

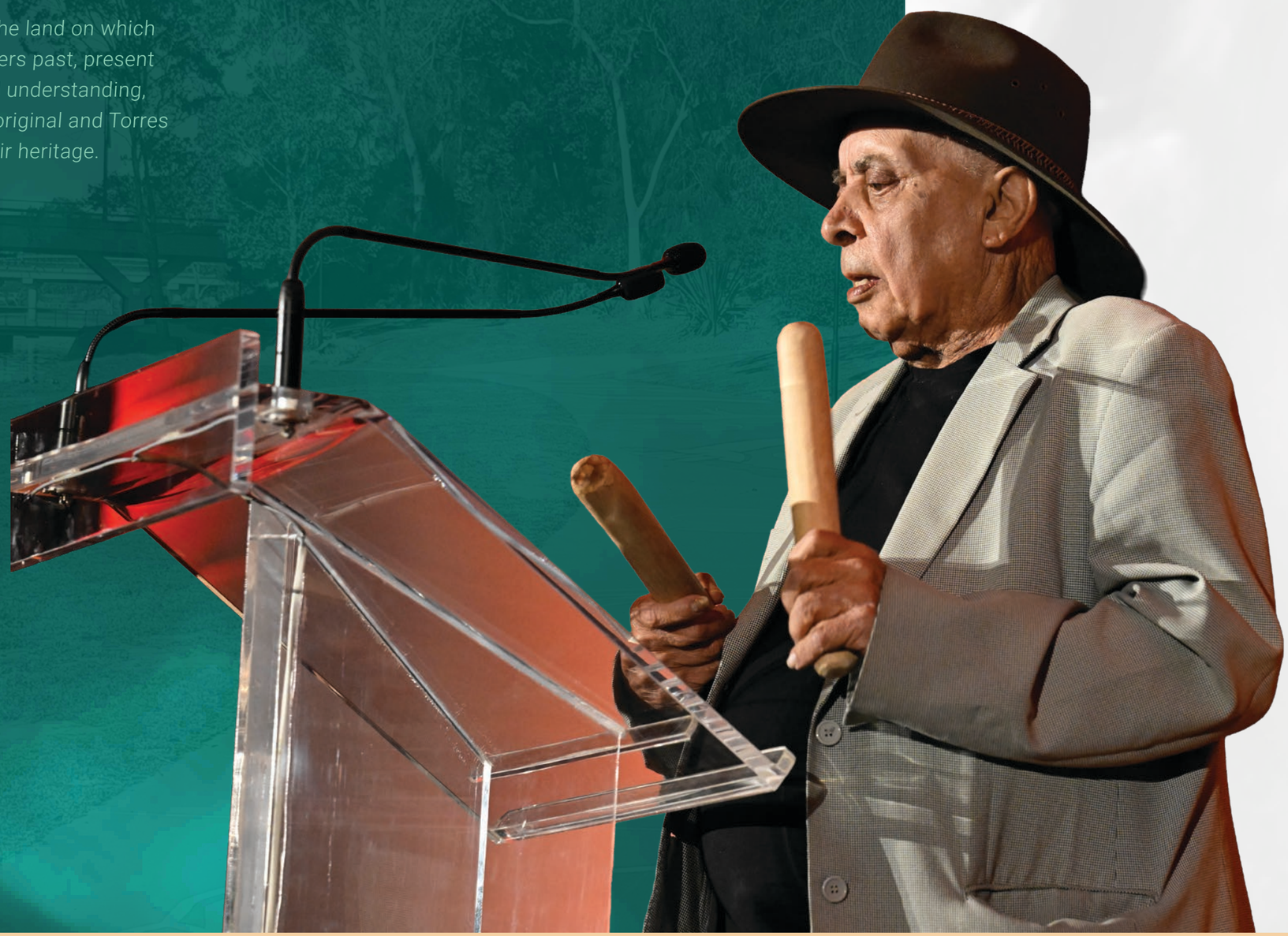
ZEST AWARDS

2025 CEREMONY

western sydney community forum

Acknowledgment of Country

We acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we work and live, and we pay respect to Elders past, present and future. We promote mutual respect and understanding, and we recognise and pay respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, their cultures and their heritage.



Our Partners

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Our Team



AUNTY CAROL COOPER OAM



UNCLE GREG SIMMS OAM



BILLLE SANKOVIC



VIKRAM MURTHY



NADIANA ALBISTUR



GEORGIE STAYCHES



JOSHUA BIRD



ANITA HANNA



TANIA FERNANDES



CAMILLE SAHID-FLICK



KATE MITCHELL



CARLEY MERCER

Our Patron



THE HON. CHRIS MINNS MP

Our Co-hosts



CHRIS BATH



TOM NANCE

Our Ambassadors



AUNTY CAROL COOPER OAM



PROF. JENNIFER WESTACOTT AO



MATILDA HARRY



DR. JIM TAGGART OAM



JEN ARMSTRONG



OLIVER MABOREKE



PAM BATKIN



DAVID BORGER



MARY HAIEK



DR. CEN AMORES



LYALL GORMAN

Hall Of Fame

JUDGING CRITERIA

There are those within the community sector who have dedicated their lives to making greater Western Sydney a better, more equitable place to live. The ZEST Hall of Fame recognises and celebrates these individuals' contributions.

Belinda Ryan

Homes NSW - Western Sydney District

Belinda is nominated for her exceptional dedication and professionalism during the Gas explosion that occurred on June 1, 2024, at a public housing complex in Whalan Western Sydney. She played a crucial role in assisting and relocating 21 elderly residents, some with disabilities, ensuring their individual needs were met. Belinda, who has worked for Homes NSW for over 10 years, has continued to support the displaced tenants, providing emotional support and access to essential services, often working after hours. Her compassionate efforts, especially towards a resident who lost her daughter in the explosion, have profoundly impacted all those affected, exemplifying the best of Homes NSW and Western Sydney.

Harinder Kaur OAM

Harman Foundation

Harinder Kaur OAM is a fearless, action-driven leader whose mission is to create hope for those in crisis. As CEO and Co-Founder of Harman Foundation, she established HER House refuge for women and children and a 24/7 DV Helpline tailored for the multicultural community. Harinder never waited for government funding - instead, she mobilised the community to drive change. With unshakable faith in HIS power, she believes "we are the changemakers, not the government." Her bold, compassionate leadership continues to transform lives, restore dignity and inspire others to stand up and serve with courage.

Kathryn Hammond

Richmond Community Services Inc

Kathryn Hammond is a dedicated leader with over 25 years of experience in community services across greater Western Sydney. Currently, as Executive Officer at Richmond Community Services Inc. (RCSI), she has led impactful programs, including the RCSI Community Pantry, which supports families facing financial hardship. Kathryn has also facilitated numerous community consultations to ensure local needs directly shape program development. Her unwavering commitment to empowering communities, advocating for vulnerable populations, and her extensive experience in community development, policy advocacy and service delivery make her a highly deserving candidate for induction into the ZEST Hall of Fame.

Lena Nahlous

Diversity Arts Australia

Lena Nahlous is a visionary leader in community and cultural development and social impact, driving change in greater Western Sydney for 25+ years. As CEO of Diversity Arts Australia and formerly Executive Director of Arts and Cultural Exchange, she has pioneered groundbreaking programs that advocate for and amplify underrepresented voices in the creative and community sectors. Lena's career spans community services, arts leadership and advocacy, fostering inclusive programs that empower CaLD and socially-excluded communities. A trailblazer in championing equity within Australia's creative and social sectors, Her work has left a lasting impact on cultural equity, sector development and capacity building.

Nagham Shalal

MRC - Western Sydney Migration Resource Centre

Nagham is a highly educated and dedicated community leader. While completing her PhD in Mechatronics Engineering in Australia, she actively volunteered and worked to support refugees and migrants. Since 2015, she has taught the 'Preparation for the Australian Citizenship Test' course, helping over 3,000 individuals pass their tests. She developed 900+ practice questions and a free website to enhance learning. Her classes, offered online and in person, improve English skills and promote social inclusion. Additionally, she has volunteered and worked at Western Sydney MRC, other community centres and schools, assisting refugees with essential paperwork. Her dedication has transformed lives in greater Western Sydney.

Samey Minkara

Street Industries Inc.

Samey Minkara is a transformative community leader who turned lived experience into lifelong impact. Growing up on the Riverwood Housing Estate, he witnessed firsthand the challenges facing marginalised youth - and has spent the past 18 years creating real change across greater Western Sydney. From volunteer to visionary, Samey founded Street Industries, a grassroots movement supporting over 2,200 young people through mentoring, outreach and place-based programs. His leadership is bold, relational, and built on trust. Samey hasn't just led from the front - he's walked alongside the young people others have written off, helping them rise and lead in their own right.



Stephen Chiu Ho Li

CASS Care Ltd

Professor Li is a highly respected pathologist with 28 years of experience in health education via broadcasting and columns. He is the Director of Core Pathology and Clinical Chemistry Services at NSW Health Pathology West Sector, overseeing 27 hospitals, and the Director of Westmead Hospital's Lipid Clinic. Academically, he is an Associate Professor at Western Sydney University and a research associate at the Vascular Research Centre. He leads CASS, Australian Chinese Medical Association (ACMA), and CanRevive. For 10 years he served on two committees of NSW Multicultural Health Communication Service (MHCS), advocating for culturally appropriate translation, now an Australian standard.

Tairyn Vergara

The Parks Community Network Inc

Tairyn Vergara has dedicated over two decades to community development and advocacy, focusing on supporting marginalised and vulnerable groups. As the CEO of The Parks Community Network (PCN), a place-based organisation, she has led collaborative, sustainable change in Fairfield and surrounding LGAs. Tairyn is recognised as a compassionate, visionary leader committed to social equity and improving access to essential services for at-risk communities. Under her collaborative leadership, PCN has developed programs and services that address local needs, promote resilience, and reduce inequality, with a focus on mental health, education, and community well-being for families, children, youth and carers.

Outstanding First Nations Community Initiative

JUDGING CRITERIA

The greater Western Sydney areas encompasses the traditional lands of the Dharug, Gundungurra and Dharawal. This award category seeks to recognise and celebrate some of the exceptional work being by and with First Nations communities in greater Western Sydney to make a positive impact at the local or regional level.

Buudjarli Guwiiyang (Good Fire - Dharug)

Greater Sydney Local Land Services

Buudjarli Guwiiyang is a program that runs weekly across Western Sydney and is supported by Dharug, Gundungarra, Dharawal, Darkinjung and other First Nations people across Western Sydney. Various groups through this initiative meet weekly across the year to apply cultural fire to revitalise cultural practice and heal country. Through this program, mob are leading the way to address invasive species, protect Aboriginal cultural heritage and build social cohesion.

Culture Leading the Way: Working together in partnership for Aboriginal children and families

South Western Sydney Local Health District

Aboriginal children are more likely to be developmentally vulnerable compared to non-Indigenous peers and face barriers to culturally safe healthcare. Services delivered within a cultural framework and through Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs) improve healthcare access. Adapting mainstream child and family services into an integrated hub format enhances health and developmental outcomes. This project is aimed to improve access to paediatric healthcare for Aboriginal children through a culturally led partnership. An integrated hub model at Tharawal early education centres increased healthcare access and improved outcomes, demonstrating the effectiveness of Aboriginal leadership and collaborative program development.

Fairfield Engaging Families of Aboriginal Heritage FEFAH

Fairfield City Council

The Fairfield Engaging Families of Aboriginal Heritage (FEFAH) Network, launched in 2019, aims to build understanding and improve relationships between the local government the community services sector and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. By collaborating with local Aboriginal families and service providers, it seeks to offer culturally appropriate solutions that promote social cohesion and opportunities. The initiative follows a structured approach: defining meaningful community engagement, deciding on methodology and determining follow-up actions. FEFAH is a network of 18 local Indigenous and non-Indigenous service providers and community members working together to address community needs.



Merana Aboriginal Community Association for the Hawkesbury Inc

Merana is a not-for-profit initiative in the Hawkesbury, established in 2003 by First Nations community members. Managed by and for First Nations communities, it delivers co-created programs supporting people across all stages of life. Key programs include After School Group, Family Fun Days, Falls Prevention, Aboriginal Go 4 Fun and cultural events like NAIDOC Concert and Ball. Unique to Merana is its community-led program development, offering un-funded initiatives like Seniors' Lunch, Men's and Women's Groups, Weaving Workshops and cultural activities such as Welcome to Country and Dance Performances. Merana provides a space for First Nations communities to gather, belong and thrive.

NSW Aboriginal Safe Gambling Service

Ashley Gordon and the service work non stop across the wider NSW regional and urban area's setting up small community outreach points to provide awareness around the bad effects of gambling. This is the only service that can provide a cultural insight to the effects of bad gambling decision, but more importantly this service provides pathways to making better choices. Ashley is a dedicated person and has the energy, kindness and time to spend to help communities suffering from bad gambling illnesses. The service mission is to build meaningful relationships with Aboriginal people, key services and relevant stakeholders. There focus is to engage with these local services and the local programs within the community.

