



REWARDING INSPIRING FULFILLING

What women say about Local Government



Make-up of NSW Local Government Councillors

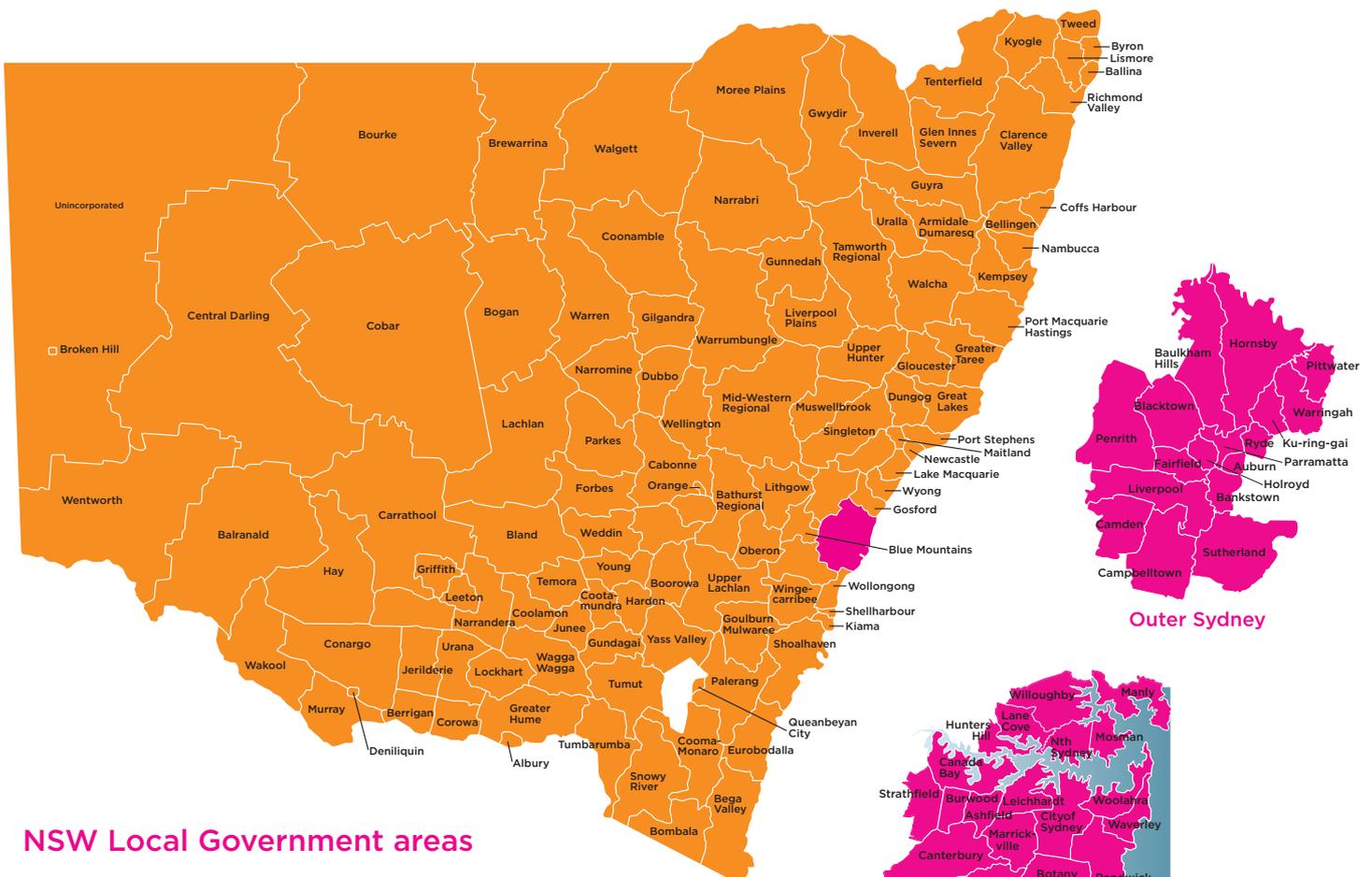
- The average councillor in NSW is likely to be male; aged 50 or more; speaks English as a first language; and is a professional, self employed or a primary producer/farmer.
- The most common age group of councillors is 50-59 years, followed by 60-69 years
- About a quarter (27%) of councillors are women
- 24 councillors (1.6%) identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, compared to 2.1% of the NSW population (ABS cat.3238.0 2009)
- The first language spoken by 91% of councillors is English. This compares to 26% of the NSW population speaking a language other than English at home
- 47 councillors (3%) indicated they had a disability, compared to 20% of the Australian population (ABS cat. 4430.0, 2003)
- Nearly half of all councillors are professional and self-employed
- The typical mayor is male; aged 60 or more; speaks English as a first language; is a primary producer/farmer, professional or self employed; and has served at least two terms on council
- More than three-quarters (77%) of all mayors are male

Based on this information the following groups are under-represented in local government

- Women
- Those aged between 18 and 39 years
- Those who first language spoken is not English
- People with a disability
- Lower income occupations
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in some council areas

Source: *Candidates and Councillors 2008 - Report on the Survey of Local Government Elected Members and Candidates for elections held in September 2008*

www.dlg.nsw.gov.au



NSW Local Government areas

Front cover:

- Left to right top row: Ally Dench, Tania Mihailuk, Monica Barone, Gwen Griffen
 Left to right middle row: Manjeet Grewal, Genia McCaffery, Jan Barham, Jenny Dowell
 Left to right bottom row: Helen Connell, Morven Cameron, Esme Martin AM, Denise Osborne



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MINISTER'S FOREWORD

W

e are pleased to release the *Rewarding, Inspiring, Fulfilling – What women say about local government* booklet.

This booklet is one of the NSW Government's contributions to the *Year of Women in Local Government*. It shines a light on the different experiences of women working in local government.

The diverse group of women who share their stories on these pages are an inspiration to other women who may be considering local government either in terms of employment and career progression, or in terms of representing their community as an elected councillor.

In 2002, the NSW Government launched a kit for newly elected women councillors in local government. The *Hands Up for Women in Council* kit grew out of a concern about the level of women's representation in local government.

Nearly a decade later, women's representation in decision-making roles in local government is still of concern. A typical councillor in NSW today is: male; aged 50 years or more; speaks English as a first language; is a professional, self employed or a primary producer or farmer; and served in the previous elected council. Only 21% of Mayors and 27% of councillors in NSW are women.

Women make up approximately 20% of senior staff in NSW councils and only 5% of general managers. Ideally, women should hold closer to 50% of decision-making positions in local government so that councils may be truly representative of the communities they serve.

This is why the *Year of Women in Local Government* is so important. Focusing on the role of women in local government during 2010 has prompted many communities to hold workshops and forums to examine this issue, and to develop strategies to overcome some of the systemic barriers to women's participation in local government.

We trust you will enjoy these stories and that you, too, may be inspired to get involved and, in doing so, enhance women's status in local government.

Barbara Perry

Minister for Local Government

Jodi McKay

Minister for Women

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Dr Maree Smith

Laboratory Manager
Port Macquarie-Hastings Council

Dr Maree Smith is fairly unique in local government. She's a scientist with a passion for algae, and she runs the council's Water and Natural Resource Monitoring Laboratory.

With a well-established career in science in both the private sector and the State Government behind her,

'I am optimistic that the council will support the introduction of programs that will create more opportunities for women to advance their careers.'

'The council has a much broader focus than science. I am ambitious, so I have to decide - do I want to continue to work in science, which I love, or move into other areas that might give me more career advancement opportunities?'

Maree says being appointed a *Women in Local Government* Ambassador this year has increased her focus on how women progress into senior positions at the council, and her own career development.

'I am optimistic that the council will support the introduction of programs that will create more opportunities for women to advance their careers.'

Maree says she has found Sheila Wellington's book *How to be your own mentor* very useful.

Nonetheless, she says, she still has the juggle that most women have with a family and a career.

'I have high expectations of what I can achieve, but there are times when it doesn't feel like there is much time for me!'



Maree and her family left Brisbane in 2004 and arrived in Port Macquarie looking for a sea change.

After a short stint with the Cooperative Research Centre for Water Quality, Maree took up her current position at Port Macquarie-Hastings Council in 2005.

'The best thing about my job is being able to continue to work in the area where I have a passion and expertise, and in such a wonderful location.'

It is because of her work specialty, however, that she is at something of a crossroads.

'I have tried to take on much of the advice she offers in her book, such as deliver on the expectations of your manager and more, manage your time well, blow your own trumpet, develop expertise that others will rely on, take a risk - step up to the opportunities and if you see a job that needs doing do it.'

She has been fortunate to progress her career with the support of both her partner and work colleagues.

'My partner gave up his own business to look after our son until he was at school, so I could continue to work full-time in the field of science in a leadership position.'

While the business of the Laboratory is very serious, there are some light-hearted moments.

