



# Matriarchs of Maribyrnong

We acknowledge that we are on the traditional lands of the Kulin Nation. We offer our respect to the Elders of these traditional lands, and through them to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples past, present and emerging.

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## Message from the CEO

International Women's Day provides an important opportunity to recognise the women who shape our community and inspire change.

Through the Matriarchs project, Maribyrnong City Council is proud to honour the women whose strength, care and leadership hold families, cultures and neighbourhoods together.

These women create connection, advocate for others and pass on wisdom that strengthens our community now and for generations to come.

We invite our community to help us recognise and celebrate the Matriarchs among us, and the lasting impact they continue to make across Maribyrnong.

**Celia Haddock**  
Chief Executive Officer



Matriarchs are women who lead with strength, love and courage.

They hold families and communities together, advocate for others, share wisdom, and create change through their actions.

Matriarchs pass on knowledge, culture and values, provide care and guidance, and often support others quietly and consistently.

They are powerful. They change the world. They are the queens among us.

Please meet the Matriarchs of Maribyrnong 2026, as nominated by community members whose lives they have made brighter and better.

Helen is a deeply respected community development leader, and the ultimate community connector.

Helen  
Rodd



Helen is the founder of social enterprise Hot House Living Lab, through which she auspices the work of women from diverse backgrounds to run micro enterprises, enabling them to use their existing skills to create an income for their families. Helen is a mentor to community leaders, connects people and cares for Country. She creates meaningful opportunities for connection and inclusion and offers leadership by lifting others up, particularly women.

# Enid Marie Earle

(Enid) Marie has been an active member of the local community all her adult life.



Marie and her husband ran a successful butcher's business in Yarraville from the 1950s to the 1980s. After retiring, she was elected to Footscray City Council, rising to the position of Deputy Mayor, and was the first Citizen of the Year of the City of Maribyrnong. Marie also established the U3A and the Walking Group in Yarraville. She turns 100 this year and has said the most significant social and scientific advancement in her lifetime was the birth control pill for women.

**Halima is a community leader, change-maker, and champion of opportunities for women.**

**Halima  
Mohamed**



Since arriving in Australia as a refugee from Somalia, Halima established Skilling, Employment and Aid Enterprises Australia Inc., creating a sewing program for African women to gain skills, qualifications in design from RMIT, and pathways to employment and small business opportunities. She set up a canteen enterprise at a local school, providing learning and employment opportunities for African women and initiated an African Young Women's Leadership Program to support their voices, and their leadership and career aspirations.

**Lola and her husband Peter, were instrumental in the creation of Cruikshank Park, Yarraville.**



In 1968, Lola and Peter approached Council with a proposal to transform the wasteland - once home to around 11 quarries and an informal tip - behind their property. For the next 50 years, with the support of an advisory committee, Lola and Peter redeveloped it into the beloved park enjoyed by the community today. In 2021, Lola and her husband were jointly awarded the Maribyrnong Citizen of the Year Award for their lifelong commitment to Cruickshank Park.

**Amanda is an  
award-winning  
financial planner  
and the founder  
of Conversations  
That Matter.**



Conversations That Matter is a community-led movement that supports women and survivors of gendered violence. Drawing on her lived experience, Amanda has become a trusted advocate who brings people together with compassion, courage and a deep commitment to safety and equity. She is reshaping how the community understands and responds to gendered violence, making Maribyrnong a safer and more compassionate place for all.

# Anastasia Le

**Anastasia is a prominent  
Vietnamese Australian  
trans woman, advocate,  
and community leader.**



Anastasia is recognised for her extensive work in social justice, LGBTIQ+ advocacy and support for marginalised communities, including refugees and people with disabilities. In 2025, she was inducted into the Victorian Honour Roll of Women as a Change Agent. She is a board member of the Victorian Pride Centre, works for disability employment service, Matchworks, and is a radio presenter on JOY 94.9.

**For nearly two decades,  
Vivienne has been a steady  
and compassionate presence  
in her leadership role at  
Braybrook and Maidstone  
Neighbourhood House.**



Vivienne helped build programs that respond to real and urgent need, including food relief, community connection, and support for people experiencing disadvantage. She has been a strong advocate for public housing tenants, working alongside residents to ensure their voices are heard, and their rights, dignity and wellbeing are respected. Her leadership has always been grounded in care, fairness and inclusion. She is the embodiment of the enduring value of lived experience, wisdom and service.

