

# *Step This Way*

Women at work in Local Government in  
South Australia

Councils as employers of choice for women



***Showcasing leading practice***

September 2008



A joint State/Local Government initiative managed by Local Government Managers Australia SA Division, in collaboration with Local Government Association of SA, Australian Local Government Women’s Association (SA Branch), and the South Australian Government, through the Office for State/Local Government Relations and the Office for Women

## FOREWORD

In 2007 a national review overseen by the Australian Local Government Women's Association, titled *The Way Forward*, recognised that while some significant advances have been made in strengthening the role of women in Local Government, much more needs to be done to improve the participation of women.

Despite increasing numbers of women participating in the workforce, the progress of women into leadership positions has been slow across the board. Women continue to be under-represented in all spheres of government. Governments are also experiencing workforce skill shortages, and Local Government is experiencing difficulties in attracting and retaining skilled senior staff.

Along with being representative of the population as a whole, building the leadership capabilities of women across a wide range of roles and responsibilities releases an untapped workforce potential.

*Step This Way* has been prepared as part of South Australia's overall response to *The Way Forward – a Review of the National Framework for women in Local Government* released by the Australian Local Government Association in June 2007

It describes the real activities of Councils in our State that are providing workforce opportunities, organisational commitment resulting in tangible outcomes for women employees.

*Step This Way* is a joint initiative between the Local Government Managers Association SA Division and the Australian Local Government Women's Association SA Branch, with input from a joint State and Local Government advisory group. It is designed to do two things:

- Research and deliver information about current practices of councils in South Australia to advance women's workforce participation, including any actions taken as a result of receiving *The Way Forward*; and
- Provide case study leading practice examples that are improving women employee participation in Local Government in South Australia.

*Step This Way* gives recognition to council achievements over recent years and is a resource for all councils. It provides readers with useful contacts to find out more about the workforce practices. These are profiled for other councils to consider for adaptation within workforce management practices.

It does not pretend to be a complete presentation of all council initiatives, although all councils were given the opportunity to contribute. *Step This Way* does, however, try to provide a wide range of examples to help generate interest and stimulate new initiatives.

I acknowledge all those involved in the development of *Step This Way* and thank the contributing councils and women officers for their willingness to share information about organisational initiatives and experiences.

As *The Way Forward* recognises, while there has been some improvement in women's participation in Local Government, there is still some way to go. I encourage Local Government to continue to work towards the achievement of greater participation of women in leadership.



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## WELCOME TO STEP THIS WAY

**STEP THIS WAY is about women employees in Local Government in South Australia and showcasing the actions that Councils are taking to enable women to work in senior and non-traditional roles. It also highlights the strategies that can be used to manage potential and encourage diversity, in order to achieve equity in the workplace.**

Women's participation in the workforce has grown steadily during the past several decades, yet despite this growing participation, women's careers tend to continue to take a decidedly different direction to those of men, not only in the Local Government sector but also in all spheres of government and the private sector.<sup>1</sup> The literature suggests this is due to a variety of factors including women's careers being interrupted for family reasons, and a perceived lack of opportunities for advancement in a patriarchal workforce culture. Over the years there has been much research about challenges faced by women and well documented observations about the slow rate of change.

Following the release in November 2001 of *The National Framework for Women in Local Government*<sup>2</sup> Local Government took up the challenge to consider the issues that contribute to a low rate of participation in decision-making in Local Government by women, both in the elected sphere and within Local Government administration. The National Framework identified that if Australia is to realise its full potential as a nation, then systems must be responsive to maximise the capacity of all available skills offered from the population as a whole. It proposed potential strategies to address the workforce issues identified in areas of job selection and promotion; taking account of family responsibilities; cultural change; training and development; and regional networking opportunities.

In 2007, a review of the National Framework, overseen by the Australian Local Government Women's Association, resulted in the release of *The Way Forward*.<sup>3</sup> The review report identified that the same issues identified in 2001 remain prominent in inhibiting better participation by women in leadership positions in Local Government. It found that, in the period between the release of the 2001 Framework and its review, while some progress has been made in strengthening the role of women in Local Government, these changes have not substantially increased the number of women in decision-making positions and more needs to be done.

The national review identified that along with being representative of the population as a whole, the issue of improving the participation of women in Local Government is particularly relevant given the current national skill shortages. Of note, women make up around 51% of the population<sup>4</sup>, and over recent decades a higher proportion of women have taken up tertiary studies, and this has significantly increased the skilled labour pool from which to draw.

*The Way Forward 2007* has been released at a time when Local Government throughout Australia is exploring a diverse range of workforce planning initiatives that take into account the different workforce aspects of regional, rural and urban locations. These initiatives include exploring new ways of working within the current work force, and with local businesses and communities.<sup>5</sup> Responding to the release of *The Way Forward*, Local Government Managers

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Local Government Training *An overview of current literature identifying the role and participation of women in Local Government, October 2007*; *Women Struggle for Equal Share* reported in *The Weekend Australian* business pages, 28 June 2008; [www.eowa.gov.au](http://www.eowa.gov.au)

<sup>2</sup> *National Framework for Women in Local Government* developed by Australian Local Government Women's Association, 2001

<sup>3</sup> *Review of the National Framework for Women in Local Government - The Way Forward* developed by the Australian Local Government Women's Association, 2007 [www.algwa.net.au](http://www.algwa.net.au)

<sup>4</sup> Source: *The Way Forward* (see footnote 2.)

<sup>5</sup> Local Government Managers Australia: *National Skills Shortage Strategy for Local Government* May 2007

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Australia has recently adopted a national strategy for strengthening and promoting women in Local Government management, senior management and leadership decision making positions [www.lgma.org.au](http://www.lgma.org.au)

*“If we accept the premise that our organisations should understand and reflect the community we serve, there is no room to debate the need to attract more employed and elected women in Local Government. At 51% of the general population, women still make up less than 30 percent of all elected members, 15% of mayors and 10% of our most senior executives in South Australian Councils”<sup>6</sup>*

So, why does achieving equity in the workforce matter? It can matter because:

- tapping into 100% of the available talent pool results in improved workplace relations - unique skills and talents are drawn upon, recognised and valued;
- increasing efficiency and organisational viability - staff are more productive, innovative and creative;
- improving customer service when staff diversity reflects customer diversity; and
- absenteeism and staff turnover drops.<sup>7</sup>

### **About *STEP THIS WAY* – The Project**

The *STEP THIS WAY* project responds to the release of *The Way Forward* in South Australia to provide a focus on exploring action associated with women employees in Local Government in South Australia.

In providing such a focus it is recognised that by no means are women the only group under-represented in Local Government, nor other Governments. It is well documented that Aboriginal Australians, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and young people are also under-represented across the board. It is also recognised that some issues addressed in this paper are relevant to men as well as women, although there are particular historical and behavioral disadvantages for women associated with the issues.

*The Way Forward* strategies, once implemented, seek to have positive spin-offs beyond the aim of advancing women in Local Government. A diverse, well trained and mobile workforce with flexibilities built in for all workers seeks to better position Local Government to meet the challenges of changing social, economic and environmental circumstances, and to address skill shortages in a range of disciplines into the future.

The Local Government Managers Australia (SA) and ALGWA SA Branch secured funding from the Local Government Research and Development Scheme in early 2008 for the *STEP THIS WAY* project to research and showcase leading practice examples of current efforts, experiences and approaches by Councils in South Australia to support women officers.

The project involved a survey of South Australian Councils which enquired about any steps that councils might have taken to pursue the action goals that are set out in *The Way Forward*. The survey, hosted by the Local Government Association of SA, also invited case study examples of the Council as an ‘employer of choice’ for women which are included in the *Showcasing Leading Practice* section of this publication.