Our Lore Corporation

Our Lore Corporation is a not-for-profit support service for families struggling with having a loved one behind bars. Our Lore make keeping connected packs, which include envelopes, stamps, note pads, pens, colours pens and crayons. They've also started now doing more welfare support such as, referrals for people in need of food, clothing and everyday living items. They are based in Bradbury and service families in the surrounding area.

The First People's Walk

Western Sydney University

The First People's Walk at Western Sydney University is a significant space for students, professional staff, academics and community to engage, reflect and share knowledge. Open for nearly two years, it has become a space for teaching, storytelling and cultural connection, aligned with the University's Indigenous Futures Decadal Strategy. Visitors can immerse themselves in soundscapes that convey Indigenous perspectives, creating a thoughtful and reflective experience. This initiative promotes cultural education, strengthens community engagement, and highlights the importance of preserving First Nations knowledge and traditions, serving as a continuing symbol of resilience, wisdom, and the rich contributions of First Nations Peoples.

Womens Business Second Chance Hub (WB2C)

Her Futures Foundation

The Women's Business Second Chance (WBSC) Hub is a ground-breaking program for women at risk of being left behind. It aims to give them the chance to achieve quality learning, entrepreneurship and employment outcomes through access to educational, employment and support services, tailored to their needs as learners and future earners. These opportunities have seen women leave and recover from domestic violence, become independent and roles models for their children and families.

Young Mums and Bubs Group

Baabayn Aboriginal Corporation

The Baabayn Aboriginal Corporation's Young Mums and Bubs Group provides invaluable support to young women in the community, offering practical assistance in areas such as housing, mental health and job seeking while also mentoring the next generation. This program has played a pivotal role in empowering young mothers to reconnect with their cultural heritage through creative outlets, including Indigenous art. Over the years their artwork has been showcased such as at the 2022 Vivid Festival. The program continues to foster strong sense of identity and belonging, ensuring that young mothers can maintain and pass on their culture to future generations.

Outstanding Community Partnership

JUDGING CRITERIA

This category recognises a successful small-scale community partnership that has achieved an extraordinary social impact through community collaboration in Western Sydney.

Activate Australia's Skills Campaign
Settlement Services International (SSI)

Almost half (48%) of permanent migrants in Western Sydney work in jobs below their level of skill and qualification. To unleash the economic potential of migrants, SSI spearheaded a collaborative project to raise awareness of the untapped skills of overseas-trained professionals, the systemic barriers they face, and to advocate for change. This project included the Billion Dollar Benefit report series (www.billiondollarbenefit.org.au) – three landmark reports to understand the challenge, opportunity and way forward – an annual Refugee and Migrant Jobs and Skills Summit to workshop solutions, and an alliance advocacy campaign called Activate Australia's Skills to reform the system (activateaustralia.org.au).

Andrew and Cameron Macarthur
Blue Mountains Mazda

Andrew and Cameron Macarthur have supported the Thrive Services DRIVE program with a fundraising Cars and Coffee just under a decade. Every month they sponsor a BBQ at their 'Cars and Coffee' Vintage car display in the grounds of the Edge Cinema. They donate the entire proceeds to our Thrive DRIVE program which supports women who escaped Family & Domestic Violence (FDV) to get their driver's license. Each year they provide over $13,000 to keep the program running. By donating the entire proceeds from their Cars and Coffee BBQ each month, Andrew and Cameron support an essential program that assists women who have escaped FDV to rebuild their lives, gain skills and confidence, improve their independence and employability.

Beyond Care

Beyond Care has partnered with the Sydney Wanderers to support the All Ability Hub, an initiative designed to bring together individuals with diverse disabilities in an inclusive environment. This program offers participants the opportunity to engage in enjoyable and meaningful activities, fostering a sense of community and connection. It highlights the commitment to promoting accessibility and inclusion for all.

Blacktown Exercise Sports and Technology (BEST) Hub
Blacktown City Council

The Blacktown Exercise Sports and Technology Hub (BEST) is a world-class facility at the intersection of sport, culture, health and community. Blacktown Sportspark began life as a Sydney Olympics training and competition venue but has been reimagined from "grass" roots up. It's now an 'open-to-all' park, connected by new pathways, bridges and bikeways to adjacent communities, rail and the Western Sydney Parklands. The BEST Hub and Lodge is the centrepiece of the Sportspark, transforming the park into an innovative and integrated sport, health, education and community precinct including physical literacy spaces; public fields; a café which are available the public.

Burra Bumal - Campbelltown Arts Centre and NAISDA Dance College
Campbelltown City Council

Burra Bumal, presented in partnership by Campbelltown Arts Centre and NAISDA Dance College, is a transformative program empowering young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through dance and culture. Offering free in-school workshops across Western Sydney and Macarthur, it introduces students to cultural and contemporary dance. The Burra Bumal Mentorship Program provides 12 students (Years 9–11) with artistic mentorship, On Country visits, a NAISDA residency, and performance opportunities. This initiative fosters cultural pride, creative expression, and professional pathways, ensuring lasting impact. Burra Bumal celebrates the strength and stories of First Nations youth, enriching communities through dance and connection.

Champions of Change
Campbelltown City Council

Champions of Change is Campbelltown City Council's multi-year initiative aimed at empowering and equipping community members to actively participate in preventing Domestic and Family Violence (DFV). Developed in partnership with South West Multicultural Community Centre and NSW Council for Pacific Communities, the initiative provides residents with the knowledge and skills to create culturally relevant, community-led solutions. The launch event gathered over 300 community members from diverse sectors, sparking discussions led by key organisations. Over 100 pledges were made, leading to grassroots initiatives across the LGA. Champions of Change continues to support Council's commitments to preventing and eliminating Domestic and Family Violence in Campbelltown.

CREATE & Wesley Mission Connection Event

CREATE Foundation

CREATES Connection events are designed to strengthen community ties and promote social and cultural inclusion for young people in Greater Western Sydney, particularly those in out-of-home care. Recognising the complex challenges faced by young people, especially those living with a disability, they partnered with Wesley Mission to create an event that centered their voices and experiences. Being in out-of-home care can sometimes feel isolating. These events, and the opportunity to meet new friends and have a fun day full of activities while sharing their own stories can help create a sense of belonging. Connection Events provide a safe environment to enable and support the building of natural friendships, and for children and young people to find they are not alone in their care experience.

Fairfield Multicultural Interagency – Community Capacity Building Working Group

Fairfield City Council, CORE Community Services, Assyrian Resource Centre, Family Planning Australia, Navitas Skilled Futures, SSI, STARTTS, TAFE NSW

The Fairfield Multicultural Interagency Community Capacity Building Working Group (CCBWG) unites local organisations to support CALD communities in Fairfield City, including migrants, refugees and emerging groups. By tapping into the diverse expertise of its partners, the group provides tailored training on vital issues like mental health, community governance and advocacy. This strong collaboration helps tackle community challenges, strengthen connections, and build the skills of ethno-specific leaders and organisations. The CCBWG is committed to making a lasting impact, empowering leaders and creating sustainable support systems that benefit these communities for the long term.

Friday Night Football

Street Industries, Western Sydney Wanderers & Alcohol Drug Foundation

Friday Night Football is a powerful grassroots collaboration bringing together Street Industries, Western Sydney Wanderers and the Alcohol and Drug Foundation to support young people across greater Western Sydney. Designed to connect with culturally diverse youth facing systemic barriers, the initiative combines sport, mentoring, and community connection in a way that feels real and relevant. Delivered weekly over 12 months as part of the broader Street Sports movement, it engaged 303 young people across Liverpool, Canterbury-Bankstown, and Georges River - providing safe spaces to belong, grow and access new opportunities. This isn't just football - it's a movement changing the game for young people on and off the field.



Fusion of Indigenous Arts - Sri Lankan-Australian Women's Network (SLAWN) with Saree Selections

Sri Lankan-Australian Women's Network (SLAWN)

This partnership represents a unique fusion of First Nations and South Asian arts, promoting cultural connectivity, diversity and women's leadership. The project emphasised capacity building, mentoring and empowering women by creating opportunities with both cultural and economic impacts locally and regionally. It fosters discussions on diversity, gender parity, and violence against women. By blending trade, tourism, and fashion, this initiative celebrated cultural diversity while paving the way for women to thrive across various fields, leaving a significant mark on greater Western Sydney. Future plans include integrating diverse art forms into education programs to address taboo topics and expand opportunities for women.

Ignite. Empower. Achieve.

Uniting NSW.ACT

Ignite. Empower. Achieve. is a community collaboration between Uniting Local Area Coordination (LAC), NSW Department of Education and Western Sydney University. The project addresses the critical shortage of mental health services in Western Sydney and improves early intervention support for young people by placing postgraduate counselling students in primary and high schools. Across 28 participating schools, preliminary feedback shows a 34% increase in student wellness scores. This groundbreaking approach is not only transforming mental health support in schools but also provides real-world training for future professionals, creating a sustainable model for long-term community impact.

InterGenerate – Diversity Arts Australia & Sydney Opera House

Diversity Arts Australia

InterGenerate is a transformative partnership between Diversity Arts Australia and Sydney Opera House, designed to create meaningful intergenerational and intercultural connections through the arts. By bringing together emerging and established culturally diverse artists, the program fosters mentorship, intergenerational knowledge-sharing, and creative collaborations. This initiative culminated in a major showcase at the Sydney Opera House, amplifying underrepresented voices in greater Western Sydney's arts sector. Through workshops, networking events, and live performances, InterGenerate strengthens industry pathways while celebrating the rich cultural diversity of Western Sydney.

Nepali Students at Western Sydney

Nepali Students at Western Sydney (NSWS) has built strong partnerships to celebrate and support the Nepali community in greater Western Sydney. In 2024, NSWS collaborated with Canterbury Bankstown Council to host the inaugural Dashain Festival in Campsie, bringing together over 200 community members. Additionally, NSWS partnered with student clubs, international students, and community leaders, alongside the Premier of NSW, Ministers, and MPs, to organise Dashain Fest 2024 at Western Sydney University, attended by over 500 people. These collaborations have fostered cultural inclusion, student engagement, and community cohesion, earning NSWS multiple awards for outstanding partnership and event excellence.

North Parramatta Affordable and Social Housing Project

Hume Community Housing

To address the housing crisis in Western Sydney, Hume Housing has partnered across public, private and not-for-profit sectors to deliver 66 new social and affordable homes. With support from all three levels of government, Mono Constructions, Women's Community Shelters, and the Immigrant Women's Speakout Association, this $45 million project will provide secure housing for over 100 people, including women and children escaping violence, older women, and essential workers. This partnership demonstrates how cross-sector collaboration can deliver real, place-based solutions to housing need.

"Stronger Together" (HUBS - Hawkesbury Unites for Better Services)

Richmond Community Services Inc

"Stronger Together" is an initiative uniting TEI service providers in the Hawkesbury to expand their reach and impact. Launched in 2023, this partnership - under the HUBS network (Hawkesbury Unites for Better Services) -brings together eight organisations to enhance service visibility and accessibility. We have created shared promotional materials, information booklet and webpage. Stronger Together pools staffing resources to attend key community events, this enables smaller organisations to have a presence at events they couldn't manage alone, ensuring more residents can access vital services. "Stronger Together" fosters resilience, reduces isolation and enhances support for community as well as strengthening community connections.

Women of Blacktown 2025

Australian Catholic University

The 'Women of Blacktown' project is made up of four different parts: book showcasing the stories of 25 remarkable women in the greater Western Sydney, workshop on 'Building on your strengths', video project and panel discussion that focussed on the lives and work of the multicultural women leaders who were awarded the Blacktown Woman of the year awards in the previous years. A high social impact project, it has served to enable connection, build understanding and empathy among the locals and create a strong bonding within the community by addressing their needs.

Outstanding Community Sector Leader

JUDGING CRITERIA

This category aims to recognise a community worker who has shown extraordinary initiative in actively developing the well-being and improvement of their community.

Annah Sorrenson-Cox

Hume Community Housing

Over a 10-year career at Hume Community Housing, Annah Sorrenson-Cox has progressed from an admin officer to a senior manager, driven by a deep commitment to western Sydney. Growing up in social housing in Western Sydney, she brings lived experience to her leadership and a strong connection to the people she serves. Her standout achievement is the creation of Hume Social - a weekly community café and pantry co-designed with residents to tackle food insecurity and isolation. The initiative has grown rapidly, empowering customers, building social connection, and setting a new benchmark for inclusive, place-based community engagement.