**Kerrie has a dual  
legacy as an artist of  
national significance  
and a steward of  
local history.**



At the Living Museum of the West in Maribyrnong, Kerrie has been instrumental in shaping community-centred storytelling. She played a key role in developing the Museum's early visual identity and contributed to landmark projects. Her work documenting local Indigenous, industrial and migrant histories preserved stories that might otherwise have been lost. As an artist, her achievements span decades. Her large-scale geometric installations – exhibited in major Australian galleries – have inspired emerging artists and brought national attention to the creative talent rooted in Melbourne's west.

**For over three decades Elizabeth has championed migrant inclusion, accessible and equitable aged care for culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and effective community services for all.**



As CEO of Australian Multicultural Community Services, Elizabeth guided community organisations through major reforms, strengthened governance across the sector, and championed culturally safe services for migrant, Aboriginal and remote communities. She was instrumental in the upgrade of Millennium House, Footscray and is President of the Rotary Club of Footscray. Her work has touched thousands of families, Elders and frontline workers, always with a focus on compassion, fairness and practical solutions.

**Lorraine  
Woodman  
OAM**

For over 30 years, Lorraine has been dedicated to increasing the participation of young people with intellectual disabilities in sport, particularly cricket.



Volunteering across numerous clubs over the years, Lorraine has been instrumental in making inclusion a reality for many young people in the West. Lorraine was recently awarded an OAM as part of the 2026 Australia Day honours for her services to cricket. In 2022, she was awarded Volunteer of the Year at Maribyrnong City Council's Civic Awards.

Sandra demonstrates exceptional leadership through her long-standing, values-driven service to the Maribyrnong community.

Sandra  
McGuire



Sandra has volunteered at the Rotary Club of Yarraville for 21 years and has been involved in the Stony Creek Music Festival, the Yarraville Festival, local Carols, Young Writers programs, tree planting, and support for Soul Kitchen in Braybrook. She contributed to the Money Mentors program in local high schools and delivered financial wellbeing sessions through the Western Bulldogs Sons and Daughters of the West program. As a passionate advocate for women's safety, she played a key role in Conversations That Matter, raising awareness about domestic violence and the need for improved financial systems that better support victims and survivors.

Colleen is a long-term community activist and advocate.

Colleen  
Hartland



In the 1990s, Colleen led the community campaign against the storage of toxic chemicals at Coode Island and was a foundation member of the Hazardous Materials Action group (HAZMAG). She was a Greens MP for the Western Metropolitan Region from 2006-2018, holding portfolios of health, mental health, disability, ageing, gambling and liquor regulation, veterans and emergency services, and served as a City of Maribyrnong Councillor from 2003-2005.

**Maureen has volunteered locally for 46 years, giving her time to a wide range of organisations.**



Maureen has volunteered for opportunity shops, food programs, reading programs, health services, schools, playgroups, community facilities, nursing homes, tutoring/mentoring, Scouts, and the Council of Single Mothers, often drawing on her professional background in librarianship and education. In 2017, she was jointly awarded the Citizen of the Year at the Maribyrnong City Council Civic Awards. Maureen is a tireless advocate for raising the voices of people and communities who often go unheard. She demonstrates that service to others can be part of everyday life.

**Susan works tirelessly to support those in need, striving to ensure people can live life with dignity and receive the support they need.**



As a Program Coordinator at cohealth, Susan coordinated a team of Home Tutors delivering a home-based early childhood enrichment program, targeting families with children attending 4-year-old kindergarten. She volunteered with 300 Blankets, an organisation dedicated to supporting people experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness in Victoria, and now volunteers as the Braybrook Community Hub Concierge, where she continues to make connections and support vulnerable community members. Her unofficial nickname is 'Mama Bear'.

Lynda is a deeply ethical, quietly powerful, and profoundly community-centred leader.

Lynda  
Ford OAM



As owner and Principal Consultant of Mosaic: Intercultural Solutions, Lynda supports organisations to navigate complexity in culturally diverse contexts with care, intelligence, and long-term vision. Working with the South Sudanese community, her work enables young people to shape their own futures while contributing meaningfully to the cultural and social fabric of the wider community. Through her leadership at Enterprising Partnerships and her long-term volunteer role as Programs Director at the iGen Foundation, Lynda consistently invests in systems that help communities thrive beyond dependency.

