

# LOCAL COMMISSIONER PROFILE



## MOSSMAN GORGE COMMISSIONER KAREN SHUAN



Karen Shuan is a community leader, mother, grandmother, dancer, artist and proud Kuku Yalanji woman. These are just a few of the roles she fulfils along with the role of Local Commissioner, and guardian and teacher of local traditional knowledge to the many people who visit the Mossman Gorge Centre. Karen works at the Mossman Gorge Centre greeting and sharing traditional knowledge with visitors from around the globe. The Mossman Gorge Centre is known to locals as the 'Gateway'. Karen could be considered in her role as the 'Gatekeeper', protecting and sharing the knowledge passed down to her by family, and keeping the age old traditions of the Kuku Yalanji Clan from the rainforest alive.

In her spare time Karen likes to paint and has become an acclaimed artist. Earlier this year her artwork was exhibited in the Mossman Gorge Centre. Her paintings express culture through animals, and regularly depict two worlds coming together as one in harmony.



A woman of many talents, Karen is also the owner and dance coordinator of the Wabul Wabul Kuku Yalanji Dance Group and confesses her passion lies in educating the next generation of community children by sharing the dancing knowledge and skills that were handed down to her by her mother. Karen says, "All of my talent is from my mother". Karen has passed this tradition and knowledge of dance and stories to her own daughters and would now like to focus on handing down the knowledge of language.

A fluent speaker of the local language Karen is aware the Kuku Yalanji language is quickly disappearing. She states that the younger community members do not speak the language as their Elders have done, and in many homes only English is spoken now. In 2017 Karen took on a role teaching language in Mossman Gorge and hopes the group will be reformed again this year. She is aware there has been an Indigenous cultural push to incorporate Indigenous language into local schools. Mossman State School has secured funding for a language teacher and plans to replace the Japanese class with local language. Karen continues to work toward keeping local language a focus in the community and is currently talking to kindergartens in the area about language and culture programs in the early years to create and nurture an awareness of the local Aboriginal culture.

Local Commissioner Karen Shuan speaks in language during conference as Elders in community frequently prefer to speak in language. Karen says you can see clearly from their body language the ease with which they understand. They find greater comfort in the familiarity of their own language. Karen explains, "This is why we need to keep our culture and language alive".