Belinda Leonard

Noro Music Therapy, Panthers Foundation, Nepwan Blue Mountains LHD & PHN, Walk it Off

Belinda Leonard, a pioneering leader in Western Sydney, made history as the first woman appointed to the Panthers Group Board. In this role, she champions transformative community initiatives, leveraging the organisation's reach to create lasting social impact. Her extensive volunteer work spans healthcare committees and grassroots advocacy, where she drives improvements in local services. Through strategic partnerships and hands-on engagement, Belinda's work with Noro Music Therapy demonstrates how corporate leadership can authentically serve community needs. Her dedication to inclusive, accessible services reflects a deep commitment to empowering Western Sydney's diverse communities.

Bhavika Patel

St Vincent de Paul Society

Bhavika Patel exemplifies the ideal combination of talent, compassion, fairness and professionalism in her role as Team Leader. Managing a number of Support Cantres, Bhavika works tirelessly to provide guidance and support to all her Coordinators, always striving to ensure the best outcomes for everyone involved. Her work ethic is unparalleled, consistently going above and beyond to make sure that each Coordinator has the tools, knowledge, and support needed to succeed. What sets her apart is her unwavering commitment to fairness - she treats everyone with respect, listens to our concerns, and handles all challenges with empathy and integrity. Her leadership not only drives operational success but also inspires trust and loyalty among the entire team.

Carole-Anne Priest
Liverpool Neighbourhood Connections

Carole-Anne is Liverpool Neighbourhood Connection's unsung hero who quietly goes about helping women in Liverpool. Carole-Anne is a Lawyer and the Co CEO of Liverpool Neighbourhood Connections. Carole-Anne has worked and volunteered in Liverpool community sector for ten years. Carole-Anne just takes the extra workload on and never seeks out recognition for this and her capacity for kindness, support and advocacy is unmeasurable. In addition to all of this Carole-anne assists in overseeing all the staff, amazing programs and enterprises that LNC currently run.

Chantelle Ogilvie-Ellis
Sydney Alliance

Chantelle is an experienced Community Organiser with a demonstrated history of working in civil society organisations. Skilled in Training Delivery, Volunteer Management, Community Organising and Community Engagement. Strong community professional with degrees from the University of Sydney and the Australian Catholic University, as well as experience as an academic lecturer and tutor in the field of theology.

Deena Yako
Refugee Council of Australia

Deena has been dedicated to refugee resettlement since 2006, focusing on empowering young refugees through education and better settlement pathways. As Director of Community Engagement at the Refugee Council of Australia, she leads the Refugee Stories for Change program, amplifying refugee voices to challenge stereotypes and foster empathy. Drawing from her own experiences, Deena uses storytelling as a tool for advocacy, cultural exploration and education. She is committed to highlighting refugee resilience and promoting acceptance, ensuring that lived experiences drive meaningful change in Australian society.

Dheliwe Agnessy Zigori
Zimbabwe Association in Australia (ZIMAA)

Dheliwe has been instrumental in bringing the Zimbabwean Community in NSW together. She organised women's groups according to LGAs and facilitated interactions and working together to support one another. She organises social events, and facilitate discussions with different experts on matters that affect women. Women feel free to share challenges in these groups and appreciate the lessons learnt which they advise will help navigate the different situations in their lives. She fosteres and actively ensures families are supported when bereaved. She also introduced Community groups in regional NSW and reaches out to women and families in areas like Dubbo, Orange, Wagga Wagga etc. Dheliwe is now working with young people, creating youth groups and bringing them into the system. She aims to ensure the Community can support each other and access required help.

Doumoua Diab Howcher
Community Care Kitchen

Dom has one of the most purest hearts and souls around. Running multiple businesses does not limit this woman from volunteering hours of community service all in the name of joy and love. The effort and dedication to helping others in need is unmatched and contagious, recruiting a team of passionate volunteers who are inspired by her.

Dr. Jaime R. Lopez, CPA
NARRA Co-op Ltd

Dr. Jaime R. Lopez,CPA is a highly awarded volunteer and community leader, recognised for his outstanding contributions to both the Filipino-Australian community and various organizations. With a rich academic background, including a PhD in Education and multiple leadership roles, he has founded and led numerous community groups, particularly focused on helping migrants, promoting Filipino culture, and supporting community welfare. His achievements include leadership in various non-profits, innovation in housing partnerships, and numerous awards and nominees such as the Premier's Volunteer Recognition. Dr. Lopez's commitment to volunteerism and social impact has made him a pivotal figure in Western Sydney's community development.

Emie Roy
The Stories Untold Collective

Emie Roy is the founder of The Stories Untold where, as a speaker, writer and documentary film maker she searches for untold stories in Western Sydney reflecting the culturally richnesses in our area. Ms Roy wrote and directed the documentary 'Unlocked', exploring how the pandemic changed the lives of four people living in Western Sydney. In the same period, Ms Roy curated and edited a collection of stories called "The Light at the End of the Tunnel". In 2023 Emie was announced as the Blacktown City Woman of the Year. Mayor Cr Tony Bleasdale, who was the Mayor at the time said: "Ms Roy is a dedicated voice for the Blacktown City community and her work is a testament to the passion she has to spotlight issues and start important conversations. In 2024, Ms Roy continued her documentaries, by writing and producing "Chenda", the story of the drum plays.

George Ayoub
Solution Ideas Ability Boutique

George is a friendly, down to earth individual who works tirelessly and compassionately supporting all people with disabilities through programs and projects. With lived experience, he demonstrates strong leadership and he works to bring out the best in others.

Jhan Leach
Blacktown Women's and Girls Health Centre

Jhan is a woman with a huge heart and that has shown through her hard work and dedication with Blacktown women's and girls' health Centre as well as Northwest Sydney and Nepean Blue mountains Women's Domestic Violence Court Advocacy Services. Jhan holds the position of Executive Officer at Blacktown Women's and Girls Health Centre.

Joanne Zahorodnyj
Baptist Care

Jo is the Western Sydney Hub Lead for Baptist Care. Jo is instrumental in the running of The Hive, one of Australia's most established and effective place-based collective impact initiatives. The Hive has a goal for all children in Mount Druitt to start school well, with equal opportunity to learn, be healthy and participate in quality community life. The Hive provides a community backbone and works in close collaboration with key partner organisations, identifies local priorities, collaborates on innovative solutions and advocates for system-wide change.

Kathryn Hammond
Richmond Community Services Inc.

Kathryn Hammond is a transformative leader in the community services sector, with over 25 years of experience in greater Western Sydney. As Executive Officer at Richmond Community Services, Kathryn has been instrumental in revitalising the organisation and expanding its services to meet the growing needs of the community. Her innovative approach to service delivery, including the establishment of the Community Pantry and new youth and family programs, has had a lasting impact on the Hawkesbury region. Kathryn's leadership, commitment to social justice, and ability to foster collaboration make her a deserving nominee for the Outstanding Community Sector Leader award.



Kerry Dolaghan
Link Wentworth

For 30 years, Kerry's work in the community sector has been brave, compassionate and inspirational. Through various roles, she has driven change and applied insights from successful pilots to develop ambitious programs. Her legacy over 15 years with Link Wentworth includes establishing our industry-leading assertive outreach model and turning new initiatives into multiple, successful programs. Her work has created better community outcomes for people throughout Nepean, Blue Mountains, Hawkesbury and Lithgow - including the homeless, young people, rough sleepers, people experiencing domestic and family violence, social housing tenants, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, women's health services and the LGBQTI community.

Luke Hull
Woodville Alliance

Luke Hull has devoted 29 years to Woodville Alliance as a Disability Service Mentor, showcasing a deep commitment to supporting individuals with disabilities. His wealth of experience highlights his passion for empowering clients, promoting inclusivity, and improving their quality of life. Luke combines empathy with practical strategies to help those he mentors achieve their personal goals and overcome challenges. Renowned for his exceptional interpersonal skills and steadfast dedication, he has become a trusted advocate within the community, leaving a lasting impact on many lives. His contributions reflect the core values of service and resilience in the field.

Maninder Singh
Harman Foundation

Maninder Singh is the Chair of Harman Foundation and a strong advocate for ending violence against women. Through his visionary leadership, he has led numerous awareness campaigns and grassroots initiatives that support both women and men in building respectful, harmonious communities. Maninder's commitment has empowered over 30,000 families through vital services addressing domestic violence, homelessness, and youth and senior engagement. Known for programs like the Thrift Factory and Kids4Kids, and his motto "Keep going, it is worth it," Maninder continues to inspire positive change with compassion, collaboration, and a deep sense of social responsibility to create awareness and practical solutions to survival victims of DV.

Mel Thomas
KYUP! Project

Martial arts instructor Mel Thomas is empowering girls and women to "stand in their power" and build a safer community. In 2013, Mel won a scholarship from the Layne Beachley Foundation after realising she could use her 20 years of self-defence training to empower others. This led to the creation of the KYUP! Project, a charity dedicated to ending violence against women through primary prevention. A two-time Australian Hapkido Association champion, Mel teaches self-defence and mentors women and girls. She collaborates with organisations like NSW Police, Burdekin Project, Salvation Army, Mackillop Family Services, and Community Northern Beaches to reach youth and families. She is currently working with James Griffin MP, Member for Manly, to pilot a self-defence program for students on the Northern Beaches.

Michael Campbell
WestWords

Michael Campbell is Executive Director of WestWords, greater Western Sydney's literature development organisation. In 2024, WestWords engaged over 40,000 people through 194 programs across 93 partner organisations and 35 schools. Michael has built WestWords into a nationally recognised cultural force - championing equity, storytelling, and community voice. Under his leadership, young people have become first-time authors, refugee and LGBTQIA+ writers have found platforms for their truth, and local creatives have been employed and empowered. Michael leads with quiet purpose and fierce commitment, proving that true leadership isn't about visibility - it's about impact, trust and a community that thrives through creativity.

Olivia Wellesley-Cole
SierraCom

Olivia has master's degrees in international law and Peace Studies, and is secretary of her local Rotary Club, and chairperson of the Owners Committee at her residential accommodation. Olivia used to be an engineer talking to machines. Now Olivia Wellesley-Cole is an aid worker talking to relief organisations, governments and some of the most disadvantaged people in the world. Olivia has for many years supported most African Community Organisation in Policy making, support in governance and making sure they follow Australians Community regulations. She is one of the founder members of Sierra Leone Youth Awards, helped African Women Community Support Group (AWCG) in being registered as a Community Organisation and follow the regulations. She is active in several organisations in the Sierra Leonean and African communities in Sydney, focusing on capacity development of women and girls and general advocacy. Olivia is a silent Hero who wants to see Community Organisation do the right things by the laid down rules and succeed in helping the community.

Paul Newman
Black Pages Pty Limited

Paul Newman, a proud Elder and Traditional Owner of Wiradjuri, Gadigal, Wailwan, and Kamilaroi heritage, brings over 40 years of expertise in community, government, and corporate sectors, particularly in Aboriginal affairs. He has held senior executive roles, including First Nations Senior Business Advisor at World Vision Australia and Chairperson of the NSW Reconciliation Council. With formal qualifications in business and communications, Paul is dedicated to community economic development, education, and governance. As a Board Member and Chairperson of Communitas Volunteers Australia, he continues to drive positive change and strengthen Indigenous rights and reconciliation efforts.

Prasanna Kumar Shanmugam
Anglican Diocese of Sydney

A community sector leader with 17 years of experience in Change management, and Innovative Developments. Prasanna has demonstrated extraordinary leadership by driving strategic innovation and community impact. They successfully analysed and compiled comprehensive property data, enabling informed decision-making for facility and service enhancements. Through innovation, policy development, and strategic foresight, Prasanna has transformed compliance, streamlined operations, and significantly improved community well-being. Their ability to inspire change and implement impactful solutions underscores their exceptional leadership.

Redempta Robinson
Bicol Communities League Inc.

For more than two decades, Demi Robinson has given generously her time to the service of the community. In the spirit of volunteerism, she has held executive positions in various community organisations namely: civic, women, cultural and sporting groups. She has an active participation in many mainstream community activities such as the Blacktown City Festival, Blacktown City Show, Seniors Festival, Clean Up Australia and many more. Her tireless work ethic, social responsibility and commitment have seen her active participation in the Blacktown Workers Women Lawn Bowling Club, the Blacktown City Council Seniors Advisory Committee and the Blacktown Seniors Choir, "Simply Voices". A highly respected professional and leader in the Filipino community, Ms Robinson successfully swept through the 2024 Workers Club Board of Directors elections with the highest number of votes.

Samey Minkara
Street Industries Inc.

Samey Minkara is a powerful force in grassroots community leadership. Over the past 18 years, he has supported thousands of young people from culturally diverse, marginalised communities - many at risk of disengagement or justice system involvement. As the founder of Street Industries, Samey combines lived experience with bold innovation to drive community-led change across Western Sydney. He leads from the front: mentoring on the street, designing programs, and challenging systems to improve. Samey isn't just building programs - he's building movements that transform how communities connect, lead and thrive.

