2026 SALLY ISAAC MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP FUND* AWARD

Recognising the significant community contribution of young women 35 years and under

AWARDS BOOKLET

LOCAL GOVERNMENT LGPRO PROFESSIONALS THELEADINGVOICE

AUSTRALIAN COMMUNITIES FOUNDATION

*The Sally Isaac Memorial Scholarship Fund is a sub-fund of Australian Communities Foundation

BACKGROUND

Sally Elizabeth Isaac was an extraordinary woman and young leader in the Local Government sector who passed away in early 2009.

In 2006, at the age of 33, Sally was appointed Director of Community Programs at Yarra City Council where she was directly responsible for 342 professional staff working in aged care, childcare, community planning, advocacy, the arts and library services.

She had an amazing capacity for developing people and engaging in policy debate, and her absolute commitment to social justice in the community is sorely missed. People from all walks of life, from government to business, remark on the respect and admiration they had for Sally.

Sally was exuberant and brave, bright and insightful, brilliant and engaging. She was focused and intelligent with an enduring commitment to making things better. She was also humble, loving and full of fun, with wisdom beyond her years.

There was something truly special about Sally Isaac. For all who knew her, she will remain an inspiration and close to their hearts. Soon after her death her family, friends and colleagues met to discuss ways to recognise the incredible impact that she had on people's lives.

In 2009, they established the Sally Isaac Memorial Scholarship Fund, as a sub-fund of Australian Communities Foundation. Its aim is to raise funds and awareness to build a significant capital endowment which is distributed in perpetuity by way of an educational scholarship to help foster young women leaders who make a significant contribution to their community.

The award recipient receives a $10,000 educational scholarship for research or study in Australia or overseas.

PURPOSE OF THE AWARD

The purpose of the LGPro Sally Isaac Memorial Scholarship Fund Award is to:

- Recognise the enormous contribution that Sally Isaac made to public life, especially to those in the community who were more socially excluded and disadvantaged
- Raise the profile and support fundraising efforts for the Sally Isaac Memorial Scholarship Fund
- Foster and encourage future female leaders in the community who commit to making a significant improvement to the community.

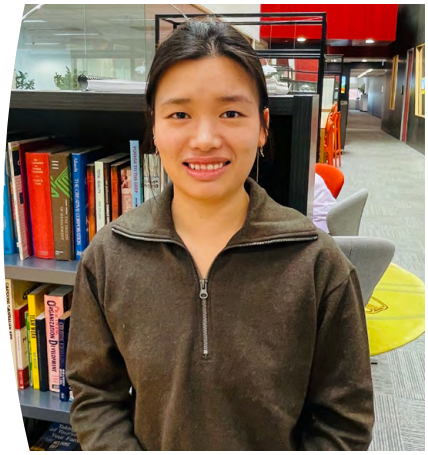


Sally Elizabeth Isaac

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WINNER





ANN LY

Community Advocacy Officer
Greater Dandenong City Council

Dr Ann Ly is a community advocate and emerging leader committed to fairness, inclusion and social justice. Born and raised in Greater Dandenong, she began working in local government at 17 and brings organisational discipline, strategic analysis and exceptional stakeholder management to her work. Her career shows a sustained ability to combine careful analysis with purpose, persuasion and community focus, building credibility across elected representatives, officers, partner organisations and people directly affected by policy.

As Secretariat of the Back Your Neighbour initiative, Ann coordinates the Mayoral and Councillor Taskforce Supporting People Seeking Asylum. Under her coordination, the initiative has grown to almost 50 local governments, more than 300 councillors and officers, and over 90 partner organisations across community, legal, faith and education sectors. Coordinating this broad coalition requires diplomacy, political awareness and disciplined organisation. Ann keeps participants aligned around a shared objective while ensuring lived experience remains central to the initiative's messages and priorities.

Ann strengthened the Taskforce through consistent advocacy resources, lived-experience storytelling and coordinated delegations to decision-makers. In 2026, she organised 15 meetings over two days involving councillors, technical advisers and people with lived experience, while broader engagement increased public understanding and national policy visibility. This work demonstrates strategic leadership rather than one-off advocacy: Ann creates structures, relationships and practical resources that enable many organisations to act consistently and sustain pressure across different levels of government.