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<sup>6</sup> Starr S, GM City Services, City of Charles Sturt “*Leading the way forward*” LGMA Local Government Managers Australia August/September 2007, page 12.

<sup>7</sup> Australian Government – Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency- [www.eowa.gov.au](http://www.eowa.gov.au)

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## 1. THE WAY FORWARD – A REVIEW

*The Way Forward* (also referred to as “the review”) provides for a revised National Framework for Local Government, setting out a Statement of Commitment, Goal, Objectives and potential strategies to advance the status and participation of women in Local Government. The review also reported on key factors that inhibit increased and more productive participation of women in Local Government within three broad interwoven topics that are identified as currently facing the sector (refer 3.2 below). Briefly, these are:

- **Capacity** – Resource and financial constraints.

*There are fewer opportunities and more limited resources which exacerbate the difficulties for the advancement of women in regional areas and in small rural Councils.*

- **Culture** – Local Government is reported to be more male dominated at the decision-making and senior officer level than most other parts of Australian society. A clear cultural shift is therefore required to make Local Government an employer of choice for women and to include them in strategies to address skill shortages.

*For things to change we must do something differently.*

- **Governance** – Better and stronger governance and strategic leadership will position Councils to face the pressing challenges of an increasingly ageing population and workforce skill shortages.

*Leaders at all levels of government and other organisations must demonstrate real commitment if women’s participation at senior levels of decision-making and management is to increase.*

Along with this showcase, there are a number of parallel activities in South Australia that are responding to *The Way Forward*.

Since the release of *The Way Forward*, the Local Government Association of South Australia State Executive and the Minister’s State/Local Government Forum have endorsed the formation of a State and Local Government working group on women in Local Government. Hosted by the Local Government Association, the joint working group is examining issues and identifying strategies to improve women’s participation in South Australia’s Local Government, both as elected members and in senior management positions.

The group comprises representation from Local Government Association (the LGA Executive Director is Chair); Local Government Managers Australia SA Division; Australian Local Government Women’s Association SA Branch; State Government (Office for State/Local Government Relations, Office for Women, Department of the Premier and Cabinet’s Public Sector Workforce Division); a metropolitan Council Chief Executive Officer; and the Australian Services Union.

During the research for *Step This Way*, several Councils consulted women within their organisation and/or in Local Government regions to identify perceived issues impeding women’s progress into senior positions. The information collated through these consultations is to be made available to the joint women in Local Government working group to inform overall strategic directions.

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## 2. THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN SENIOR POSITIONS

This section explores the status of women in senior officer positions in Councils in South Australia. For the purpose of *Step This Way*, “senior officers” have been identified as:

- within the Senior Officer classification of the Municipal Officers Award (MOA), and/or
- senior positions subject to a common law contract, outside of the Award and/or Enterprise Agreement.<sup>8</sup>

*Sourcing complete, up to date and reliable sector wide data about the status of women in senior positions has been challenging. The task has involved gathering information from a number of sources and whilst not directly comparable, the various sources of data do reflect general consistency in the overall profile by gender. The data which follows is presented as an overview and indicator of trends only, and is not intended to be read as statistically reliable.*

### 2.1 South Australian Local Government Grants Commission Data

The most complete data has been sourced through the South Australian Local Government Grants Commission (the Grants Commission). The Grants Commission collects demographic information on behalf of Councils, the Local Government Association of SA, the Public Administration Training Advisory Body (SA) Inc, and other interested parties.

For a period up until 1997, Equal Employment Opportunity data was used by the Local Government Equal Employment Opportunity Advisory Committee (refer Appendix A). The Committee concluded its work on 30 June 1997. The Grants Commission has continued to collect gender related employment data through the annual returns that are required to be submitted by all Councils. The profile of senior employee by gender data for the June 2003 and 2007 returns supplied to the Grants Commission follow.

Table 1: Gender Profile by MOA Level  
(commencing at Level 1 and moving to more senior positions at Level 12)

MOA LEVEL	TOTAL 2003	Male	Female	TOTAL 2007	Male	Female
1	4	3	1	7	5	2
2	21	18	3	38	19	19
3	25	22	3	54	25	29
4	56	46	10	75	58	17
5	70	57	13	67	54	13
6	15	14	1	42	37	5
7	28	25	3	43	34	9
8	27	23	4	25	19	6
9	9	9	0	8	4	4
10	6	6	0	11	10	1
11	7	5	2	13	8	5
12	15	13	2	23	18	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>283</b>	<b>241</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>406</b>	<b>291</b>	<b>115</b>
<b>% of total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>85%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>72%</b>	<b>28%</b>

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<sup>8</sup> Rob Wallace, Industrial Relations Consultant, LGA, and executive officer for the joint Women in Local Government working group.

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Table 1 suggests an overall increase from 15% of women senior employees in 2003, to 28% in 2007. However, it appears that employees on common law contracts (men and women) are not necessarily included in the above profile.

The proportion of senior officers engaged on common law contracts is understood to have increased progressively since 2003. It is also observed from the “Senior Officers on Contract” data provided by participating Councils through the project questionnaire that about 75% of these employees are likely to be men.

**The absence of the employees on common law contracts data is to be noted in any reading of Table 1.**

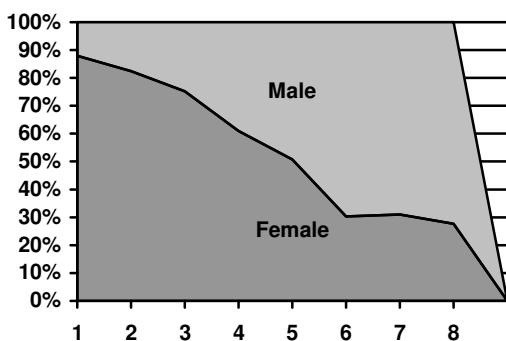
## 2.2 Local Government Association of SA - Workforce Profile Data

A review of the profile of women listed in senior positions in the 2008 South Australian Local Government Directory, indicates women hold 71 of the 345 positions identified as “senior” in that publication, representing **20.58%**.<sup>9</sup>

The Grants Commission data (see Table 1) also demonstrates that women are clustered in the lower classification levels with a lesser ratio of women to men in the more senior levels.

Although now possibly dated, these clusters are depicted in the following graph extracted from LGA Workforce 2005 data.<sup>10</sup>

*Graph 1: MOA Award Classification Level & Employee Gender*



The LGA Workforce 2005 data also indicates that at that time there was a disproportionately high percentage of women in part time and casual positions but it was unknown as to whether this was at the request of the employee (by choice) or reflected the workforce requirement.

The gender balance within the functional groups was also skewed to historically traditional gender occupations as at the 2005 data, as depicted in the following graph.<sup>11</sup>

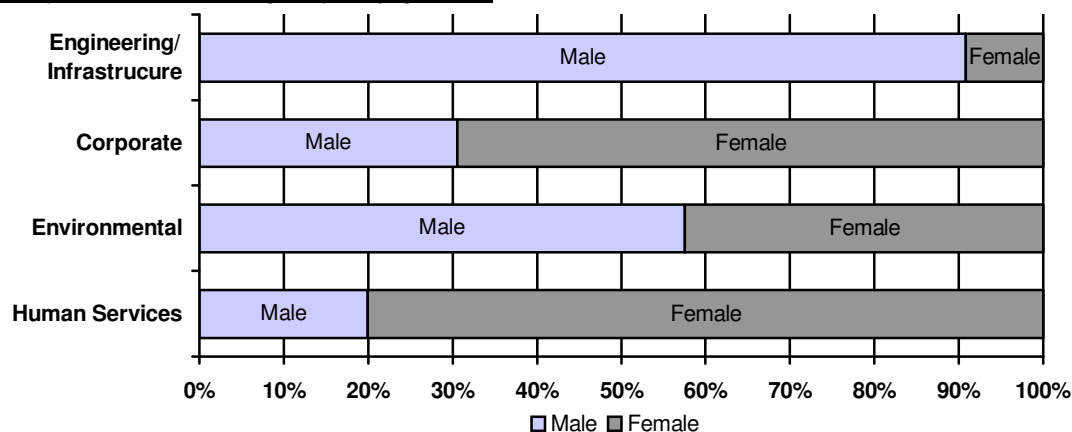
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<sup>9</sup> Local Government Corporate Services, *SA Local Government Directory 2008*

<sup>10</sup> *Workforce Planning for Local Government in South Australia 2005 Update* LGA of SA, page 9

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, page 6

*Graph 2: Functional groups by gender*



The Engineering/Infrastructure group had a notable 90.8% of male employees and accounts for 43.5% of the total workforce. The Environmental Functional Group also shows a predominance of male employees, with 57.6%. Conversely, Corporate and Human Services are dominated by women employees (69% and 80% respectively), reflecting the more traditional roles and occupations taken up by women in the workforce.