Sara Muzamil
Jesuit Refugee Service Australia

Sara Muzamil is a tireless advocate for refugee and migrant communities, with a lifelong commitment to supporting survivors of gender-based violence. Having overcome displacement herself, she now leads the Finding Safety Project at Jesuit Refugee Service Australia, providing holistic support to women facing domestic violence, forced marriage, trafficking, and other forms of abuse. With a background in policy advocacy, casework, and international development, Sara has influenced systemic change, trained frontline workers, and empowered vulnerable communities worldwide. Her leadership exemplifies resilience, compassion, and an unwavering dedication to justice. Sara collaborated with various organisations and stakeholders to raise awareness about the challenges faced by refugees and asylum seekers women and girls. Through her work she has helped create safer and more inclusive environments for vulnerable women.

Silvana Santos-Lofaro
Hoxton Park Public School

Silvana has opened her doors to the community and offered numerous programs to connect community members whether young or old and of many different backgrounds. Programs include cook n connect, swimming, arts and craft, gardening workshops, ID Care workshops and Galmatic workshops too. All programs are inclusive and has made a positive impact. Silvana is an important member of the school community, organising programs suited to all community members. Silvana has strong communication and leadership skills.

Uncle David King
Dingo Darbo

Uncle David King is a revered Gundungurra Elder and a passionate advocate for Indigenous culture and land management. He holds a Graduate Diploma in Natural Cultural Resource Management from Deakin University and a Cert 4 in Indigenous Leadership from the Australian Indigenous Leadership Centre (AILC). As the founder of the Swampcare group at Garguree the Gully in the Blue Mountains, Uncle David has demonstrated extraordinary leadership, transforming the initiative into a vibrant community effort. His dedication to the well-being of the community and the environment has earned him numerous accolades, including the BMCC NAIDOC Recognition Award and the NSW Landcare Indigenous Land Management Awards. Known for his work as an educator and group facilitator, Uncle David continues to inspire and drive positive change, focusing on Country, Culture and Community.

Yasser Zaki
Tender Loving Care Disability Services

Yasser Zaki is an esteemed community leader and CEO, dedicated to transforming lives through innovation, inclusion, and impact. As the CEO of Tender Loving Care Disability Services, he has championed initiatives that empower individuals with disabilities, foster community engagement, and drive sustainable social change. His leadership extends internationally, supporting vulnerable populations through TLC Impact Foundation. Yasser's unwavering commitment to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has facilitated groundbreaking programs in education, employment, and accessibility. A two-time finalist & one time winner for CEO Magazine's Executive of the Year (Healthcare), he exemplifies visionary leadership, resilience and a deep passion for positive social impact.

Outstanding Project Stronger Communities

JUDGING CRITERIA

This award category seeks to recognise and celebrate some of the exceptional work which has strengthened the community or improved social or cultural inclusion in greater Western Sydney.

2168 Miller Mobile Food Hub
Core Community Services

A collaborative initiative across CORE Community services, (CORE) including Multicultural Communities - Community Connections, Operations and the Strategy and Analytics team. In this partnership, each team contributed significantly throughout every phase, from the initial conception to the project development, marketing and execution. Together bringing to life a community driven mobile food hub project, delivering to 2168 local schools, government and non-government agencies and residents' essential items and food hampers in an effort to address food insecurity during the ongoing cost of living crisis. CORE has been in operations for over 45 years, with a particular focus on culturally and linguistically diverse communities, children, young people and their families, people with a disability, the aged and those facing financial disadvantage or hardship.

All in Gala
Advance Disability Services & Respite

The All In Gala is a special event dedicated to supporting people with disability, who often face challenges due to social isolation. This event provides an opportunity for individuals with disability, their parents, carers, and friends of all ages to enjoy a formal night out, have fun, and be part of the community. Events like this are rare, but together, we can create a memorable night for people with disability and their families/carers. The Gala Committee is a collaborative partnership of representatives from the non-government sector, working together to support people with disability in accessing the community and living as independently as possible.

Being Mental Health Consumers - Being Connected Online Community
Being Mental Health Consumers

An organisation rooted in lived and living experience of mental health challenges, dedicated to making a positive impact on the mental health community in NSW. Driven by a passion for advocating change and improving the mental health system, BEING CONNECTED creates a supportive and respectful space where individuals can share their stories, recovery journeys, and connect with others. It's a place where people are empowered to find their voice and contribute to the ongoing transformation of mental health services.

Bridging Digital Futures & Pathways in Western Sydney

Creating Chances

Delivered by Creating Chances, the Digital Futures and Future Pathways program was a 10-week initiative across four Western Sydney schools, engaging 83 students from Canterbury-Bankstown, Cumberland, Blacktown and Penrith LGAs. The program focused on self-awareness, goal setting, leadership and understanding the future of work in technology. By using sports activities to reinforce key lessons, the program emphasised student voice, positive relationships, and a forward-looking approach to employment pathways. It equipped students with tools to create innovative solutions to social challenges through technology, culminating in industry taster workshops and a pitch event at Cognizant HQ in April 2024.

Building a Bridge to High School

Woodville Alliance

The Building a Bridge to High School project, led by Woodville Alliance, is a initiative dedicated to enhancing the wellbeing of children and young people in greater Western Sydney. Through evidence-based programs delivered in partnership with local schools, this initiative has equipped over 1,200 students with essential coping skills and resilience. By fostering emotional support and strengthening connections between students, families, and educators, the project plays a vital role in community recovery and social inclusion.

Can We Have A Conversation? (Youth Anti-Racism Workshop)

Addison Road Community Organisation

Can We Have A Conversation? Youth Anti-Racism workshops were born out of a critical gap in education - too many young people were missing out on the tools they needed to recognise and challenge racism, whether they witnessed it, saw it embedded in systems, or experienced it firsthand. Designed by youth, for youth, the program not only delivered essential anti-racism education but also created job opportunities for young people with lived experiences of racism. The response was overwhelmingly positive - students from across Sydney shared that the workshops helped them make sense of their experiences and gave them the confidence to challenge racism in their schools and communities. Some were even inspired to start anti-racism clubs at their schools!

Citizenship & Beyond

Western Sydney Migrant Resources Centre

Citizenship & Beyond is a program running at WSMRC for over two years, supporting migrants and refugees on their journey to Australian citizenship. Held once a week during school terms, this three-hour course includes structured learning and a guest speaker session covering topics such as justice, law, Centrelink, employment, health, and any other settlement issues. The program empowers participants with knowledge of Australian values, rights, and responsibilities, fostering confidence and a sense of belonging. By providing essential information and guidance, it ensures individuals are well-prepared for citizenship and long-term community engagement.

Community Care Kitchen

Collecting from the community to give back to the community in need. Community Care Kitchen is a non profit organisation helping the most vulnerable communities within our community by a group of volunteers.

Community Care Team

City of Parramatta

City of Parramatta's Community Care Team deliver a range of Aged Care, Over 55's Leisure and Learning Services, Volunteering and NDIS Services that focus on improving social inclusion outcomes through addressing isolation, marketplace failures, socioeconomic disadvantages and capacity building to result in independence and access to the community. This is demonstrated through Community Care's unique underpinning Social Role Valorization (SRV) theory that supports the training of staff and volunteers to deliver services in a truly person-centred model, understanding that someone's values roles in society are communicated and supported to ensure that their values are not diminished in society by labels (for example, there is more to someone than being a wheelchair user, but rather appreciating society's response to reducing access restrictions so that they can participate equally).

Community For Everyone

Side By Side Advocacy

Community for Everyone bridges the gap between isolated people with intellectual disability and their community. The project enhances the social inclusion and active participation of people with disability by connecting them with volunteer social connectors who share similar interests. Fostering genuine, shared interests between people with disability in freely given relationship with volunteer connectors not only enriches the lives of those involved but also strengthens the fabric and capacity of the community to be inclusive. By addressing social isolation and loneliness and promoting inclusive participation, this project demonstrates how to establish social networks for people who are profoundly socially isolated.

CREATE Foundation Connection Events

CREATE Foundation

Connection Events lay the foundation of CREATE's work, providing children and young people with a sense of belonging and the chance to meet other children and young people with experience in the out-of-home care system. Being in out-of-home care can sometimes feel isolating. These events, and the opportunity to meet new friends and have a fun day full of activities while sharing their own stories can help create a sense of belonging. Connection Events provide a safe environment to enable and support the building of natural friendships, and for children and young people to find they are not alone in their care experience. Connection Events aren't just for the kids too! Carers and workers are welcome to get involved to foster positive relationships with the children in their care. Whether it be Easter parties, Christmas parties or Sibling Connection Events, these free, fun-filled days allow children the chance to connect, play and delight in activity-packed fun for all involved!

Enrich Abilities Support Program

Enrich Abilities

Enrich Abilities empowers people with disabilities through diverse programs and services. Their latest initiative, the Enrich Abilities Support Program, provides financial aid for essential, low-cost items not covered by the NDIS. This helps participants and their families overcome small but significant barriers. By removing these obstacles, they enable NDIS participants to achieve their goals, gain independence, and enjoy their everyday living. They believe that even the smallest support can spark big changes, and they are dedicated to helping our participants thrive.



Fairfield City Council - Safer Cities Canley Vale

Fairfield City Council

Fairfield City Council delivered Safer Cities Canley Vale in partnership with Transport for NSW to enhance perceptions of safety for women and girls in Canley Vale. Council worked with local women to co-design tailored solutions, which saw $1 million invested in public space improvements that addressed safety concerns, revitalising Canley Vale town centre. Lighting, alfresco seating, way finding signage and public art reflecting the area's cultural diversity has activated Canley Vale and strengthened the community's sense of belonging and local identity. Post-intervention, there was a 36% increase in the number of women who felt safer in Canley Vale after dark.

fREADom INSIDE BookClubs

Women's Justice Network

WJN provides gender responsive and trauma informed support that responds to the lived experience of women and girls affected by the criminal law system, working toward advancing their prospects and well-being. WJN addresses issues facing criminalised women and girls systemically by advocating to improve the systems that impact their lives and individually by practical assistance, mentoring and leadership development. Their weekly fREADom Inside BookClubs are currently being delivered in NSW women's prisons in Windsor, Silverwater, and will soon extend to Emu Plains. The program consists of 10 women per book club with a new book introduced every 4-6 weeks.

Good360 Australia

At Good360 Australia they are connectors. They connect charities, schools and society's most vulnerable with businesses willing to donate unsold or surplus goods, services and disaster recovery essentials. The result is a Circle of Good that reduces need and waste in our communities at the same time so everyone benefits – from people to the planet. Headquartered at Smithfield, Good360 supports 4700+ charities/disadvantaged schools nationally, and approximately 12%, almost 600, in the 13 LGA's across Western Sydney. Since launching in 2015, over $170 million worth of material aid, around 30% of their total impact, has been distributed in Western Sydney.

Guildford Together: Revive & Reimagine

Cumberland City Council

Responding to community concerns around safety in Guildford, council involved the local community in co-designing the new look for a dilapidated laneway in Guildford town centre, which was reopened after the upgrades via the Back to Guildford Festival on May 25,2024. This initiative which was a collaboration between Transport for NSW and Cumberland City Council under the Safer Cities: Her Way program, focused on enhancing safety and inclusivity for women and girls. The success of the Back to Guildford festival demonstrated the positive impacts of bringing the community along on the journey, empowering them to shape their public open spaces.

Heroes with Ability School Gala and Inclusion Day (International Day for People with Disability)

Heroes with Ability

Heroes With Ability is a community-driven initiative dedicated to empowering people with disabilities through inclusive sports programs in greater Western Sydney. Partnering with local schools, Liverpool Council, and Michael Clarke Recreation Centre, the program enhances physical health, confidence, and social inclusion. A highlight is the annual multi-sports gala day, where 300 students with disabilities represent their schools in a competitive event for the first time. Supported by local volunteers, the initiative welcomes participants of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities, fostering a more connected and inclusive community while increasing opportunities for people with disabilities in local sports and recreation.

Homes for Older Women Program

Older Women's Network (OWN) Blue Mountains & OWN NSW

Homes for Older Women (HOW) is a not-for-profit program addressing housing insecurity and homelessness for women aged 55+. Run by Older Women's Network (OWN) Blue Mountains, the initiative connects older vulnerable women with homeowners who have vacant granny flats, studios, houses, apartments and spare bedrooms for rent. Since launching in May 2024, the program has secured housing for 46 older women, far exceeding our original goal of 30 women accommodated in the first year. Older women are the fastest growing group to experience homelessness in Australia. HOW is a community-based solution utilising existing housing stock to provide secure, affordable shelter.