Maree recounts how after the Laboratory was successful in achieving a significant milestone she emailed her manager to come for a celebration. Unfortunately, she didn't check the spelling before she sent it and his invitation suggested he 'come alone', rather than 'along.'

Clearly surprised, he sought agreement that it was ok to bring someone.

'Now I realise it was for moral support or safety in numbers!'

'He was very reassured when he arrived to discover that my staff were there too!'

ABOUT 5% OF GENERAL MANAGERS IN COUNCILS ARE WOMEN

APPROX 20% OF SENIOR STAFF IN COUNCILS ARE WOMEN.



Vanessa Chan

General Manager
Ashfield Council

Vanessa Chan is a rare commodity in local government – she is one of only three female General Managers in Sydney and six in New South Wales.

'I'm certainly not your typical council General Manager. I'm in my early forties, half Chinese, and a woman,' she says.



Much of Vanessa's early career was in the community services and social welfare area. It was characterised by a mix of full-time and part-time work, due largely to contract work and family responsibilities.

'My career has not been linear. Both in the community sector and local government, I moved sideways and backwards to get different professional experiences and skills, and that meant at times I took a pay cut or worked reduced hours.'

About seven or eight years ago, as a one year contract at Waverley Council

as Manager, Community Services was coming to a close, Vanessa accepted a position as Executive Officer to the General Manager.

'It was a tremendous platform to develop more experience and exposure to other areas within council. My professional base was redefined at that point from community services to corporate strategy.'

From Waverley, Vanessa moved to Hurstville City Council as Manager, Corporate Planning, and then in 2007, to Ashfield Council as Director, Corporate and Community Services, 'a position which combined my two great loves'.

After acting as General Manager of the council for several months, Vanessa was appointed to the position in early 2010.

'I had a really good think about doing the job, but after acting in it for several months I felt incredibly comfortable in the role.'

It comes with a big time commitment, particularly with council meetings at least once each week, but Vanessa says the time responsibilities for a General Manager are no greater than being at the Director level in local government.

'You do have to develop skills to manage the work load, to set reasonable expectations, and to work effectively with and through others.'

She says workplace flexibility is particularly 'front of mind' at the moment. 'Ashfield Council introduced 18 weeks paid parental leave last year and we are currently developing



an action plan to review our EEO Strategies as part of our commitment to the *Year of Women in Local Government*.'

Vanessa says she has had great champions and supportive peers, and has been privileged to work with some outstanding women. More recently, she has been developing some very supportive relationships with her fellow General Managers. One recently told her, 'If you stick around long enough you too can become a cranky old man!'

'... you do have to develop skills to manage the work load, to set reasonable expectations, and to work effectively with and through others.'

She is also lucky, she says, to have 'a really special partner' who shares the parenting of their three school-aged children. 'We have agreed that we can only manage one and a half jobs in the family at a time, so my partner currently works part-time.'

For the foreseeable future, Vanessa intends 'Getting settled into my new job, being the very best General Manager I can be, and working with my staff and colleagues to deliver excellent services to the Ashfield community'.



Esme Martens AM

Councillor
Mid Western Regional Council

In the 1960s, when the barriers to employment for women in any profession were tough, Esme Martens was charging her way through them. A qualified engineer, Esme has worked for over thirty years in local government and has spent the last six

'If one of the workers got sick, then I did the concrete mixing or reinforced the steel.'

degree. I was only the third woman from the university to do so.'

Not long after, she was in Central Queensland, living in a rough hut, supervising a construction and earthworks crew.

'If one of the workers got sick, then I did the concrete mixing or reinforced the steel. There was no greater teacher than doing the job yourself.

'The men soon realised I was fair dinkum and that I didn't brook any nonsense,' she says.

Her first foray into local government was as Assistant Engineer with Tweed Shire, doing flood mitigation, sewerage and road design, and then Senior Assistant Engineer with the Richmond River County Council at Lismore.

in the end, and became my staunchest supporter, and years later, my husband.

'I had great perseverance, worked long hours, listened and learnt. I did not try to be blokey, but myself. Gradually, I earned the respect of the workers.'

Many a time she found herself having to explain to callers that she **was** the Shire Engineer.

By the early 1970s, Esme had added to her already impressive resume with a Degree in Economics, a Certificate of Qualification as Local

Government Engineer, and a Certificate in Construction Management.

In 1976, she joined Rylstone Shire Council as Shire Engineer and remained there for the next eighteen years, directing a range of public works.

During that time, Esme, and another female engineer, Dr Cindy Hall, were the first women to be honoured as Fellows by the Institution of Engineers, Australia.

In 1988, she received an AM for services to local government and the community.

In 1993, Esme's career hit a low point. 'I lost my job as a result of a political decision. There were a lot of complaints in the local newspaper, but there were no grounds for appeal.'

'I had great perseverance, worked long hours, listened and learnt.'

Forced to move to Sydney for work, Esme became an Estate Manager and then Regional Manager with the Office of the Protective Commissioner. Around this time she completed a Certificate in Frontline Management.

When some people might have considered retiring, at age sixty-three, Esme became Manager of Engineering with the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care, at Westmead.



years as a local government councillor. Her career has been characterised by a willingness to seize every opportunity, and a life-long commitment to learning.

'Everyone thought I was crazy, except my mother, for using a Commonwealth Scholarship to study civil engineering, but in 1962, I graduated from the University of Queensland with my

Impressed by her expertise, the Shire President of Woodburn Council, together with fellow councillors, appointed her the Shire Engineer. It was 1967, and Esme was twenty-seven years old and Australia's first female Shire Engineer. Unfortunately, the council's Shire Clerk did not approve.

'He told the council they had gone stark raving mad, but he came around

In 2006, and while nursing her ill partner, Esme nominated and won a position on Mid Western Regional Council.

'People had not forgotten my years of service and I was voted back again in 2008 - the only woman on the council.'

Esme says she has never hankered to be Mayor. 'I'm a quiet achiever. I get as much satisfaction from serving on a number of committees, and being able to make a difference to people's lives.'

Esme says that she was motivated to make a career for herself after she



saw how her mother's opportunities were limited by circumstance. She has been fortunate to have two partners who championed her career, several male employers who gave her work opportunities, and a loyal female friend.

Her advice is 'You have to believe in yourself, never ignore an opportunity, work hard and earn respect'.

**THE AVERAGE COUNCILLOR
IN NSW:**

**IS LIKELY TO BE MALE;
AGED 50 OR MORE;**

**SPEAKS ENGLISH AS A
FIRST LANGUAGE;**

**AND IS A PROFESSIONAL,
SELF EMPLOYED OR A PRIMARY
PRODUCER/FARMER.**



Carmel Krogh

**Director
Shoalhaven Water
Shoalhaven Council**

There are a surprising number of similarities between Carmel Krogh's career and that of Esme Martens (see left).

Like Esme, who was a pioneer in engineering in the early 1960s, Carmel was the first female graduate in civil engineering, in 1985, from the NSW Institute of Technology, Sydney.

By virtue of their professions they both worked predominantly with men, they had to overcome the prejudices of older men, and they also engaged in life-long learning. Carmel has supplemented her degree in civil engineering with a Master of Engineering, a Graduate Diploma of Local Government Engineering and a Master of Business Administration (MBA).

As a young graduate, Carmel says she endured the pettiness of being



'I just said I've got a thicker skin than that.'

excluded from the odd event because of her gender, the occasional pinch on the bottom, as well as some appalling language.

'I remember one meeting where I was taking the minutes. The language was pretty colourful and one of the men at the meeting said something that was supposed to upset me. I just said I've got a thicker skin than that.'



'Those things wouldn't happen today, but some of my best memories are of the older inspectors and overseers who accepted me once they knew I wasn't easily offended. They mentored me and gave me guidance.'

Carmel has spent fifteen years in local government in NSW and Queensland, and for most of that time in the water and sewerage industry, which she is passionate about.

'Local government suits me. I am involved in the water industry, and I have a senior management role that allows me to be involved in a full range of issues.'

Carmel is married, but chose not to have children. Her husband already had three grown up children. 'I have always been fairly career minded and quite driven.'

She is a great advocate for a career in local government. 'You can get such a diverse range of experiences. There aren't too many jobs around that allow you to be so closely involved with the community and politics.'



Gwen Griffen

**Councillor
Gunnedah Shire Council**

Gwen Griffen, the longest serving councillor on Gunnedah Shire Council, was always interested in politics, and always writing letters to the local paper about local issues.

She says that a friend urged her to stand for the council, 'Because you've got a lot of common sense and you say what you think'.



Gwen joined the council in 1995 and was the first Indigenous person to do so. She chairs several bodies that represent Aboriginal issues, particularly education.

'I had no trouble joining the council, and being a woman and an Indigenous person had no impact at all.

'There are not too many Indigenous councillors at present, but because of education and confidence, I think more Indigenous women are likely to become involved in local government in the future.'

'The biggest rewards come from getting the difficult issues through council.'