**Jules is a true  
connector  
and champion  
for women in  
business.**

**Jules  
Brooke**



As the founder of She's The Boss, Jules has created an empowering network for female founders and women in business. Through the She's The Boss community, she has created spaces where women feel seen and championed. Jules creates environments where collaboration replaces competition. She doesn't just talk about community, she builds it: empowering women to share their stories, use their voices and build confidence through connection. Her dedication, authenticity, and passion for uplifting others has earned her multiple awards, establishing her as a powerful advocate for women's leadership.

**Ayeesha led the successful campaign to maintain a Community Children's Centre as a not-for-profit service.**

**Ayeesha  
Montalti**



Ayeesha's role in advocating alongside the community demonstrated the impact that sustained advocacy and collective action can have in shaping outcomes that reflect shared community values and priorities. Through her advocacy, Ayeesha helped preserve access to high quality, community focused care through ensuring not-for-profit early years' service provision.

# Donna Sherwani

Donna is a powerful community and business leader who is advocating for a kinder world.



Donna is a lawyer, business founder, workshop facilitator, public speaker, author, and the founder of Kind Rebel. She is passionate about helping organisations and communities contribute meaningfully, lead with purpose, and embrace diversity as strength. Her advocacy helps people understand how to use lived experience to create change.

Frances is a dedicated volunteer who facilitates the Spanish-speaking playgroup at Maidstone Community Centre.



Originally attending the group with her grandson, Frances continued after he started school, driven by her deep commitment to support her Spanish-speaking community. Frances offers guidance, comfort, and a strong sense of belonging to new mothers and families who are new to Australia, and often lack local family support. She ensures every participant feels seen, supported, and valued.

**Suzanne  
Alexander**

**Suzanne is a financial wellbeing specialist, money mindset expert and speaker, whose leadership elevates the voices of women across the community.**



Suzanne has a passion for improving financial literacy and works tirelessly to support women and young people build essential financial skills by championing inclusive learning initiatives that break down barriers, foster independence, and enable individuals to participate fully in economic life. Suzanne encourages others to grow, lead, and contribute to stronger, more resilient communities.

Line Dance Choreographer, Heather Barszuskij, is passionate about line dancing, which she has been teaching for 33 years.

Heather  
Barszuskij



Heather's weekly classes at Maribyrnong Community Centre cater for up to 70 participants from beginners upwards. She hosts workshops and socials every two months, getting the community together to dance, socialise and showcase their skills. As an accomplished choreographer, she has several line dances to her name and has travelled interstate and overseas to continue improving her skills.

Sue is a beloved neighbour and mainstay of the Middle Footscray community.

Sue  
Heerey



Sue makes all feel welcome, creating a sense of belonging and unity. She is always the first to offer help, gather the troops, and make sure nobody feels alone. During the pandemic, Sue and her neighbour started a Middle Footscray Facebook group to ensure everyone had the support they needed, and Sue and her husband, Lloyd, have set up a small library on their fence, where neighbours exchange books and share items they no longer need but may be useful to others.

**Dianne is a leader,  
trailblazer, food  
entrepreneur,  
and founder of  
Dianne's Dips.**



Dianne started the family-owned business from scratch from her home in 1981. Made from local produce and crafted with love, Dianne's Dips are stocked in stores in Melbourne, across Victoria and beyond. Dianne is a mother of three, grandmother of 10 and great-grandmother of three and is considered the queen of her family.

**Luba is the  
longtime Secretary  
of the Macedonian  
Pensioners  
Association of  
Footscray.**

**Luba  
Kekovska**



Based at the Yarraville Seniors Centre, the community group promotes social and cultural connection. Luba is instrumental in the support she provides to the Association and its members, coordinating and cooking a full lunch for the group each week.

Jo is a  
passionate  
advocate  
for the  
local area.

Joanna  
Attard



As a creative and social justice focused woman, Jo creates moments where people feel welcome, included and part of a shared experience. She advocates for events that create opportunities for connection across cultures, ages and backgrounds, ensuring events reflect the community, support local voices, and create safe, engaging spaces. Jo also ran a Kanga Training franchise, supporting new mums with their fitness and creating a community of support, empathy and inclusion.

**Tao is a deeply impactful community leader whose work with women embodies courageous, values-led leadership and meaningful social change.**



As a life and business coach and the founder of Bold Women in Business, Tao supports women to step beyond hustle culture and reconnect with their innate power, purpose, and self-trust, redefining what empowered leadership can look like for women today. Tao's leadership is grounded in lived experience, including mental illness, neurodivergence, and motherhood, which gives her work an authenticity, compassion, and credibility that resonates deeply with the communities she serves.



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