

Meet our Intercultural  
Ambassadors



City of Greater Bendigo

# Intercultural Ambassador Program

2023/2024



CITY OF GREATER  
**BENDIGO**

## Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge that the City of Greater Bendigo is on Dja Dja Wurrung and Taungurung Country. We would like to acknowledge and extend our appreciation to the Dja Dja Wurrung People and Taungurung People, the Traditional Owners of this land.

We pay our respects to leaders and Elders past, present and future for they hold the memories, the traditions, the culture and the hopes of all Dja Dja Wurrung People and Taungurung People.

We express our gratitude in the sharing of this land, our sorrow for the personal, spiritual and cultural costs of that sharing and our hope that we may walk forward together in harmony and in the spirit of healing.

## About the Intercultural Ambassador Program

The City of Greater Bendigo's Intercultural Ambassador Program is a voluntary leadership opportunity for multicultural or Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community members from across Greater Bendigo to share their culture, connect with others, and enhance understanding and cultural diversity.

The role provides Ambassadors the opportunity to develop their leadership skills, share their culture, inform policy, connect and network with others, and enhance understanding and cultural diversity for Greater Bendigo. Intercultural Ambassadors share their cultural heritage and promote intercultural understanding between different cultural groups living with in the Greater Bendigo area.

Ambassadors will assist in promoting, launching, hosting and supporting relevant events, such as; Reconciliation Week, NAIDOC Week, Harmony Day, Refugee Week and Cultural Diversity Week. Intercultural Ambassadors will also have opportunities to join and contribute to council meetings, committees, working groups and other activities that contribute to inclusion policy for Council as identified.

For further information about the program or to make contact with an Intercultural Ambassador please contact the City of Greater Bendigo.

Email: [enquiries@bendigo.vic.gov.au](mailto:enquiries@bendigo.vic.gov.au)

Post: City of Greater Bendigo, PO Box 733, Bendigo 3552

Phone: 1300 002 642

For information in your language, call Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) on **13 14 50** and request City of Greater Bendigo (1300 002 642).



## **Nishadi Weeratunga**

A Sinhalese woman from Sri Lanka, Nishadi moved to Bendigo in 2019. She has a Bachelors in Urban and Regional Planning and worked as an Urban Planner for seven years before transitioning to a career in Community Services and Aged Care.

Caring and nurturing, Nishadi is always looking for new ways to share and give back to the community such as participating in the Imagining Greater Bendigo community panel. In her free time, you can find Nishadi cooking in the kitchen or writing and reading poetry.

Nishadi is excited to be involved in more community activities, cultural practices and special events. As an Intercultural Ambassador, her aim is to be a voice for those who are underrepresented and not heard in our community.

## **Lwe Pree**

Lwe is a Karen woman born in Burma. When she was two years old, her family was forced to flee to Thailand where they spent 18 years in a refugee camp. Lwe and her family resettled in Bendigo in 2015 and now, Lwe is studying a Bachelor of Nursing and volunteers at a number of non-profit organisations.

Lwe describes herself as 'a small woman with a big and ambitious heart'. She strives to be a shoulder to lean on for everybody she meets, spending an incredible amount of time volunteering in the community. She has assisted with Karen events, been involved in interpreting and translating support and provides life administration support to local Karen people. In her free time, she enjoys reading, cooking and crochet and loves visiting the Bendigo Art Gallery.

Lwe is looking forward to participating in training and development opportunities and learning more about other cultures in the community. As an Intercultural Ambassador, she wants to advocate for the Karen community and share her culture with Bendigo.





### **Marlissa Theresia**

Marlissa is an Indonesian woman of Christian faith who migrated to Australia in 2020. She is a Law major undergraduate, having spent three years working as a Corporate Legal in Jakarta. Here in Bendigo, Marlissa works as a Farm Hand at Hazeldene Chicken Farm and in the kitchen at Newbridge Hotel and hopes to become a Farm Manager.