Gwen says you can't expect accolades. 'Often some of the constituents don't like the decisions council make, but you are there to do a job for the whole community, and to do it to the best of your ability. The biggest rewards come from getting the difficult issues through council.'

Gwen recently completed an Aboriginal Women's Leadership Program Certificate IV course and she says it provided useful lessons in leadership, good governance and teamwork.

'We are excited at the council to have one of the youngest Mayors in Australia. I believe we need more young people to join council, but it is hard, particularly for women with young children.

'It's a time consuming job. I am passionate about the work I do for my constituents otherwise I would not nominate for council.'

Gwen joined the council when her five children were grown up, and her family has always been very supportive.

'I love the camaraderie and the friendships I have experienced by being in local government, so I will campaign at the next election, and see how things turn out.'

Gwen was a nominee for the 2010 NSW Woman of the Year, 2007 Aboriginal Councillor of the Year and a nominee for the 2006 Local Hero Achievement Award.



Morven Cameron

**Director
Community Development
Lake Macquarie City Council**

Scottish born Morven Cameron was determined she was going to live in Australia and a year backpacking here in the early 1990s hardened her resolve.

'I did a Masters to supplement my degree in sports science, and I used the experience I had as a manager of an indoor sports centre to earn the points to be eligible to migrate.'

There was a slight hiccup when close to leaving for Australia, 'I met my husband and stayed an extra year in the UK so he could sort out his visa'. They finally arrived in Sydney in 2001.

After several months, Morven got a job at Ku-ring-gai Council as a Sport and Recreation Planner. 'It was a fantastic experience and I worked with really good people.' It proved a useful stepping stone to her next job at Lake Macquarie City Council as Manager, Community Planning.



Morven, has since added a Diploma in Local Government Management to her other qualifications, and is now Director of Community Development. She has over 200 staff and is responsible for the council's community assets, including roads, parks, libraries, swimming pools and halls.

'I get a real sense of satisfaction that I have made a positive contribution ...'

Although currently on maternity leave following the birth of her first child, Morven is itching to be back at work, and is returning full-time.

'Work is hugely important to me and I am ready to go back. I couldn't do this role part-time – it wouldn't be appropriate or fair to the organisation.'

She plans to use a mix of a nanny and family day care for childcare.

While she may not need to take advantage of it, Morven says 'Lake Macquarie Council is very willing to make flexible working arrangements to meet the needs of both employees and the organisation. 'Many people working for council have flexible work arrangements because they either have children or elderly parents to care for. We are a large organisation and can accommodate a range of flexible work practices.'

Morven says local government often undersells its value as an employer, and to the community.

'It's a great feeling when we open a new childcare centre, playground or public space. I get a real sense of satisfaction that I have made a positive contribution to the local community.'



Manjeet Grewal

**Group Manager
Engineering Operations
Sutherland Shire Council**

With about five hundred staff, Manjeet Grewal manages what she terms 'the traditionally outdoors work force' of Sutherland Shire Council – civil and building construction, garbage services, parks, and mechanical workshops.

She says the fact that she is a chemical engineer, working in a largely male dominated area, tends to be commented on more by others, rather than something she notices herself.

While she doesn't think gender has ever been an issue for her employment prospects, 'I feel that as a woman you still have to be more qualified than most men. You have to demonstrate that you are ahead of the pack'.

Manjeet was born in Malaysia of North Indian parents and came to Australia to study at university. After graduating, she spent the next few years gaining experience in both financial analysis and engineering.

'I was doing a lot of travelling, and starting a family was on the horizon, so I thought I needed a lifestyle change. I saw an opening at Sutherland Shire Council.'

Manjeet started work as a financial analyst in the engineering division at the council. Over the next sixteen years she was either offered, or put her hand up to manage several different areas at the council – engineering, building construction and maintenance, regulation and enforcement, and the Leisure Centre.

'The challenge is to attract and retain women, and to make career development available.'

During that period she also took maternity leave for several months.

Manjeet says she has been fortunate to have male managers who have been 'pivotal' to the opportunities she has had at the council.

'Sutherland Shire Council has been a good place to work. They provide flexibility, and they understand the importance of family and its place in your career.'

'I think local government, in general, is a good place for women to work. The challenge, they have is to attract and retain women, and to make career development available.'

She says her tips for working in local government are really gender neutral: 'You shouldn't sell yourself short, have confidence that you can extend yourself, and be prepared to have a negotiation about your working



arrangements. The council will make arrangements for individuals.'

As for her largely male workforce, 'they are very polite', and in deference to her gender, 'watch their language.'

'They also tend to be very circumspect whenever we have to review the location of strains and injuries.'



Genia McCaffery

Mayor
North Sydney Council

Genia McCaffery loves being the Mayor of North Sydney, but she grits her teeth every time an election rolls around.

'You can't get onto the council unless you survive the election process and the longer you've been there, the nastier the personal attacks. It's not gender based, just the cut and thrust of politics, but it's what turns people off being involved in local government,

'It's immensely satisfying if you are interested in bulding strong communities.'

Government Association (LGA), and its President since 2004.

'What I like about local government is that you make decisions that deliver results. There are not many levels of government where you can feel you have made a real impact on the community.

'It's immensely satisfying if you are interested in building strong communities.'

Genia made her first foray into local issues in the 1980s, when she campaigned against a development in her street. She helped to get the Independent Ted Mack elected as Mayor at North Sydney Council, and became the public face of the campaign to save Luna Park. With her high profile it was not surprising that she was urged to stand for the local council.

As President of the NSW LGA, she is mindful that 'It is a lot easier for women

'The remuneration is terrible for the work you do - the number of hours and the public demands. There is almost a Victorian attitude that it's a job for the independently wealthy.'



And for women who are working and juggling families, taking a third job on as a councillor isn't all that attractive either, as Genia knows. She was running her own business and had two teenage children when she was first elected to local government.

'I was fortunate to have a very tolerant husband. He worked long hours, but we juggled it so one of us was around for the children. It relies on the commitment of the whole family.'

Genia says 'I always liked interacting with people and being a councillor has given me the chance to learn a few more skills.

'I had good communication skills, but as Mayor they have really improved.

'I've also learned how to bring people together so that they feel genuinely listened to.'

Another skill she has learned is how to calm people who are clearly agitated about an issue. 'I take a really big breath, lower my voice and try to be calm.'

She says she has been fortunate to have the former President of the Local Government Association, Peter Woods, as a supporter. 'He never told me what to do, but he was always helpful.'



and one reason, why I won't join a political party. There is a 'whatever it takes' philosophy. It's all about winning not achieving.'

Genia has been a councillor on North Sydney Council since 1995, and popularly elected as Mayor four times. Since 1998, she has also been on the Executive of the NSW Local

to get elected to councils in Sydney, than it is in the country. At a recent Local Government Leaders Meeting 'nearly all the mayors were men'.

While things are changing slowly, and there are more 'intelligent, talented, capable women' entering local government, women still don't find it all that appealing.

While a career in either state or federal politics might seem an obvious next step, 'I'm a doer, I have tremendous respect for the Independents at both the state and federal level, but I don't think it suits me.'

'It's very satisfying being President of the LGA because it gets me into the policy making arena in the state, and my role on the Australian Local Government Association gets me into national policy making.'

As for the 2012 local government elections - 'I usually make up my mind just before the election'.



**THE FOLLOWING GROUPS
ARE UNDER REPRESENTED IN
LOCAL GOVERNMENT:**

WOMEN;

**THOSE AGED BETWEEN
18 AND 39 YEARS;**

**THOSE WHOSE FIRST
LANGUAGE IS NOT ENGLISH;**

PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY;

LOWER INCOME OCCUPATIONS;

**ABORIGINAL AND TORRES
STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLE IN
SOME COUNCIL AREAS.**



Simone Schwarz

**Group Manager
Community Life
City of Ryde**

When Simone Schwarz arrived at the City of Ryde Council in 1989 as a Community Worker, she thought she 'had died and gone to work heaven'. She was given an office, a car and some money to 'actually do things'.

By contrast, her earlier career in the community sector had been characterised by a lack of money, and then at TAFE by a lack of connection to the students.

After a few years at Ryde, where she was a community worker in a small Community Services team, Simone moved to Sutherland Shire Council, eventually becoming Manager of the Strategic Planning Unit.

With the birth of her two children, Simone and her husband shared parental leave, making it possible for her to remain in her position. She returned to work four days a week.

It hasn't always been plain sailing. At one stage, Simone was given a

'... women never asked for the top of the salary range. Men do it all the time.'

senior management role, but with 'a very pokey office', unlike her colleagues on an equivalent level.

'Another woman at the council told me that I couldn't be seen to compromise on the size of the office or the car. At her urging I took a tape measure and started measuring up other senior managers' offices. One old school senior manager asked me what I was doing, and said "now listen girlie ..." I booked myself in to see the General Manager, but before I could say anything I was told I had a new office.'