Hume Social

Hume Community Housing

Hume Social is a community café and pantry launched by Hume Community Housing in Telopea in October 2024 to tackle food insecurity and social isolation. In partnership with Foodbank Australia and Plate it Forward, it offers free weekly lunches, fresh produce, and pantry staples to all residents. In the twenty weeks since its launch Hume Social had served over 840 meals and 3900kg worth of food. The initiative builds community resilience, improves tenancy outcomes, and reflects Hume's deep engagement and place-based approach to addressing cost-of-living pressures, breaking down social isolation and building stronger communities.

Knia Maps

People with disabilities find it difficult to access their community, as they have no way of knowing if, or how, to get to their destination, and if it will include them. Knia Maps is the Google Maps for Accessibility. We've used AI to convert all open sourced accessibility data out in NSW into a singular format, and display them in our map. And we enable businesses, government/organisations and the public to crowdsource in depth information, reviews and feedback on venues', services' and events', accessibility. All the things Google Maps can't do, we can.

KYUP! Project - Mel Thomas

KYUP! Project

Martial arts instructor Mel Thomas is empowering girls and women to "stand in their power" and create safer communities. In 2013, Mel was awarded a scholarship from the Layne Beachley Foundation after recognising she could use her 20 years of self-defence training to help others. This led to the founding of the KYUP! Project, a charity committed to ending violence against women through primary prevention. A two-time Australian Hapkido Association champion, Mel teaches self-defence and mentors women and girls. She collaborates with organisations such as NSW Police, the Burdekin Project, the Salvation Army, Mackillop Family Services, and Community Northern Beaches to support youth and families. She is currently working with James Griffin MP, Member for Manly, to pilot a self-defence program for students on the Northern Beaches.

Link Wentworth's Neighbourhood Improvement Program

Link Wentworth

The Neighbourhood Improvement Program is a unique collaborative Program engaging partners and volunteers from across the community to beautify and improve the homes of people living in social housing in Western Sydney. Link Wentworth and key partners Habitat for Humanity tap into resources and volunteers to focus on a targeted site, with participation from staff, tenants, businesses, corporate volunteers and donors across the community. In 2025, the Program has held sessions at sites in St Marys, Cranebrook, and Shalvey communities, resulting in significant impact on living environments, social and community dynamics and a collective sense of caring for communities.

PCC Keeping Seniors Tech Savvy

Parramatta Community College

Parramatta Community College's Tech Savvy Seniors program empowers senior citizens in greater Western Sydney with essential digital literacy skills. Through tailored workshops - covering smartphones, online safety, and government services - they bridge the digital divide, fostering independence and social connection. Since its launch, PCC has delivered 120+ workshops (onsite and offsite), engaging 1000+ seniors from diverse cultural backgrounds. This initiative combats isolation, enhances access to healthcare and banking, and strengthens intergenerational bonds. Recognised by the NSW Government, it exemplifies PCC's commitment to inclusive, life-changing education for seniors.

Recipes for Connection Project

Older Women's Network Bankstown Wellness Centre

Recipes for Connection is an empowering initiative by the Older Women's Network (OWN) that brings together older women from refugee and migrant backgrounds, creating a space where their voices, traditions, and experiences are valued. Through sharing recipes and the personal stories behind them, women celebrate their cultural heritage while building meaningful connections and overcoming isolation. The project fosters confidence, belonging, and intergenerational exchange through workshops, gatherings, and a collaborative cookbook. By recognizing the strength and wisdom of these women, Recipes for Connection uplifts their contributions, amplifies their stories, and reinforces their vital place in the community.

Refugee Stories for Change

Refugee Council of Australia

The Refugee Stories for Change Schools and Community Education Program (RSFC), developed by the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA), aims to build social cohesion and raise awareness about the experiences and contributions of refugees in Australia. The program seeks to increase awareness and understanding of the challenges refugees face, reduce negative perceptions while fostering acceptance of refugees and people seeking asylum, and build community harmony by promoting greater tolerance. Through storytelling and education, RSFC encourages meaningful conversations that challenge misconceptions and support a more inclusive and welcoming society for all.

RESET4YOUTH Youth Beat

Mission Australia

Youth Beat is a 3-person team of exceptional workers who perform outreach service through a Youth Beat van, where they reach and engage young people and provide them with information and education, specifically in more remote areas of southwest Sydney, where access to support is limited. The Taster Barber Workshop in South West Sydney successfully strengthened the community by offering 30 young people an opportunity to explore a career in barbering. Led by a local barber with strong community connections, the workshop provided hands-on experience and insights into the profession. YouthBeat played a pivotal role in coordinating the event, handling registrations, and liaising with local organisations to ensure its success.

SHINE for Kids Parklea Correctional Centre Child and Family Program

SHINE for Kids

Parklea Correctional Centre Child and Family Program is facilitated by SHINE for Kids and provides a drop-in centre, parenting courses, child and parent activity days and Storytime to support families and ensure children and young people maintain or build a strong relationship with their parent in custody, increasing well-being and decreasing feelings of isolation. Visiting a prison can be daunting, so trained staff help families arrange visits, navigate the system, and ensure that time spent with a parent in custody is positive and child friendly.

Strong Safe Families

Prosper (Project Australia)

Strong Safe Families provides events, programs, professional development, workshops, community development activities and family wellbeing initiatives tailored to culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Programs are delivered in community languages and have been created to support new arrivals, refugees, asylum seekers and marginalised families to navigate complex systems. The Strong Safe Families offering includes the award-winning 'Achieving School Success' which supports school transition and successful family experiences with the Australian education system, Better Beginnings which promotes parent-child relationships, and 3R's (Rights, Relationships, Responsibilities) to support new arrivals to have positive interactions with complex systems such as Health and Education.

The BizABLE Microenterprise Program

The Right Coordination

The BizABLE Microenterprise Program empowers people with a disability to become entrepreneurs by providing essential resources, training, and support for launching and sustaining small businesses. This innovative initiative fosters inclusivity and economic independence, enabling participants to tap into their unique talents and skills. Through personalised mentorship, access to creative supports, and community networking, BizABLE promotes self employment and strengthens local economies. By breaking down barriers and enhancing opportunities those often excluded from the workforce, the program not only transforms lives but also cultivates stronger, more resilient communities, making it a deserving nominee for the Outstanding Project in Stronger Communities.

The Carramar Early Learning Centre - Woodville Alliance

Woodville Alliance

The Carramar Early Learning Centre - Woodville Alliance, a flagship initiative of Woodville Alliance, is a model of excellence in early childhood education. The Centre has played a pivotal role in empowering children and families by providing essential learning and developmental support, establishing a strong foundation for future success. Through innovative programming and strong community connections, it has fostered a nurturing environment where children flourish, even during challenging periods.

The CASS Respite Clubhouse

CASS Care Limited

This 3-day Respite Clubhouse Project, with an optional 2-night stay, supports people with dementia and their carers from East Asian backgrounds, including Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, and Indonesian communities in Yagoona, Campsie, and beyond. The program focuses on respite care and transition planning for those new to or struggling with existing aged care services. Through culturally and linguistically appropriate support, participants gain access to essential resources, social inclusion, and tailored guidance to ease their transition between service types. By fostering a stronger community, the program empowers families to navigate the healthcare system with confidence and improve their overall well-being.

The Child, Youth and Family Interagency

Richmond Community Services Inc.

The Child, Youth and Family Interagency is a collaboration between Richmond Community Services, Hawkesbury Community Outreach Services, Peppercorn, Strong Nation, Merana Aboriginal Community Association for the Hawkesbury Inc., Barnardos Australia and Hawkesbury City Council. The interagency strengthens community connections by uniting family support workers to enhance service delivery. Events like Child Protection Week and Harmony Day provide family-friendly activities, resources, and a welcoming space for diverse families to connect with essential services, reducing barriers to support and fostering social and cultural inclusion.

The Digital Empowerment Initiative: Bridging the Digital Divide in the Fairfield LGA

Community First Step

The Digital Empowerment Initiative (DEI) addresses the substantial digital exclusion in Fairfield LGA by improving digital access and affordability and enhancing digital literacy and ability, particularly for culturally diverse women-led, single-parent households. Through tailored culturally and linguistic programs, participants gained confidence and tools to engage with the digital world by equipping Vietnamese and Arabic-speaking mothers with essential digital skills, translation support, and the provision of laptops and data packages. The DEI also demonstrates the importance of an 'end-to-end' structure prioritising wrap-around support, empowering women to access services, connect socially, and improve their social and economic opportunities.

The EViE Project - Ending Violence Improving Equality

Blue Mountain's Womens Health and Resource Centre

The EViE Project mission is to build community resilience and address gender based violence through education and empowerment. In 2023-24 the young women's EViE project consisting of high school students, created and distributed a community safety survey to gather data surrounding womens safety in public spaces and distributed violence prevention resources across local high schools. The group has been active in the community and local schools in highlighting the social drivers of violence impacting womens and children and produced some powerful messages through film and art to advocate for young womens safety to the community.

TLC Impact Cafe (Frapp & Capp)

TLC Impact Café is more than just a café, it is a social enterprise dedicated to inclusion, empowerment, and community transformation. Operated by TLC Impact Foundation, it provides meaningful employment and training opportunities for individuals with disabilities, enabling them to build confidence, gain valuable skills, and contribute to society. By fostering a culture of acceptance and support, TLC Impact Café breaks barriers to employment and strengthens community connections. Through inclusive hiring, mentorship, and accessibility-focused initiatives, it creates a stronger, more inclusive greater Western Sydney, making a tangible impact on lives and local businesses alike.

Western Sydney Tech Innovators

Western Sydney Tech Innovators (WSTI) is a grassroots initiative dedicated to fostering AI-powered innovation and enhancing AI literacy within the Western Sydney community. Led by Lailei Huang and a group of passionate community members, WSTI has rapidly grown to over 350 active members and is entirely volunteer-run. The organization offers free hands-on workshops, interactive events, and educational programs aimed at empowering individuals and businesses to harness emerging technologies. WSTI has established partnerships with organizations such as the City of Parramatta Council, Western Sydney Startup Hub powered by Spacecubed, Western Sydney University, and UNSW, to drive economic growth and promote digital inclusion in the region.

WestWords - Writers in Western Sydney Schools Program

WestWords

In 2024, WestWords' Schools Program delivered 60 creative writing activities across 40 Western Sydney schools, reaching 5,806 students and employing 27 professional writers. Focused on equity and inclusion, the program worked with schools in some of the region's most disadvantaged communities. Students published 12 anthologies, shared their stories proudly at school launches, and took home books featuring their own writing - often the first book in the household. Over 90% reported improved confidence and self-expression, with many showing measurable gains in literacy and engagement. WestWords transforms classrooms into creative sanctuaries - where young people don't just learn to write, they learn they belong.

Women of Blacktown 2025

Blacktown City Council

The 'Women of Blacktown' project is made up of four different parts: book showcasing the stories of 25 remarkable women in the greater Western Sydney, workshop on 'Building on your strengths', video project and panel discussion that focussed on the lives and work of the multicultural women leaders who were awarded the Blacktown Woman of the year awards in the previous years.
A high social impact project, it has served to enable connection, build understanding and empathy among the locals and create a strong bonding within the community by addressing their needs.

WSYD Moving

WSYD Moving is an initiative focused on tackling physical inactivity and health inequities in Western Sydney. It works to create a healthier community by fostering collaborations across sectors to promote active lifestyles. Through events like the WSYD Moving Symposium, the organisation facilitates partnerships, shares best practices, and develops strategies to reduce inactivity. It also provides a platform for knowledge-sharing and professional development through its Community of Practice. The initiative aims to systemically improve access to physical activity, sport, and recreation in the region, ultimately contributing to healthier, more connected communities.

Youth Health Education Officers and the Vocational Education and Training in Schools (VETiS) program

Youth Health Service

Joelle Hewitt has been a Youth Health Education Officer for the last 12 months, working with vulnerable young people aged 12-24 years in Southwestern Sydney local health district. In her role, she develops and facilitates education workshops to empower participants with the knowledge, skills and tools to enable them take control of their health and wellbeing outcomes. Joelle holds a bachelor's degree in health science with a double major in Health Promotion and Public Health and is currently completing her master's in public health.

Outstanding Project Climate & Environmental Resilience

JUDGING CRITERIA

This category recognises exceptional community projects that respond to the impacts of climate change on vulnerable people across greater Western Sydney. Examples may include projects which seek to amplify community voices or build community resilience to climate change.

10 Sustainable Building Design Objectives

Blacktown City Council

In 2018, Blacktown City Council endorsed the 'Responding to Climate Change Strategy'. In 2023, Council Executive tasked the Environmental Services division and the City Architects Directorate with developing a sustainability strategy for new and refurbished Council buildings. After considering building rating systems like Green Star and NABERS, which were deemed too costly and time-consuming, the Council collaborated with external consultants to create a detailed matrix. However, this approach proved overly prescriptive. A revised strategy, based on national and international best practices, was adopted, introducing 10 Sustainable Building Design Objectives to guide the design and implementation of 10 key civic projects.

