

**Friday 10 March 2017**

**Teaching beyond the classroom walls and building multicultural school community wins national awards.**

Two Victorian teachers will receive national awards at the ASG National Excellence in Teaching Awards (ASG NEiTA) today at a ceremony in Melbourne.

Emma Larsen from Avenel Kindergarten and Carolyn Elliot from Pembroke Primary School (Mooroolbark) will join 11 other outstanding educators from across Australia in receiving the top awards.

Selected from more than 1350 nominations in 2016, the 13 national award recipients will be honoured for their inspiring and innovative contribution to teaching.

Emma Larsen who is a passionate believer that education extends beyond the classroom walls and integrates the community will receive an ASG NEiTA Early Career Teacher award.

"In a small town, a kindergarten serves as more than a place of learning—it is a gathering point, a meeting place for families and a social hub.

In conjunction with an open invitation for the community to participate and contribute to our programming and a service culture that values families as the first educators has helped create a family centred environment that I am really proud to have worked in."

Ms Larsen's greatest achievement has been introducing a play-based indoor-outdoor program that allows for extended periods of uninterrupted play where children are encouraged to take risks, explore and imagine.

ASG NEiTA Chairman Allen Blewitt says in her short career Ms Larsen has adapted to the challenges of teaching outside the classroom walls.

"I congratulate Ms Larsen for taking a holistic approach to children's learning and growing, working collaboratively with families and agencies, while viewing children as unique and capable learners. She has also had to address issues of homelessness and disadvantage at a developmentally appropriate level after an excursion to Melbourne where the children remarked on the 'people sleeping on the streets'. Working with the local Family Care office the children collected food for disadvantaged families at Christmas addressing issues of social injustice in an authentic manner, which Ms Larsen believes would not have happened if they remained within the confines of the kindergarten walls."



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Carolyn Elliott from Pembroke Primary School (Mooroolbark) was nominated by a parent and will receive an ASG NEiTA Community Engagement award for embracing local Burmese refugee families within the school and 'working tirelessly to help all families in need'.

As the principal of a 'high-poverty' school the majority of students come from backgrounds where their parents have low education levels and have not been able to break the cycle of unemployment and generational poverty.

"A substantial increase in the allocation of funds has been provided to Victorian schools in an effort to address issues of inequality and disadvantage. Despite this, data such as NAPLAN continues to indicate an overall decline in results. Therefore targeted 'equity in action' with a clear purpose and intent becomes crucial to enhancing overall student outcomes for all."

At her school Ms Elliott has instigated a three pronged approach towards addressing disadvantage and increasing students' outcomes through early intervention, consolidation and aspiration and community building.

For example, a refugee playground and early literacy and intervention program in partnership with Monash University was created to assist students who came into the school with minimal preschool opportunities or language skills. Funding and resources have also been allocated for an intensive literacy program which is available throughout the school with the support of a Multicultural Education Aide to guide students as they transition from English as an Additional Language to mainstream schooling.

Mr Blewitt says Ms Elliott's strategic approach not only addresses individual student needs but also addresses barriers that impact upon families and the wider community.

"I congratulate Ms Elliott for the long term sustainable impact she's been able to achieve through her leadership over eight and a half years. She has overseen a significant increase in student outcomes performing above the state average in NAPLAN tests and she has also inspired students to set high expectations of themselves despite their circumstances through a targeted numeracy program. This achievement is also attributable to community building which is a core aspect of the school that is seen as critical to success. When schools, families and community groups work together to support learning, children embrace the notion of lifelong learning."

Parents, grandparents, secondary student councils, school boards, councils, parent associations, committees of management and community organisations throughout Australia nominated these inspirational recipients.

Chief Executive Officer of ASG NEiTA, John Velegrinis says the ASG NEiTA recipients have all been recognised by their local communities for making a genuine difference to education and for supporting the educational aspirations families have for their children.



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"I congratulate Ms Larsen and Ms Elliott along with the other ASG NEiTA recipients. These outstanding teachers and educators have earned the respect of their communities through their hard work, building trusting relationships and ensuring their love for education gets passed on to their students, creating a culture of lifelong learning.

Teachers have an enormous responsibility and our ASG NEiTA recipients take on this responsibility with humility, striving to always be accountable for their actions, working beyond what is expected of them and expecting nothing in return. Their joy comes from the challenge of ensuring their students flourish academically and socially, giving students choices and offering holistic solutions. This is why ASG NEiTA has thrived for the last 22 years. The community thanks and applauds you for your contribution to teaching the next generation of young Australians."

The national awards are divided into four categories: leadership and development, innovation, community engagement and introducing, early career teacher. For more information on the 13 national awardees, including profiles go to: <http://www.asg.com.au/neita>

Eleven national award recipients will receive \$5000 professional development grants with one teacher getting the incredible opportunity to go to Space Camp in the U.S. One teacher is also awarded a \$2000 Disability Inclusion Grant.

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**For more information, please contact:**

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**Editor's notes:**

*The Australian Scholarships Group (ASG) is a member owned organisation, helping to create educational opportunities for children. ASG has been helping families and their children for more than 40 years. During this time, more than 530,000 children have been enrolled with ASG and more than \$2.5 billion in education benefits and scholarship payments returned to members.*

*The ASG National Excellence in Teaching Awards (NEiTA) started in 1994 in Australia and 1996 in New Zealand. Since inception, more than 34,000 teachers have been nominated by the community in the two countries, with more than 1050 teachers receiving more than \$940,000 in professional development grants, prizes and endowments.*

*For more information visit: [www.asg.com.au](http://www.asg.com.au)*



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