Ann proposes to complete Deakin University's Graduate Certificate of Politics and Policy. Study in democracy, policymaking, governance and political communication would strengthen her ability to translate community needs into evidence-based advocacy and influence fairer outcomes across local, state and federal systems. The proposed study builds logically on these strengths. It would add formal policy and political communication capability to her demonstrated skills in coalition-building, stakeholder management and translating complex community concerns into clear action.

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HIGH COMMENDATION





ELLA DUNIAM

Senior Statutory Planner
Hepburn Shire Council

Ella Duniam joined Hepburn Shire Council during severe staff shortages and a significant planning backlog. She quickly became a pivotal member of the team, combining a strong work ethic with calm communication, practical systems improvement and a willingness to support applicants, colleagues and junior staff. Her progression into a senior role within months reflects professional judgement, adaptability and the trust she has built. She contributes not only through her own caseload, but by lifting capability around her.

Since joining Council in September 2025, Ella has issued more than 130 decisions, including over 100 permits and 30 post-permit decisions. Her reports are used as examples of good practice, while her coaching has strengthened the planning knowledge and confidence of business support staff and junior planners. These results show efficiency without sacrificing quality. Ella's technical reports, practical coaching and readiness to help with work at every level have supported backlog reduction and stronger, more consistent practice.

Ella's agribusiness background and commitment to rural communities inform her approach to planning. She carefully applies the Hepburn Planning Scheme, explains how applicants can achieve better outcomes and advocates for land-use decisions that support appropriate development while protecting rural character and function. Her approach demonstrates integrity and courage in a field where decisions can be contested, combining firm professional standards with patient explanation and practical guidance.

Ella is completing a Graduate Diploma in Urban and Regional Planning through the University of New England. She expects the study will deepen her understanding of the environmental, economic and social dimensions of development and complement the knowledge she already applies in practice. Together with her willingness to mentor others and improve systems, Ella expects it will strengthen her capacity to support applicants, guide colleagues and contribute to planning decisions that balance appropriate development with the long-term needs of rural communities.

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SPECIAL MENTION





CLARE HARVEY

Sustainable Programs Officer
Manningham City Council

Clare Harvey is passionate about local, sustainable and equitable food systems. As Sustainable Programs Officer at Manningham City Council, she creates inclusive environmental programs that connect climate action with community health, food literacy, cultural understanding and social connection. Her work is marked by creativity, collaboration and an ability to translate broad environmental goals into activities that people can understand, join and carry into their homes, schools and neighbourhoods.

Clare developed Preserving Tradition, a sold-out workshop series exploring Persian, Italian and Chinese food-preservation practices. She also expanded Home Harvest, which has attracted 1,260 attendees since early 2025, and led Manningham's participation in a net-swap initiative reducing wildlife risk and plastic waste. Across these initiatives, Clare combines strong program design with cultural curiosity and practical delivery, creating welcoming entry points into sustainability and shared learning.

At Doncaster Hill Community Garden, Clare led an accessibility-focused renovation and helped create a shared space producing fresh food for relief. She has also delivered the SEED school program, supporting more than 600 students and planting over 400 locally indigenous plants. These achievements demonstrate inclusive environmental leadership, with Clare considering accessibility, education and community ownership together and using partnerships and hands-on experiences to connect ecological outcomes with confidence, wellbeing and belonging.

Clare has commenced a Master of Environment at the University of Melbourne, combining conservation, public health and development subjects. She expects her postgraduate study will help her connect climate, biodiversity, food security and community development at a deeper level. Clare also expects it will strengthen her capacity to design inclusive local programs, complementing the practical program design, cultural responsiveness and collaborative approach already evident in her work.

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SPECIAL MENTION





SHARINA LADHARAM

Aboriginal Community Engagement and Events Officer

Melbourne City Council

Sharina Ladharam is a proud Wiradjuri woman committed to meaningful and lasting change for Aboriginal communities through local government. Her work is grounded in self-determination, cultural respect and the belief that Aboriginal voices should shape decisions, policies, places and experiences. Sharina combines cultural knowledge, relationship-building and practical delivery, working across organisational boundaries to ensure engagement is respectful and Aboriginal participation is meaningful rather than symbolic.