Good360 Australia

At Good360 Australia they are connectors. They connect charities, schools and society's most vulnerable with businesses willing to donate unsold or surplus goods, services and disaster recovery essentials. The result is a Circle of Good that reduces need and waste in our communities at the same time so everyone benefits – from people to the planet. Headquartered at Smithfield, Good360 supports 4700+ charities/disadvantaged schools nationally, and approximately 12%, almost 600, in the 13 LGA's across Western Sydney. Since launching in 2015, over $170 million worth of material aid, around 30% of their total impact, has been distributed in Western Sydney.



Paramatta Bike Hub

Addventageous

Charlene is the founder and operator of Parramatta Bike Hub which seeks to encourage people with bike riding through mental health, training, navigation maintenance skills for CALD, women and child groups. Encouraging people to consider and gain skills with active transport will lead to reduced vehicle emissions, private vehicle demand, reduce congestion and reduce demand on non-renewable resources while improving public health.

Reducing the use of disposable nonsterile barrier plastic gowns by ICU staff

South Western Sydney Local Health District

Disposable nonsterile barrier gowns, used to prevent infection and contamination, became routine post-COVID. In a 2022 study, over 50% of gown use in our ICU was unnecessary. We initiated a quality improvement project aiming to reduce gown use by 15% . Using the University of Michigan Learning Health Cycle methodology, we introduced an educational package promoting appropriate gown use. Results showed a 39.4% reduction in gown use (from 3,800 to 1,500 per month), with no change in MRO acquisition rates. This led to a reduction of 2,081 kg CO2 emissions, 700 kg clinical waste, and $2,300 in costs monthly.

'Resilient Villages'

'Resilient Villages' project, Mountains Community Resource Network (MCRN Inc)

'Resilient Villages' supports, celebrates & facilitates community-led, locally-driven, resilience plans & actions in the Blue Mountains. There is no 'one size fits all' approach to managing the complex processes of response, recovery, & resilience cycles. Each community has its own unique set of geographical, cultural & historical features that inform its response; these processes must be managed by the people who understand them the best - the community themselves. Rather than a top-down approach where decisions are made outside the community, we believe that community-led resilience building starts and continues with listening & collaborating on the priorities of community members.

Tabiea Climate Action Campaign

Arab Council Australia and Nature Conservation Council of NSW

The Tabiea Climate Action Campaign, a partnership between the Arab Council Australia and the Nature Conservation Council of NSW, is designed to engage Arabic-speaking communities in Western Sydney. It seeks to raise awareness about the specific impacts of climate change on their region and empower individuals to take meaningful action. Through education and advocacy, the campaign encourages community members to participate in political processes, voice their concerns, and support policies that address climate challenges. By fostering a deeper understanding of environmental issues, Tabiea aims to inspire long-term commitment to sustainability and climate justice within Arabic-speaking communities.

Outstanding Project Community Arts & Culture

JUDGING CRITERIA

This category recognises exceptional community projects that achieve social impact through arts and/or culture in greater Western Sydney. Examples of community arts and culture projects may include those that use art and culture to build social connection or as a means of expression of identity.

Abstract Abilities
Uniting NSW.ACT

The Abstract Abilities Art Competition, established in 2019, provides a platform for artists with disability to showcase their talent, share their unique perspectives, and celebrate creativity. The competition has grown each year, with artists gaining recognition, selling their work, and building their confidence. The competition fosters inclusion and empowers participants to explore art as a form of self-expression and economic opportunity. One artist sold their entire collection, while another winner credited the competition with transforming their artistic confidence, leading to a partnership with a well-known art dealer. Through art, this initiative drives social change and visibility for artists with disability.

Arts in Health Program, Liverpool Health and Academic Precinct, Liverpool Hospital Redevelopment
South Western Sydney Local Health District

The wonder of the arts is transforming the experience of patients, staff and community in the Liverpool Hospital redevelopment. Unveiled last year, the artworks beautifully celebrate our region's connection to country and culturally diverse community. Co-designed with Aboriginal and multicultural communities, the artworks feature the themes of belonging and culture. The First Nations artworks, a sculpture and the digital Burbangana installation, meaning take my hand and hold me up in the Darug language, welcome the community in the main entrance. The stunning wall art, designed by local artists from migrant and refugee backgrounds, is showcased across the new building.

Elevated Culture Festival 2024
Elevated Culture Foundation

Elevated Culture Festival is a grassroots community movement grounded in Pasifika values and driven by a passion for multicultural inclusion. Born in Western Sydney, its brought together over 30 schools since its inception in 2023 through an annual cultural festival, teacher workshops, and youth-led initiatives that centre identity, belonging and cultural wellbeing. More than just events, Elevated Culture builds meaningful partnerships between families, schools, and local services - creating spaces where young people feel seen, supported, and empowered. By connecting students to real opportunities and leadership pathways, it's reshaping how schools engage Pasifika communities and driving lasting impact through the power of culture and connection.

Fairfield Fashion Runway
Think+DO Tank Foundation

Fairfield Fashion Runway at Think+DO Tank Foundation, consisted of the Couture Collective, the Adornment Collective, FoodLab and the Seed of Hope Choir bringing together local women from diverse backgrounds to co-create garments, adornments, food and song celebrating their cultures. Over the span of 2 years, participants worked with artists and designers to explore themes of Land, Motherhood and Spirituality, culminating in a public parade and exhibition. Through collaborative art-making and storytelling, the project empowers women, uplifts cultural expression, and provides a platform for their voices to be seen and heard in public spaces.

Fancy A Cuppa
Harman Foundation

Fancy a Cuppa is a unique Harman Foundation initiative using a mobile coffee van to raise awareness about domestic and sexual violence. While offering free coffee, the van creates a safe, welcoming space for conversations and support. The bold signage spreads the message: Say No to Domestic and Family Violence. The project empowers vulnerable community members by offering accredited barista training with hands-on work experience, helping them gain confidence, skills, and pathways to employment. Fancy a Cuppa connects with the community through compassion and care- transforming lives, one meaningful cup at a time.

Katia Kullengren
Ballet Without Borders

Katia is a visionary leader and passionate advocate for the transformative power of arts and culture. As the founder of Ballet Without Borders (BWB), she has dedicated herself to making ballet accessible to children in disadvantaged communities, fostering confidence, creativity, and cultural appreciation. Alongside her role as Chair of The Living Room Theatre and Chief of Staff at Settlement Services International, Katia balances strategic leadership with hands-on community engagement. Driven by a mission to break barriers in the arts, she combines innovative teaching methods, meaningful partnerships, and a holistic approach to create lasting social impact through ballet and storytelling.

Learning Through Music
Woodville Alliance

The Learning Through Music program brings families together through meaningful musical experiences that nurture creativity and connection for children aged 0-5. Designed with developmentally appropriate activities, the program empowers parents and children to explore music in a supportive and engaging environment. With 50 families actively participating, it fosters confidence, joy, and social interaction while celebrating cultural diversity and inclusivity. This dynamic initiative strengthens family bonds and builds a sense of community through the universal language of music.

My brilliant sophisticated spontaneous scarf adventure and journey - Imogen Jade & Jenny Kee

Campbelltown City Council

Exhibition 'My brilliant sophisticated spontaneous scarf adventure and journey' presented a silk scarf collaboration between emerging artist Imogen Jade, living with down syndrome and fashion icon, Jenny Kee AO. The exhibition featured Imogen's design journey with Kee, including a short film from local filmmakers, Samia Halabi and Ludwig El Haddad capturing their journey and an interactive space inspired by the project's focus on uplifting and affirmative words. This project was facilitated by Little Orange, a Campbelltown Arts Centre working studio for artists who identify as a person living with disability, d/Deaf and Hard of Hearing and/or Disabled Creatives.

'Ngalambay' by Maddison Gibbs and Danielle Mate

Campbelltown City Council

'Ngalambay' is an immersive portal through time and space linking Water, Mother and Country by Aboriginal artists Maddison Gibbs and Danielle Mate. Campbelltown City Council partnered with Transport for NSW under its 'Places to Love' program to connect its Billabong Parklands to the CBD. Campbelltown Arts Centre collaborated with the artists and an intergenerational cohort of First Nations women over three artist led workshops: on site, on Country and in the studio. The finished artwork honours Campbelltown's Minerva Billabong, a sacred Dharawal birthing site, and the late Aunty Kay Bussell, who passed on Traditional Water Cleansing Ceremony to Campbelltown's community.

Paint Liverpool REaD

Schools as Community Centres Program - Ashcroft Public School

'Paint Liverpool REaD (PLR) is an early literacy initiative that encourages parents and carers to 'share stories, talk, sing, read and play with their children every day from birth'. PLR is facilitated by a working group made up of individuals from local organisations who give their time in-kind to conduct early literacy activities in the Liverpool community. Our mascot GoGo the Gecko travels around Liverpool engaging with families and sharing his early literacy messages. PLR is part of Paint the Town REaD which is a nation-wide initiative with over 100 locations across Australia.



Refugee Stories for Change

Refugee Council of Australia

The Refugee Stories for Change Schools and Community Education Program (RSFC), developed by the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA), aims to build social cohesion and raise awareness about the experiences and contributions of refugees in Australia. The program seeks to increase awareness and understanding of the challenges refugees face, reduce negative perceptions while fostering acceptance of refugees and people seeking asylum, and build community harmony by promoting greater tolerance. Through storytelling and education, RSFC encourages meaningful conversations that challenge misconceptions and support a more inclusive and welcoming society for all.

Settlement Services

Accessible Diversity Services Initiative Limited (ADSI)

Aynalem Tessema is a dedicated and highly skilled Settlement Generalist Worker with over 10 years of experience at Accessible Diversity Services. She has previously served as a manager, demonstrating exceptional leadership and commitment to both clients and employees. Aynalem is known for her strong interpersonal skills, professionalism, and compassion, making a lasting impact on those she works with. She has built trusting relationships with clients, employees, and volunteers, fostering a supportive and inclusive environment. Her expertise, dedication, and outstanding service have made her an invaluable asset, and she continues to make a meaningful difference in the community.

StoryCasters
Diversity Arts Australia

StoryCasters is a ground-breaking training and mentorship program that empowers culturally diverse young people in Western Sydney to become the next generation of arts journalists, content creators, and cultural critics. Through hands-on experience in podcasting, arts reviewing, digital storytelling, and multimedia production, StoryCasters amplifies underrepresented voices while building industry pathways for emerging creatives. The project fosters community engagement and creative leadership, ensuring that the arts landscape in greater Western Sydney reflects its diverse communities. With over 100 graduates to-date, StoryCasters has been instrumental in increasing access to the arts while providing young talent with skills, networks, and professional opportunities.

TAGATA MOANA: People of the Pacific Ocean
Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre

TAGATA MOANA was a dynamic arts and culture program at Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre, celebrating the diverse artistic expressions of the Moana Oceania region. The program showcased three powerful exhibitions by Pacific artists - Tyrone Te Waa, Sereima Adimate/Stelly G(including her feature film), and Adriana M hanga Lear - alongside a series of free creative hands-on workshops curated by Leo Tanoi which animated the arts centre over a series of weekends in Spring 2024. In addition, we also presented two ambitious skills and professional development initiatives:

1. CLUB WELD ATTITUDE, a 3-week music development program catering for Pasifika musicians with autism
2. BODY PASIFIKA an all-day culture and leadership development program bridging art, culture, and sport led by NRL start Nigel Vagana.

TAGATA MOANA created a platform for art, cultural exchange, promoting social impact and cultural connection.

WSMRC Creative Explorer Program
Diversity Arts Australia Western Sydney Migrant Resource Centre

The Western Sydney Migrant Resource Centre Creative Explorer Program is an after-school art and music program that was run in 2024 focusing on working with young people from CALD backgrounds at Ashcroft Public School in Liverpool. The program aimed to provide a safe and supportive environment for students to develop their artistic and musical skills, while also building confidence, communication skills, and a sense of belonging. The project was also supported by the NCOSS School Gateway Project and bilingual arts and music facilitators.

Outstanding Project CALD Communities

JUDGING CRITERIA

This category recognises the community projects and initiatives, which address the needs and contribute to positive outcomes for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities, within greater Western Sydney.

Build Your School Community Project
Navitas Skilled Futures (NSF)

NSF's 'Build your School Community' project aimed to foster migrant parent engagement with their school community and their children's learning through designing and piloting a suite of learning resources. Research and policy advice (e.g. The Centre for Multicultural Youth) highlights cultural awareness and English language skills as critical for migrant families' engagement with schools, for settlement and meaningful participation in Australian society. NSF collaborated with the Refugee and Community Liaison Officer for Sydney Catholic Schools and St Gertrude's Catholic Primary School, Smithfield. During 2024, migrant parents attended 'English plus Engagement' classes (DHA Adult Migrant English Program funded) on school grounds.