Marlissa is a social butterfly and brings positive energy into every room she walks into. She loves to cook and sing- you can always find her on the karaoke machine! She attends bible study with Connect Girl Group and Bendigo Australia Indonesian Klub (BAIK) community gatherings where she cooks traditional Indonesian food and dances with her friends.

As an Intercultural Ambassador, Marlissa wants to share Indonesian culture particularly food and dance, change the narrative about racial barriers and most importantly, spread kindness and respect in Bendigo.

### **Laila Hashimi**

Laila is a Hazara woman and born in Afghanistan. She came to Australia in 2014 as a refugee and has been a pillar of support for the community ever since. Laila is incredibly busy, working two roles at Loddon Campaspe Multicultural Services, modelling for a number of Hazara fashion organisations and volunteering at Golden Square Pool, the Old Church on the Hill and at community events such as Zinda Festival and White Night.

Laila is a passionate advocate and activist. Her strength and confidence make her a positive role model for all, particularly young refugee women. In her rare moments of free time, Laila enjoys going to the gym, swimming, filmmaking and tattooing with henna.

As a proud Hazara woman, Laila is looking forward to sharing her heritage and culture, building her leadership skills and learning more about other cultures in Bendigo. She hopes to use her opportunities as an Intercultural Ambassador to represent her community.



## Yadwinder Singh

Yadwinder is a Punjabi man of Sikh faith from India. He migrated to Australia in 2013 as an international student, graduating with a Bachelors of Information Technology. He moved to Bendigo two years ago and works as Depot Manager at Direct Freight Express. Yadwinder also volunteers with Australian Sikh Support, a not-for-profit community support organisation and supported the community during the recent floods.

Calm and gentle, Yadwinder enjoys gardening, cricket, listening to Punjabi folk music and spending time with his family including wife and two young daughters. He loves the outdoors and likes to spend his evenings visiting Bendigo's beautiful parks and gardens.

Yadwinder wishes to be a voice for his community and is most looking forward to hosting cultural events and religious ceremonies. A firm believer in 'unity in diversity', he hopes to use his position as an Intercultural Ambassador to spread awareness of Punjabi and Sikh culture and beliefs particularly to youth in the Bendigo area.

## Miriam Casas

Miriam was born in Mexico and spent her youth across South America including Venezuela, Peru and Brazil. She spent her teenage years in the US before moving to Australia and settling directly into Bendigo in 2013. Throughout her career, Miriam has found her strengths in education and linguistics. She is a founding member of Hispanos Unidos de Victoria which aims to promote, foster and provide a richer understanding of Spanish-speaking cultures in Victoria.

Miriam brings a wealth of knowledge and a passion for education to our program. She is a strong leader for those around her, leading by example in all that she does. An admirer of nature, she likes to spend her free time exploring the outdoors and gardening.

Miriam loves living in Bendigo and being part of our thriving community and is looking forward to further supporting our multiculturalism and social cohesion. As an Intercultural Ambassador, she hopes to share the concept of "uncachito de la nuestro", Spanish for "a little bit of what is ours".



### **Shilin Joseph**

Shilin was born in India and moved to Australia in 2007. She spent her first year in Australia studying and living between Ballarat and Melbourne. When she found a job at Bendigo Health in 2008, Shilin and her family decided to make Bendigo home and she has since worked all throughout Bendigo Health in a number of positions. She is currently a Clinical Nurse Consultant and in her final year of studies to become a Nurse Practitioner.

Shilin is kind and a humanitarian at heart. She is community focused- she has organised multiple local dance shows, helped prepare food for community functions and facilitates local Womens Groups regularly. In her free time, you can find Shilin cooking and eating delicious meals, dancing and spending time with her three children.

As an Intercultural Ambassador, Shilin hopes to continue to share her culture, heritage and art forms with the greater community. With her passion in health, Shilin's goals are to provide health support and education to people from refugee backgrounds.