At Melbourne City Council, Sharina works across Aboriginal affairs, engagement, events, policy and Caring for Country. She led NAIDOC in the City in 2024, 2025 and 2026, with the 2026 event welcoming more than 3,500 people and creating opportunities for Aboriginal artists, businesses and organisations. Delivering these events over successive years demonstrates planning, partnership management and follow-through, while creating visibility, economic opportunity, cultural learning and stronger connections.

Sharina established the City's Aboriginal Staff Network and has contributed to First Nations strategies, the Stolen Generations Marker and culturally respectful projects across the organisation. Beyond her role, she is a foster and respite carer through VACCA and volunteers at her local foodbank. Her leadership is equally evident in the structures she creates for others, reflecting initiative, generosity and a consistent commitment to voice, belonging and self-determination.

Across public events, internal networks, policy initiatives and community service, Sharina demonstrates leadership that is practical, culturally grounded and generous. She builds trust, creates platforms for others and follows complex projects through from engagement to delivery. Her strength lies in connecting people and purpose: ensuring Aboriginal knowledge informs Council's work, creating opportunities for Aboriginal participation and enterprise, and helping colleagues translate respect and commitment into visible, sustained action.

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2026 AWARD NOMINEES

LISTED IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER BY SURNAME

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SHELDAN ALEXANDER

Team Leader Social Inclusion Action Group Officer

Greater Geelong City Council

Sheldan Alexander is an emerging local government leader with more than a decade of experience across community health, youth engagement, mental health promotion and social inclusion. She combines empathy and relationship-building with strategic thinking, evidence-based practice and a strong commitment to ensuring people affected by disadvantage can influence decisions that shape their lives. Across her career, Sheldan has shown that effective leadership begins with listening and turning lived experience into practical service design.

At headspace Geelong, Sheldan established a co-designed peer support program for young people awaiting mental health services. She later strengthened youth participation at Greater Geelong before leading the establishment of the Social Inclusion Action Group, embedding lived-experience leadership, accessible participation and community-led investment. Her work demonstrates co-design, persistence and an ability to build trust with people who may have experienced exclusion from conventional systems.

Sheldan has helped remove practical barriers to participation through accessible recruitment, participant remuneration and Access Enabler Payments supporting transport, childcare, interpreting and accessibility needs. She has shared learning through staff masterclasses, community forums and collaboration with other councils. The practical supports she introduced show close attention to why participation can fail, pairing strategic ambition with operational detail so community members can contribute without carrying unreasonable financial, caring or access burdens.

Sheldan's broader contribution is her ability to combine human insight with systems change. She creates credible pathways for people with lived experience to influence decisions, equips colleagues to work more inclusively and builds partnerships that extend learning beyond one program or organisation. Her leadership is thoughtful and evidence-led, but also highly practical: she notices the conditions people need to participate, acts on those barriers and ensures community knowledge is treated as expertise rather than consultation alone.

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MICHAELA ASCIAK

Coordinator Life Stage Strategy and Planning

Brimbank City Council

Michaela Asciak leads a multidisciplinary team at Brimbank City Council, translating research, community engagement and data into organisation-wide strategy. Her work is distinguished by systems thinking, care for the people she leads and sound judgement when navigating complex workforce and community issues. Michaela is particularly skilled at seeing connections between workforce wellbeing, service planning and community outcomes, bringing people into design processes while keeping reform grounded in evidence.

Previously as Wellbeing Advisor, Michaela designed and embedded Brimbank's first whole-of-organisation Wellbeing Framework, developed an onsite early-intervention employee assistance model and established Council's first Peer Support Network. She also led reforms to occupational violence, psychosocial risk and fitness-for-work practices through extensive consultation. This demonstrates initiative, consultation and sound risk judgement, moving systems from reactive responses towards clearer governance, earlier support and practical protections.