Digital Sisters Program
Community First Step

Digital Sisters Program - Bridging the Digital Divide for Women. The Digital Sisters program empowers women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds with essential digital skills to navigate everyday life with confidence. This free, four-week program is facilitated by bilingual mentors who provide information in Vietnamese and Arabic, ensuring participants can fully understand and engage with the content in a welcoming and supportive environment. Participants gain practical skills such as using smartphones, accessing online services, recognising and avoiding scams, and staying connected with family and friends. So far, we have delivered Digital Sisters to 6 groups - 3 for Vietnamese-speaking women and 3 for Arabic-speaking women - offering tailored learning experiences that meet the needs of each community.

Finding Safety Project
Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) Australia

Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) Australia's Finding Safety Project provides lifesaving support to refugee and migrant women in Western Sydney facing gender-based violence, including domestic and family violence, forced marriage, dowry abuse, trafficking, and modern slavery. The project delivers holistic, trauma-informed services, including casework, emergency relief, and capacity building programs. Through sector training, community outreach, and advocacy, Finding Safety raises awareness of GBV with an acute understanding of cultural complexities thus ensuring culturally sensitive support for CALD women. The project aims to empower women through providing them a safe space and a support community, whilst also advocating for and with them to create systemic change.

From the Ground UP to Equality

Arab Council Australia

This project was implemented by Arab Council Australia (ACA) in South West Sydney (SWS) between 1 July 2018 and June 2021 and later extended until 31 March 2022. The Project received funding for a further 18 months until June 2023 and much to our surprise and delight DCJ has on their own accord again offered a further extension period of 12 months. The aim of the Project was to highlight aspects within Arab culture that support gender equality, challenge attitudes and beliefs that underpin gender inequality and address and reverse the gendered drivers that increase the probability of Domestic and Family Violence (DFV). The resulting program, titled Musawat (meaning Equality in Arabic), was co-designed with the community. The aim of the program is achieved by delivering an Arabic specific prevention and strengths-based program for women and men to achieve attitudinal change.

Hoxton Park Public School Community Hub

Hoxton Park Public School Community Hub is run in partnership with Liverpool City Council and a program of Community Hubs Australia. The program supports families and their children as they navigate the education system and strengthen their connections with the local community. The Community Hub bridges the gap between migrants and the wider community, by connecting participants with schools, with each other and with organisations that can provide health, education and support.

Hume Housing's Cabramatta OzHarvest Nest course

Hume Housing

The OzHarvest NEST course, delivered in partnership with Hume Housing's Cabramatta community, supported 16 CALD community members and their families through a six-week cooking and nutrition program. Participants learned practical skills including meal preparation, label reading, and healthy ingredient swaps, while building confidence and food literacy. The program created a culturally inclusive space where diverse cooking traditions were shared, friendships formed, and social connection strengthened. By the final week, participants were confidently discussing nutrition and actively engaging in group cooking. The course concluded with a community meal, cookbooks, and Woolworths vouchers - celebrating both personal growth and collective achievement.

Inspiring Hair Freedom

Enable Women Africa

Enable Women Africa is a community foundation being created, dedicated to ending hair stigma for Black women and girls by advocating, educating, and driving systemic change. Through #InspiringHairFreedom, we challenge deeply rooted biases that label natural Black hair as unprofessional or unacceptable. Our work empowers women to embrace their identity without fear, ensuring they can thrive in workplaces, schools, and society. By amplifying voices, influencing policies, and shifting cultural narratives, we are not just freeing hair, we are freeing these women in Western Sydney and beyond.

Miss Sahara

Lead Beyond Education

Miss Sahara is a national leadership pageant that empowers African-Australian women by fostering leadership, confidence, and cultural pride. Established in 2018, it serves as a platform for participants to advocate for Africa's diverse heritage while challenging stereotypes and promoting inclusion in Australian society. Miss Sahara facilitates personal growth, skill development, and community engagement, helping women become role models and ambassadors of success. Through its initiatives, the pageant strengthens social cohesion, celebrates African culture, and inspires a new generation of leaders within the African-Australian community.

Pasifika Moving Aiga

Western Sydney Local Health District Multicultural Health Service, Collective Leisure, University Technology Sydney, Wesley Mission, Blacktown City Council and Emerton Youth Recreation Center BCC

Pasifika Moving is a co-designed physical activity initiative aimed at reducing health disparities among Pasifika communities in Western Sydney. The community-led program provides culturally relevant weekly exercise groups for Pasifika women (i.e., mothers), who are often overlooked, and play a key role in shaping the health behaviours of their families and communities. Pasifika Moving prioritises community leadership and inclusivity through empowering members to take ownership of the physical activity initatives. Initially launched as a pilot research project, the program has been running for 18 months, welcoming over 30 Pasifika women and their children from Western Sydney, achieved through ongoing collaboration with the University of Technology Sydney, Western Sydney Local Health District, Collective Leisure, Wesley Mission, and Blacktown City Council.

Refugee Stories for Change

Refugee Council of Australia

The Refugee Stories for Change Schools and Community Education Program (RSFC), developed by the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA), aims to build social cohesion and raise awareness about the experiences and contributions of refugees in Australia. The program seeks to increase awareness and understanding of the challenges refugees face, reduce negative perceptions while fostering acceptance of refugees and people seeking asylum, and build community harmony by promoting greater tolerance. Through storytelling and education, RSFC encourages meaningful conversations that challenge misconceptions and support a more inclusive and welcoming society for all.

Rhythm for well being

AASHA Australia Foundation

Rhythm workshops will focus on music, dance, and drumming and audience participation will be used to explore the natural benefits of music, sound, dance, art, and drumming. Worhsops of Rhythm for well-being for seniors will involve a structured routine that incorporates physical activity, healthy eating, meaningful social interaction, and cognitive stimulation. The focus will be on incorporating rhythmic elements like music and movement patterns to enhance overall well-being and quality of life. PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES: stretches to improve flexibility and mobility, walking or light cardio-arm movements to music. Strength training exercises targeting major muscle groups. Dance class beneficial for coordination and cognitive function. COGNITIVE STIMULATORS: Brain puzzles Reading. poetry learning new skills, flower making, quilt making social connections Regular social group meetings Community groups-AASHA seniors 9 monthly group phone calls, chats -networking. MINDFULNESS AND RELAXATION: Yoga, meditation, deep breathing -with a Qualified yoga teacher. EATING: Balanced meals- vegetarian Indian meals- Hydration- Water, tea- Music with a consistent rhythm can improve mood and stimulate memory. Positive Reinforcement- Engaging in rhythmic activities will be enjoyable and provide a sense of accomplishment.

Strategies to Prevent Modern Slavery (StoP) Program

Settlement Services International (SSI)

Modern slavery can take many forms and affect more Australians than we realise, with women, children, refugees, people seeking asylum, and recent migrants most at risk. The StoP program works with multicultural communities to increase knowledge and understanding about modern slavery with a focus on forced labour, domestic servitude, and forced marriage. We offer in-language community education to help migrant communities recognise the signs and empower them to take positive action. We tailor the sessions to meet the needs of the community to build capacity and equip them with the knowledge on support services and legal responses.

Street Sports

Street Industries Inc.

Street Sports is a grassroots movement empowering young people through high-energy community events that combine sport, food, and mentoring. Delivered in local areas across South-West Sydney, the initiative creates culturally relevant, accessible spaces for young people from diverse and marginalised backgrounds. Since 2022, Street Sports has engaged approximately 1,200 young people across Liverpool, Canterbury-Bankstown, and Georges River—offering connection, belonging, and real pathways to opportunity. It's more than a program—a community-powered movement helping young people rise above challenge and embrace their potential.

Swim Brothers & Her Swim School

Fitness for Purpose

Swim Brothers and Her Swim School are not-for-profit, trauma informed and culturally safe pool to ocean drowning prevention programs for Multicultural communities. The programs address the over representation of drownings amongst CALD and refugee communities by delivering sector award winning programs with large impacts. Swim Brothers and Her Swim School are the first culturally safe and trauma informed pool to ocean. Programs that provide weekly learn to swim, ocean safety and surf life saving programs in Auburn, Liverpool, Guildford, Roselands, Birrong, Blacktown and Miller.

Take the first step to start your new career - Employability support for migrant women (Korean/Vietnamese speaking)

CASS Care Limited

This project supported Korean and Vietnamese migrant women in Fairfield, Auburn, and beyond with limited English skills, helping them overcome employment barriers. While mainstream programs exist, language challenges often exclude them, despite their willingness to participate socially and culturally. This initiative provides a series of tailored employability support, guiding them toward their first jobs while building a multicultural community and professional network. By addressing barriers and offering career support, the project empowered over 800 women to integrate into the workforce and broader society, equipping them with the resources, confidence, and connections needed to thrive in Australia's labour market.

The Poetic Nest

The Still Nest

The Poetic Nest is a transformative initiative hosted by The Still Nest, providing bereaved parents, especially those from CALD backgrounds, a space to heal through creative writing and poetry. Held in person and through a series of online workshops, this immersive experience was led by award-winning poet and Bankstown Poetry Slam director, Sara Mansour and facilitated by bereaved mother and director of The Still Nest, Dr Fatima El-Assaad. Through guided workshops, participants found solace, connection, and a voice for their untold stories of their infertility journeys, and their lost babies and children. Supported by City of Canterbury Bankstown, AusRelief, Bankstown Arts Centre, and Outloud.

Titan Sports Group

Titan Sports Global

We foster, train and coach children to build resilience, confidence and physical health. Our range of sports includes Australian Football, Basketball, Handball, Soccer, Gymnastics and Karate to allow children to explore and excel in their dream sport. Titan Sports has become a community pillar in Wentworth Point, aiming to create a safe, caring environment for our kids with less TV and mobile devices. Parents are often too busy to organise productive time for children who are easily isolated by technology. Given the significant diversity of culture and language, with a high immigration rate into the suburb, Titan Sport uses sport and playing as a mechanism for connection, providing the community with an invaluable service, an entry way to friendship and belonging. Since beginning in a concrete, underground parking lot, the Titan Sports team has grown to become a community group that now provides Australian Rules coaching, teaching newcomers to the community about Australia's favourite game.



Welcome All Cultures Multicultural Engagement Program, Liverpool Health and Academic Precinct, Liverpool Hospital

South Western Sydney Local Health District

The Welcome All Cultures Multicultural Engagement Program was developed to encourage the involvement and engagement of the region's culturally diverse community in the $830 million Liverpool Hospital redevelopment. Addressing health literacy, language and cultural barriers, the program includes face-to-face, in-language sessions with cultural groups, in their own communities where they feel most comfortable. The program has empowered the groups to have confidence in the redevelopment while building trust and connection with their hospital. Culminating in a multicultural open day at Liverpool Hospital, the response has been overwhelmingly positive from the hundreds of people attending the sessions.

Women Of Blacktown 2025

The Stories Untold Collective

The 'Women of Blacktown' project is made up of four different parts: book showcasing the stories of 25 remarkable women in the greater Western Sydney, workshop on 'Building on your strengths', Video project and Panel discussion that focussed on the lives and work of the multicultural women leaders who were awarded the Blacktown Woman of the year awards in the previous years. A high social impact project, it has served to enable connection, build understanding and empathy among the locals and create a strong bonding within the community by addressing their needs.

Outstanding Youth Leader

JUDGING CRITERIA

This category aims to recognise a young person who has shown extraordinary leadership in actively supporting the well-being and improvement of their community.

Anthea Husein

Western Sydney University

Anthea is a current student at Western Sydney University, studying a double degree in Bachelor of Science and Bachelor of Business. She is passionate about empowering others and inspiring young girls to pursue STEM, as embodied through her development of EmpowHerMind, a children's storybook. Anthea is a vibrant and driven student leader whose contributions have significantly shaped the social and technological fabric of the Western Sydney University community and beyond.

Brooke Mizzi

Western Sydney University & SuperKids Behaviour Consulting

Brooke Mizzi is a current student at Western Sydney University, studying her Masters of Professional Psychology. She is dedicated to her work as a behaviour consultant for children on the autism spectrum and is passionate about having an impact on the social and emotional development of children, fostering inclusivity, and improved outcomes for families.

Jelly Van Doorn

Western Sydney University

Jelly is a student currently studying their Masters of Research at Western Sydney University. Jelly is passionate about giving back to the WSU community through their involvement in the Student Community Food Security Programs. His dedication to supporting the student community is evident in his hands-on involvement and willingness to travel far and wide to procure supplies for the Student Pantry.

Kenny Cao

Kenny has been actively involved with the Y NSW's Youth and Community programs since 2021 when he was 15 years old. He is now starting his first year in Radiography, as it is his dream to become a paediatric radiographer to assist in early diagnostic procedures, with a focus on MRI. He dreams of seeing the happy faces of children as they develop and improve over time and wants to be someone who spreads joy. Kenny is a very bubbly, understanding, and proactive person. He does not shy away from challenges and is always seeking to encourage those around him.

