

Aunty Violet Sheridan

Aunty Violet Sheridan is a proud Ngunnawal woman who generously shares her personal connection to Country and passes on her knowledge so the next generation can learn about and understand the oldest continuous living culture in the world.

A quiet achiever who gets on with the change she hopes to see, Aunty Violet's position as a pillar of the community in Canberra and the region was recently recognised when she was named ACT NAIDOC Elder of the Year 2022.

Growing up on her mother's Country in Yass, Aunty Violet remembers it as "a terribly racist town". The hardship she and her family encountered in this rural town spurred her passion for sharing her culture and empowering her community.

However, the hardships also contributed to several of Aunty Violet's loved ones developing mental health conditions. She knows all too well the struggle many people have in seeking support that is appropriate for their culture and needs. That is why she wants to lend her voice to destigmatise mental health concerns.

"There's always someone to help," Aunty Violet said, whether a family member, friend or mental health professional.

She particularly wants to get this message out to young people and Canberra's senior citizens. Each group has their own unique mental health needs and deserves appropriate support.

To reduce stigma in our society, Aunty Violet believes we need to consider the language we use when we discuss mental health conditions and stop reinforcing negative stereotypes.

"It makes people scared," she said, "and then they don't get support and things get worse."

When she is feeling low, Aunty Violet has a support network she reaches out to, including having long chats with her sister. She is looking at taking up yoga soon to help improve her physical and mental wellbeing.