In her current role, Michaela led development of the Life Stages Framework, consolidating separate age-based strategies into one approach spanning early childhood to healthy ageing. Her partnership management and evidence-led advocacy helped secure earlier commitment of $3 million for kindergarten infrastructure in St Albans East. Her leadership is strategic and delivery-focused: she can analyse fragmented systems, develop a coherent model, secure cross-directorate support and maintain attention on communities experiencing disadvantage.

Michaela is completing a Master of Public Health, majoring in Policy and Strategy, at La Trobe University. She expects the study will strengthen how she uses population health, evaluation and systems planning to direct constrained resources, measure outcomes and design services for families experiencing disadvantage. Michaela also expects it will build on her demonstrated ability to connect evidence, organisational reform and community need, supporting her progression as a leader who turns complex analysis into practical, sustained and equitable action.

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MADELINE CONDY

Emergency Management Planning and Claims Officer

Latrobe City Council

Madeline Condy is an up-and-coming local government professional strengthening Latrobe City Council's emergency management, disaster recovery and community support capability. She combines technical discipline with a practical, people-centred approach, ensuring funding and compliance work translates into tangible benefits for residents affected by emergencies. Her progression from administrative support into a specialist role reflects adaptability, curiosity and a willingness to master complex requirements.

Madeline has helped secure more than $2.9 million in disaster recovery funding with a 99 per cent recovery rate. She improved evidence management and work tracking, enabling previously uncaptured expenditure to be claimed, including $58,672 in staff labour and plant costs following the August 2024 storms. These results demonstrate precision, persistence and strong cross-team coordination, converting careful administrative work into material financial and community benefit.

She also identified a gap in emergency support preparedness and developed practical training, guidance and resources for approximately 50 staff. This strengthened Council's ability to respond to residents experiencing displacement, property damage, financial stress and uncertainty with confidence, compassion and accurate information. The initiative shows Madeline looks beyond her immediate responsibilities, identifies system weaknesses and responds with practical tools that build capability across the organisation.

Madeline's effectiveness comes from combining analytical rigour with initiative and empathy. She can interpret detailed funding requirements, establish reliable evidence processes, coordinate contributions across teams and remain focused on what recovery work means for residents. Her willingness to build others' confidence shows emerging leadership, while her attention to detail protects public resources and strengthens Council's readiness. Together, these attributes position her as a trusted contributor in high-pressure and rapidly changing environments.

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MADALENE CURSIO

Community Safety Program Officer

Greater Dandenong City Council

Madalene Cursio has built her career around social justice, health equity and improved outcomes for vulnerable communities. Her experience spans alcohol and other drug harm prevention, community health, not-for-profit organisations and local government, guided by the belief that everyone should be able to live in a safe, healthy and connected community. Madalene combines specialist knowledge with resilience, initiative and a strong prevention focus.

At Greater Dandenong City Council, Madalene is leading development of Council's inaugural Alcohol and Other Drug Harm Prevention Framework. The work shifts the focus towards prevention, early intervention and community capacity-building, while recognising links between substance-related harm, homelessness, mental health and perceptions of safety. Developing the framework requires research, strategic thinking and the ability to build organisational support for an approach focused on underlying causes.

Madalene has strengthened partnerships across health and community safety networks and expanded Community Safety Month as a platform for engagement and education. Earlier, she helped establish a social enterprise sewing program at St Kilda Gatehouse and volunteered in women's crisis accommodation with Launch Housing. Her career demonstrates that this commitment is longstanding rather than role-specific, with Madalene consistently building trust, connecting services and creating practical opportunities for people experiencing disadvantage.

Madalene's contribution is defined by her ability to connect evidence, partnerships and compassion. She approaches complex issues without reducing people to a single experience or service need, and brings partners together around prevention, safety and inclusion. Her resilience enables her to work in challenging contexts, while her communication and relationship-building help shift organisational thinking. This combination allows her to influence both immediate programs and the broader systems that shape community wellbeing.