Simone says women need to have the courage and the confidence to ask for things.

'I used to sit on so many interview panels and women never asked for the top of the salary range. Men do it all the time. It's one reason why women are not getting paid the same as men.'

Simone returned to work full-time at Ryde Council earlier this year with a staff of one hundred and thirty.

'If you want to give back to the community, then local government is the place for you, you can actually make things better for people.'

The next logical move for Simone is to be a General Manager of a council one day, but 'I am very conscious of the skills and time commitment needed for that job.

'There is so much complexity in local government. You have to be across so many businesses.

'For the time being, I am quite happy where I am.'





Jenny Dowell

**Mayor
Lismore City Council**

Jenny Dowell had a pretty torrid time becoming a councillor on Lismore City Council, but it was nothing compared to becoming Mayor, and learning within days that she had breast cancer.



In the lead-up to the 2004 local government elections, Jenny had to deal with aggressive dogs – a door-knocker’s nightmare, and a vicious anonymous campaign against her, but it didn’t deter her from winning a seat on council. While campaigning in 2008 she had the added attentions of a stalker.

After being diagnosed with cancer four days after the election, some people suggested she should step down. ‘I never thought of resigning. Work gave me something to occupy my mind.’

Jenny used her condition to raise awareness about the issue. After less than a week’s leave for surgery, she was back on duty for her first function, ironically enough, a Breast Cancer breakfast.

‘Local government is the best level of government ... there is no filter between us and the community.’

Jenny says being a Mayor is a full-time job and keeps her away from home most nights of the week. With grown up children and a husband who works full-time she can afford to invest more time in the job.

‘I just love it,’ she says, ‘It’s the greatest honour being elected by the community to represent your community.’

Jenny moved with her family to Lismore in 1991, and while working part-time for the Department of Education, volunteered for a variety of local community services.

Despite her involvement in these activities, Jenny says she had no idea about the amount of fabulous work being done in the community by volunteers.

‘One of the joys of being Mayor is being able to attend the morning teas, to launch things like the community garden at the local school.

‘Local government is the best level of government. There is no filter between us and the community.’

That said it can be hard when the community doesn’t like a decision. ‘As Mayor, you can cop a lot of abuse and anger and you have to acknowledge that anger.’



Her advice for women considering a career in local government is to attend council meetings, read the business papers, nominate for a local committee and find a mentor.

‘I learned a lot by observing a female councillor, who became a mentor. She always argued a position passionately, but if she lost, she accepted it and then moved on.

‘While I may disagree with the other councillors, I have their respect because I work hard, I’m fair and I have high ethical standards.’

Jenny was the recipient of one of the 2010 Minister’s Awards for Women in Local Government for her outstanding leadership during the major floods in Lismore in 2009.





Monica Barone

**Chief Executive Officer
City of Sydney Council**

Monica Barone has been CEO of City of Sydney Council since 2006, but thinks people still make assumptions about how a CEO should look and behave.

‘People have an image in their mind. I’m not very tall and not very commanding, so that even though they know the CEO is a woman they often walk right past me, searching for the tall commanding person in charge!’

Monica says that people also make assumptions about a woman in a senior management position, ‘About your capability, that you won’t be tough or strong enough, that you won’t be astute about policy or have business acumen.’

She says she was appointed to her position because the Lord Mayor and the council were prepared to take a risk and appoint someone who had not been a CEO or General Manager.

‘They wanted someone with a particular set of skills – someone who understood how local communities work and think, and someone who could talk to people about the future of the city and how we are working towards sustainable communities.’

Monica has been working in local government for just over ten years. She moved from Canberra, where she worked predominantly in arts related positions, running a theatre company for several years, to Warringah Council to do cultural planning.

After a few years at the council she was appointed Manager, Policy Planning and Commissioning.

‘You learn a lot about everything – about how to build a community and an economy.’

‘I learned a great deal about the strategic and operational areas of council, and about environmental planning and sustainability.’

Monica’s next job was as Director of Community Living at South Sydney Council, where she was responsible for all community services. She retained this position when, about eighteen months later, South Sydney Council amalgamated with the City of Sydney Council.

to be more difficult and frequently they just don’t go there.’

At the City of Sydney Council there are four women on the eleven member Executive. She notes that two of these women work from home one day a week.

Monica says many women who do well in local government come from the human services areas, where the issues are complex and the operational challenges are considerable.

‘In the human services area there is high local need, but fewer resources, therefore, women get good management and financial management experience.’



Monica says that local government should provide a fantastic career option for women, but often doesn’t. The problems, she says, aren’t the women.

‘Councils keep recruiting the same people over and over. They have to let new people in and they have to focus on the skills they need to meet the challenges facing local communities.’

The working hours are another impediment. For much of Monica’s time in local government she was a single parent with a young child. She made career choices that gave her proximity to home and her child’s school, but long hours and meetings late in the day were a constant bugbear.

‘This is a barrier to women attaining higher positions. They know it is going

Monica says that people underestimate local government. ‘You learn a lot about everything – about how to build a community and an economy.’

‘What is good about local government is the capacity to do so many diverse and interesting things and to see the benefits of your efforts.’

Although she says she usually has one eye on the next job, Monica says at present she is ‘Just thinking how much I have to do to pull this job off.’

‘There just aren’t enough hours in the day. We have a vision to be excellent in every aspect of the work we do and we’re achieving outstanding results. This role is a dream come true.’



Tania Mihailuk

Mayor
Bankstown Council

Tania Mihailuk holds the record for being the first female Mayor to have a baby in office. It's a dubious honour, since the title comes with a life that she describes as 'quite a juggling act'.

As well, she has a 'very supportive mother', now retired, who comes to her home on week days to help with the children.

Her husband, who works full-time, is also a councillor on Bankstown Council. 'He understands the commitment and responsibilities involved. We support each other.'

Although Tania doesn't have time for a social life, and hasn't had more than a few days off for as long as she can remember, she thrives on the job.

'Local government is where the action is. It is so grassroots.

'Becoming a councillor has provided me with an opportunity to be more involved in the community and in shaping its future.'

Tania is very much a product of multi-cultural Bankstown – a community comprising over one hundred and thirty nationalities. Her grandparents were

Tania's entry into local government followed a wide ranging career, working in the industrial relations sector, infrastructure and construction, the Human Rights Commission and the State Public Service. She has two degrees in economics and law.

After becoming involved in local community services, Tania was approached to stand for local government. Her election in 2004 was not an easy contest.

'Despite the demands and the need to make difficult decisions, the overall experience of being Mayor has been very rewarding.'

'Some people were very preoccupied with my background, wanting to know my cultural heritage, and intrigued why a young woman was standing for council.

'I even had one woman approach me and say I shouldn't run for council because I was a woman and she believed women shouldn't be involved in government.

'I just let those things go. I didn't take it personally'.

While 'politics' is the ugly side to local government, and Bankstown has a reputation as a 'boys club', she says she has had more positive experiences than bad ones. 'It helps that I am raising my family here.'

While she does not want to discourage women becoming involved in local government, 'There is no point sugar coating the real experience of being a woman with a young family in local government. Most of the people on council are older businessmen who have independent means and time to engage in local government. If you're like me trying to raise a family, and pay off a mortgage, it will be more difficult'.

Poor financial remuneration; lack of childcare for women who don't have family support; the unusual hours, and the political landscape, are all difficulties to be overcome, she says.

Her advice is, 'Complete your education and make sure you are comfortable in your career before becoming involved in local government'.



The description is hardly surprising, since in addition to her recent baby, she also has two toddlers under five years old, attends about three hundred events a year, and at one stage held down a full-time job as well!

She manages, she says, because 'The community has been very understanding and the council has been supportive.'

Russian who escaped to China after the Russian revolution. After similar unrest in China, her parents migrated to Australia in the early 1960s.

'They eventually settled in Bankstown and their focus was on paying off the home and sending their children to school. I grew up in Bankstown and have a genuine interest in its progress.'

While she can't see herself returning just yet to 'an ordinary office job', being a community spokesperson is a job she enjoys.

'Meeting so many people has opened my eyes to the varying needs of a community. Despite the demands and the need to make difficult decisions, the overall experience of being Mayor has been very rewarding.'

Tania Mihailuk was a recipient of one of the 2009 Minister's Awards for Women in Local Government because of her significant contributions to local government.



**THE TYPICAL MAYOR:
IS MALE;
AGED 60 OR MORE;
SPEAKS ENGLISH AS A FIRST
LANGUAGE;
IS A PRIMARY PRODUCER/
FARMER, PROFESSIONAL OR
SELF EMPLOYED;
AND HAS SERVED AT LEAST
TWO TERMS ON COUNCIL.**



Alison Hester

**Manager
Human Resources
Kogarah City Council**

The General Manager of Kogarah City Council often recalls the interview which Alison Hester attended for the position of Human Resources Manager. 'He said the interview panel thought I was a whirlwind. I had so much passion and motivation.'