Of the 68 Chief Executive Officer positions in Councils in South Australia, at the time of preparing this publication two positions are held by women as follows:

- Helen Dyer was appointed by the Corporation of the Town of Walkerville in October 2006, a metropolitan area north east of Adelaide with a population of just over 7000 and staff of 39.
- Carmel Noon was appointed by the Kangaroo Island Council in November 2007, a rural Island council with a population of around 4,500 and staff of 65.

### 2.3 Pay Equity

*“Pay equity is about achieving equal remuneration outcomes in the workplace. It is about eliminating sex discrimination from the wage-setting system by ensuring that employers use gender-neutral and gender-inclusive criteria to determine the value of job components such as skill, responsibility, qualifications and working conditions.*

*Employers that ensure they remunerate staff equally are signaling their commitment to their employees. This typically translates into increased job satisfaction, greater employee productivity and improved employee loyalty. In light of current skill shortages, such an organisation will be more attractive to both female and male job seekers, and better able to retain existing staff.”<sup>12</sup>*

Australian Bureau of Statistics data as at May 2007 shows women’s average weekly earnings were 83.6% of men’s, constituting a gender pay gap of 16.4%. In the area of human resources, where women are more commonly found as top earners, the gender pay gap is less.<sup>13</sup>

***The available gender profile data for senior employees in Local Government in South Australia is somewhat sketchy and dated, and data is not available with respect to gender pay equity differential. Notably, The Way Forward observed this was an Australia wide issue and recommended the collection and publication of statistics on the participation of women in Local Government, as a priority strategy at a State level.***

<sup>12</sup> Australian Government Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency *Pay Fact Sheet*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*

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### 3. THE WAY FORWARD - A snapshot of progress in South Australia

At the time of the release of *The Way Forward* across Australia, all Councils were encouraged to consider the endorsement of the Statement of Commitment and Goals set out in the review and to apply the strategies within their organisations.

One component of the *STEP THIS WAY* project was the design and administration of a questionnaire to gauge the extent to which Councils in South Australia have taken this up, and Councils were also invited to submit case study examples of any steps taken to advance the progress of women through the organisation or to the wider Local Government sector.

*31 (46%) of the 68 Councils in South Australia participated through the questionnaire. A full report on the data and comments gathered is available at [www.lga.sa.gov.au/site/page.cfm?u=1319](http://www.lga.sa.gov.au/site/page.cfm?u=1319)*

While no definitive statistical conclusions can be drawn from the survey responses, the following report card provides a best case status report among South Australian Councils, given that the Councils which accepted the invitation to profile their efforts are more likely to be the most proactive in progressing equity principles and practices.

#### 3.1 The Way Forward Report Card

The key features drawn from data from 31 participating Councils follow.

- 10 (33%) have either endorsed a Statement of Commitment to work towards increasing the representation of women in Local Government, or plan to do so.
  - Comments from 6 other Councils (a further 20%) indicated a commitment to the underlying principles without the need for a Statement; positive results are being achieved without having a deliberate strategy in place; and/or consideration will be given to this issue through the next strategic planning cycle.
- 12 (39%) have endorsed Goals to increase the participation of women into senior staff positions, or plan to do so.
  - Two other Councils commented that they have a general unwritten policy supporting participation of women in senior positions, and selection of all positions is on merit.
- Endorsement of *The Way Forward* objectives, or inclusion in Council's strategic management planning process, was indicated as follows.
  - *To create Councils and communities where all participate and actively share their skills, knowledge and experience* (59.3% of the 31 participating Councils)
  - *To engender inclusive Councils where a full range of opinions is sought, respected and taken into account in decision-making* (50% of the 31 participating Councils)
  - *To ensure effective leadership in pursuing agreed strategies to implement the Framework* (44% of the 31 participating Councils).
  - *To expand training and networking opportunities that will support those strategies* (52% of the 31 participating Councils).

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### 3.2 Maximising Opportunities and Potential - What is getting in the way?

*The Way Forward* documented issues the review process had identified that impede women's progress through the ranks of Local Government to senior officer positions. These are grouped under the three topics: Capacity, Culture and Governance.

The outcome of the research for this showcasing project, and consultation with women employees in South Australian Councils, is consistent with the trends identified in Local Government and elsewhere nationally, as follows:

#### Capacity

- Resource and financial constraints of Councils limiting opportunities for paid maternity and parenting leave, and targeted training, for example, in public speaking, assertiveness, financial management, managing conflict.
- National skill shortages, making it difficult to attract and retain staff.
- Councils increasingly competing for qualified and experienced specialist staff.
- Lack of specific provisions for emerging leaders including mentoring, career planning and opportunities for acting in higher duties position.
- Some women lack self confidence, and have difficulty in demonstrating and marketing their skills, abilities and particular talents.
- Some women are reluctant to take on increased responsibilities, as they need to balance these with family responsibilities. It is common practice for senior officers to work long hours and attend out of hours meetings on a regular basis which is problematic for those who historically have a primary caring responsibility role.
- Inability to secure suitable child care arrangements.
- Inflexible work arrangements when returning from maternity leave.

These factors were seen to be exacerbated in some rural and regional Councils where:

- staff turnover is low, impacting on opportunities for acting in higher duties and job sharing;
- professional development, training and mentoring arrangements were limited; and
- the tyranny of distance and geographic isolation impedes advancement across regions.

#### Culture

*The Way Forward asserts a clear cultural shift is required to make Local Government an employer of choice for women and to move to address skill shortages. The leadership for this to happen must come from the elected body of Council, who in turn selects the CEO. These key leaders influence the culture of the organisation and a cultural shift will depend upon whether diversity is valued by Council and the CEO.*

Women are likely to bring a range of diverse qualities to senior positions and different views and attitudes about community service needs, planning and organizing, and dealing with people.

- Are these skills used to best advantage?
- Recruitment, recognition and lack of opportunity issues - are there aspects in job and person specifications hindering women in applying for senior posts?
- Is there pay equity which appropriately values diverse skills, abilities and responsibilities?
- Is there access to voluntary flexible working arrangements?
- Are part time work or job sharing arrangements considered as work place options?

To take the lead to bring about changes to culture, *The Way Forward* suggested that Councils adopt voluntary codes of conduct to promote an inclusive organisational culture, equal opportunity and good governance.

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## Governance

Better and stronger governance and strategic leadership will position Councils to face the challenges of changing socio-economic structures and an emerging labour and skill shortage.

