Celebrating and Empowering Women in our Community

The Monash Women’s Leadership and Participation Strategy 2011-13
Introduction

Council successfully applied for the Victorian Government’s Women’s Leadership Grants 2010. The aim of this application was to develop the first Monash Council Women’s Leadership Strategy by 2011, guided by women in our community. Outcomes of the Women’s Leadership Strategy will recognise the role of women in all aspects of our community and build capacity of women to take on leadership roles.

The City of Monash has a diverse population (50.6% of who are female) with a large and increasing proportion of the population who are over 55 years of age and from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Women who live, work, study or access a service in the City of Monash will benefit from the Women’s Leadership Strategy.

Key Principles

This strategy is guided by the following principles:

- Council is committed to recognising, supporting and celebrating gender equality.
- Council acknowledges women are diverse in culture, ability and background.
- Council values participation from all women and will support participation as required.
- Council is committed to developing and strengthening partnerships with community members, organisations and businesses.
- Council is committed to using accessible communication (including simple English, translation, online and print media).
Consultation Process

To provide Council with guidance on the development of this Strategy, the Women’s Leadership Strategy Steering Committee (WLSSC) was formed. The WLSSC includes members from:

- MonashLink Community Health Service.
- Women’s Health East (WHE).
- Monash Volunteer Resource Centre (MVRC).
- Monash Women’s Business Network (WBN).
- Jean Hailes Foundation.
- Monash City Councillors.
- Community groups and community representatives.
- Monash Council Community Planning and Development Department (CP&D).

With collaboration from members of the WLSSC the development of the Strategy was launched in August 2010 with two events, a ‘Morning Tea Party’ and a ‘Girls Night Out’. Over 150 women attended these events held at Monash Council, Civic Centre.

“Just to say thanks for the celebrating women speaker event. [sic] Very much enjoyed. I actually thought it would be a horrendous bore about highflyers, but no. Very engaging speaker and no nonsense.” — Comment from a woman in the community consultation.

Women from the community were involved throughout the consultation process. In-depth information was gathered by:

- Training 15 women about how to facilitate a focus group.
- Eight of these women facilitating a focus group within their community.
- Forty-eight women in Monash attending one of these focus groups (including women who do not usually attend council events), to share their ideas.

“I just wanted to thank you for the opportunity to do the Women’s Leadership Training Session. It was a very enlightening and enjoyable day. I feel I have learnt a great deal and hope to put it into practice.”
— Comment from a woman in the community consultation.

A survey was developed to quantify the information obtained from the focus groups. One hundred and twelve surveys were completed and 93% of respondents were female, though otherwise representative of the City of Monash in regards to demographic profile.

“I am excited knowing that our Council has finally raised the awareness of Women in Leadership, not necessarily in politic [sic] but in various areas.”
— Comment from a woman in the community consultation.
What is Leadership?

Many women take on roles in the community which would normally be identified as leadership positions. However, these women do not always identify themselves as leaders.

“I don’t feel like a leader, just the same as everyone else.” – President of a local community organisation.

Using ideas from the consultations, leadership in this Strategy is defined as ‘someone who, at home, work or play, can: inspire and empower others; form relationships and work with others; be assertive; lead by example; make decisions; mediate and negotiate; believe in themselves; have emotional intelligence; have the ability to communicate well; and have the ability to turn an idea into reality.’

“I think just understanding that you might actually be a leader opens up so many doors. When I found out that I was a leader ... I began to understand my experiences in a new way, and realised/found the confidence to move forward and take on new challenges and opportunities!” – Comment from a woman in the community consultation.
**Why Women?**

Community expectations are based on our values and beliefs, which have the potential to sustain inequality and contribute to discrimination. These beliefs and values, which we learn from others and our experiences, are complex, subtle and often unconscious. As women come from different backgrounds (e.g. ethnicity, faith, sexual orientation, disability and so forth), these beliefs and values vary. There is a need to specifically support women to be able to overcome various barriers to leadership and participation, due to these community expectations and their other responsibilities.

The barriers to leadership and participation identified by women in Monash include:
- Access to flexible work options and work/life balance.
- Access to childcare.
- Lack of strong female role models.
- Women participate in leadership roles without recognising it as leadership.
- Time taken for caring for children and domestic work.
- Attitudes of others in the community towards women in leadership positions.
- Lack of female role models from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB).
- Communication barriers for women (including literacy, lack of culturally sensitive and translated information).

Council acknowledges the importance of overcoming these barriers to benefit both the women individually as well as the general community. Women in Monash identify the following benefits of participating in community life:
- Enabling women to develop professionally and personally.
- Recognising that women have different life experiences than men and bring different benefits to leadership.
- Making a contribution to family and the community.
- Increasing career and training opportunities.
-Achieving personal goals.
- Financial independence.
- Empowerment through access to information and decision making processes.
- Increased numbers of positive NESB female role models in the community.

“*Women are born leaders, we just get on and do it*”

– Comment from a woman in the community consultation.
**Strategy Framework**

This Strategy aims to increase the number of women who identify as leaders in the Monash community by:
- **Recognising** what women already achieve in our community.
- **Empowering** more women to identify as leaders.
- **Supporting** women to overcome barriers to participation.
- **Enhancing** the leadership skills and opportunities for women in Monash.