Alison was twenty-six years old at the time, and with a Diploma in Human Resources, some administrative experience in the private sector, and about seven years human resources experience at several NSW hospitals behind her, she says, 'I was ready to step out on my own. I hadn't been looking for a job in local government, but it has been the best decision I've made'.

All contrary to the advice of one of her friends who told her 'that going into local government was 'a career killer'.

Five years later, Alison says, 'My friend was absolutely wrong. I've never once looked back. I've been given more financial and people resources to manage, had numerous professional development opportunities and been supported financially to complete a Graduate Certificate in Management.

'We have a progressive council that is passionate about diversity and that provides significant opportunities for women. Seven out of the twenty-two managers at the council are women.'

However it seems not everyone has caught up with the level of diversity in the workplace.

'I recently presented a paper at a

'Success in my career is about ensuring that I'm in the right place with the right people.'

conference, which was organised by an association connected with local government. The participants were predominantly male. When I opened the gift I received from the organisers, it was a pair of cufflinks!

Alison says she has been fortunate to have mentors wherever she has worked, 'and they have been very important to the success I have achieved.'

She says her current General Manager is a mentor. 'I respect him and feel inspired by him. He always shows faith in my ability and gives me confidence to do things I never thought were possible.'

Alison says she is single at present and focused on achieving financial security, 'But local government will be a good place to work when I do think about having a family, because of the opportunity for a work life balance'.



'Success in my career is about ensuring that I'm in the right place with the right people. It is also about giving back to others and ensuring each individual has the potential to grow and develop.'

Alison was the recipient of one of the 2010 Minister's Awards for Women in Local Government for her exceptional leadership skills and passion for human resources, and for her efforts to provide more opportunities for young people and women in the council.



Katheryn Smith

Councillor
Gloucester Shire Council

'You learn such a broad range of knowledge and skills. It opens your eyes ...'

Now, 18 months after her election as a councillor, Katheryn says the experience has been 'Absolutely great. You learn such a broad range of knowledge and skills. It opens your eyes to all the work that council has to do'.

Juggling her council commitments, two children under five years and part-time study means she has to rely on friends for help.

'I'm not good at balancing - I feel some guilt about the kids, and the lawns can get a bit long, but once you've had the opportunity to make decisions you don't like missing a meeting in case something comes up that you're concerned about.'

She says she's fortunate to have a mentor in one of the female councillors, 'who is strong and a good communicator'.

Katheryn left school when she was fifteen years old and worked in a variety of jobs. She has certificates in nursing and administration, and is also a marriage celebrant.

Now twenty-seven years old, she is doing an Open Foundation course as a stepping stone to starting a law degree.

'It would be great to see more women in local government.'

Katheryn Smith decided to stand for Gloucester Shire Council in 2008 because she wanted to take a stand against the stigma she saw around single mothers. A single mother herself, she says 'Your life experience shouldn't be used against you'.

When she saw an advertisement in the local paper about an information evening for potential candidates for local government she says, 'I had a light bulb moment'. Katheryn attended the evening, decided to run, and then went door knocking.

There was a view among some older men in the community that 'Women should be seen and not heard, but I put that down to a generational thing', she says.



Denise Osborne

Mayor
Greater Hume Shire Council

For more than twenty years, Denise Osborne has combined being a local government councillor, while working full-time and raising a family.

The combination of working in human services roles early in her career, and being a single parent in a public housing area in Albury, made her realise the importance of local community services.

In the early 1980s, after remarrying and settling in Jindera, near Albury, Denise stood for election to Hume Shire Council, but missed out.

'Nowadays, being a female Mayor is not so unusual ... Gender is only a peripheral issue now.'

A brief period of unemployment enabled her to attend council meetings in the lead-up to the council elections in 1987, where she observed the deliberations and the debate. 'I gained a better idea about how councils work.'

Her nomination at this election was successful, but with children, and working full-time, the big impediment was the 9am start to the meetings.

'I worked additional hours so I could use flexi-time to attend the meetings.'

Denise had six terms as Mayor of Hume Shire before the council was amalgamated and went into administration in 2004. About the same time, her husband became ill.

It was a particularly difficult time, but also a great experience, says Denise.



'There was such strong community interest in the outcome that I found it inspiring.'

Elections for the newly formed council took place in March 2005. Denise has been Mayor of Greater Hume Shire Council since 2006.

'Nowadays, being a female Mayor is not so unusual, but for a long time there weren't many female Mayors and when I attended functions my husband was frequently mistaken for the Mayor. Gender is only a peripheral issue now. We have four women on our council.'



Although she has been approached about standing for pre-selection for a state seat, Denise says she is enjoying the opportunities to do things in the local community.

'What I would really love is the opportunity to be a councillor and not have to do paid employment as well!

'Perhaps that opportunity might arise when I retire from paid employment.'

Denise was the recipient of one of the 2008 Minister's Awards for Women in Local Government for implementing a range of public consultation measures in her area.



Leia Thiele

**Councillor
Lockhart Shire Council**

In December 1993, Leia Thiele's job as a bus driver in Sydney started to lose its appeal. Her husband wasn't happy in his job either.

While visiting Leia's brother, who had relocated to Tootool (about an hour from Wagga Wagga), Leia and her husband considered their own tree change.

The idea became reality in January 1994, when Leia, her husband and three children left Sydney to settle in Tootool, a rural town with just 'six houses and some silos,' says Leia.

After a few years there, the family moved about ten minutes away, to a 100-acre property just outside The Rock.

Leia gave up paid work, had two more children and joined several community services, before standing for the 2004 local government elections. She was

'If you don't work as a team things don't happen.'

unsuccessful, but made it on to council at the 2008 elections.

'On both occasions I thought not being a local was a barrier, but one of my supporters said to me, "You have done more in your short time here, than some of the people who have lived here all their lives".'

Leia says that the councillors get on well. 'If you don't work as a team, then things don't happen.'

'Funnily enough, when they tried to set up the council so that the ward representatives weren't sitting next to each other, we had all the women on one side and all the men on the other. We had a laugh, but decided to leave it that way.'

After nearly two years as a councillor, Leia says she is finding her feet and her voice.

'I have been on a steep learning curve. I remember I used to complain about the council, but now I realise just how hard things can be.'

Leia says she is on duty all the time when she is out in the community. Fortunately, the other councillors, and her husband and children, have been 'encouraging and supportive'.

In addition to her council responsibilities, Leia is also studying part-time for a Bachelor of Arts, and she and her husband are in a choir. 'It's a great stress relief,' she says.





Penny Holloway

General Manager
North Sydney Council

*'I'm pleased and proud to be here.
It's a great place to work.'*

Government had just amalgamated 172 councils into 78.

'I thought there would be some opportunities in local government given the reform process and I started looking at what was available.'

Although Penny didn't have direct local government experience she thought

The move was relatively straightforward for Penny's husband, a writer, but not for their fifteen year old daughter.

'Fortunately my husband has always supported my moves and he has shared the parenting of our daughter, but my daughter had to make a big adjustment.'

Penny remained at Latrobe for four years, 'But I didn't want to stay in the country forever. I wanted to work in a metropolitan area and I was happy to move interstate.'

Penny Holloway suggests that not being typecast is important if you want to advance your career in local government.

'Local government still carries the legacy of its past role as an infrastructure provider so there is a view that you need to have an engineering or financial background, but these days you need to have a much broader range of skills and experiences.

'And you also have to be prepared to move between councils, and between the city and the country.'

Prior to moving to her present position at North Sydney Council in 2001, Penny lived and worked in Victoria. 'I started my professional life as a social worker.'

She worked for the Victorian Public Service for many years, providing community services; doing occupational rehabilitation; planning community housing programs; managing the state's Building Better Cities program, and running the Office of Youth Affairs.

Along the way she acquired formal qualifications in languages, social work, urban planning and public policy.

'I didn't plot my career but I was keen to advance it. I observed others being typecast in roles and I didn't want that to happen to me, so in the mid 1990s I decided I needed a change from the State Public Service. The options were the Federal Government, Local Government or the private sector.'

It was a particularly volatile time in local government because the Kennett



she had the capability to run a local council, 'But the competition for CEO roles was fierce.'

One interview for such a position proved an eye opener. 'I was floored when they asked me if I would be able to relate to the outdoors staff and would I be able to gain their respect.'

Penny didn't get the job but was subsequently appointed to a position one rung down from CEO, managing all council services at Whitehorse City Council, a middle ring suburb of Melbourne, formed by a recent amalgamation.

'It was a new organisation and it was interesting work, but tough.'

Realising that her best chance of becoming a CEO of a council was to move to the country, Penny applied for, and was appointed CEO of Latrobe City Council, a regional council about two hours east of Melbourne. The locality incorporates numerous power stations, coal mines, a major paper manufacturing company, and also has an agricultural base.