- Enforcement of codes of conduct and implementing practices which embrace equal opportunity laws and principles will reduce the incidences of harassment and intimidation, which are reported to go unchecked as a cultural norm in some organisations.
- EEO Actions Plans may be in place, but integration across the organisation is not evident.
- Devaluing of positions traditionally held by women reinforce a male orientated culture.
- Some Councils reported they do not ensure gender equity on all job selection panels. Achieving this objective is reported to be problematic where there is a small work force and an existing gender imbalance.
- Very few Councils report on their EEO Action Plans in their Annual Report.
- Two Councils reported that they have a designated senior staff position holding the “women’s portfolio”, not necessarily by nomination but rather due to the fact that the woman holds a senior position.

## Getting the Balance Right – Balancing Work and Life Responsibilities

International research has found that Australians work the longest hours of any OECD country with 20% working more than 50 hours a week.<sup>14</sup> Work life for senior staff in Local Government in South Australia is no exception to the working long hours routine. The demands of a position may result in very long hours, attending evening Council and Committee meetings on a regular basis. This may result in subtle discrimination practices and the continuation of these practices.

Workers struggle for a balance between life and work.

- This has traditionally been the outcome for many women, often not by choice, but driven by their dual workforce (for survival) and family life responsibilities.
- As men increasingly share family responsibilities, this trend has become an issue for both men and women, calling for new models of gender roles and family life commitments.
- The most common concept identified through the research referred to above is spending quality time with family and companions while maintaining some level of career and income.
- There is a trend towards choosing work-life balance over bank balance as the most important fact of job attraction and retention.

*“Contrary to popular opinion, (our research shows) work-life balance was not just simply a “female issue” nor was it solely a demand of Generation Y or those with caring responsibilities. In the next eight years, baby boomers would start to move out of full time jobs. But they still intended to have some kind of work. All valued work-life balance.”<sup>15</sup>*

Getting the balance right has been identified as a priority issue for all South Australians in South Australia’s Strategic Plan through a target aimed at achieving work-life balance. The recent release of research findings as follows provides valuable resources on this topic.

- The *Report of the Select Committee on Balancing Work and Life Responsibilities* by the Parliament of South Australia, with diverse evidence supporting the need for a policy and action framework to take South Australia forward as a community that values and encourages a healthy balance of work and life.

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<sup>14</sup> Converge International – Employee assistance programs, research findings.

<sup>15</sup> Dr Lindsay Mc Millan, CEO, Converge International

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- The *2008 Australian Work-Life Balance Index* developed by the University of South Australia's Centre for Work and Life. The Index is the first ever tool developed in Australia to establish base-line data and allow measurement of the comparative improvement in overall quality of life. The research leading up to the development of the Index showed that if a workplace is supportive of personal commitments and family responsibilities through flexible working arrangements staff are more likely to be satisfied at work.

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## SHOWCASING LEADING PRACTICE

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This section showcases examples of South Australian Councils that are moving towards becoming an “employer of choice for women”.

A benchmark for an employer for choice for women has been established by the Australian Government Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency (EOWA). To be considered an Employer of Choice for Women, an organisation needs to demonstrate that it:

- has employment policies in place that support women across the organisation;
- has effective employment processes that are transparent;
- has strategies in place that support a commitment to fully utilising and developing its people (including women);
- educates its employers (including supervisors and managers) on their rights and obligations regarding sex-based harassment;
- has an inclusive organisational culture that is championed by the CEO, driven by senior executives and holds line managers accountable; and
- delivers improved outcomes for women and the business.

In supporting the above criteria, from 2007 the following were among the pre-requisites for organisations applying for EOWA Awards.

- Equal Opportunity for Women is a standing agenda item on a Committee chaired by the CEO or his/her direct report.
- Female managers can work part time.
- Paid maternity leave – minimum of 6 weeks’ paid leave after 12 months service.
- Sex-based harassment training is conducted at Induction for all staff (including management, contract staff and casual staff), and refresher education or an update is received by all staff (including management, contract staff and casual staff), and refresher education or an update is received by all staff every 2 years.
- Pay equity gap between average male and female salaries at each level of the organisation is less than the national gender gap identified by ABS research (currently 17%).
- At least 27% of managers are women or the number of female managers is greater than the industry sector.<sup>16</sup>

*This section showcases leading practice examples in Local Government workplaces. The examples presented have not specifically been evaluated against the above criteria, but it is clear they demonstrate a commitment to working towards becoming employers of choice for women. In particular the examples demonstrate the importance of:*

- *having a gender equity action plan in place with regular reviews of progress;*
- *highlighting women’s achievements, thereby fostering role models for other women; and*
- *being creative when it comes to considering flexible work arrangements.*

*Some individual achievements of women in Local Government are also profiled, along with women who have demonstrated leadership in mentoring and supporting the advancement of women into senior positions.*

It is not suggested that these examples are a complete record of South Australian Councils’ efforts in supporting the advancement of women. Rather, the examples have been offered by the Councils which accepted the open invitation to contribute to the showcasing publication.

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<sup>1616</sup> Australian Government – [www.eowa.gov.au](http://www.eowa.gov.au) EOCFW Awards – Criteria and Prerequisites 2007 onwards

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## EMPLOYERS OF CHOICE FOR WOMEN – CHECKLIST EXAMPLES

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The following case studies represent a “checklist” of examples of opportunities taken up by Councils working towards becoming employers of choice. They are included here with the aim of motivating thinking about creative ways to progress achievement of a more balanced profile of the senior workforce, and at the same time support the imperative of addressing skill shortages.

For some readers there may be new ideas – for others there may be useful reminders of different strategies to consider.

Clearly the extent to which Councils are able to develop the various strategies and actions showcased will depend on the size of the organisation and resources available, and to some extent their geographic location. However, some of the initiatives and actions aimed at creating equity in the workplace are easily achieved, cost effective and resource efficient.

*“Creating equity is about changing culture, changing expectations, breaking down the outdated myths about women and finally valuing the massive contribution women make to the workplace whether full time, part time, working from home or in the office, starting their careers or nearing retirement.”<sup>17</sup>*

### CITY OF ONKAPARINGA

The City of Onkaparinga covers a large geographic area in the southern metropolitan region of Adelaide with a population of over 156,000, and 589 employees.

*“Since its inception in 1997, the City of Onkaparinga has fostered a strong, supportive culture that accepts appointment on merit as the norm rather than something special. Support for the advancement of women within and beyond the organisation is an underlying principle that is integrated into the way we do business on a daily basis. It is also a significant consideration in all our workforce strategies, planning and management approaches.”* Jeff Tate, CEO

**Enterprise Bargaining Agreements** include *family friendly* conditions as follows.

- √ ***Paid parental leave***. Twelve weeks paid Maternity Leave after three years service (since 1997).
- √ In the latest agreement two weeks ***Paid Partner’s Leave*** has been introduced, and more recently Parental Leave provisions allow for pro-rata access after 1 year of service.
- √ ***Flexible paid and unpaid leave provisions*** for caring responsibilities, emergencies and other personal reasons beyond award or legislative provisions.
- √ A more rapid method of ***progression through the incremental pay steps for part time employees***, to overcome barriers for part time employees (predominantly women)
- √ ***Job Sharing*** working arrangements are promoted and available at all levels of the organisation.

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<sup>17</sup> Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency [www.eowa.gov.au](http://www.eowa.gov.au)

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## Training and development

- ✓ *Springboard Women's Development Program* has been run in house four times, and all women staff have been encouraged to participate. The CEO and in house senior women share their knowledge and career experiences, along with women invited from other Councils in the region.
- ✓ Women employees participate in the *LGMA Emerging Leaders Program*, mentored by senior staff.
- ✓ *Personal development* and career progression is available to all staff (full time or part time) through study assistance for those undertaking part time tertiary studies, as well as extended leave to allow employees to study full time with the guarantee of job security at the conclusion of studies.
- ✓ Regular in house training programs promote equity and diversity principles. An active *Equity & Diversity Committee* is in place, including a network of trained Equity and Diversity Contact Officers.