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| **Partnerships and Capacity Building**
**Objective:** Increase the skills and knowledge of women in Monash to take up leadership positions. |
| 1.1 | Explore opportunities to support women to become more involved in their community. Prepare a discussion paper of possible actions and how Council can achieve these. | • Community Planning and Development
• Family Day Care
• Monash Volunteer Resource Centre | 2011-12 |
| 1.2 | Explore opportunities to assist women to create support networks. Determine community interest and potential project actions.* | • Community Planning and Development
• Women’s Health East
• Community members
• Schools and kindergartens | 2011-13 |
| 1.3 | Educate business community and support women to advocate for flexible work options. Invite guest speaker to present at Council business events including Women’s Business Network. | • Economic Development
• Monash Business Network
• Women’s Business Network
• Community Planning and Development | 2011-13 |
| 1.4 | Explore opportunities to overcome barriers for women (representative of the Monash community) to be involved in Council community consultations. Consider the ‘Gender and Diversity Lens for Health and Human Services’ when developing, implementing and reporting on community consultation. Ensure gender diversity data is collected in Council consultations as appropriate. | • Corporate Planning
• Community Planning and Development
• Public Health | 2011-13 |
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<td>1.5</td>
<td>Research the needs of women from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB) who are international students or are family of international students.</td>
<td>Develop partnerships with the international student community. Determine the needs of this community and how this Strategy can support or advocate for these needs. Sponsor five women to attend the Women’s Leadership Camp, coordinated by the Victorian Immigrant and Refugee Women’s Coalition.</td>
<td><a href="#">Community Planning and Development</a>, Monash University International Student Service, Holmesglen TAFE, Various student associations, Victorian Immigrant and Refugee Women’s Coalition</td>
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<td>1.6</td>
<td>Collaborate with women from the community to facilitate women’s leadership seminars on various topics of interest as identified by the women of Monash.</td>
<td>Assist women to facilitate two seminars promoting women’s leadership.*</td>
<td><a href="#">Community Planning and Development</a>, Community members, Women’s Business Network</td>
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<td>1.7</td>
<td>Support the Women’s Health East ‘Investing in Women’ project which supports women who are isolated and/or disadvantaged to engage in meaningful social opportunities.</td>
<td>Attend Project Steering Group. Develop and strengthen partnerships between Women’s Health East, community organisations and community members in Monash.</td>
<td><a href="#">Women’s Health East</a>, Community Planning and Development, Community members</td>
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<td>1.8</td>
<td>Partner with Economic Development to deliver workshops on workplace skills and sponsor women to attend.</td>
<td>At least one workshop delivered and women from the community sponsored to attend.</td>
<td><a href="#">Community Planning and Development</a>, Women’s Business Network, Economic Development, Neighbourhood Houses</td>
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<td>1.9</td>
<td>Explore opportunities to support women of Monash to return to the workforce through developing partnerships with key organisations and potential collaborative projects.</td>
<td>Develop partnerships with key organisations. Research practical opportunities to assist women to enter the workforce (such as clothing drive, interview skills, resume writing, coaching) and implement project strategies.*</td>
<td><a href="#">Community Planning and Development</a>, Neighbourhood Houses, Opportunity Shops, Women’s Business Network, Libraries</td>
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| 1.10 Explore opportunities to develop or partner with a Women’s Mentoring and Networking Program. | Facilitate meeting with Monash Volunteer Resource Centre, Victorian Immigrant and Refugee Women’s Coalition and the Women’s Business Network. | • Community Planning and Development  
• Women’s Business Network  
• Victorian Immigrant and Refugee Women’s Coalition  
• Community members | 2011-13 |

**Information Provision**

*Objective: Increase women’s access to information to support their participation in the community.*

| 2.1 Continue to promote accessible community information, support and referral services. | Accessible community information, support and referral services promoted. | • Council’s Information and Arts Department  
• Monash Waverley and Oakleigh Community Information and Support  
• Community Planning and Development  
• Libraries | Ongoing |

| 2.2 Continue to provide accessible information about Community and Arts grants and community events. | Information distributed to Monash community. | • Community Planning and Development  
• Information and Arts  
• Libraries | Ongoing |

**Policy and Advocacy**

*Objective: Advocate for women’s issues and participation in the community.*

| 3.1 Advocate for prevention of violence against all women. | Support White Ribbon Day annually.  
Support Inner East Primary Care Partnership preventing violence against women priority area. | • Public Health Unit  
• Community Planning and Development  
• Monash Youth and Family Services  
• Inner East Primary Care Partnership | Ongoing |

| 3.2 Support International Women’s Day events within Council and community. | Facilitate an annual event for International Women’s Day. | • Community Planning and Development  
• Public Health Unit  
• Women’s Health East | 2011-13 |

| 3.3 Explore opportunities to acknowledge women in leadership. | Prepare a discussion paper. | • Community Planning and Development  
• Women’s Business Network | 2011-12 |

**Service Delivery**

*Objective: Provide support to Strategy and women in the community.*

| 4.1 Identify Council Officer as a contact for women’s issues. | Council Officer for Women’s issues nominated. | • Community Planning and Development | 2011-13 |

*Subject to additional resources being provided in current and future budgets.*