In fact, Penny moved to NSW and North Sydney Council, where she says she works very well with the Mayor, Genia McCaffery. 'I'm pleased and proud to be here. It's a great place to work.'

The sentiment sums up her attitude to moving into local government. 'It was a great move - fantastic.'

Penny says that several factors have contributed to her career in local government. 'I was willing to take a few risks. I did four lots of study and I was prepared to move to jobs in the country and interstate.'

And as far as the future is concerned, 'I want to continue to contribute to the community and to local government.'

Penny Holloway was the recipient of a 2009 Minister's Award for Women in Local Government for her contribution to the development of the local government profession and the advancement of women in local government.



Jan Barham

Mayor
Byron Shire Council

As the first popularly elected Green Mayor in Australia, and the first female Mayor of Byron Shire, Jan Barham has had her fair share of ups and downs.

Not long after she became Mayor in 2004, prominent businessman Gerry Harvey attracted national attention when he dubbed her “an emotional girl”.

Rather than confront Harvey, Jan chose to deflect the issue. ‘I had a T-shirt made that said ‘emotional girl’ and I put a heart on the sleeve.’

Clashes over development and the environment are commonplace in this part of the world and Jan has frequently been in the firing line.

‘In public life you have to remember that the decisions you make are for the common good and are not going to please everyone.’

‘Women are careful and considered decision-makers who aren’t afraid to admit when they don’t have all the information.’

Unfortunately, she says, it’s the personal attacks that discourage women from standing for local government. ‘I am single and childless, so the attacks and criticism don’t impact on others. I have developed a thick skin. I think women with families don’t want to inflict that sort of experience on them.

‘It’s disappointing, as my experience is that women are careful and considered decision-makers who aren’t afraid to admit when they don’t have all the information. They should be encouraged, as they are the sort of people you want on council.’

Another problem is the lack of financial remuneration given the demands of being a councillor. ‘I’m earning as much now as a full-time Mayor as I did twenty years ago when I was employed in the fashion industry. Many women I know have chosen to get involved in the community through volunteering.’

Despite some negative experiences, Jan says, she would urge women to get involved in local government.

‘Sometimes I’m walking along the street and people will just come up and say “thank you” or give me a hug about some issue. That warmth is what community is about.’

Jan’s own move into local government occurred when she moved to Byron Bay about twenty years ago. She was

working in Sydney at the time and decided to split her time between there and Byron, to have a quieter life.

She quickly got involved in local issues and became active in the Greens movement, helping Ian Cohen to become the first Green elected to NSW Parliament in 1995.

From 1995-99, Jan was his Parliamentary Advisor, but she says, ‘I missed my home and decided that I really wanted to stand for local government and serve my community’.



Being elected to the council in 1999 was ‘A great honour. You are being trusted to make decisions that affect people’s lives’.

‘Being real’ is one of the lessons she’s learned while being on the council. ‘I’ve ridden a billy cart and I’ve flown around on a trapeze. You have to allow yourself to look silly sometimes, but most importantly, you have to stay in touch with your community and be accessible.

‘One of the most fulfilling things you can do is to represent people in the community who don’t have a voice.’

Jan is the Vice President General of the NSW Local Government Association.





Karen McKeown

Councillor

Penrith City Council

Despite the urgings of a family friend who was also a NSW State MP, Karen McKeown initially declined to run for a seat on Penrith City Council.

With four children and a full-time job as an industrial advocate in the financial services sector, Karen thought she already had enough to do.

Then the MP died unexpectedly on the day of the state election in 2003, and not long after Karen was reminded by his family 'that he always had high hopes for you'.

He was one of several people who, having observed her involvement in local community activities, thought she had skills and abilities that would be useful to local government.

I thought if these people, who I respect, think I can do this, perhaps I should

'I thought if these people, who I respect, think I can do this, perhaps I should have a go.'

have a go. It wasn't easy. I had to do a lot of hard work and I had to stand for pre-selection.'

The effort paid off when Karen was elected to Penrith City Council in 2004.

She did not, however, forsake full-time work. 'Fortuitously, not long after I got elected to the council I was offered another job, working for the Miscellaneous Worker's Union. I had to visit schools and childcare centres. I started work at 5am and worked until 9am and then went back later in the day from 3-7pm so I had the middle of the day for council commitments.

'Thinking about it now makes me feel exhausted,' she says, but 'I had a very supportive husband and family. I had three teenagers at home - another had left home. You can't do it without the support of your family'.

Even now as a full-time advisor to the upper house MLC, Helen Westwood, Karen still faces a one and a half hour commute to and from work each day.

Her early experience on the council was challenging. 'I couldn't understand the language they were speaking. There were so many acronyms.

'There were no women around to ask for help so I went to the longest serving councillor, who was a former headmaster, and I said I need to learn a lot so I'm going to stick with you.

'I rang him so often I think his wife thought I was stalking him.

'He was a crusty old fellow, but a great mentor. A few years into my first term on the council he became the Mayor and he chose me to be his deputy.'

As the current NSW President of the Australian Local Government Women's Association, and a National Ambassador for the *Year of Women in Local Government*, Karen is well aware of the low representation of women in local government.

'Women are the primary care givers and they are often working to earn a second income, so they don't have a lot of time.'

'I spend about five nights a week on council activities. If you want to go into local government then you have to think about how you will manage work and family commitments.'

Karen says that although not enough women are nominating for council, 'Those that do, usually get elected, and once they are on the council they tend to be more collaborative.'

Her technique for making sure she's heard in meetings is 'To lower my voice, slow down my speech and to talk quietly. It tends to stop any other interactions.'

Karen has had a stint at Deputy Mayor, but her ambition is to be the Mayor one day. 'I think it would be the greatest honour.'

And while she says she's not interested in state politics, 'I should have learned by now to never say never'.



THE MOST COMMON AGE GROUP OF COUNCILLORS IS 50-59 YEARS, FOLLOWED BY 60-69 YEARS

ABOUT A QUARTER (27%) OF COUNCILLORS ARE WOMEN



Colleen Fuller

**Deputy Mayor
Gunnedah Shire Council**

Colleen Fuller has spent most of her life in Gunnedah and she is devoted to the town and its community.

As well as being Deputy Mayor of the council she is on numerous local committees, and was recently appointed Country Vice President of the Australian Local Government Women's Association. This year she was also a finalist for the 2010 *NSW Woman of the Year*.

'If you want to achieve something then you need to have a voice and stand up and be counted,' Colleen says.

Colleen entered local government in 2004, after raising a family and running a business in Gunnedah.

Her first job was in a local bakery when she was sixteen years old. She moved to Sydney in the late 1960s where she trained as a secretary and met her husband, a miner from Wollongong.

In 1975 they returned to Gunnedah where they established a fruit shop and raised three daughters Kathleen, Sally and Roslyn.

In the 1990s three local coal mines around Gunnedah closed and about six hundred people lost their jobs. To make matters worse, the local abattoir closed about the same time.

'In almost one month about fourteen hundred jobs were lost.'

Colleen recalls having coffee in town with a friend one day when a local woman stopped to say her family had lost everything.

'I thought that I could contribute to council for the good of the community ...'

'I realised we had to do something to help these families, so I set up the Miners Support Group. We helped to relocate families to other mining areas in the state.

'Many people left the town and half the shops were empty.'

Colleen had thought about standing for council but ruled it out while she had children at home. She made an attempt in the late 1990s but was unsuccessful. At the urgings of her husband, Ron, she tried again.

'I thought that I could contribute to council for the good of the community and was elected to the council in 2004.'

like cooking and sewing to some of the young women with babies.

'We also encouraged them to return to their studies and to go to TAFE. Two of these young women have now completed their higher school certificate.'

Colleen says that local government has been a wonderful experience and a great way to further her ability, but it's also 'a juggling act if you have a family. I'm at meetings most nights and some people think you are on call 24/7. I get calls at 6am because someone's bin wasn't emptied.'

Nevertheless, she says, the council is working well and she is content to continue her involvement in local government.

'My goal is to listen to the community and achieve the best for Gunnedah.'



About the same time Gunnedah was experiencing a resurgence in mining. Colleen says the Miners Support Group still provides support to families who move to the town to work in the mines.

'We are a very resilient community. We will always fight back.'

Colleen says one of her initiatives was to harness the support of some of the older women in the town to teach skills

**24 COUNCILLORS (1.6%)
IDENTIFIED AS ABORIGINAL
OR TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER,
COMPARED TO 2.1% OF THE
NSW POPULATION**



Ally Dench

**Assistant General Manager
Wollondilly Shire Council**

Ally Dench believes you can't let personal circumstances prevent you from getting on with life and your career. 'I wouldn't let barriers stop me doing what I wanted. My son taught me that.'

Ally says she spent many years lobbying state and federal governments for better services for people who have a disability after the birth of her son, 'But I hadn't thought about local government. I realise now that most change happens at the local level. You can make a difference and you can see the results quickly.'

Ally completed a Degree in Social Sciences while she was caring for her son and her three other children, with the support of her husband and local community services.