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GEORGIA ESPLIN

Senior Community Resilience Lead

Maribyrnong City Council

Georgia Esplin is a community development practitioner specialising in disaster recovery and resilience. She is committed to ensuring community voice, local knowledge and lived experience shape emergency management planning, moving communities from being recipients of services to active partners in preparedness and recovery. Georgia brings calm coordination, respect for lived experience and a strong understanding of community development to complex recovery environments.

Following the 2022 Maribyrnong River flood, Georgia worked with residents, community organisations, agencies and service providers to translate recovery needs into practical programs. She led the Maribyrnong Community Flood Plan, creating a community-owned resource embedding locally relevant risk and preparedness information within formal planning. The plan demonstrates her ability to convene diverse contributors, translate community insight into an enduring resource and give residents an active role in shaping preparedness.

Her projects include the award-winning Maribyrnong Insurance Project and the highly commended children's book We Watched Our River Rise. Both responded to needs identified by affected communities, using culturally safe information and supported storytelling to improve access, recovery and connection. These projects show creativity and sensitivity, with Georgia using accessible information and partnership to address insurance barriers, strengthen connection and ensure children's experiences are not overlooked.

Georgia's leadership is characterised by patience, credibility and an ability to work across systems while remaining grounded in individual experience. She turns consultation into shared ownership, creates safe ways for difficult stories to inform practice and builds partnerships that continue beyond a single recovery project. Her work demonstrates that community resilience is strengthened not only through plans and services, but when people are respected as knowledgeable partners with an active role in shaping decisions.

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ELIZABETH HALL

Customer Service Officer

Banyule City Council

Elizabeth Hall, known as Lizzie, brings dedication, professionalism and genuine care to her role as Customer Service Officer at Banyule City Council. Working across waste and rates enquiries, she takes ownership of issues, investigates solutions and follows up with residents to ensure concerns have been resolved. Lizzie's nomination reflects reliability, empathy and a strong service ethic, together with an ability to learn quickly and remain composed across varied enquiries.

Lizzie became the first new recruit to learn and support both waste and rates enquiries. She has contributed to efficient service delivery while managing a high volume of calls and emails, and has been recognised for proactively identifying urgent matters and ensuring they reach appropriate teams. Working across two complex service areas demonstrates versatility and sound judgement, while her clear communication supports residents navigating unfamiliar Council processes.

Her contribution extends beyond Council through mathematics tutoring, children's programs, community events and volunteering. She has supported people experiencing homelessness or family violence by connecting them with police, crisis services and shelters, and has volunteered with Montsalvat, Beach Missions and local sporting activities. Across these settings, Lizzie uses patience, problem-solving and communication to help people build confidence and access support.

Lizzie is studying a Bachelor of Secondary Education at La Trobe University, majoring in art and minoring in English. She expects the degree will prepare her to help young people build confidence, creativity, resilience and belonging. Lizzie also expects it will allow her to apply attributes already demonstrated in customer service and community work, including encouragement, clarity, persistence and a willingness to take responsibility for helping others, as she builds a positive contribution in education and community life.

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SAMANTHA LAMBERT

Coordinator of Early Years Programs

Whittlesea City Council

Samantha Lambert has spent more than 15 years improving outcomes for children, families and communities. Her career has progressed from direct early-years service delivery into leadership, guided by curiosity, continuous learning, practical innovation and a commitment to leading with kindness. Samantha combines ambition and learning with a supportive leadership style, questioning established approaches, testing ideas and guiding teams through change while keeping children and families central.

At Hume City Council, Samantha established the first Bush Kinder program within her service, working through planning, risk and implementation while building family confidence. The program continues almost six years later. At Whittlesea, she helped establish clinical governance structures and develop Council-specific guidance for service quality and risk. These examples show innovation and governance capability, taking ideas through to sustainable delivery while building systems supporting quality and accountability.

Samantha revitalised the Whittlesea Early Years Partnership, transforming a declining network into a forum attracting more than 50 participants each term. A participant-led Child Safety Community of Practice now enables local professionals to share emerging practice and respond collectively to reform. This demonstrates consultation, curiosity and responsiveness: rather than preserving an underperforming model, Samantha examined the need, involved peers in redesign and created conditions for participants to take ownership.