## Women in senior positions and non-traditional roles

- ✓ The senior management team has had at least 40% female membership since 1997 and 50% for around a decade. This representation is compared with other large South Australian metropolitan Councils where the average is around 20%.
- ✓ Women hold senior management and leadership positions in non-traditional roles. For example, Manager of Field Staff, General Manager of Engineering, and women in the Horticulture, Maintenance, Rangers and Waste Work Crews including women trainees in these teams.

## Women in planning and decision making

- ✓ All employees are encouraged to participate in Local Government activities to develop decision making skills and networks. Examples of women representatives on committees and boards follow.
  - Membership of Libraries Board of South Australia
  - Membership of Southern Region Waste Board
  - Membership of Adelaide Hills Natural Resource Management Board
  - Board Director Guide Dogs for the Blind
  - Guest lecturing in the doctoral program in the Graduate School of Management University of South Australia and at the School of Sciences, Flinders University
  - Representatives on South Australian Teleservices Association Committee
  - Presentations at Local Government and professional conferences and seminars
  - Committee membership of a number of professional Local Government groups
  - Mentoring of staff in other metropolitan Councils.

## Women advancing to leadership positions in other Local Government areas

- ✓ The City of Onkaparinga values all employees and strives to retain them.
- ✓ Personal development assistance is also provided for women who seek to pursue careers outside the organisation. Some of these have continued to make a significant contribution within and beyond Local Government.
- ✓ Some have progressed to other Councils, whilst others have established highly successful private consultancies in a range of planning, communication and management fields.

## Attracting Women into Non-Traditional Roles

In April 2008, the Chief Executive Officer initiated a workshop involving the CEO, and representatives from all classification levels in the organisation to explore ways of attracting women to apply for positions at the City of Onkaparinga, and in particular to those roles not traditionally filled by women. Topics under consideration included how to make advertising more

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appealing to women, for example by promoting flexible work opportunities, and enterprise agreement conditions as a means of fostering work-life balance.

Ways of targeting women's groups, students and women within the organisation were also considered, along with promoting the City of Onkaparinga as an excellent career option for women. The outcome of this Workshop will further inform human resource strategies.

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As the General Manager Corporate Services, Beth's Role encompasses financial and asset management for the City along with marketing and communications, human resources management, organisational development and information and communication technology. Throughout a broad and diverse career that includes having led significant change in non-traditional areas for women in Local Government such as field operations, engineering and infrastructure design, Beth has actively and consistently supported the personal and professional development of many women both within the organisation and in other Councils.



**CITY OF CHARLES STURT**

The City of Charles Sturt covers the metropolitan area west of Adelaide extending to the coastline, with a population of around 104,000 and 487 employees. The City of Charles Sturt has actively supported advancing the status of women in its workforce since 1999. It was the first Council in South Australia to endorse *The Way Forward* and form a Gender Matters Panel to advance its objectives, comprising the Mayor and other elected members, CEO, staff representative from all levels of the organisation, and representation of young women.

*"The City of Charles Sturt believes that successful and total integration of women requires a range of strategies sustained over time. The examples below provide a sample of those which have assisted us on this journey."* Mayor Harold Anderson AM JP

**Winner of the 2003 LGMA Management National Challenge**

The City of Charles Sturt nominated an all female team of six women, the first ever all female nomination to the challenge. The team went on to become national winners, competing against the winning teams from all Australian States and New Zealand.

- ✓ This created considerable publicity and caused much contemplation amongst practitioners in the industry, especially since four of the six women were aged in their twenties and from below management level.
- ✓ Within the organisation the team became a powerful and positive symbol for gender equity and the win assisted team members in their career progression, and to become mentors and coaches for future teams.

**Women in the Leadership Team**

- ✓ There has always been a strong representation of women in the Leadership Team (the top 3 levels). In early 2008, the ratio was eight female to five male managers.
- ✓ In addition 46% of Team Leaders and 43% of the entire workforce are female.

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## Workplace Culture

One great measure of success for cultural change is when the very thing you set out to achieve is the expected norm and comes as no surprise when it happens – achieving this status can take many years. Charles Sturt has attained this status through achieving a gender balance within the workforce. This has been reinforced by comments from the young female representatives on the CCS Gender Matters Panel who indicated that they have never felt any disadvantage in either gaining employment or advancement within the City.

√ The Panel plans to validate these observations soon through a survey and workshops.

## Healthy Lifestyle Program

√ Another initiative demonstrating the contemporary workplace culture of caring for staff is the support provided for healthy lifestyles. This includes incentive programs, educational courses, health checks, free yoga classes at lunch time and subsidy of gymnasium fees.

√ These initiatives are not gender specific but part of a culture which acknowledges individual needs, including those of women workers.

## Employer of Choice - Work/Life Balance and Family Friendly Policies

In 2006, a workforce analysis was undertaken which culminated in a report entitled '*Aging Work and Lifestyle Balance*'.

While not gender specific, the report covers a range of strategies to ensure the City of Charles Sturt is an employer of choice, including attracting and retaining younger people; managing an age diverse workforce; flexible working conditions including part time employment options for staff wishing to commence a family; life long learning; and coaching and mentoring.

Two examples of Policies which have had positive outcomes for women follow.

√ *Work/Life Balance Policy* allows requests for changes to start and finish times, part time arrangements and working from home. There are numerous examples of women who have taken advantage of this flexibility:

- *"An administration officer in Compliance now works 4 days a week to help her balance work and two school aged children."*

√ *Children at Work Policy* which, under special circumstances, allows staff to bring their children to work.

- *"This policy enabled a planning assessment officer to return to work during the first year after the birth of her first child. A vacant Manager's office was made available so the new mother could bring her very amenable baby son to work until arrangements could be made for her to work from home with full dial in access."*

## Support for Leadership Development and other Programs

The Future Leaders Program, initiated in 2007, is a tailored training program for up and coming leaders, involving the assessment of individual leadership and behaviour styles, emotional intelligence, holding honest conversations, coaching for performance, innovation and creativity, thinking on your feet, a mentoring program, action learning projects and development centre work.

√ The City of Charles Sturt inaugural FLP comprised six women and five men from areas including Libraries, Planning, Open Space and Recreation, Environment, Property, Engineering, Customer Service, Environmental Health, Community Services. One of the participants in this program was recognised for her achievements in 2007 by winning the LGMA Emerging Leaders Award.

√ Women have undertaken other leadership programs such as the Women's Springboard Program, Young Business Leaders SA, and the Governor's Leadership Foundation Program.

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Other development opportunities include:

- ✓ secondment and acting in management roles are pursued, leading to eligibility to apply for more senior positions in the organisation.
- ✓ As all permanent management positions are advertised externally, the high rate of appointment of internal applicants provides evidence of having developed skills which are comparable to or exceed the open market place.

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A town planner by profession, Jan has held positions in Community Development (recreation planning); as Manager Open Space & Recreation responsible for planning, policy, and development and maintenance of a parks and recreation portfolio with 100 staff. In 2007 Jan developed the City of Charles Sturt's Community Plan through a 9 month project placement demonstrating strong strategic and community engagement skills. These opportunities all augured well to provide Jan with the confidence to take on a new and exciting challenge in a male dominated arena as Manager Engineering and Construction at a time when the market for professional Engineers is very tight.

Jan was one of the members of the all female winning LGMA Challenge Team of 2003 and has joined the City of Charles Sturt Gender Matters Panel to advance opportunities for women within the Council and Local Government generally.



**Sandie Starr's valuable contribution through her long standing commitment to the advancement of women in Local Government is acknowledged.**

As Acting Chief Executive from June 2006 to February 2007 Sandie was invited to represent officers of Local Government at the National Round Table in February 2007 which finalised the Review of the National Framework for Women in Local Government.