After she graduated Ally went to work in the disability and community

'... be politically astute and know who's who, hang out with the people you aspire to be like.'

services area for the State Government, Camden Council and the NSW Spastic Centre, often commuting long distances to do so. She helped to set up the National Carers' Association.

'When my son passed away, my situation changed and I thought I can go in a different direction.'

Ally went to work at Wollondilly Shire Council as Community Services Manager in 2005, and since 2009 has been the Assistant General Manager.

'Some people expressed surprise that I got what was perceived to be a "bloke's job". They said you'll have to wear a tie.'

Coincidentally, her daughter made a skirt out of ties for her final year school project and Ally wore it to work, 'to break the ice'.

She says most people have been extremely supportive, and particularly, her General Manager. 'He provided opportunities for me to progress and I jumped at those opportunities.'

'My advice for other women is to be politically astute and know who's who, hang out with people you aspire to be like, and take the opportunities that come your way.'

At present, Ally is enjoying the chance to 'help people to participate in decision-making. I love a challenge - that's what motivates me'.



Helen Connell

**Human Resources Manager
Holroyd City Council**

Helen Connell is jubilant because Holroyd Council recently won the *Women in Local Government* category in the 2010 *Australian Local Government Awards*.

'Holroyd Council's program has been going for almost six years. We are constantly improving it and trying new and different ways to create a better environment for women.'

'We have twelve options for flexible work, and there are variations within those options, and the benefits apply equally to women and men.'

'Women don't give themselves credit for what they can do. They have to be prepared to grab hold of an opportunity if it crosses their path.'

Helen's first foray into local government was about twelve years ago when she left work in the private sector, where she was doing payroll and personnel work to join Strathfield Council.

'It was a newly created human resource management role and it gave me the opportunity to put my own stamp on the job.'

'I was fortunate to work with a General Manager who had not come from a background in local government. He opened doors for me. He let me act as a director in an operational area. The opportunities and the skills I developed there helped me to get the job at Holroyd.'



Helen moved to Holroyd Council in her current position in 2004. She is a representative on the management team and reports to the General Manager.

'Local government can be a great place for women. There is so much diversity. You can come in as an administrative assistant and be offered opportunities to move into areas like planning, community service or customer service.

'The opportunity to live and work in the same area, and if you need it, to have access to local childcare is another benefit,' she says.

Helen says being in human resources is a bit like being a General Manager. 'You get to see right across the organisation.'



She doesn't rule out the possibility of becoming a General Manager one day.

'I'm not sure that it will happen, but if the opportunities come up I will throw my hat in the ring.

'Women don't give themselves credit for what they can do. They have to be prepared to grab hold of an opportunity if it crosses their path.

'I don't say I can't do things, I just give it a go.'



Linda Hutchinson

**Finance Manager
Brewarrina Shire Council**

The remoteness of Brewarrina Shire Council - in the far west of NSW - has been instrumental to Linda Hutchinson's career.

'The council has always found it difficult to attract qualified staff so they have been prepared to give me a go.'

Linda joined the council straight from school over thirty years ago, and for the last ten years has been the Finance Manager.

Brewarrina Council has a small population and rate base, but it covers a vast area. It manages traditional council services, as well as Centrelink, an RTA agency, Tourist Centre, Child Care and Youth Centres, as well as the doctor, the chemist and the dentists.

'When I finished school I didn't know what I wanted to do. Brewarrina Shire was a member of the Western Shires

'More than half the staff is Indigenous, and there are equal numbers of men and women.'

Dental Service and they were looking for a dental nurse and I got the job.'

When the dentist left, Linda moved into the finance section of the council. By the time the new dentist arrived they didn't want to let her go.

'The Deputy Shire Clerk taught me a lot. Being a small council, I have had a go at a variety of jobs, among other things, cemetery records and building returns.

'I don't have formal accounting qualifications. I have learned everything on the job and from other staff.'

Linda says she is one of many Indigenous staff at the council. 'More than half the staff is Indigenous, and there are equal numbers of men and women managers'.

Travel is probably the biggest bugbear. 'There is no airport here, so if we go to meetings or courses it means a four hour drive to Dubbo and an overnight stay.'

Linda and her husband, who also works at the council, have raised two children over the time she has been working at the council. Childcare was not available at the time, so she was fortunate to have the help of her parents.

'You can do so much more in a council like this. Something different always crops up.'





Darriea Turley

Councillor
Broken Hill City Council

Not surprisingly, Darriea Turley has frequently had to resort to the takeaway menu as she juggles the demands of being President of the Australian Local Government Women's Association, Chair of the Rural Women's Coalition, and a councillor on Broken Hill City Council.

As if that is not enough, she has also been a representative on numerous Broken Hill committees and boards, and for her entire career, has always had a day job – currently as Manager of Community Engagement for the Greater Western Area Health Service.

AIDS Community Worker. 'Within a few months of getting the job I was working full-time. It was a catalyst for seeing the lack of services available in rural Australia.'

'It makes economic sense to have women in leadership roles in local government.'

She won scholarships to study HIV/AIDS abroad, completed a Graduate Diploma in Sexual Health Counselling, and has since spent many years developing sexual health programs across western NSW.

Darriea has always had some flexibility with work, but has relied on the support of her husband to help with their two children, 'I'm blessed to have such a champion in my husband, however, cooking was never his forte, hence the takeaway menus!'

Darriea was elected to Broken Hill City Council in 1995. 'I spent so much time advocating for different causes I'm sure the Mayor thought I was stalking council! It worked, because he asked me to run on his ticket. At the time I didn't realise I was a filler. Luckily, the party had a strong ticket and I got in.'

Given where she lives, and her many commitments, you might think that travel has been one of the most challenging

against me, and it was because there had never been a female Mayor. The media even asked – "how can a woman become Mayor? I was amazed and outraged".

'It wasn't about me being better – it was about bringing something different to the job. Women bring a perspective that is valuable. We are intuitive, we invest in building relationships and we have a lot of energy. It makes economic sense to have women in leadership roles in local government.'

Although Darriea didn't win, the contest was very close and it took a week to decide the outcome.

The good thing about local government, she says, is that 'I get great satisfaction from connecting communities to policy making. If you stop and listen to the community, and make the right decision, you can see the result.'

However, there are still a few things that annoy her. 'When I meet people for the first time they still want to shake my husband's hand, assuming he is the councillor.'

She's also concerned that decisions appear to be made outside of the council, which haven't been subject to debate and discussion. 'It's one reason I joined the Australian Local Government Women's Association because I wanted to be with like minded people.

'Sharing the common experiences and camaraderie of other women councillors and having a sense of humour helps', she says, 'Like when I dressed for a cocktail party and ended up fishing for barramundi in high heels!'

Darriea is particularly excited about an ALGWA initiative – the *ALGWA 50:50 Councils for Gender Equity Accreditation and Awards Program*, which will audit councils to determine the status and participation of women in leadership and decision-making roles.

'We need to value the attributes women bring to leadership in local government. Women have to put their hand up for both elected positions and management. They have to find a mentor and network and, of course, join the Australian Local Government Women's Association. As NIKE says, "just do it!" the rest will follow and the rewards are infinite.'



'I have a diary. I have a list. I don't put off until tomorrow what I can do today. I also ensure I have a social life. Work can come and go, but your friends and family can't.'

Darriea trained and worked as a nurse. When she had children, she applied for a part-time job as an HIV/

aspects of Darriea's life, but instead she cites the personal abuse she endured in 2004, when she ran for Mayor.

'I feel blessed in my life. I have been a councillor for many years and absolutely enjoyed every day. However, when I ran for Mayor there was a very nasty, vindictive personal campaign



Jean Hay AM

Mayor
Manly Council

'... women tend to be more involved in committees and community representation.'

Although her transition to local government as an elected representative was smooth, Jean says, with hindsight, she may not have chosen to contest the 1987 election. Her husband was elected as the State Member for Manly, and in 1988, was appointed Minister for Local Government and Planning.

'It was a terrible time on the council. The opposition was constantly tearing into him as the Minister. It was very hard, but that is the price you pay – its politics,' Jean says.

Jean says the current council works well together and gender is not an issue. 'Manly has always had a good record of women on the council. We have five women at present.

'I think the one area where there may be a difference between men and women is that women tend to be more involved in committees and community representation.'

Jean estimates she spends about seventy to eighty hours a week on her Mayoral duties. As a popularly elected Mayor, and one who has lived her entire life in Manly, 'People know you, and expect more of you when they vote you in.

'If something goes wrong people always blame the council first, and they will ring you at all hours of the day or night.'

In 2003, Jean ran for the state seat of Manly. She was unsuccessful, but is philosophical about the loss.

'I never had a burning ambition to go into state politics. I really enjoy local government.'

Late in 2009, Jean was diagnosed with breast cancer. She is participating in a worldwide clinical trial of a new drug and has used her profile to promote awareness of the disease.