### **Eunmi (Rachel) Cho**

Rachel was born in South Korea. She first visited Australia in 2006 as a student to learn conversational English for a year but fell in love with Bendigo and has since spent her years following building a life here with her family. Eunmi has a Bachelors in Human Resource Management and has worked across a variety of industries. She is currently an Employment Mentor at Loddon Campaspe Multicultural Services.

Eunmi is down-to-earth and humble. She escapes into nature to recharge by going on road trips and camping with her family. She loves music, playing the piano and singing. Her current hobby is learning how to speak and sing in Mandarin.

Eunmi is excited to be an Intercultural Ambassador to share both traditional and modern Korean culture and values. She looks forward to learning more about other cultures and hopes to raise awareness and acceptance of multiculturalism in Bendigo.





## Maha Htoo Sein

Maha was born in Myanmar (Burma) and is of Karen background. His family migrated to Western Australia on a humanitarian visa in 2009 before moving to Bendigo in 2015. Maha previously worked as personal care assistant at an aged care facility before landing a traineeship at Loddon Campaspe Multicultural Services (LCMS). He has since worked across LCMS in a number of roles including as a Multi-lingual Support Worker (English, Poe Karen and Burmese) and is currently a Project Coordinator (Communications).

Dedicated and giving, Maha describes his passion as assisting everybody around him to live the most fulfilling life possible. Outside of all his generous work for the community, Maha enjoys cooking, photography and spending time in nature.

Maha would like to share his experiences and culture, make new connections and build on his personal development and leadership skills. As an Intercultural Ambassador, he aims to educate the community on the experiences of refugees and share the different journeys of Karen refugees in particular.

## Enos Mahachi

Born and raised in Zimbabwe and having lived in Botswana and the UK, Enos has had great lived experience as an immigrant before settling in Bendigo in 2017. His journey sparked a passion for inclusion, diversity and social cohesion which has seen Enos support the community through his previous work as a social worker and current role as Director at an NDIS provider.

Enos is outgoing and friendly, he connects with everybody he crosses paths with. Any conversation with Enos will leave you feeling like you've made a new friend. A husband and father of two sons, Enos enjoys meeting new people at church and in the community, travelling and listening to music.

Enos hopes to share his culture, connect with the community and enhance his own understanding of cultural diversity in Bendigo. During his term as an Intercultural Ambassador, he would like to focus on organising cultural events, developing educational materials and leading training sessions.



### **Dr Thaera O'Brien**

Thaera is from Malaysia, migrating to Australia in 2019. She was born into a family of advocates and activists and has become an academic in her own right with over 20 years of experience in teaching, training, research, cross-cultural intelligence and project management in the higher education industry. Thaera also has significant experience working with non-profit organisations, working across a number of multicultural women's organisations. Her last position was as the Chairperson for Loddon Campaspe Multicultural Services.

As demonstrated through her impressive list of works to promote human rights, social justice and equity, Thaera is selfless and always looking for ways to improve the quality of life for everybody she meets. Outside of her busy work schedule and life as a mother, Thaera enjoys learning and practicing traditional cultural dances.

Thaera looks forward to continuing her extensive work in empowering multicultural communities. Her aim as an Intercultural Ambassador is to improve the representation of multicultural communities in the media.

### **Dassanyake Sampath Wickramasinghe**

Dassanyake, also known as Sam, is a Buddhist from Sri Lanka. He worked in the Tea Plantation sector and was the president of the Regional Rotary Club before moving to Australia in 2006 where he spent the last 15 years working for the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing. Sam is currently the Senior Advisor in the Public Housing Department.

Sam is a people person in all senses. He loves connecting with people, speaks multiple languages, enjoys social networking and cherishes time with his wife and two children as often as he can. With a passion for music, he enjoys spending his free time playing percussion and guitar.

Sam is excited to share his experiences and knowledge while learning and connecting with those from different backgrounds. Sam has a vision for Bendigo to be the most liveable, inclusive, safe and welcoming regional city in Australia and hopes to use his opportunities as an Intercultural Ambassador as a step in achieving this goal.