Khadijah Habbouche

Muslim Women Australia

Khadijah is a confident, passionate and resilient young Australian Muslim of Lebanese Palestinian background. She is actively involved in developing social awareness and action amongst young people, creating a platform for high achievement and a voice for social goodness, as well as demonstrating the interconnections that exist between all levels of society and the impact individuals can truly have. Through her community activism, Khadijah is involved in youth program development, mentoring of young girls, and establishing community projects and initiatives. During Covid-19, she helped form the Muslim Women Australia's Youth Advisory Committee to help address the issues young people were facing in the extended lockdown, particularly in Southwest Sydney. A certified swim instructor, Khadijah also teaches swimming to women who have escaped domestic violence, contributing to their healing process. Across her various community roles, she mentors young girls using culturally and religiously inclusive mental health and leadership strategies.

Lamisa Shah

Western Sydney Migrant Resource Centre, PROJECT ROCKIT, System 2

Lamisa, 20 (she/her) is passionate about bringing awareness to disability and racial discrimination within Western Sydney and our wider society. She is studying International Relations and enjoys baking deserts. Lamisa is nominated as a leading members of PROJECT ROCKIT's National Youth Collective, where she has built strong advocacy and community development skills over the last couple of years and is bringing those into Western Sydney. Lamisa is leading her generation in addressing bullying, hate and prejudice through participation in not just national campaigns with PROJECT ROCKIT, but in work with organisations like System 2 and Western Sydney Migrant Resource Centre where she is playing a role as a lived experience advocate and helping design, co-facilitate and guide other young people in Western Sydney in projects that promote resilience, address racism and create a more respectful and kinder community.

Linh Trinh

Western Sydney University

Linh is a current student at Western Sydney University studying a Bachelor of Engineering (Honours). She is a club leader at the University and was awarded the Vice Chancellor's Excellence Award in 2024 in the Student category for Engagement, a showcase of her innovation and contributions to the technological ad social landscape of Western Sydney. Linh recently won the VC Excellence Award in the Student category for Engagement showcasing that she is an innovator whose contributions to Western Sydney's technological and social landscape are both profound and far-reaching.

Mackenzie Woodbury

Western Sydney University

Mackenzie is a 22-year-old who has Cerebral Palsy (CP). With seven years of experience in the NSW Rural Fire Service, she has contributed in both Incident Management and firefighting roles, and is an active member of two brigades, where she holds multiple leadership roles such as Training Officer, Community Engagement Officer, and Equipment Officer. Holding a Bachelor's in Humanitarian and Development Studies, she specializes in Humanitarian Preparedness and Human Rights Protection. In addition to her emergency services work and education, she contribute to the EPIC-CP program which collaborates with children with CP, their families, and clinicians to break the cycle of disadvantage and disability so all children with CP can thrive. This work has led to several published research papers, and multiple speaking engagements, she also assists with research in pain management for orthopaedics and CP, working to improve education and care for children with CP.

Nabin Gautam

Nepali Students at Western Sydney

Nabin Gautam is a dedicated youth leader committed to empowering the Nepali and international student community in Western Sydney. As President of the Nepali Student Club at WSU, he has led initiatives promoting mental health, cultural inclusion, and student support, earning multiple awards. He played a key role in organising Dashain Fest 2024, which received recognition from the Premier of NSW. As Secretary of the Nepalese Blood Donor Association Australia, he has inspired 20+ youth donors, personally donating 26 times at young age. Recognised as 'Community Person of the Year 2023' & 'International Student of the year 2023 (ELICOS)', Narayan continues to drive meaningful and lasting change.



Rachel Harrison

Western Sydney University, National Centre for Childhood Grief

Rachel is a current student at Western Sydney University, studying her Masters of Clinical Psychology. She is a dedicated, driven, and passionate young woman who volunteers at the National Centre for Childhood Grief as a support worker, helping children navigate grief in a nurturing environment. Rachel has made significant contributions to the Western Sydney region through her impactful volunteer and professional work in various fields. As a volunteer support worker with the National Centre for Childhood Grief, Rachel plays a pivotal role in child counselling groups for children who have lost a parent.

Rajmallan Thiagarajan

Raj is a forward-thinking, empathetic and community-minded young person who is currently a Young Citizen of the year recipient, and champion for young people's mental health. Rajmallan has shown exceptional commitment to service, leadership, and personal growth across school and community levels. Recognised in the school's Honour Book, he has excelled in leadership, academics, and community impact. His achievements include earning the Bronze Duke of Edinburgh Award and participating in the NSW Premier Debating Competition. As a Youth Ambassador for the Western Sydney Community Forum, he advocated for anti-racism and youth leadership.

Ziyan Tejani

Multicultural NSW (NSW Government) and New Colombo Plan (Australian Government)

Ziyan Tejani is a 23-year-old Indian-Australian youth leader from Western Sydney, dedicated to mental health advocacy, youth empowerment, and inclusive policy. From mentoring underrepresented students to advising on policy and human rights, Ziyan seeks to build programs that uplift and inspire. He serves on the Multicultural Youth Network for the NSW Government and nationally as a New Colombo Plan Alumni Representative. Ziyan leads with empathy and a deep passion for empowering youth and community. His contributions have been recognised through the North West Sydney Young Volunteer of the Year Award, NSW Mental Health Youth of the Year Award, and the Asian-Australian List of 2024.

Western Sydney University Unsung Heroes Award

Aashish Neupane

Aaahish is a current student at Western Sydney University who has been instrumental in the development of major multicultural events in Western Sydney. As President of the International Students Association at Western, he greatly expanded their membership in one year alone, and is devoted to providing his fellow students a sense of belonging while at University through hands-on experiences in leadership and community engagement.

Aimee Lawson

Aimee is a current student at Western Sydney University and is an active and passionate advocate for social justice. She has volunteered extensively at local schools and community organisations in the region. She is devoted to her work in community legal centers, including the Western Sydney Community Legal Center, the HIV/AIDS Legal Centre, Knowmore Legal Center, and the Just Support Center, and is passionate about ensuring individuals facing legal and social challenges receive the support and advocacy they need to navigate complex systems.

Anthea Husein

Anthea is a vibrant and driven student leader at Western Sydney University. She has held roles within the Western Sydney Formula SAE team, and prior to moving to Australia, she launched EmpowHerMind, a children's storybook designed to inspire young girls to pursue STEM. This project has earnt her national recognition and regional awards in New Zealand.

Arafa Abdelaziz

Arafa is a current student at Western Sydney University, studying a Bachelor of Health Science with a focus on Public Health. She is a support worker with the NDIS and is passionate about ensuring individuals with disabilities receive the resources they need to live fulfilling and indepedent lives. She is also an active volunteer with the Sudanese Australian Health and Wellbeing Association, where she has spearheaded initiatives aimed at improving the health and wellbeing of Sudanese Australians.

Ashes Niroula

Ashes is a Western Sydney University student completing their Masters of Civil Engineering and devoting their time to the WSU Chapter of Engineers Without Borders.

Battoul Saleh

Battoul is a current student at Western Sydney University, studying a combined degree in Occupational Therapy and Creative Leadership. She is committed to creating inclusive, accessible spaces for learning, healing, and professional growth. She is a recipient of the Western Sydney University Summer Research Scholarship, and an active voluntee with Taha Academy at her local Islamic mosque, where she tutors neurodiverget children in Islamic and Quranic studies.

Bowen Fucile

Bowen is a current student at Western Sydney University, and has served as General Secretary and now Vice-President of Undergraduate Education with the Student Representative Council. He also holds a leadership role within the University's Formula SAE team and is passionate about championing initiatives that better equip his fellow students for their future careers.

Brooke Mizzi

Brooke is a currently student at Western Sydney University completing her Masters of Professional Psychology. She is devoted to providing exceptional service to children and families in the Western Sydney region, having worked as a behaviour consultant for children on the autism spectrum. Additionally, she has worked as a mental health school workshop facilitator, conducting school workshops with primary and high school children and advocating for mental health literacy and aiding in resilience building.

Chi Hao Lu

Chi Hao Lu is a current student at Western Sydney completing his Masters of Inormation & Communications Technology. He devotes his spare time to volunteering for Western's Vietnamese International Student Association, and has held a variety of roles within the initiative including Secretary, Treasurer, and Head of Events.

Damien Hollis

Damien is a current student at Western Sydney University and is a leader amongst the University's Formula SAE team, where he has proactively developed organisational systems that mirrors best practice in professional technological environments.

Daniel Bonatti

Daniel is a current student at Western Sydney University, where he has held a range of leadership positions withint he Student Community through the Student Representative Council. He has also been extensively involved in the government of the University's academic committees and is passionate about youth outreach in STEM education.

Jade Dsouza

Jade is a current student at Western Sydney University and is a highly engaged member of The Academy program. She is a student leader through the Formula SAE team and takes pride in being a Student Ambassador through a range of speaking commitments and other events where she represents the students of WSU.

Jelly Van Doorn

Jelly is a current student at Western Sydney University, where he has held a number of leadership positions amongst the Student Commuity, including student clubs, societies, and the Student Representative Council. He is dedicated to improving the social landscape of Western Sydney University and providing safe spaces to connect with others.

Katherine Warwick

Katherine a current PhD candidate in Western Sydney University's School of Science. Her research focuses on the anthropogenic impacts on platypus populations, positioning the species as an indicator of waterway health. She is deeply engaged with the Western Sydney community, collaborating with landholders, councils, and local groups to incorporate their knowledge into her research. She is passionate about educating young people about the importance of biodiversity and sustainable water management and inspiring the next generation of scientists and environmental advocates in Western Sydney.



Lena Huynh

Lena is a current student at Western Sydney University completing a Master of Teaching (Primary). She is a mentor in the University's MATES program, where she volunteers her time to helping first year students transition into life at WSU, imbuing her sessions with a sense of community spirit, patience, and enthusiasm.

Lidya Rivai

Lidya is a current student at Western Sydney University, currently completing a Master of Teaching. She has been actively involved in the student community as a club leader and works closely with various groups and programs to support student wellbeing, including her contributions to the Pantry program, where she helps to distribute free groceries to students in need.

Linh Trinh

Linh is a current student at Western Sydney University. She recently won the Vice Chancellor's Excellence Award in the Student Engagement category for her contributions as founder and president of the Robotics, Automation and Manufacturing Club at the University. She has transformed student engagement through hands-on STEM initiatives that empower students to develop real-world technical skills and connect them to industry professionals.

Miraan Ali Khan

Miraan is a currently student at Western Sydney University enrolled in a Bachelor of Psychology (Honours).

Nicola Tsoutis

Nicola is a current student at Western Sydney University, enrolled in a Bachelor of Advanced Science. She is a highly engaged volunteer in her spare time, and is passionate about working with Australian wildlife initiatives to save and protect native species.

Nisal (Nimesha Dayawansa) Keembiyage

Nisal is a current student at Western Sydney University, studying a Bachelor of Medical Science. He has been involved as the president of the Sri Lankan Student Union at Western, and plays a key role in fostering a sense of belonging for international students. He is also a well known content creator at Western with an authentic engaging online presence.

Richard Xu

Richard is a current student at Western Sydney University and a dedicated member of the Student Community Food Security Programs team. He also volunteers weekly at the Parramatta City Community Dinner, and is passionate about making an impact on the lives of students in need.

Sonu Sonu

Sonu Sonu is a current student at Western Sydney University studying his PhD in Engineering. He is a highly engaged HDR student and has consistently contributed to a wide range of cultural, academic, and community-building initiatives that have had a positive impact on the broader student body. His passion and devotion to the University community has recently elevated to an active role in organising high-profile international delegations and workshops aimed at strengthening the university's global business presence.

Souhaib El Arja

Souhaib is a current student at Western Sydney University, and has accumulated over 200 hours of community service through his participation with the University's Academy program and the New South Wales State Emergency Service.

Vidushi Sethi

Vidushi is a current student at Western Sydney University, and is the co-founder of the University's Wester Sydney Indian Society, a pivotal organisation connecting over 2000 students and professionals from diverse backgrounds. She has led campaigns to provide students with vital resources, including free food, health and wellness workshops and career resources. She is passionate about ensuring the safety and wellbeing of her fellow students, and has co-led the University's Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment campaign, raising awareness around personal safety and the importance of consent in a University setting.

Zacks Fernandez-Hocknull

Zacks is a current student at Western Sydney University studying a Bachelor of Psychology (Honours). He is an engaged student who devotes his spare time to volunteering as a mentor through the WSU Mentor program where he has had a demonstrable impact on his mentees who have attended his sessions through his semester. He has made them feel welcome and comfortable at University and is an exemplar of creating communities, studying hard, and spreading kindness to others.

ZEST AWARDS

ZEST is led by

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