Throughout the gruelling treatment regime she is continuing to undertake her Mayoral duties.

'I find working a godsend. I don't have to think about it. I just get on with what I have to do.'

In 1998, Jean was awarded a Member, Order of Australia (AM) for service to the Manly community.

Jean was also the recipient of one of the 2010 Minister's Awards for Women in Local Government because of her significant contributions to local government over many years.

Few women have had such a long association with local government as Jean Hay AM, Mayor of Manly Council. She has served on the council for twenty-two years and has been popularly elected twice as Mayor.

Jean was first elected to the council in 1987 after many years of service to the Manly community. She was a foundation member of a number of local community and sporting boards and committees, and active in fundraising for welfare and health education programs.

By the time she was elected to the council, Jean had already seen the inner workings of local government at the side of her husband who had been a councillor on Manly Council for many years, and the Mayor on several occasions.



ONLY 21% OF MAYORS ARE WOMEN

NEARLY HALF OF ALL COUNCILLORS ARE PROFESSIONAL AND SELF-EMPLOYED



Vesna Kerstev

**Manager
Rangers and Parking Services
Liverpool City Council**

In 1991, Vesna, her husband, and new baby took a giant step into the unknown when they arrived in Australia from Macedonia.

They were on an adventure to see what life was like in Australia. Almost twenty years later they are now citizens.

However, Vesna says, life wasn't so easy in the early days. 'There is this sense of detachment ... you don't know anything and you can get very low. After a few months, I realised I had to go out and do things myself.'



She enrolled in English classes to improve her English, and completed other classes in business administration and typing. 'I wanted to get into the workforce. I like to be intellectually challenged.'

'Local government has lots of opportunities if you are proactive, work really hard and want to make a difference.'

Vesna started doing voluntary work and then paid administrative work with the Sydney Dance Company and the Australia Council for the Arts.

In 1998, she moved to Liverpool City Council as an Executive Assistant to one of the managers.

Her expectations that there would be more professional opportunities in local government have been met, given the range of jobs she has performed over the last eleven years at the council.

She became a Neighbourhood Manager, where she says 'I had to deal with many issues every day, like safety maintenance.

'When I started managing the maintenance crews they said "how can you do this job?" It is a two way thing - you have to earn respect. Over time, I developed a good relationship with them.'

After a period managing Neighbourhood Services she became Manager, Enforcement and Forums, each month attending several neighbourhood meetings in the evening, whilst also studying part-time. (She graduated with a Master of Business and Commerce.)

For the last few years Vesna has been managing council's Rangers and Parking Services.

She says local government has lots of opportunities 'if you are proactive, work really hard and want to make a difference.'

While she doesn't feel there have been any barriers to her getting work opportunities, 'I think, even now, because I have an accent that some people see me as different.

'However, I like being different. I value myself as a person. I want to be the best I can be and I think most people see that. With personal drive you can do a lot.'

Although she handles complaints from people who have been fined, Vesna says working with, and for the community is very special.



Kate Bambrick-Browne

**Project Manager
North Sydney Council**

'I've had enormous good fortune', says Kate Bambrick-Browne, about her career so far in local government.

'North Sydney Council provides a very supportive environment for families and for a work life balance.'

Kate joined the council in 1999 as a Landscape Coordinator, upgrading parks and landscaping for civic places. Prior to that, she had worked in a similar position at Mosman Council and before that, as a Landscape Architect in private practice, doing project based work.

'I had been thinking that a family would be on the horizon some time in the next few years, and I knew local government would be a good place to work because they are very supportive of families.

'There was also an altruistic component to working in local government. I wanted to do something for the community.'

By the time Kate went on maternity leave to have her first child, she had already been appointed Manager, Parks and Reserves. Over the next few years she moved in and out of the role.

'I opted not to go back into a senior role when I came back from maternity leave. I had the work life balance in mind so I moved into a Landscape Coordinator role, which I did part-time.'

A few years ago, when the Manager's position came up again, Kate was appointed to it once more.

The arrival of her second child and another period of maternity leave

followed. In February 2010, Kate returned to the Manager's position. Although she worked four days a week, 'I managed to pack five days into four'.

Recently, however, she has decided she would like to spend more time with her youngest child and so for twelve months will work fewer hours in a Project Manager's position. 'Work life balance has always been a consideration in my career.'

Throughout her time at North Sydney Council, Kate says, she has been proactive about seeking opportunities. 'I am constantly challenged by the broad range of interests and needs in the community and the expectations placed on council. This makes working in local government an exciting place to be.'



'Council has provided fantastic opportunities for me to develop my professional life ...'

'Criticism is levelled at local government, but it is often misplaced.'

Although Kate says she does not have formal mentors at the council, 'I have received a huge amount of support from my immediate Director and colleagues, as well as the Human Resources Manager. They have been very supportive of my professional career.'

Kate says that having a female Mayor and General Manager at the council certainly helps.

'They recognise that in order to retain female staff in senior positions they have to offer flexibility. North Sydney Council has really provided fantastic opportunities for me to develop my professional life and still combine it with a family life.'

'There are very few women I know, in the same industry as me, who have been able to return to their jobs post children. They can't believe how lucky I have been.'



Clare Phelan

**Finance Manager
Mid Western Regional Council**

Clare Phelan's advice to young women in Sydney wanting to fast-track their career is to take a risk and head out west.

At twenty-eight years old, and the Finance Manager for Mid Western Regional Council, Clare says a fulfilling career doesn't have to mean 80 hour weeks and huge salaries.

'In local government, in the country, you can have a rewarding career, a variety of work experiences and a great lifestyle.'

When she left high school, Clare started an accounting cadetship with Eurobodalla Shire council, while she did her Bachelor of Commerce at the University of New England.

After four years she moved to Condobolin as Finance Manager.

'I had no idea where Condobolin was, but to my husband and I it seemed like an adventure.'

She moved to Mid Western Regional Council three years ago.

In 2009, she had her first child and recently returned from maternity leave to work four days a week.

'The council has been incredibly supportive. They gave me a blackberry and a laptop, and I attended a few meetings, so I could keep up with what is happening at work.'

Clare has experienced few barriers to being a young female manager, despite the stereotypes that country people are more conservative.

'You can't sit back and wait for things to happen - you have to make them happen.'

'I think that stereotype is a bit offensive. Country people are a lot more practical. If you show them you are capable then that's all they are concerned about.'

Even the one bad experience Clare had, she says, was quickly resolved by the council.

'I am fortunate to work for a very progressive council that recognises that gender balance is a good thing.'

'I also have a senior female manager who I go to for advice and to bounce ideas off.'

Clare says she plans to further her education by doing a Master of Business Administration, with the longer term objective of becoming a General Manager in a council.

'If you want to be successful in local government, then you have to work hard, speak up and volunteer for projects, and you have to get out and meet other professionals, and build your reputation.'

'You can't sit back and wait for things to happen you have to make them happen,' she says.



In 2009, Clare was the Local Government Managers Australia (NSW) Young Manager of the Year and the team captain who led the Mid Western Regional Council to victory in the LGMA's Australasian Management Challenge.

TOP TIPS FOR SUCCESS IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

- 1** Believe in yourself
- 2** Be proactive – volunteer to do things – don't wait for things to happen to you
- 3** Never ignore an opportunity – take a risk!
- 4** Work hard and earn respect
- 5** Be prepared to move between councils, between the city and the country, and even interstate to enhance your opportunities
- 6** Speak up! Have the courage and the confidence to ask for things e.g. acting opportunities, promotions, pay rises, workplace flexibility
- 7** Find a mentor
- 8** Have a supportive partner and/or family
- 9** Network with professionals in your area of expertise, and build your reputation
- 10** Expand your opportunities through education and learning
- 11** Seek the guidance of other women in the same field as you
- 12** Persist! Don't give up at the first hurdle
- 13** Attend council meetings, read the business papers, nominate for local committees.

References and resources

Division of Local Government
NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet
www.dlg.nsw.gov.au

Local Government and Shires Association
www.lgsa.org.au

Australian Local Government Association
www.alga.asn.au

Australian Local Government
Women's Association
www.algwa.net.au

The 50:50 Vision - A National Program
for Gender Equity in Local Government
www.algwa.net.au/files/T5TA4RM411/50_50_Vision.pdf

NSW Office for Women's Policy, NSW
Department of Premier and Cabinet
www.women.nsw.gov.au

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Back cover:

Left to right top row: Colleen Fuller, Vanessa Chan, Katheryn Smith, Dr Maree Smith

Left to right second row: Clare Phelan, Leia Thiele, Penny Holloway, Karen McKeown

Left to right third row: Kate Bambrick-Brown, Vesna Kerstev, Jean Hay AM, Carmel Krogh

Left to right bottom row: Alison Hester, Simone Schwarz, Darriea Turley, Linda Hutchinson

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'You have to believe in yourself, never ignore an opportunity, work hard and earn respect.'

