard work. I am yet to see Gary exhausted.

I must therefore assume that volunteering is in Gary's DNA. He's been talking about the value of volunteers since he came to Melbourne in 1996. We are told he believes so strongly in it that he started volunteering in Melbourne three days after he landed in the country.¹ This is true. In the mid 1990s, I met Gary, leading a bunch of students at RMIT's World Week, once an on-campus festival - until he took it to the streets of Melbourne, and helped make it a city event.

Gary will not be Supressed. In 1997, he founded PoisE'n / PoisE'n Bollypop a non-profit dance collective that empowers international students through performing art, run solely by volunteers. Gary recruited, choreographed, directed and acquired gigs for the collective. In a conversation we had some years ago, he said although it was a an RMIT collective group, there were no RMIT rooms to book for rehearsal. So, they moved to corridors, and to a street, but were moved along by cleaners and security guards. He said students are keen to do things, but at the time he said there was no support. He said that 'Space is required and not given, so students hop between spaces.' I think perhaps Gary is a revolutionary.

He has, with amazing agility, combined work and fun. He operates just as elegantly in student and multicultural spaces - in organisations and community environments.

For example, as if being the City of Melbourne's International Education Manager is not enough, he's also been a member of various advisory committees, Gary is a member of numerous advisory committees including the North Melbourne Football Club's *The Huddle*, the Victorian Multicultural Commission (VMC) Regional Advisory Council, Crime Stoppers Victoria and the Australian Government's Best Practice in International Student Engagement Project.

There's never a dull moment with Gary – and we have witnessed many transformations, disguises, costumes and makeovers. We've been entertained, enabled, empowered and inspired by his energy.

Despite his apparent light-heartedness, however, Gary has a humanity that has endured and has supported many others. He has shown courage. He's not afraid to admit personal struggle.

I'll finish with a testimonial from another (former) student champion for international education, Thomson Chn'g who said:

You are an inspiration to many current and former students including myself. I'm glad to be associated with and surrounded by people like yourself and many others to continue doing good for the sector and for the students.

Gary, on behalf of past and present students, ISANA and the professional staff you've supported, thank you, and congratulations.

Paula Durance
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¹ InsiderGuides