Samantha is completing a Master of Business Administration focused on strategy, finance, governance, innovation and change. She expects the MBA will broaden capabilities already demonstrated across service design, partnerships and governance, helping her plan sustainable services and influence investment. Combined with her practical experience and commitment to collaborative leadership, Samantha expects it will strengthen her ability to connect community experience with organisational decision-making and lead reform without losing sight of the children, families and practitioners affected.

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ALEXA LLOYD

Coordinator Sport and Recreation

Monash City Council

Alexa Lloyd is an emerging leader known for integrity, courage and accountability. In a traditionally male-dominated sporting environment, she respectfully challenges outdated practices and difficult behaviours while advocating for fair facility allocation, stronger governance and greater opportunities for women and girls. Alexa supports difficult decisions with evidence, clear expectations and sustained relationships with clubs and operators, balancing firmness with practical support.

Alexa led the technical specification and contract framework for a flagship multi-sport tennis and golf facility. Following its opening, she helped renegotiate the operating model, improving service coordination and supporting the tennis club's growth from 383 members before relocation to more than 800 by the end of its second year. This demonstrates commercial judgement alongside community purpose, keeping affordability, participation, inclusion and customer experience central.

She also redeveloped the Monash Sports Club Framework and personally met with all 96 sporting clubs during its first assessment round. The framework strengthened standards for governance, sustainability, participation and gender equity, while evidence-led consolidation made more facility capacity available to growing clubs. Meeting every club shows the depth of consultation behind her decisions and her ability to combine sector knowledge with consistent standards and evidence.

Alexa's leadership is effective because she brings courage and discipline to issues where competing interests and established practices can make change difficult. She listens widely, communicates expectations clearly and uses evidence to reach defensible decisions. Her knowledge of contracts, governance and facility operations is matched by a strong sense of fairness and public value. This enables her to improve systems while maintaining relationships and expanding sustainable, inclusive opportunities for community participation.

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ELLY MOUSELLIS

Digital and Social Media Officer

Bass Coast Shire Council

Elly Mousellis combines creativity, initiative and empathy with a strong commitment to accessible and engaging public communication. As Bass Coast Shire Council's Digital and Social Media Officer and Chair of its Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Working Group, she influences well beyond the traditional boundaries of a communications role. Elly uses her understanding of digital audiences to make Council clearer, more approachable and more inclusive.

Elly uses storytelling, video, humour, lived experience and interactive digital concepts to make local government understandable. Her campaigns have communicated fire preparation, environmental advocacy, tactile bin markers and accessible water wheelchairs, connecting practical Council work with people's everyday experiences. The range demonstrates versatility, curiosity and collaboration, with Elly finding the human relevance in complex subjects and selecting formats that help different audiences understand and act.

Between January 2025 and September 2026, Council's Facebook content received eight million views and more than 34,000 link clicks. Elly also created the internal newsletter The Loop and has led or supported Women in Leadership, Cultural Diversity Week, Pride Month and Wear It Purple initiatives. These results show creativity supported by strategic discipline, audience insight and an ability to create space for voices beyond communications.

Elly's broader strength is purposeful creativity: she does not treat engagement as attention alone, but as an opportunity to improve understanding, access and participation. She builds productive relationships with technical teams and community members, identifies the clearest story within complex information and adapts content for different needs. Her initiative within the equity working group and internal communications also demonstrates facilitation, organisational influence and a sustained commitment to making public institutions more understandable and inclusive.

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PEARL LI NG

Head of Smart City, Innovation and Improvement

Casey City Council

Pearl Ng is a strategy and transformation leader whose career spans engineering, technology, consulting, the built environment and local government. Across these fields, she has remained focused on solving real problems and ensuring innovation serves a clear community purpose. Pearl combines curiosity with strategic discipline, asking how technology and organisational change can address genuine needs rather than treating innovation as an end in itself.

At Casey City Council, Pearl has shaped and led the Smart Casey program and portfolios across smart cities, innovation and business improvement. Her work includes Living Labs bringing Council, community, industry and research partners together to test ideas in digital equity, climate action and social connection. This model demonstrates collaborative leadership and willingness to learn through experimentation, turning strategic ambitions into practical programs with community relevance.

