



FLOWERS FOR PM

Aimee Scott

TWO indigenous floristry graduates were elated after presenting Prime Minister Julia Gillard with a native flower bouquet last Thursday in a ceremony organised by GenerationOne.

"It was amazing," Natasha Drew said. "I was very nervous, I still am! She was really impressed by the big bouquet."

"She's a very nice lady," Loretta Cooper said. "You know how when you see people on TV they don't look the same in person? She looked exactly the same."

In October, Ms Drew and Ms Cooper completed a 12-week job-ready floristry program hosted by Mercedes Sarmini of Flowers by Mercedes in Waterloo.

Ms Cooper has decided to make floristry her career and will be join-

ing the team at Flowers by Mercedes in January.

"I love handing the arrangements I've made to people, and seeing the joy and happiness on their faces when they get them," she said.

She recommended job-ready training to other Indigenous Australians.

"My advice is for other people to get in and do it," she said. "You really do come out of your shell. It means you've got a career for your future, maybe not straight away, but one day at a time."

Sydney MP and Minister for Human Services and Social Inclusion, Tanya Plibersek, was also at the ceremony.

"It is fantastic to see businesses like Flowers by Mercedes running effective training programs and offering real job opportunities for the

local Indigenous community," Ms Plibersek said.

Mercedes Sarmini is passionate about her job-ready training program and plans to expand it in 2011.

"I am hoping to establish a relationship with the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations and hopefully they can see the demand for job-ready training with employment outcomes in the indigenous community," she said.

"I am very fortunate and extremely grateful to have established a relationship with GenerationOne, who have helped shine a light on this successful job ready floristry program."

GenerationOne is a community campaign to end indigenous disadvantage in one generation. Go to generationone.org.au.



Prime Minister Julia Gillard is presented with her floral tribute. From left, Mercedes Sarmini, Sydney MP Tanya Plibersek, Natasha Drew, Prime Minister Julia Gillard and Loretta Cooper. Photo: Melvyn Knipe