Sandie has also been an active member on LGMA working groups relating to gender issues, which has enabled her the opportunity to share information about City of Charles Sturt strategies.



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**CITY OF SALISBURY – *PROJECT CONNECT***  
**Category Winner for Increasing Women’s Participation**  
**National Local Government Awards 2006**

*Project Connect* has been evolving at the City of Salisbury since 2003 when a small working party of senior women in the Community Services and Strategic Planning Departments were inspired to formulate a strategic approach to support women within the organisation. This initiative followed on from the release of the findings of the National Framework for Women in Local Government (developed by ALGWA) in November 2001.

The first step was to collate and analyse workforce profile and data from a women only focus group. The data showed that there was a disparity between the ratio of women/men in all professional areas, and that women were feeling as though there were few professional opportunities for them in senior positions. It also showed that women lacked confidence in multi disciplinary project environments which were predominantly occupied by men.

In senior positions there was only one woman in a team of seven Directors and less than 25% of other senior positions were occupied by women. In the 2003 City of Salisbury Corporate Plan it was identified that action was required to re-dress this gender imbalance in leadership positions within the organisation.

In response, the concept of *Project Connect* was developed by the Working Party and the Human Resources Manager, with the aims of:

- ✓ raising the level of awareness, acceptance and visibility of women;
- ✓ providing employees with knowledge and resources to “connect” with the organisation; and
- ✓ enabling women to develop their careers and to realise their potential in Local Government.

The *Project Connect* framework encompassed a variety of well attended events and programs, as follows.

- ✓ A series of lunch time sessions were convened with inspirational speakers focusing on personal and professional goals and ambitions for men and women.
- ✓ *Worklife Choices* was introduced – a self diagnostic tool for assisting personal and career goal setting.
- ✓ Leadership training was offered, preceded by analysis of feedback from peers and managers.
- ✓ Invitations were extended to women to attend women’s events such as IPAA and AIM sessions.
- ✓ *Bizarre Bras* was convened – a breast cancer awareness program shared by community and employees.
- ✓ *Growing Professionally Course* was offered – seven sessions ranged from self assessment, goal setting through to being your own PR company. This program was regularly attended by 19 women from all departments across Levels 3 – 7, with feedback from managers as a core component. This has subsequently been run in 2008 with an equal number of graduates.

The benefits of *Project Connect* have been to:

- ✓ reinforce issues in common for women, and for men and women;
- ✓ establish cross organisational links, and informal mentoring opportunities;
- ✓ foster growing confidence to engage with and take up women’s issues in the broader community as part of Council business.

A change in the workforce data profile resulted.

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- ✓ There was an increase from 28% of senior positions held by women in 2003, to 39% in 2006 however this has not been sustained in 2008 due to turnover and recruitment trends.
  - ✓ There have been increased promotional benefits for women, with 15 women reclassified, 18 women appointed to roles involving managing staff (in all areas except Asset Services).
  - ✓ 19 women have undertaken tertiary studies relevant to their areas of work.

This changing profile can be clearly aligned with the change of Human Resource practices at the City of Salisbury and the impacts of the visibility of *Project Connect*.

A more recent initiative, *Salisbury Success*, will build on this success through a re-shaped business excellence framework based on a system improvement model which places a high value on the inclusion of all people. This initiative will further position leaders within the City of Salisbury to confidently face the challenges of emerging changes.

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Pru has worked within the Community Services Department at the City of Salisbury for 22 years. The Department covers the divisions of Recreation, Libraries, Healthy Ageing & Access, Youth & Neighbourhood Services and the Salisbury Memorial Park Cemetery. Pru has had extensive experience in both policy development and in hands on delivery of services.

Pru is the only women in an Executive team of eight.



## **CITY OF PLAYFORD**

### *2008 Northern Local Government Emerging Women's Leadership Symposium*

The City of Playford has a commitment to fostering the increased participation of women in senior positions, and has established the Equal Opportunity/Work Life Balance Group to support the advancement of strategies through its strategic plan.

The 2008 Symposium was an initiative of the Equal Opportunity/Work Life Balance Group in response to a random survey which canvassed the reasons why women may not advance to leadership positions in Local Government. Key issues arising related to:

- ✓ opportunities to access and learn knowledge and abilities required to manage increasingly complex work at the executive-level; and
- ✓ confirmation and verification from other women on the leadership path that they are on track with their approach to future opportunities and moving along the career path.

With the full endorsement of the Executive, the City of Playford planned, initiated and hosted the 2008 Symposium at their Civic Centre on 8 February 2008, with support from Local Government Managers Australia (SA) and project sponsor Shredlogix. The aim of the event was to provide a training and development opportunity for women employees and to network with women working in Local Government within and beyond the region. The event was attended by over 60 women from the following Councils.

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- The Barossa Council
  - Berri Barmera Council
  - Town of Gawler
  - Light Regional Council
  - City of Playford (host)
  - City of Salisbury
  - City of Tea Tree Gully
  - City of Whyalla

The 2008 Symposium program included sessions covering the topics of:

- ✓ setting priorities and goals;
- ✓ being assertive and managing image;
- ✓ making it happen, including effective mentoring and coaching; and
- ✓ an *On the Couch* session with women in senior leadership positions.

The overall program was rated highly successful by participants who offered suggestions for topics for future symposiums.

At the time of preparing this publication further Local Government Women's events were being planned by the City of Playford, as follows:

- A Local Government Women's Leadership Workshop in July 2008, a follow up session from the 2008 Symposium based on the key themes of self evaluation, communication, and speaking confidently.
- *Women's Leadership - Local Government*. A State Conference to be held on 24 September 2008 at the Sebel Playford Adelaide, with high profile speakers and an evening conference dinner.

These well attended events provide invaluable opportunities for women to share ideas and practical ways in which to progress into the senior ranks of decision making in Local Government organisations.

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Chris has been involved in the IT industry for 18 years. Chris commenced her Local Government career at the Adelaide City Council 9 years ago, and spent time at City of West Torrens before taking up a position at the City of Playford.

Chris has a commitment to equity and diversity issues in the work place with a particular focus on women's issues. This interest has led Chris to involvement in the Equal Opportunity/Work Life Balance Group at the City of Playford and as a member of the Joint Working Group on Women in Local Government.



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## LEADING PRACTICE - CASE STUDY EXAMPLES

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*City of Marion commits to fostering a culture of respect and valuing diversity*  
**“A cultural shift requires highest level leadership. It’s about changing expectations and creating equity”**

The City of Marion understands that achieving a cultural shift requires leadership at the highest levels of decision making. That is why there is a strong leadership commitment to working towards building a culture which reflects a balanced concern for getting the job done (tasks and skills) and for satisfying the needs of the individual (work and life aspirations). For their efforts the City of Marion was awarded a “*Cultural Transformation Award*” in 2007 by Human Synergistics International.

