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‘On country’ aged care organisation achieves national recognition

An aged care centre that enables Elders to stay ‘on country’ and remain part of the local community is a finalist in the 2014 HESTA Aged Care Awards.

Umoona Aged Care Aboriginal Corporation, in the remote South Australian town of Coober Pedy, is one of five finalists in the Outstanding Organisation Award category.

The organisation has been recognised for encouraging Elders to revive interest in traditional culture by sharing their knowledge of languages and customs.

Umoona Aged Care Executive Officer, Sonia Mazzone, said the organisation was founded in 1998 so Elders could live in an aged care facility where their daily health needs could be met — while enabling them to remain active custodians of their cultural heritage.

“Our residents are involved in cultural activities such as art and craft workshops, singing and dancing, they attend Sorry camps and funerals, and collect bush medicine and materials for crafting artefacts,” Ms Mazzone said.

“We think nothing of travelling 600 kilometres to attend the Tjilpi Pumpa Festival or being the focus of a family history project documenting residents’ stories that involved a combined total of 4,000 kilometres of travel to preserve this knowledge.”

Ms Mazzone said the high level of community engagement was helping to close the disparity in the morbidity rate between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians.

“Our residents are now living into their high-seventies, eighties and even nineties, despite dealing with chronic diseases and frailty, and they are engaging in life to their fullest capacity,” Ms Mazzone said.

“Another benefit has been that many older community members now come home to country to be cared for in their final years in a secure, respectful environment that acknowledges their cultural responsibilities.”

Ms Mazzone and other interstate finalists will be flown to Melbourne to attend the awards dinner, where the winners will be announced on Tuesday 5 August 2014.

A \$30,000 prize pool will be shared among the winners, generously provided by long-term HESTA awards supporter ME Bank. The Outstanding Organisation and Team Innovation Award winners will each receive a \$10,000 development grant, while the Individual Distinction Award winner will receive a \$5,000 ME Bank *EveryDay* Transaction Account and \$5,000 towards further education.

HESTA is the leading super fund for health and community services, with more than 770,000 members and \$27 billion in assets. More people in health and community services choose HESTA for their super.

Visit hestaawards.com.au for tickets to the awards dinner or to learn more about the awards.

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