

Gunargie O'Sullivan

Community Radio Legend Award

This is a letter to nominate Gunargie O'Sullivan for the NCRA's Community Radio Legend Award. I have known Gunargie since 2008 when I started working at the NCRA as the Membership Coordinator. She was an active and enthusiastic member of the Aboriginal caucus, as it was then known, and had been involved with CFRO-FM in Vancouver for at least ten years before that.

At one point, she was doing five radio shows: one at CiTR-FM, one at CJSF-FM and three at CFRO-FM. And it is hard for me to think of a time with her when she didn't have a recorder at the ready and wasn't planning to cover an event or encouraging other people to do the same. She even did it in Ottawa when in town for just a few days.

I really got to know Gunargie because of her time on the NCRA Board and our work together on the Resonating Reconciliation project.

Gunargie was the one who found out about the funding from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Together, we came up with the idea for Resonating Reconciliation and the structure of the project and co-wrote it over the phone. She then pushed me to apply for significantly more money (which we got). And she used her connections to help ensure we had Indigenous representation and participation from the advisory committee to every other part of the project.

As project staff, Gunargie's commitment to community radio, her knowledge of the subject matter, her community connections, and her radio production skills are the main reason the project exceeded expectations, with stations producing more than 70 documentaries by a diverse range of participants in communities across Canada.

She also organized five amazing Red Jam Slam events, all also broadcast live. The day-long Red Jam Slam event I helped organize in Ottawa was a good example: broadcast live on CHUO-FM, more than 100 people attended in person, including a number of people from Ottawa's Inuit community. The day rotated from tears to laughter, and the performances included a modern dancer, a traditional drum circle, a comic book artist, a hiphop dance class, and a blanket exercise to help people understand the context of Canada's indigenous policies over hundreds of years. The event space included local artisans selling their work and lunch was catered by an Indigenous company.

I am wildly proud to have played a part of the Resonating Reconciliation project because it was grounded in first-person radio, covered stories that weren't being told anywhere else, and supported local stations and their communities. Some of the documentaries won awards and lots got coverage in other local media outlets. This is the kind of work the NCRA wants to promote.

Also, as a radio nerd, let it be said that at the Resonating Reconciliation workshop held at the NCRC in Winnipeg, Gunargie played one of the best pieces of radio I have EVER heard, interviewing her cousin about her alcoholism in the context of their mothers' experience in residential school.

Since that project, I know Gunargie worked with stations to include station's identifying the Indigenous territory they broadcast from as well as including more Indigenous language content.

I also want to mention the importance of Gunargie's diplomacy in an organization that was sometimes very conflicted. She focused on commonalities and the work to be done, rising above.

I feel like community radio in Canada is different and better because of Gunargie's involvement and for that reason, I am happy to nominate her for the NCRA's Community Radio Legend Award.

Thank you,
Shelley Robinson