*In 2002, a suite of tools was introduced by the Chief Executive Officer to canvass and address cultural and leadership issues within the organisation, some of which were understood to be based around gender issues. The strategy has since been supported through statements in Enterprise Agreements and a commitment to ongoing review and continuous improvement through an organisation wide survey every two years.<sup>18</sup> The organisational cultural tools:*

- *examine how staff experience the operating culture (behaviour norms)*
- *measure how staff experience the effectiveness of organisation’s structures, systems, technology and management abilities through day to day practices*
- *measure key outcomes at all levels – department, business unit and whole of organisation*
- *Each work area then completes an action plan to address any areas below the “norm”.*

*In addition, the CEO, Directors and all third level managers undertake a survey at a minimum of every two years which aims to support the executive and corporate management groups as effective leaders. This strategy provides:*

- *leaders with an awareness of the impact of their own leadership strategies and how these affect the performance of staff;*
- *managers with information about how their behaviours are perceived by others, indicating areas where change may be required; and*
- *as part of this program, a coach is available to senior managers to assist them in meeting their goals or to work through opportunities identified in their individual survey results.*

*A cultural transformation has been reflected through the following changes since the program was initiated in 2002.*

- ✓ *Position descriptions at all levels have a statement about expectations and commitment to embrace the philosophy of a constructive culture.*
- ✓ *The strategic plan outlines a number of strategies to achieve constructive culture.*
- ✓ *Policies and procedures reflect the commitment to a constructive culture, particularly in relation to human resource practices.*
- ✓ *Extensive induction for new staff on policies, procedures and expectations.*
- ✓ *Monthly staff meetings where the vision is clearly articulated.*
- ✓ *The priority for recruitment and selection is on cultural fit, followed by technical fit.*

*This cultural change has brought positive benefits for both women and men in a work environment where individual differences are respected and diversity is valued.*

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<sup>18</sup> The workforce planning and development tools referred to are Human Synergistics Organisational Cultural Inventory, Organisational Effectiveness Inventory, Life Style Inventory and Leadership Impact Inventory.

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*City of Victor Harbor succession planning addresses skill shortages*

*“Two Executive Assistants who live in Victor Harbor with their families showed potential for, and interest in, undertaking more challenging work within the organisation. Taking into account the frequent occurrence of vacancies in our Planning Department, we recognised the succession planning opportunity in offering training and professional development to these women. At the same time, the women could see the benefit of a more challenging work environment.*

*As a result we have supported the two women to undertake Para Planning studies. One has progressed to a Para Planning position within the organisation with the possibility of further extending her studies to provide enhanced career path options. This progression would also open up potential opportunities for the other Executive Assistant who has undertaken the Para Planning Studies.*

*Time off for study attendance for the six month study period was approved and course fees were reimbursed. An opportunity for one of the women to utilise her new skills and knowledge arose within a couple of months of completing the study.*

*The strategy has resulted in greater work satisfaction for valued employees and a bolster to the resources available to meet development assessment demands. It also adds to the pool of qualified resources within the Local Government sector.”*

The **District Council of Yankalilla**, the **District Council of Ceduna**, the **District Council of Alexandrina**, and the **City of Mitcham** also commented through the project questionnaire that they have family orientated policies, offering flexible family friendly working arrangements. Other Councils indicated a commitment to considering a request for flexible arrangements, but due to small staff numbers, and low turn over these issues have not been raised. This is particularly the case in smaller and more remote rural Councils, for example, the **District Council of Barunga West** (population about 2,500), **District Council of Elliston** (population just under 1,200) and the **District Council of Lower Eyre Peninsula** (population just over 4,000)

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## LEADERSHIP EXCELLENCE AWARDS 2008

### LOCAL GOVERNMENT MANAGERS AUSTRALIA SA

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Local Government Managers Australia (LGMA) is the leading professional association representing Local Government managers and future leaders in Australia and Asia/Pacific. LGMA is committed to the development and improvement of Local Government management and to ensuring that its members are at the forefront of change and innovation.

The LGMA Leadership Awards Program is integral to the pursuit of excellence and improvement in Local Government. These awards, now in their twelfth year, recognise outstanding and innovative leaders, managers, and their councils in addition to emerging leaders. Each year the LGMA SA promotes a number of Award categories for professionals working within Local Government. The Awards are designed to encourage recognition of quality leadership within SA Local Government. The Award ceremonies were held on 18 April 2008.

#### THE AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN ADVANCING THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

*Sponsored by the Government of South Australia through the Office for Women and the Office for State/Local Government Relations*

This Award was introduced in 2008 as an additional category in LGMA SA Leadership Excellence Awards. The Award is designed to encourage Councils and Local Government bodies to focus on innovative and practical ways of supporting and advancing women, whether this be through corporate process improvements, or projects or initiatives to further women's participation at a senior level.

The two finalists in 2008 were the City of Charles Sturt and the City of Onkaparinga, with the City of Onkaparinga announced as the inaugural Award winner in this category. The strategic approach adopted by these two Councils has been profiled earlier in this publication.

#### EMERGING LEADER OF THE YEAR AWARD

Three of the four finalists for the *Emerging Leader of the Year Award* were women, one of whom was announced as the winner. A profile of the women finalists follows.

##### **Heather Barclay – Town of Gawler (winner)**

Heather is the Manager Public Works, a role traditionally undertaken by men. In this role Heather is responsible for a team of 40 (mainly male) employees responsible for maintaining and cleaning the town's community facilities. The team had previously been seen as set in its ways, less productive than it might have been and mostly reactive to unexpected situations. Heather has successfully led a change program built around listening to the ideas of employees, instilling pride in the workforce, building teams responsible for specific areas and improving overall performance. This has been achieved without the assistance that might be provided by an organisational development function in a larger Council.



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## EMERGING LEADER OF THE YEAR AWARD

### **Celine Luya – City of Unley (Finalist)**

Celine is the team leader for a significant Home and Community Care Program delivered by the City to its senior residents. Celine has successfully led a change program which has enabled the City and its funder to achieve greater value for money by delivering services to between 20% and 60% more clients, and at the same time build a higher level of energy and enthusiasm amongst the team. Celine enabled her team to increase its confidence in the services being delivered, resulting in a 100% compliance score in a recent audit by the Commonwealth Government.



### **Michelle Tucker – City of Salisbury (Finalist)**

Michelle is the City's Principal Strategic Planner. She is responsible for working with the Council staff and the community of the City to further the Council's sustainability agenda. Michelle is passionate about helping communities deal with the issues of climate change and environmental degradation and has successfully introduced many parts of the City's organisation to the broad concepts of sustainability. She was responsible for the final co-ordination of the City's Sustainable Future Plan including its adoption by Council and now works tirelessly to ensure its implementation within and beyond the Council.



## OTHER RISING STARS

### **Kate Fleetwood – Adelaide City Council Winner of the Risk Manager of the Year Award**

Kate is the Team Leader, Risk Management Services. She was nominated for her leadership in the preparation for, and conduct of, the 2007 Adelaide City Council Elections.

This required the development and application of a comprehensive risk assessment methodology which involved all major stakeholders discussing and documenting risks, assessing their likelihood and consequences and introducing controls and strategies to ensure that the elections were conducted successfully. The task was more complex because of the need to have a representation review as a forerunner to the adoption of a wards system and the significant changes to voter rights.



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**Barbara Chappell – City of Onkaparinga  
Winner of the Leadership and Management Excellence –  
Metropolitan Councils SA/NT Award**

At the time of the award, Barbara was the Community Engagement Officer for the City.

Barbara has developed and implemented a community engagement framework based on the IAP2<sup>19</sup> model which offers increased opportunities for community views to be considered as part of the council's decision making processes. This approach ensures a wide range of perspectives are brought to council's decision making – not just those of the vocal minority groups.

Barbara has also been influential in the adoption of the IAP2 model through her co-ordination role with the LGA as it seeks to improve community engagement in Local Government generally.



**Belinda Portelli – City of Burnside  
Finalist for Excellence in Sustainability within Local  
Government**

Belinda has developed and implemented a simple model to enable proposed investments in environmental programs and initiatives to be assessed for their financial and economic value for money.

The model also enables Council to assess the relative merits of alternative proposals to ensure that it can make informed decisions about which option would provide the best return on investment. It is capable of being used by other Councils and other spheres of government.



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<sup>19</sup> International Association for Public Participation – [www.iap2.org.au](http://www.iap2.org.au)

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## STEPPING UP AS CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

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In October 2006, Helen Dyer was appointed Chief Executive Officer by The Corporation of the Town of Walkerville, a metropolitan Council situated to the north east of Adelaide with a population of just over 7000 and 30 employees.