Pearl's projects have received recognition and acclaim through platforms like the World Smart City Expo and the Australian Good Design Awards. She contributes beyond her day job through the Australian Smart Communities Association, Our Future Cities and CALD2Lead. These roles reflect her wider sector contribution: sharing knowledge, supporting cross-council learning and advocating for inclusive leadership while maintaining focus on outcomes that can be sustained beyond individual projects.

Pearl's effectiveness lies in connecting disciplines, organisations and people around shared challenges. She creates structured opportunities to test assumptions, learn from evidence and move promising ideas into delivery. Her technical grounding is matched by strong facilitation, partnership-building and strategic judgement, allowing her to communicate across professional boundaries and maintain community purpose. By sharing learning beyond her organisation, she also helps strengthen sector capability and supports a more collaborative, inclusive approach to innovation.

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MONIQUE O'KEEFFE

Community Development Funding Officer

Greater Dandenong City Council

Monique O'Keeffe is a community development and grantmaking professional with more than 15 years of experience across local government, community services, emergency management and the not-for-profit sector. Her practice combines strategic leadership, collaboration, integrity and a strong commitment to measurable community impact. Monique brings analytical skill together with empathy and an understanding of how funding decisions affect organisations and residents in practice.

At Greater Dandenong City Council, Monique facilitates a community grants program investing approximately $2.1 million each year. She led a Grants Reporting Review and developed an Outcomes Framework and Annual Impact Report, strengthening accountability, impact measurement and evidence-informed decisions. Her review work demonstrates an ability to improve complex systems without losing their purpose, giving decision-makers clearer evidence about outcomes created through public investment.

Monique has delivered training in grant writing, evaluation and financial literacy, and presented at sector conferences on grantmaking and social impact. Beyond Council, she has worked in homelessness and crisis accommodation and volunteers with the Australian Red Cross, RedR and Melbourne's Pasifika community. These activities show that she builds capability beyond her own role and brings learning from crisis, humanitarian and culturally diverse settings into her practice.

Monique's contribution is distinguished by the way she connects governance with community reality. She understands the importance of robust assessment, transparent reporting and responsible stewardship, while also recognising the pressures faced by small organisations and vulnerable residents. Her communication and training skills help partners improve, and her frontline experience keeps system reform grounded in practical consequences. This combination enables her to strengthen both the integrity of funding programs and the capability of communities to create lasting impact.

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STEPHANIE VASSILIOS

Coordinator Ageing Well

Nillumbik Shire Council

Stephanie Vassilios brings innovation, thoughtfulness and collaborative leadership to local government. As Coordinator Ageing Well at Nillumbik Shire Council, she looks beyond conventional service models, carefully considers community and organisational needs, and builds her team's confidence and capability. Stephanie combines strategic thinking with empathy and a willingness to test new approaches, supporting her team through change and connecting areas of Council around shared needs.

Stephanie developed Together Through Loss, recognised at LGPro's 2026 Positive Ageing and Wellbeing Awards. The program supports people experiencing grief and bereavement and has created connections continuing beyond Council's formal involvement. She has also led major aged-care reforms while maintaining service continuity. Together Through Loss demonstrates her ability to identify an unmet need and build a sensitive, sustainable response that enables relationships to continue beyond formal delivery.

Her work includes the Young Mentors Program, connecting older adults and students, and an intergenerational photography exhibition challenging ageist assumptions. Stephanie leads a team of six and has embedded evaluation, continuous improvement and stronger collaboration across ageing, youth and community services. These initiatives show creativity and partnership-building, while her leadership through aged-care reform demonstrates resilience, operational discipline and an ability to balance immediate continuity with long-term capability-building.

Stephanie's leadership is effective because it combines compassion with structure. She creates room for her team and partners to contribute, uses evaluation to improve services and looks for connections that can produce broader community benefit. Her willingness to address grief, ageism and major sector reform shows courage and sensitivity, while her focus on sustainable delivery ensures good ideas translate into dependable support. These attributes make her a thoughtful leader of services for older people and vulnerable residents.

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