Helen has had a diverse professional career spring boarding from her qualifications in town, urban and regional planning, and environmental law.

Helen is no stranger to working in non-traditional areas, with her working life commencing on the GMH assembly line during university vacations. Because Helen was a daughter of a GMH “white coat” her workmates did not consider her a merit appointment. She was initially isolated and ignored but carried on regardless until she was eventually accepted as “one of the boys”.

Helen commenced her professional career in the recession of the early 90’s taking up contract jobs at a time when permanent placements were a rarity.

Helen attributes her strong work ethic values to her father who encouraged her to “have a go” and to do her best in whatever challenges she took on. Turning to her Local Government experience, here is what Helen has to say.



### ***A snapshot of my professional career***

*I commenced my Local Government career at the City of Norwood, Payneham and St Peters in early 1999, prior to which I worked in Planning SA in policy and project positions. My previous experience also encompassed work in the SA Tourism Commission and in private sector planning firms in Adelaide and Darwin. My diverse background and experiences (both professional and through travel) assisted me to take up a variety of roles in Local Government and I always looked for new opportunities to expand my knowledge and skill base.*

### ***Encouragement and mentoring along the way***

*What was significant was the support and mentoring I received along the way from more senior officers, both men and women, during my time at the City of Norwood Payneham and St Peters, City of West Torrens, SA Tourism. I was encouraged to take up projects and tasks which I initially thought were beyond my capabilities including to apply for a General Manager position. Upon reflection, I think many women experience this self doubt and lack of confidence to “have a go” which holds them back from applying for more senior roles.*

### ***What motivated me to step up to being a CEO?***

*I knew that to move further up the senior ranks, I needed to diversify my management role and skills. The opportunity of taking up the role of CEO at a small Council could be a stepping stone to moving on to larger Council, as I would be exposed to the whole range of responsibilities required of a CEO under the Local Government Act. The real local community atmosphere of the smaller metropolitan area of the City of Walkerville also attracted me, and I had a real sense of the right fit at the time of my interview for the position.*

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### **What have been your key achievements to date?**

*I took up this position at a time when there was a major focus on a litigation issue to do with the proposed development of a Town Centre. I think that being new to the issue helped me to introduce a fresh approach. With that sorted out, we have been able to move on to other strategic planning directions with confidence.*

*One of my goals is to establish better ways of engaging with the Walkerville community. The litigation issue polarised certain sections of the community and I am committed to building back those bridges so that Council can understand and respond to the views and aspirations of the Walkerville community effectively. I am happy with the way we are moving down this path. One initial step has been to ensure regular communications with the community via a newsletter and web site updates, both of which have been well received locally.*

*On an organisation level, I have recently reviewed the CEO job and person specification and responsibility/capabilities statement to more accurately reflect the actual qualities, skills and abilities required of the position in accordance with the Local Government Act.*

*I base my dealings with people on a “what you see is what you get” attitude. I strive to be honest and open with all my dealings with Council, staff and the community. I have a real sense that there is a culture of commitment and tolerance at Walkerville, but I am also aware of the importance of monitoring this to ensure effective management of diversity at every level. We intend to build in strategies, which will enable workplace cultural assessment and action planning on an on-going basis.*

### **Achieving a work-life balance**

*On a personal level, the support and encouragement I have had from my husband is immeasurable. Local Government is such a unique place to work and manage. Firstly, there are the challenges associated with working to an elected body with individuals coming together as a governing body with often competing interests and political views. Secondly, there is a requirement to work long hours with many out of hours commitments. Thirdly, the range of issues that Local Government deals with is forever expanding – indeed it has been a very sharp learning curve for me taking up the diverse responsibilities of CEO.*

*I certainly would have had more difficulty managing all of this without the understanding, encouragement and unconditional support on the home front. Throw into this mix, children to care for (which I do not have) and the challenge would become even more daunting for many women.*

*I know that senior officers (men and women) increasingly struggle to strike a work-life balance. We must address this issue, and in doing so we need to contemplate different ways of doing business in Local Government. I see this as one of the greatest challenges for Local Government into the future as we face not only skill shortages but also a national labour shortage.*

***Helen’s story highlights the significance mentoring support from senior officers had to play in her career progression, along with encouragement to take on personal and professional development opportunities as they arose. Helen’s perseverance, “can do” attitude, personable presentation and high level of communication skills have also underpinned her successful career in Local Government. Helen intends to ensure that employees in the organisation she manages have the same opportunities to maximise their career potential as she has experienced.***

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## STEP THIS WAY – THE WAY FORWARD

The *STEP THIS WAY* project was initiated following the release of *The Way Forward – Review of the National Framework for Women in Local Government* in June 2007.

The aim of *STEP THIS WAY* has been to explore actions associated with women employees in Councils in South Australia, with the key objectives of:

- √ mapping progress of Councils in endorsing the recommendations made in *The Way Forward*;
- √ developing a profile of the status of women employees; and
- √ showcasing leading practice examples of Councils working towards becoming employers of choice for women, and at the same time addressing skill shortage through tapping into the valuable resources women have to offer.

This publication and other associated documents listed below are available electronically via [www.lga.sa.gov.au/site/page.cfm?u=1319](http://www.lga.sa.gov.au/site/page.cfm?u=1319)

- √ National Framework SA Survey – summary data report
- √ National Framework SA Survey – summary of comments
- √ National Framework SA Commitment – Report on Council endorsement and support of objectives

Further references and resources related to becoming an employer of choice for women are available via the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency (Australian Government) website at [www.eowa.gov.au](http://www.eowa.gov.au).

### Acknowledgements

Many Councils have committed time and energy to respond to the open invitation to participate in the project, through the project questionnaire and case study examples. These efforts have contributed to the development of the *STEP THIS WAY* project.

The Project Advisory Group acknowledges and sincerely thanks all those who have participated for their valuable and welcomed contributions (see the schedule which follows).

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District Council of Karoonda East Murray  
Kingston District Council  
District Council of Lower Eyre Peninsula  
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City of Mitcham  
City of Mount Gambier  
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City of Playford  
City of Port Adelaide Enfield  
Renmark Paringa Council  
City of Salisbury  
Tatiara District Council  
City of Tea Tree Gully  
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**LOCAL GOVERNMENT EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY PROJECT**

In 1991 the Local Government Act, Division 11B 1934, was amended to require that each South Australian Council develop and implement an equal opportunity (EEO) program and to report on the progress of these programs to the Local Government Equal Employment Opportunity Advisory Committee. The Committee was chaired by the Commissioner for Equal Opportunity and had representation from the Local Government Association, Australian Services Union and Australian Workers Union.

The aim of the project was to enable current staff and prospective employees to receive fair and equitable treatment in the workplace. EEO programs aimed to provide a basis for the development of human resource management practices which ensure that no person or group of people is denied access to employment on the grounds covered by the Equal Opportunity laws.

As part of the project:

- Guidelines and Checklists were produced and distributed to the Local Government sector to assist in designing and implementing equal opportunity principles and human resource practices; and
- annual Equal Employment Opportunity “Best Practice Awards” were issued and the commitment of relevant Councils to EEO were showcased in a publication “Towards Best Practice” handbook.

The Local Government Equal Employment Project concluded on 30 June 1997. At the completion of the Project the formal requirement by Councils to report to the Committee ended. However, at that time, the Commissioner for Equal Opportunity reported that Chief Executive Officers of Councils have ongoing responsibility under Section 69(d) of the Act for developing and implementing equal opportunity plans and other initiatives.

At the Project conclusion an evaluative report was prepared titled “Report on the Local Government Equal Employment Opportunity Project”. The Report highlighted achievements of Councils while identifying future directions to ensure EEO continues to be successfully integrated into broader human resource management practices.